



The Coalition Weekly Report Wednesday, May 15, 2019

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Incidents

Appalachian NST Man Charged With Murdering Hiker On AT

James Louis Jordan, 30, faces federal charges in a brutal attack this past Saturday on two Appalachian Trail hikers that left a man dead and a woman hospitalized with severe stab wounds. Jordan was arrested early Saturday after sheriff's deputies in Wythe County, Virginia, located him along the trail in southwestern Virginia by tracking an SOS signal triggered by one of the victims.

Jordan has been charged with murder and assault with intent to murder in connection with the attack. The names of the victims have not been released, but law enforcement described the horrific scene that involved multiple agencies in a combined effort to catch Jordan.

It is high season for "thru-hikers" traveling the length of the famed scenic trail, which stretches along 2,100 miles from Georgia to Maine. Hikers typically begin around spring and trek north. The one-mile length of the trail that passes through Wythe County is rural, but runs adjacent to Interstate 81 and is full of hikers this time of year. Wythe County deputies were the first to encounter Jordan, who was found several yards from the scene of Saturday's attack.

It had been reported that a man wielding a large knife, accompanied by a dog, had threatened a group of four hikers camped out late Friday. Authorities said that Jordan pursued two of the hikers, who fled north and eluded him. Those two reached sheriff's deputies in nearby Bland County and reported the nighttime attack. The other two hikers fled south but were unable to escape. Jordan chased and caught up with them, leading to the attack. The male victim managed to trigger an SOS signal on his phone, and the mobile service provider alerted deputies to his location just north of Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The woman – who suffered defensive wounds and was severely injured by the stabbing – escaped by pretending to be dead. When Jordan walked away, she fled and eventually encountered another group of hikers six miles away. She was taken to a nearby trauma center.

The Wythe County Sheriff's Office tactical team traveled four miles into the woods, following the wounded man's SOS signal. They initially came across walkers who described a knife-wielding man known as "Sovereign" who roamed the trail with a dog. While authorities were talking to the group, a dog ambled over to the camp. Deputies followed the animal, who led them back to Jordan, and he was taken into custody without incident. Investigators later found a 20-inch knife nearby along the trail and soon discovered the male victim.

Jordan, who authorities said they think is "Sovereign," is well known to the community of hikers on the trail. Recent news reports of incidents in Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia describe a man threatening and chasing other hikers with a machete or large knife.

In late April, Jordan pleaded guilty to charges of drug possession and criminal impersonation (for giving deputies a fake ID) following a confrontation with a group of hikers in Unicoi County, Tennessee near the North Carolina border. He was sentenced to probation, fined and released from custody.

Appalachian Trail hikers are a well-connected community of athletes, enthusiasts and outdoors lovers who stay in close online contact. Word had spread among them about Jordan's frequent confrontations with hikers; two videos about Jordan on Facebook garnered a combined 26,000 views, and his website chronicles hiker life with photographs from nearly 2,000 people.

For additional details, please see the news link below.

Source: Arelis R. Hernández, [Washington Post](#).

Castillo de San Marcos NM Man Injured In Effort To Scale Castillo Wall

A man was injured after he fell 15 feet while trying to climb the wall of the Castillo de San Marcos around 2 a.m. on the morning of Monday, May 6th.

The man was put on a stretcher and transported to a nearby hospital for treatment of his injuries. His identity, as well as the severity of his injuries are not currently known. Federal charges are under consideration.

Source: [First Coast News](#).

Rocky Mountain NP Visitors Caught In Avalanches In Park

Seven people were caught in a series of large avalanches above Emerald Lake this past Saturday, but there were no fatalities or injuries. The cause of the avalanches has not yet been determined.

Rangers are advising backcountry users to not travel on or below steep snow-covered terrain in the park. More information on avalanche conditions can be found at the [Colorado Avalanche Information Center](#).

Source: [CBS News](#).

Yellowstone NP Three Sentenced For Poaching Mountain Lion

Three Montana men who were charged with illegally hunting and taking a male mountain lion in the park north of the Yellowstone River last December have admitted that they shot the mountain lion and took it back to their vehicle; one also admitted to lying about where the lion was killed.

Austin Peterson, Trey Juhnke and Corbin Simmons of Livingston were each ordered to pay approximately \$1,700 in restitution and fees and serve three years of unsupervised probation. During the probation they are banned from hunting and fishing and trapping "worldwide."

Source: [Cody Enterprise](#).

National Park System Weekly Weather Impacts Update

The increasing frequency of climate-change-related severe weather closures and incidents in NPS areas has warranted the creation this intermittent Servicewide summary:

- *Blue Ridge Parkway* – The park, which is still cleaning up from Hurricane Michael, has announced that the four-mile road up Roanoke Mountain will remain closed through at least

the end of the summer. It's been closed since last October, when the hurricane caused mudslides and severe flooding that has left the road unusable. The park will need to hire an engineer to survey the damage before beginning repairs to the road, but this will require contracting for an engineer via FHWA and there's no timeline yet on when that might occur. Taj Simmons, [WSLS News](#).

