



## Coalition To Protect America's National Parks Weekly National Park System Report

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### Incidents

#### **Yellowstone National Park Two Acts Of Sabotage Take Place At Bison Holding Facility**

Sometime on the night of February 21st, the fences at the Stephens Creek Facility were compromised, releasing 73 of the 96 bison that were inside the pen. Many, if not all, of the bison remained in the immediate area, and most returned to the pen via the same illegal fence openings over the course of the morning. Park staff had the fence repaired by midday.

None of these bison had yet been processed or tested for brucellosis. Some would have been held for possible quarantine, while others would have been transferred to Native American tribes and shipped to slaughter.

This was the second such incident this year. On the morning of January 16th, park staff discovered that 52 bison had been released from the facility. At the time of the initial report (January 17th), none of them had yet been found. No follow-up report on that incident has been issued.

These animals were being held and tested for brucellosis at Stephens Creek as part of a plan being considered to establish a quarantine program. The purpose of that program would be to augment or establish new conservation and cultural herds of disease-free plains bison, enhance cultural and nutritional opportunities for Native Americans, reduce the shipment of Yellowstone bison to meat processing facilities, and conserve a viable, wild population of Yellowstone bison.

Criminal investigations into both incidents are underway. The park is reviewing security measures at the facility and will make improvements immediately.

Source: Yellowstone news [January 17th](#) and [February 22nd](#) news releases.

#### **Yosemite National Park Missing Hiker Found After Multi-Day Search**

A hiker missing in the park since Tuesday, February 20th, was found by searchers on Friday, February 23rd

Alan Chow, who was backpacking alone, was spotted from a National Park Service helicopter around noon last Friday above Wapama Fall in the Hetch Hetchy area. Chow, who sustained minor injuries but was otherwise doing well, was reunited with family members

During the last several days, Chow stayed in his tent and was able to stay hydrated and had an adequate food supply. His preparedness and ability to make good decisions were key to his rescue and good health.

Yosemite National Park would like to thank the California Highway Patrol, Bay Area Mountain Rescue, California Office of Emergency Services, Marin County Search and Rescue, Tuolumne County Sheriffs Office, El Dorado County Sheriffs Office, Contra Costa County Search and Rescue, Southern California Winter Ski team, and YoDogs (search dogs).

Approximately 60 people participated in the search effort.

Source: [Yosemite news release](#).

### **Yellowstone National Park Man Died While Looking For ‘Hidden Treasure’**

A 53-year-old Illinois man who fell to his death in Yellowstone National Park last year was looking for a supposed hidden cache of gold and jewels.

[KULR-TV](#) in Billings, Montana, reports that Jeff Murphy of Batavia, Illinois, was looking for the treasure that antiquities dealer Forrest Fenn says he stashed somewhere in the Rocky Mountains several years ago.

The investigation by Yellowstone officials into Murphy’s death was kept private, but KULR obtained it through a Freedom of Information Act request. The investigative report reveals Murphy’s wife told park authorities that Murphy was looking for the treasure when she called to report him missing.

Murphy’s body was found in the park on June 9, 2017. He had fallen about 500 feet down a steep slope. The report ruled the death an accident.

Thousands have hunted in vain across remote corners of the Western U.S. for the supposed buried treasure.

Source: [Sacramento Bee](#).

### **Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park Eighteen-Wheeler Slams Into Park’s Johnson City VC**

On February 15th, an 18-wheeler jackknifed and slammed into the park’s visitor center in Johnson City with such force that it might have shifted the building’s foundation by four to five inches. The park shares the visitor center with the local Chamber of Commerce.

Police believe speed played a factor in the incident. Wet roads likely contributed to the accident.

No one was inside the building when the collision occurred at about 6:30 a.m. at the corner of Lady Bird Lane and U.S. 290. No injuries were reported, but the facility had to be closed. It will remain closed pending a structural engineering review.

Source: [Daily Tribune](#).

### **News From Around Washington**

Reports from Capitol Hill, the White House, the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service and other related agencies and NGO’s.

### **National Park Service Advisor Named For Legislative And Congressional Affairs**

Charles D. Laudner has been appointed a senior advisor for legislative and Congressional affairs for the National Park Service. He will work under P. Daniel Smith, deputy director for the NPS, exercising authority as acting director.

According to the *Des Moines Register*, Laudner was hired to run the Iowa campaign for President Trump and is a former executive director of the Republican Party of Iowa.

Laudner also is close to Rep. Steve King (R-IA-4), ran Rick Santorum's Iowa presidential campaign in 2012, and has "deep connections in the party's conservative and Tea Party factions."

BallotPedia, which bills itself as the encyclopedia of American politics, has some good background information on Laudner. [Click on this link.](#)

Source: Don Hellman.