- *Virgin Islands NP* – Hurricane recovery continues here as well, this time from two storms – Hurricanes Irma and Maria – that seriously damaged the park in 2017. A new concessioner, CinnOpCo, LLC, has just been selected to run the Cinnamon Bay Campground and the food and beverage concessions at Trunk Bay. Much work still needs to be done at Cinnamon Bay. Although the camping areas, restaurant, showers, and beach rental shop remain closed, park visitors will have access to the beach and the onsite porta johns during the campground cleanup. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#).
- *Ross Lake NRA* – Due to very low precipitation in the Skagit Basin over past months, Ross Lake will be as much as twenty-five feet below normal levels over the entire summer. Although the area will remain open to visitors, the low water level will have an impact on the availability of some visitor facilities, services and recreational opportunities. Currently, the boat ramp at Hozomeen and all boat-in campsites on the lake are temporarily closed. Source: [KPUG News](#).
- *Delaware Water Gap NRA* – Heavy rains caused a mudslide near Eshback on Sunday, May 5th, that forced the temporary closure of Route 209 until it could be cleared. The slide left a football-field-length section of road covered with mud, water, brush and trees. A nearby weather station recorded 1.84 inches of rain between Friday and Monday, with 1.65 inches of that falling on Sunday and early Monday. Source: Bruce Scruton, [New Jersey Herald](#).

National Park System

Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents

Below are short follow-ups on incidents previously reported in this newsletter:

- *Rocky Mountain NP* – Over a six month period in late 2018 and early 2019, three people disappeared while hiking in the park. Despite major searches for each of them that were supported by numerous state and local agencies, all three remain missing – a situation that has never before occurred in the park. Still missing are Ryan Albert, 30, Micah Tice, 20, and James Pruitt, 70. The three men had two things in common – each was hiking alone, and each had neglected to tell anyone his destination or route. In all three cases, heavy snows and high winds seriously hindered searchers' efforts. The park recorded 155 SAR incidents last year, 46 of them considered major. Source: Tyler Piolet, [Estes Park Trail-Gazette](#).
- *Joshua Tree NP* – Family and friends have returned to the park to resume searching for Canadian visitor Paul Miller, 51, who disappeared while on a hike during a two-week visit to the park with his wife Stephanie last July. Although they expressed their gratefulness to park staff and others who have already helped in the search for Miller, they said that they're not giving up their efforts to find him. More information on their efforts can be found [on this Facebook page](#). Source: Tom Tucker, [KESQ News](#).

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center

Minimal Fire Activity Reported Nationwide

NIFC remains at PL 1. The National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) continues to issue weekly reports each Friday. Initial attack was relatively light last week. Five new large fires were reported; firefighters contained four of them.

Current NPS Fires – Reports on NPS fires that appear on the NICC summary:

- *Big Cypress NP* – The 528-acre Thick Root Fire is burning in southern rough and short grass. It's 25% contained, with full containment expected by today. Twenty-two firefighters and overhead are assigned to the fire.

NPS/Interagency Fire News – Stories pertaining to wildland fire and fire-related activities that involved the NPS and its fellow agencies. Please note that stories that focus on the effects of climate change on fire – such as last week’s episode of NOVA entitled “Inside the Megafire” – appear under the wildland fire heading in the climate change impacts section below.

- *NPS Issues Report On Brian Hughes Fatality* – On May 7th, the Service released the findings and a follow-up corrective action plan regarding the July 2018 death of Brian Hughes, captain of the Service’s Arrowhead Hotshots. Hughes, 33, and his crew were working on the Ferguson Fire on the Sierra National Forest near Yosemite at the time of the accident. In response to his death, William Kaage, the chief of the NPS Division of Fire and Aviation, assembled a team of interagency and interdisciplinary experts and tasked them with conducting a serious accident investigation. The aim of the serious accident investigation team was to learn what took place and identify lessons learned. A board of review created a corrective action plan with nine proposed actions based on the report’s findings. These mainly focused on additional training courses and recommended studies. The purpose of both the serious accident investigation team and board of review is to focus on learning and training to reduce the risk of incidents like this in the future. On the morning of July 29, 2018, one of the Arrowhead Hotshots began cutting a standing dead hazard tree with help from Hughes. They intended for the tree to fall uphill; instead, it fell in the direction of the primary escape route, grazed another standing dead tree as it fell, and struck Hughes as it was coming to rest. Efforts to save Hughes’ life were made on scene by the sawyer, fellow firefighters, and paramedics on the ground and in the air. Despite these efforts, Hughes was pronounced dead as he was being flown to the Mariposa Helibase. Next steps are focused on following up on the actions outlined in the corrective action plan. Both the factual report from the serious accident investigation team and the corrective action plan from the board of review can be found at the [Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center website](#). Source: Tina Boehle and Mike Theune, [NPS Fire and Aviation Management](#).
- *Visiting National Parks Post-Fire* – Uproxx, an entertainment and popular culture news website, ran an interesting story on May 1st entitled “All The Reasons To Visit A National Park Still Recovering From Wildfires.” The article is built around an interview with Dr. Martha Witter, a fire ecologist for the National Park Service based at Santa Monica Mountains. Although it focuses on that park, the author references the other national parks recently affected by major fires – Whiskeytown, Yosemite, Crater Lake, Glacier and others. Witter describes the work of BAER teams and the rapid regrowth that occurs after a fire. Source: Allison Sanchez, [Uproxx](#).

Current Incident Resource Commitments

Category	April 26th	May 3rd	May 10th
Area Command Teams	0	0	0
NIMO Teams	0	0	0
Type 1 Teams	0	0	0
Type 2 Teams	0	0	2
Crews	0	2	11
Engines	9	19	29
Helicopters	1	1	7
Total FF/Overhead	60	189	417

Fires/Acreage

Category	2019 Total	2008-2018 Ave	2019 Variance
Year-to-Date Fires	10,625	18,654	- 8,029
Year-to-Date Acres	211,923	945,678	- 733,755

Source: [National Interagency Fire Center](#).

Congressional Actions

Reports on legislation, upcoming hearings and new public laws of relevance to the national parks, prepared by Don Hellmann, former assistant director, legislative and Congressional affairs for the National Park Service.

New Public Laws

Nothing to report.

Senate Actions

May 7 – The Senate agreed to S. Res. 193, designating May 18, 2019, as “Kids to Parks Day”.

May 7 – The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs held a hearing to examine the nomination of Dale Cabaniss of Virginia to be director of the Office of Personnel Management. He was introduced by Senator Boozman.

House Actions

May 7 – The Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies held a budget hearing on the Department of the Interior. Testimony was heard from Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt.

May 9 – The Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing entitled “The Long Overdue Need to Reform the Mining Law of 1872.” There were no witnesses from federal agencies at this hearing.

May 9 – The Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands held a hearing entitled “Wildfire Resilient Communities.” Testimony was heard from Patti Hiram, acting deputy chief for state and private forestry, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, and public witnesses.

May 10 - The House passed H.R. 2157, making supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, by a vote of 257 yeas to 150 nays. As passed by the House, the bill includes the following for the National Park Service:

- An additional \$50 million for the Historic Preservation Fund account for necessary expenses related to the consequences of Hurricanes Florence and Michael, and Typhoon Yutu.
- An additional \$78 million for the construction account for necessary expenses related to the consequences of Hurricanes Florence and Michael, Typhoons Yutu and Mangkhut, and the calendar year 2018 wildfires, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions.

National Park Service

National Park System

Benefits Of Living Near National Parks – [A study published in Science Advances](#) shows that households near ‘protected areas’ – national parks, wilderness areas or nature reserves – have higher

levels of wealth and a lower likelihood of poverty than similar households far from protected areas. Children who lived near protected areas were also taller for their age than those who lived far from protected areas. “To draw their conclusions,” reports *Lonely Planet*, “the researchers looked at 60,000 households in 34 developing countries around the world. Comparing data from households that lived within 10 km of a protected area to households that lived far from protected areas, researchers found a range of benefits associated with living near conservation areas. Households that lived near a protected area had 17% higher levels of wealth and a 16% lower likelihood of poverty. Additionally, children under the age of 5 were 10% taller than their counterparts who lived far away from protected areas. Researchers were careful to point out that simply living next to a protected area might not be enough to have a positive impact on health and wellbeing. They must also have access to those protected spaces.” Source: Alexander Howard, [Lonely Planet](#).

Additional Notes – A summary of shorter articles on issues relating to the Service:

- *New Book Out On NPS* – In honor of National Park Week, Rand McNally has published a special edition book that celebrates the national parks. Rand McNally's 144-page *National Parks* features large photographs, detailed maps, and short overviews, as well as lodging options and travel tips. Rand McNally has also launched new editions of its road atlases, including a spiral-bound, oversized *Road Atlas & National Park Guide*. The atlas is designed to help travelers plan their park visits as well as assist in navigation when they're on the road. Source: [Cision PR Newswire](#).
- *Article On Mission 66* – On April 12th, *CityLab* magazine ran an article entitled “Mission 66 and the Transformation of the National Park Service.” Although controversial to some because the development it brought impinged on natural areas, writes the author, the reality was that the Service “was responding to the modernization of American society and its effects on the national parks. It swapped out an outdated national park model for one that served visitors more effectively, thereby allowing them to experience the parks as NPS employees intended them to.” The article also includes some interesting stats. During Mission 66, the NPS built or improved 95 visitor centers, 216 utility buildings, 257 administrative and service structures, 575 campgrounds, 1,239 park housing structures, and 2,767 miles of new and repaired roads. Source: Meghan White, [CityLab](#).
- *Tips For NPS Visitors* – The *Detroit News* recently published a list of 13 tips for travelers to national parks that includes a few that are refreshing additions to such lists, such as “safety precautions are no joke” and “national parks are not zoos.” You can find the full list at the following site. Source: Christina Vercelletto, [Detroit News](#).