## **Capitol Hill Weekly Legislative Roundup**

### ***New Public Laws***

Nothing to report.

### ***Senate***

The Senate was in recess this week for the Presidents Day holiday.

### ***House***

The House was in recess this week for the Presidents Day holiday.

Source: Don Hellmann, former assistant director, legislative and congressional affairs for the National Park Service.

## **Park People, Friends and Allies**

### **Hot Springs National Park Superintendent Josie Fernandez To Retire**

Josie Fernandez, superintendent of Hot Springs National Park since 2004, is retiring next month. She was the first woman named to lead the unit, which had its beginning in 1832.

Her tenure has included substantial progress in the revitalization of historic Bathhouse Row. In addition to working with the Park Service for 25 years, Fernandez served in the Air Force Reserve, retiring as a colonel. There's no word yet on her replacement.

Fernandez said she'll stay in Hot Springs after retirement at the end of March.

Said the *Arkansas Times*: "Fernandez's tenure was marked by some scraps, including her effort to give the park service exclusive rights to the name Hot Springs National Park, which has long been used in advertising by the convention and visitors bureau. The Park Service lost that legal tussle."

[Arkansas Times story.](#)

## **Coalition News and Activities**

News and actions taken by CPANP and its members on behalf of the National Park Service and National Park System.

**CPANP Joins NPCA In Celebrating Its Centennial** – NPCA will be celebrating its centennial in 2019. As part of this celebration, the association will be highlighting its partnership with and support of the National Park Service through a series of stories. If you have a story (or know someone who does) with a tie to NPCA, please contact Mary Martin at [QSMAMO@frontinernet.net](mailto:QSMAMO@frontinernet.net). Mary is serving as our liaison to NPCA for its centennial plans. These will be shared by NPCA both in print and online. This is a critical time in history to give voice and support to current NPS employees by highlighting examples of challenging situations which turned into successes. Please share your story today. Source: Amy Gilbert.

**Member Op-Ed Piece On Proposed Wyoming Grizzly Hunt** – On February 9th, the *Casper Star Tribune* posted an editorial by member Joan Anzelmo, speaking on behalf of the Coalition, opposing Wyoming's planned grizzly bear hunt. Excerpts: "I am troubled to read reports that Wyoming is charging ahead with a grizzly bear hunt, just months after these bears were removed from the protections of the Endangered Species Act. The decision to remove grizzly bears from the Endangered Species List was flawed from the start... It is baffling to me that Wyoming would rush forward with plans for a hunt, while at the same time the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is questioning the validity of their own decision to delist these bears... Wyoming should not gamble with this most iconic symbol and the corresponding economic benefits just to satisfy the desires of a vocal minority that want the chance to hunt bears when they move beyond the boundaries of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks." [Full editorial](#).

**Executive Committee Member Speaks Out On Proposed NPS Cuts** – A column by CPANP executive committee member Sheridan Steele on the impacts of planned cuts to the NPS budget appeared in the *Kennebec Journal and Morning Sentinel* and in the *Portland Press Herald*. Although Sheridan focuses on the impacts to Acadia NP, where visitation increased by more than 55% since 2006 while the operations budget declined 8%, his observations apply to all parks. Here are the opening paragraphs: "Having worked for the National Park Service for 38 years, most recently as superintendent of Acadia National Park from 2003 to 2015, I can assure you that Americans cherish their national parks, historic sites and recreation areas. Americans know they have the best national park system in the world, with these extraordinary natural and historical resources protected and available for their enjoyment, thanks to the dedicated men and women working as rangers in the parks. That is about to change. President Donald Trump and Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke are calling for a 17 percent cut in the annual operating budget of national parks, including Acadia. This drastic reduction in funding would essentially eliminate Acadia's entire seasonal workforce and dramatically curtail or end routine visitor services, diminish resource protection and allow Acadia to deteriorate and fall into disrepair." [Full editorial](#).

### **Other Reports and Releases**

A brief summary of other recent news stories, web postings and agency press releases pertaining to the department, the National Park Service in general, public lands and the environment – particularly the impacts of climate change on park ecosystems, flora and fauna.

### **Administration**

**DOI To Begin Restructuring Project With Alaska Trial Run** – *E&E News* posted a story on February 2nd headlined "Document Reveals Ambitious Reorganization Timeline." Here are the opening paragraphs: "New Interior Department regional boundaries will be in place this year, and the agency's massive reorganization will begin in Alaska, according to a document obtained by *E&E News*. Todd Wynn, director of Interior's Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs, sent a list of 39 'frequently asked questions' to state and local stakeholders Jan. 19 about the proposed department restructuring. That [seven-page document](#) says the revamped boundaries for the 13 regional hubs will 'take effect' in the second half of fiscal 2018, which begins April 1 and ends Sept. 30. The cities where the regional hubs will be located also could be identified over the spring and summer, but the department does not plan any moves in fiscal 2018, according to the document." The article includes more details on the plan and a map of the proposed new regions. [E&E News story](#).

**EPA To Be Downsized 50% By 2020** – The February 16th edition of *The Hill*, a daily newspaper covering Congress and American politics in general, has an article entitled “The \$79 Million Plan To Gut EPA.” The Administration appears to be on track to eliminate half the employees of EPA by 2020, in the most tedious, non-controversial way possible, by using a little known bureaucratic device called “workforce reshaping.” The “workforce reshaping” started in May 2017 when EPA began by offering \$25,000 buyouts to those at or near retirement age. EPA did not replace the 372 employees who took the incentive. All told, over 700 personnel have left EPA since Trump took office, and virtually no one has been hired to replace them. EPA revealed to the *Washington Examiner* that it planned to reduce its staff by half by 2020, a more Draconian plan than most had previously imagined. See the full story for additional details. [The Hill](#).

## **National Park System**

**The Arch Becomes System’s Newest National Park** – Jefferson National Expansion Memorial is now Gateway Arch National Park. Here’s how *USA Today* told the story of the name change: “Goodbye, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. Hello, Gateway Arch National Park. Most visitors to the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Mo., might not even realize that the site is also a national park originally named for Thomas Jefferson. ‘The name Jefferson National Expansion Memorial was established long before the Gateway Arch was envisioned, and has simply never been adopted by our millions of visitors,’ says Mike Ward, superintendent at Gateway Arch National Park. ‘We hope this new name will best reflect the magnificent renovations and visitor experience we will unveil in a few months.’ The renaming bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate last year, and was signed into law by President Trump this past February. Other than the name, though, nothing else has changed.” [USA Today story](#).

**Film On National Parks Now Out On Netflix** – *National Parks Adventure*, a 2016 film that was originally shown in IMAX theaters around the country, is now out on Netflix. Narrated by Robert Redford, the documentary joins three travelers who set out to explore some of the vast landscapes that are found in the parks. Those adventurous travelers include mountaineer and explorer Conrad Anker, climber and artist Rachel Pohl, and photographer and filmmaker Max Lowe. [Digital Trends story](#).

**National Park Fund Receives Highest Rating From Charity Navigator** – The National Park Foundation’s strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency have earned it top distinction with a four-star rating from Charity Navigator, America’s largest independent charity evaluator. Since 2002, Charity Navigator has awarded only the most fiscally responsible organizations a four-star rating. In 2011, Charity Navigator added 17 metrics, focused on governance and ethical practices as well as measures of openness, to its ratings methodology. These accountability and transparency metrics, which account for 50 percent of a charity’s overall rating, reveal which charities operate in accordance with industry best practices and whether they are open with their donors and stakeholders. [National Park Foundation news release](#).

**New Book Explores History Of Travel In National Parks** – Historian Timothy Davis has written a book called *National Park Roads* that’s just been released. This description is from *High Country News*: “The large-format book combines stunning photographs, both old and new, with historical context and discussions of the purpose and place of park roads. University of Colorado professor Paul Sutter comments: ‘Roads share the view, define the line between preservation and use, and demonstrate above all else that our national parks are landscapes where nature and culture intersect.’ This book invites you to explore these intersections as you journey through the history of travel in national parks.” [High Country News](#).

**Sundry Actions and Updates** – Here, in brief, are additional reports on parks, either culled from park press releases or from newspapers:

- *Arches NP* – Blogger Jim Stiles, a current or past ranger at the park, has posted a fascinating story about an attempt in the late 40s and early to mid-50s to protect Delicate Arch – which was thought to be near collapse – by spraying it with silicone epoxy or encasing the weaker leg with a cement collar. Stiles’ report is based on research in the park’s archive of memos. [The Canyon Country Zephyr](#).

- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – The park has completed a solar energy project at Cades Cove. The project will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 23 tons per year and fuel costs by \$14,000 per year. The newly installed solar array includes 80 panels that provide a silent energy source to serve the small visitor center, bookstore, and restroom facility in the Cable Mill area. [Knoxville News Sentinel](#).
- *Delaware Water Gap NRA* – The New Jersey Department of Transportation is proposing to build a \$50 million, half-mile long fence along I-84 through the park and the famous Delaware Water Gap to protect traffic from falling rocks. Local communities are opposed; the park has issued a statement saying that it is working with DOT and has expressed concerns about the project's impact on the scenery, wildlife and plants. [Lehigh Valley Live](#).
- *Cape Hatteras NS* – Cape Hatteras Lighthouse is operating again. It had been turned off since mid-January, after several severe winter storms affected the Hatteras Island area and caused damage to hard-to-replace parts on the lighthouse's electrical systems. [Outer Banks Voice](#).
- *Denali NP* – The February 19th KidsPost section of the *Washington Post* has an article on Jennifer Raffaelli, the ranger who runs the sled-dog operation at Denali, and, of course, on her 31 Alaskan huskies. Several good pictures are included. [Washington Post](#).
- *Crater Lake NP* – Amateur photographer Erika Clements snapped a photo of a gray wolf in the park on February 14th. "Clements said the wolf jumped down from a snow bank and walked around her delivery truck before jumping onto the snow on the other side of the road. She said it was 'surreal, being that close to an animal that was both beautiful and threatening.'" She gave the photo (included in the story) to the park. [Klamath Falls Herald and News](#).
- *Yosemite NP* – The Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias will reopen to the public at 9:00 am on Friday, June 15th. It has been closed since July 2015 to complete a restoration project. In partnership with Yosemite Conservancy, the National Park Service has been working to improve natural hydrology, construct an ADA-accessible boardwalk, construct an improved welcome plaza, and improve the overall visitor experience. [Park news release](#).

## **Public Lands**

**Report: Congressional Attacks On Public Lands Increased In 2017** – The Center for Biological Diversity has released a nicely done 12-page report entitled "[Under Siege: Congress's Assault On Public Lands Surged During Trump's First Year](#)." The press release announced the report provides the rationale for compiling it: "Congress unleashed an unprecedented attack on public lands and waters during President Trump's first year in office, according to a new Center for Biological Diversity report released today. The analysis finds that the 115th Congress introduced 124 bills in 2017 to strip protections from public lands and waters, including national monuments, parks, wildlife refuges and forests – an increase of more than 25 percent compared to the 114th Congress." It also lists the six top "Public Land Enemies" of 2017 – Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska), Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyoming), Sen. Jeff Flake (R- Arizona), Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nevada) and Rep. Mark Amodei (R-Nevada). [Center for Biological Diversity news release](#).

**New App For Documenting Damage To Public Lands** – Public News Service, "a member-supported news service that advocates journalism in the public interest," reports on an interesting new app called TerraTRUTH that can be used to document damage that they see and upload it to a database. The app was created by the Conservation Lands Foundation, in partnership with Puente Institute and Grand Staircase-Escalante Partners. It encourages users to "Explore, Snap, and Send" images that show harm on land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. [Public News Service article](#).

## **The Environment**

**Northeast Forests Assessed For Climate Change Vulnerability** – The U.S. Forest Service recently published [a study](#) evaluating the vulnerability of forests across New England and northern New York

under a range of future climates. The report presents an evaluation of the anticipated response of eight forest communities to environmental changes in precipitation, temperature, and sea-level rise. Among the findings: “Model projections suggest that many northern and boreal species, including balsam fir, red spruce, and black spruce, may fare worse under future conditions, but other species may benefit from projected changes in climate... Montane spruce-fir, low-elevation spruce-fir, and lowland mixed conifer forests were determined to be the most vulnerable communities. Central hardwoods, transition hardwoods, and pitch pine-scrub oak forests were perceived as having lower vulnerability to projected changes in climate.” [New England And Northern New York Forest Ecosystem Vulnerability Assessment And Synthesis](#).

**Beech Trees Taking Over** – Meanwhile, another new report on northeastern forests – this one a 30-year study of beech trees – shows that they are becoming the dominant tree due to climate change. The study, published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Applied Ecology*, reports that the population of American beech increased substantially over the period, while species including sugar maple, red maple and birch all decreased. The changes could have major negative ramifications for forest ecosystems. [Portland Press Herald](#).

### Acknowledgements

This newsletter comes to you through the efforts of a number of people. First are our “regulars”:

- Producer: Steve Pittleman
- Congressional Correspondent: Don Hellmann
- At Large Correspondents: Dennis Burnett and Rick Smith

Thanks also to Joan Anzelmo and Duncan Morrow for sending along stories or tips for this issue.

If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to Bill Halainen at the Weekly National Park System Report: [BHalainen@gmail.com](mailto:BHalainen@gmail.com). Please don't submit them via his personal email address or Facebook page.

### A Closing Observation

"National parks are an investment in the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of Americans as individuals. They are a gainful investment contributing to the economy of the nation. They are, moreover, an investment in something as simple, yet as fundamental as good citizenship, love of country, and appreciation of the natural and historic fabric of America."

[Director Conrad L. Wirth](#)

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The *Weekly National Park System Report* is a publication of The Coalition To Protect America's National Parks. It is prepared by Coalition member Bill Halainen, former editor of the *NPS Morning Report*, and produced and disseminated by Coalition member Steve Pittleman.

The Coalition is a non-profit organization of past and current NPS employees and their allies that “studies, educates, speaks, and acts for the preservation and protection of the National Park System and mission-related programs of the National Park Service.”

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