Around The Parks

Reports on activities in the parks, listed in alphabetical order.

- *Cape Cod NS* – The park has signed a ten year lease with CJNL, Inc. to operate at a motel on park land at the former location of Nauset Knolls Motor Lodge. The original motor lodge was built in 1950 prior to the establishment of the park; it overlooks Nauset Beach was operated for many years as an NPS concession contract by the Benz Corporation. The corporation's contract with the NPS ended last year, at which time an RFP was issued for a new lessee. The signing of the lease is the culmination of negotiations with CJNL. Source: [Cape Cod Today](#).
- *Chickamauga and Chattanooga NHP* – The park is seeking public comment on possibly allowing mountain bike use on a two-mile segment of the Jackson Gap and John Smartt hiking trails on the Lookout Mountain Battlefield. Public comments on an environmental assessment evaluating the potential impacts of this action can be submitted electronically from May 6th to June 4th at [the park's PEPC website](#). Source: [The Chattanooga](#).
- *Death Valley NP* – The May 7th edition of the *Los Angeles Times* had a story about what might be considered a non-traditional form of ‘birding’ that’s drawing visitors to the park – watching

Air Force and Navy jet fighters tearing down “Star Wars Canyon” (so-called because parts of the first movie were reputedly shot there), located on the park’s western edge. The viewing location of choice is a vista point called Father Crowley Overlook, named after a Catholic priest (Father John C. Crowley) who served the desert area during the 1920s and ’30s. The Air Force and Navy have used the canyon as a training area since World War II, long before it became part of the park in 1994. Most of the aircraft that pass through come from nearby bases such as Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, Naval Air Station Lemoore, Edwards Air Force Base, Fresno Air National Guard Base and Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada. Publicity via social media has led to a significant increase in visitation, so the park has installed a parking lot, a railing along the edge of the canyon and a bathroom at the overlook to accommodate the growing number of visitors. The story includes a number of photos and a two-minute-plus video of fighters roaring down the canyon that was taken from the overlook. Source: Ruben Vives, [Los Angeles Times](#).

- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – The new section of the Foothills Parkway between Walland and Wears Valley has brought a record number of visitors to the park. Now, park and government leaders are trying to come up with ways to use the land that was bought for portions of the parkway that may never be built. The original plan for the Foothills Parkway approved in the 1940s was for a continuous 72-mile scenic route along the northern boundary of the park. With the recent completion of the longtime "missing link," there are now 34 miles finished from U.S. 129 to Wears Valley. There’s also a 5.6-mile section of the parkway completed on the eastern end from Interstate 40 to Cosby. That leaves about 33 miles that will likely never be built, so discussions are underway about a possible trail and/or other recreational facilities along the ROW. Source: Jim Matheny, [WBIR News](#).
- *Lewis and Clark NHT* – The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act, signed on March 12th, included a 1200-mile-long extension to the trail, pushing its starting point back to the Ohio River in Pittsburgh. The trail extension will increase opportunities for interpretation and education, particularly the activities that happened in preparation for the expedition. It will also highlight recreational opportunities along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and engage partners and stakeholders in trail management and related activities. The trail’s 4,900 miles now traverse the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon. Source: Mark Weekley, [Lewis and Clark NHT](#).
- *Sequoia/Kings Canyon NPs* – The park and the Sequoia Parks Conservancy have completed the development of a tour for visitors who are deaf or suffering from a hearing loss. The two organizations worked together to create the tour to better serve a wider range of visitors using grant funding from the National Environmental Education Foundation. The tour contains eight videos in American Sign Language and provides safety information and interpretive descriptions at key points throughout the tour. The grant also provided for the purchase of assisted listening devices, which amplify and clarify sound by cutting down or eliminating ambient noise. Headsets with induction neck loops are also available for visitors who use hearing aids and cochlear implants with a “T” switch. These devices are distributed free-of-charge on a first-come, first-served basis. The tours will begin at Crystal Cave on May 24th. This is the first tour of its kind in a national park cave. Source: [YubaNet.com](#).
- *Theodore Roosevelt NP* – More than four miles of the park’s scenic loop drive has been closed due to erosion that caused a depression in the road more than a foot deep. The south side of the loop road is closed from the Mile 7 closure gate to the Badlands Overlook at Mile 11.5. There is currently no estimate for the length of time of the road closure. An emergency repair funding request has been submitted through the National Park Service road repair program. Source: [KFYR News](#).
- *Yosemite NP* – Plans are in the works to improve Tuolumne County's gateway to the park and to relocate roadside parking from an overused edge of Tuolumne Meadows. Both projects are planned on Highway 120 with construction beginning next year. The objective is to combine visitor information services with campground reservations in one building and to upgrade the existing welcome center’s aging utility systems, parking areas, and public restrooms.

Upgrading this gateway to Yosemite is a priority because about a million visitors use the Big Oak Flat entrance annually and the welcome center complex serves more than 50,000 visitors a year. Additional details are available in the link to the article, or you can read [a PDF file with the project EA at this link](#). Source: Guy McCarthy, Sonora [Union Democrat](#).

Federal Government

Recent news stories, web postings, statements, and press releases pertaining to Congress (excepting official business, which appears above), the administration, DOI, and other public land management agencies that have bearing on the NPS.

Administration and Government

President Puts Military In Charge Of BI's – Getting background investigations completed has been a frustratingly slow process for years (decades?), but a resolution may be on the way. On April 24th, reports ABC News, the president signed an executive order officially making the U.S. military responsible for virtually all security background checks for millions of federal workers. The order calls for the National Background Investigations Bureau, currently under OPM, to be absorbed by the Department of Defense under a reorganized (and renamed) Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency. Though Congress mandated in the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act that a majority of the investigative bureau's caseload be transferred to the Defense Department in phases, Wednesday's order lifts the entire bureau -- and the 95 percent of all federal background checks it processes -- and places it all under military authority. As of last week, the NBI had a backlog of about 500,000 cases, a 32 percent drop from the backlog at its worst. Source: Lee Ferran, [ABC News](#).

Department of the Interior

The Continuing Adventures Of Secretary Bernhardt – Scant weeks after Ryan Zinke lowered his personal flag from the roof of DOI and headed west, thereby terminating this publication's long-running series on his adventures and misadventures in the District, his successor – one David Longly Bernhardt, a.k.a. DLB – has begun providing enough material for similar coverage:

- *DLB and the MBTA* – “Under Republican and Democratic presidents from Nixon through Obama,” reports *Reveal News*, “killing migratory birds, even inadvertently, was a crime, with fines for violations ranging from \$250 to \$100 million. The power to prosecute created a deterrent that protected birds and enabled government to hold companies to account for environmental disasters.” But, at least in part, the wildlife cops is no longer on the beat due to the actions of DLB. Bernhardt pushed a December 2017 legal opinion that declared the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act applies only when companies kill birds on purpose. The result? According to internal government emails obtained by *Reveal* from The Center for Investigative Reporting, federal wildlife agents have been opting out of investigations and enforcement, citing that policy change as the reason. Scientists caution that weakening the MBTA will imperil many types of birds that are endangered or declining in numbers and also eliminate an important source of wetlands restoration funding: penalties paid by violators. Source: Elizabeth Shogren, [Reveal News](#).
- *DLB and Past Clients* – An April 21st article in *Politico* adds to prior allegations that Secretary Bernhardt has not been forthcoming about his contacts with prior clients since coming to Interior. According to the article, he began working on policies that would aid one of his former lobbying clients within weeks of joining the Trump administration. His efforts, beginning in at least October 2017, included shaping the department's response to a key portion of a water infrastructure law he had helped pass as a lobbyist for California farmers, recently released calendars show. The department offered scant details at the time about meetings that Bernhardt, then the deputy secretary, held with Interior officials overseeing water deliveries to the farmers, leading many observers to believe he was steering clear of the issues he had previously lobbied on. But newly disclosed schedules show that he had more than three dozen meetings with key players on California water issues, including multiple lengthy meetings on

specific endangered species protections at the heart of his previous work. Those appointments were only vaguely identified on his official calendars. Interior's inspector general is probing whether Bernhardt violated ethics rules by working on policies he had pushed as a lobbyist for the Westlands Water District, a job that earned his former firm more than \$1.3 million in the five years before he returned to government service. Source: Annie Snider, [Politico](#).

- *DLB and Climate Change* – The secretary had an interesting exchange with Democrats on the House Appropriations subcommittee overseeing the Interior Department's budget last week. When they asked why DOI isn't doing more to assess and mitigate the effects of warming temperatures, acidifying oceans and other effects of climate change on lands administered by the department, his reply was that Congress hadn't directed him to take action on climate change (incidentally, he actually acknowledged that climate change is real and that humans are aggravating it). "During his first testimony to Congress since becoming interior secretary, Bernhardt said it is up to lawmakers to direct bureaucrats like himself to address the causes and effects of warming globally," reports the *Washington Post*. "The punt back to lawmakers is likely to frustrate House Democrats who are trying to hold the administration's feet to the fire on climate change, since they know that any significant climate-related legislation to emerge from their chamber is likely to be rejected by either the president or the GOP-controlled Senate. At the same time, Democrats have only passed a single climate bill — one keeping the United States in the Paris climate accord — since taking the majority." Source: Dino Grandoni, [Washington Post](#).

Former Ranger And NPS WASO AD Nominated To Be DOI Assistant Secretary – Rob Wallace, who started his career as a ranger at Grand Teton National Park, has been nominated to serve as assistant secretary for fish, wildlife and parks, a position that oversees the NPS and USFWS. Wallace was once chief of staff and a legislative aide for former Wyoming Senator Malcolm Wallop, and in the late 1980s served as the assistant director for congressional and legislative affairs for the NPS. Most recently, he has presided over the Upper Green River Conservancy, a Jackson-based group that describes itself as an "innovative partnership of ranchers, energy companies, conservation stakeholders and impact investors working together to ensure the protection of core sage grouse habitat" in the Upper Green River watershed. Wallace has also served on the boards of Teton Science Schools, the Jackson Hole Historical Society, the Jackson Hole Land Trust and the University of Wyoming's School of Energy Resources, according to a biography posted by the Grand Teton National Park Foundation, where he is also a board member. Source: Mike Koshmrl, *Jackson Hole Daily*.

House and Senate

Committee Threatens To Stop Pay To DOI Staff For Non-Compliance With Requests – On May 7th, the House Oversight Committee threatened to withhold the salaries of DOI officials who have blocked lawmakers from interviewing agency employees about whether Secretary Bernhardt was complying with recordkeeping laws. Chairman Elijah Cummings (D-MD) said this in a prepared statement: "Please be advised that any official at the Department who 'prohibits or prevents' or 'attempts or threatens to prohibit or prevent' any officer or employee of the Federal Government from speaking with the Committee could have his or her salary withheld pursuant to section 713 of the Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act." In his statement, Cummings also pointed to a 2016 GAO report that said a department's budget "appropriation was not available to pay the salary of a federal officer or employee who prevents another federal officer or employee from communicating directly with any member, committee, or subcommittee of Congress." The committee has sought interviews with Interior's administrative assistant to the deputy secretary, scheduling and advance director, executive assistant to the office of the deputy secretary and acting chief of staff and associate deputy secretary. The committee and the National Archives and Records Administration are investigating allegations that Bernhardt was keeping meetings off his official calendars and not supplying information about meetings to the public. Source: Ben Lefebvre, [Politico](#).

Climate and Conservation

This section covers the myriad interconnected, conservation-related threats that are transforming the national parks, their ecosystems, and the world ecosphere, often simultaneously.

National and Worldwide Issues

The Bad News – The news on climate and conservation issues these days is inevitably grim, but needs to be shared – mitigated, when and where possible, with good news, which follows. First the former:

- *Flooding Steadily Worsening In US* – NPR has produced [a concise, informative video](#) in which reporter Rebecca Hersher explains why flooding in America is becoming more frequent and severe. In some parts of the Midwest and East Coast, for example, extreme rain has already increased more than 50% since the early 1900s. Warmer air as a result of climate change holds more moisture and thus increases the potential for torrential rain, as occurred in the Midwest this past spring when rapid snowmelt and sudden rains destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least four people. The Midwestern flooding is a preview of what's to come in the future, as tens of billions of dollars in river trade and farmland throughout the region are under threat from projected flooding increases. Levees and floodwalls were made to withstand rain patterns of the past and these structures are failing as rains become more severe. The video also includes a good explanation of the misleading term “100 year flood” and argues for its replacement. Source: Monica Medina and Miro Korenha, [Our Daily Planet](#).
- *Erosion and Dust Storms Also Worsening* – Soil erosion in the West is getting worse and is creating more dust – which isn't good for ecosystems, human health or the economy. A [study by the U.S. Geological Survey](#) says more than 200,000 square miles of land in the U.S. is more susceptible than ever to soil erosion from wind. And roughly two-thirds of that is on federally managed land in the West. According to Michael Duniway, the lead author of the study the causes of increased dust include removal of vegetation, energy exploration, off-highway vehicles, overgrazing, and droughts and wildfires. Source: Monica Medina and Miro Korenha, [Our Daily Planet](#).

The Good News – Despite the continuous drumbeat of bad news on the climate and conservation fronts, some headway is being made in meeting and dealing with related issues:

- *States Continue To Join Movement To Control Greenhouse Gases* – In the absence of federal action on climate change, more states are setting ambitious targets to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Washington became the latest last week when Governor Jay Inslee signed a law requiring that 100 percent of the state's electricity come from clean energy sources by 2045. Washington is now the fifth state or territory—following Hawaii, California, New Mexico and Puerto Rico—to commit to 100 percent clean electricity, and at least six other states are considering similar legislation. Since January, newly elected governors in Illinois, New Mexico, Michigan, Wisconsin, Maine and Nevada have joined the U.S. Climate Alliance, a group of governors who have committed to implementing policies consistent with the U.S. goal of the Paris Agreement. Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf last week became the 24th governor to join since President Donald Trump vowed to pull the U.S. out of the accord. The states and territories in the alliance represent more than half of the U.S. population and economy, and their commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions could keep momentum going in the absence of strong action at the national level. Their goal is to achieve the Paris agreement short-term pledge made by the Obama administration: cutting at least 26-28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025. The Trump administration has disavowed this promise. Source: Phil McKenna, [Inside Climate News](#).

National Park System Issues

Climate Change – News pertaining to the impacts of climate change on park lands, waters, species and other assets:

- *National Mall and Memorial Parks* – Rising sea levels, coupled with deferred maintenance, are causing such a threat to the Tidal Basin in Washington that the Trust for the National Mall, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the NPS have joined together in a project entitled [Save The Tidal Basin](#) that aims to bring nonprofit organizations and the federal government together to reimagine the area and develop improvement plans that they say could cost up to \$500 million. The partnership’s webpage describes the problem: “Due to rising sea levels, the silt and water of the Potomac Flats make the Tidal Basin unstable; the conditions they create compromise both historic resources and visitors’ experiences. Each day at high tide, water floods the sidewalks surrounding the Tidal Basin, making them impassable and compromising the roots of the cherry trees. In addition, the daily flooding hampers accessibility, and perimeter and safety challenges, substandard visitor facilities, and inadequate interpretation all threaten the Tidal Basin. Chronic annual underfunding of the National Park Service maintenance budget compounds these issues.” Source: Justin Wm. Moyer, [Washington Post](#).
- *Mount Rainier NP* – *National Geographic* has a posting on its website that contains a short abstract of an article on the park’s diminishing glaciers that appears in its May edition. Although the mountain has the largest collection of glaciers on a single peak in the contiguous United States, they’ve lost approximately 18 percent of their volume since 1970. The most substantial thinning is occurring on south-facing glaciers and at elevations below 6,562 feet. The posting includes a graphic that shows the dramatic shrinking that’s occurred. Source: [National Geographic](#).

Wildland Fire – News pertaining to the impacts of worsening fire seasons, increasing WUI challenges, and related matters:

- *Systemwide* – The PBS series NOVA ran a show last week called “Inside the Megafire,” which focuses on the critical and growing problems caused by two forces in play at the same time – the explosion of people building homes in the wildland-urban interface (an estimated 100 million people now live within or along the interface) and the increasing severity in size, intensity and duration of wildfires. It begins with an overview of the incredibly voracious Camp Fire that includes some harrowing videos and insights into the fire by firefighters (including the head of Cal Fire, who notes that the rate of spread on the fire at one point reached an acre per second), then goes on to the other megafires California experienced last year (six of the ten worst wildland fires in state history occurred in the 13 months before the Camp Fire). The balance of the program focuses on the current challenges facing firefighters (there’s been a 1000% increase in annual acreage burned over the past 40 years) and on efforts by fire researchers to better understand the entirely different physics of megafires, which include heretofore rarely seen fire tornadoes (the one on the Carr Fire last year was an EF3 tornado that increased fire temperature to 2700 degrees). This is a must-see program. The episode runs to just under an hour in length and can be seen on [NOVA’s “Inside the Megafire” webpage](#). Source: [NOVA](#).

Park Carrying Capacity – Management challenges pertaining to the balance between park protection and use:

- *Acadia NP* – The ROD for the park’s transportation plan and related EIS was signed on May 9th. The plan will soon go into effect, improving the park’s ability to manage increasing visitation by providing several transportation options when visiting the park during peak season, including an expanded network of commercial tours, Island Explorer buses, and on-demand taxis. The construction of the Acadia Gateway Center and a new visitor center with expanded parking at Hulls Cove will allow the area to function as a park and ride and significantly improve accessibility for visitors. Private vehicles will be able to access Ocean Drive, Cadillac Mountain, and Jordan Pond with a parking reservation and all other destinations in the park without parking reservations. Approval of the ROD marks the culmination of an extensive planning, public engagement, and environmental impact analysis effort that began in 2015. Initial work on the plan will begin as soon as 2020 and will continue in years ahead. Source: Christie Anastasia, [Acadia NP](#).

- *Arches NP* – During a joint meeting of the park and the Moab City and Grand County councils last week, officials expressed an interest in implementing a “timed entry” system, thus far known as a reservation system, as an interim solution to traffic congestion in the parking lots and at the entry to Arches. This is seen as a way to take action now on this pressing issue while efforts continue to find a longtime resolution to the problem. Source: Carter Pape, [Moab Times-Independent](#).

Invasive and Exotic Species – News on exotic or invasive species that have appeared or may soon appear in NPS areas and efforts to counter them:

- *Grand Canyon NP* – Over the course of last month, park staff engaged in an operation to fight invasive plants along the banks of the Colorado River, principally Russian knapweed, camelthorn, pampas grass and perennial pepperweed. The operation targeted numerous locations along the river corridor. In the past, the park employed mechanical means to remove the plants, but without significant success. This year, a limited amount of approved herbicide was employed. Source: [Arizona Daily Sun](#).

External Challenges – Management issues related to usage or development in culturally or naturally sensitive areas abutting parks:

- *Chaco Culture NHP* – In response to the looming threat to Chaco’s cultural resources and the surrounding communities due to drilling for oil, New Mexico’s senators and representatives have introduced the Chaco Culture Heritage Area Protection Act. The bill encompasses almost 1 million acres surrounding Chaco and places the 316,000 acres of oil, natural gas and coal mineral rights owned by the federal government off-limits to future extraction. The Chaco bill only deals with some of the prospective oil drilling near the park, just the minerals controlled by the federal government. However, the New Mexico State Land Office also controls mineral rights in the area. The state land commissioner is similarly concerned about impacts to Chaco and local communities and has convened a task force to determine how the state can partner to also protect Chaco. [Click on this link](#) to see the text of the legislation before Congress. Source: Mark Pearson, [Durango Herald](#).

Systemic Pollution – Issues pertaining to air, light, sound, water and other forms of pollution associated with industrial development, population growth and other sources:

- *Tonto NM* – The International Dark-Sky Association announced last Tuesday that the Tonto National Monument has been designated as an International Dark Sky Park. This means that it has reduced the amount of artificial light impinging on its night sky and has become “one of the best places in the world to get an unhindered view of the night sky.” The article includes a video in which dark-sky advocates discuss why we need to protect our night skies as a resource. Source: [KPNX News](#).
- *Great Sand Dunes NP&P* – Great Sand Dunes has also been recognized as an International Dark Sky Park, joining three other sites in Colorado and about two dozen national parks around the country to be so designated. A celebration of this designation will be held in the park sometime this summer. Source: Kieran Nicholson, [Denver Post](#).

Park People

George Wright Society Biennial Awards Ceremony Held

Every other year, the Society confers awards to people who have made significant contributions in to the understanding and management of parks, protected areas and cultural sites in the areas of natural and cultural resources, social sciences, communications, and related fields. This year’s “Imagine Excellence” award recipients, says the Society, “have distinguished themselves for protecting

park resources, restoring natural conditions, promoting the understanding of human use of protected areas, supporting Indigenous peoples, addressing the impacts of climate change, and fostering large-scale conservation across entire landscapes. The following people received this year's awards:

- George Melendez Wright Award for Excellence – Louise Johnson, retired chief of RM at Olympic NP, and Abigail Miller, retired NPS deputy associate director for natural resource stewardship & science
- GWS Cultural Resource Achievement Award – Melia Lane-Kamahele, manager of the Service's Pacific Islands Office
- GWS Natural Resource Achievement Award – Anthony Fiorillo, chief curator and vice president of research and collections, Perot Museum of Nature and Science, and Jeffrey Marion, USGS station leader and scientist and adjunct professor, Virginia Tech University
- GWS Social Science Achievement Award – Steve Lawson, senior director, RSG, Inc.
- GWS Communications Award – Brenda Barrett, editor of *Living Landscape Observer*
- GWS Special Achievement Award – Maria Caffrey, climate scientist

You can read more detailed biographies of each of the recipients at the following link. Source: [George Wright Society](#).

National Park Foundation New Head Of National Park Friends Alliance

David MacDonald, who serves as president and CEO of Friends of Acadia (FOA), has been elected to serve as the volunteer president of the National Park Friends Alliance.

Operating under the umbrella of the National Park Foundation, the Friends Alliance is an informal association of non-profit organizations dedicated to the support of national parks. MacDonald became president at the Friends Alliance meeting earlier this spring in Washington, D.C.

“The Friends Alliance is an invaluable community of peers that has benefited Friends of Acadia’s work greatly as our staff and board have participated often over the years,” said MacDonald. “I am honored to take a turn leading the alliance and working more closely with my fellow steering committee members, with the National Park Service, and with the National Park Foundation to help the philanthropic partnerships grow in parks throughout the nation.”

MacDonald assumed the reins at FOA in May of 2012. Prior to that he spent two decades with the land conservation organization, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, where, among other positions, he worked as director of land protection. He served as the organization’s interim president in 2008.

Source: [Mount Desert Islander](#).

National Park Service Recent NPS Management Changes

Here’s a listing of recent personnel changes in the NPS. Click on the links following the brief summaries for additional details:

- *Washington Office* – Charles (Chuck) Laudner has been appointed assistant director for legislative and Congressional affairs, effective immediately. He has served as senior advisor to the director for legislative and Congressional affairs since joining the National Park Service in February 2018. The WASO memo announcing his appointment describes him as follows: “Having worked on both Senate and House staffs, Chuck brought a keen understanding of policy and a unique set of organizational skills that made him instantly effective in managing a number of important initiatives, issues, and events of significant interest to the legislative branch. A lifelong student of American history, he is deeply committed to the mission of the National Park Service and helping our nation’s elected leaders better understand how we are carrying out that mission on behalf of the American people. He will lead an excellent team of

legislative and congressional affairs specialists here in Washington and in our regional offices who share his commitment to this important work.” Source: WASO Memorandum.

From The Archives

This section contains incidents taken from *Morning Report* issues published during the corresponding week (approximately) 25 years ago in 1994. All entries appear in the original verb tense; “submitters” are those people who originally submitted the incident report.

- *Western Region* – On Tuesday, May 10th, law enforcement officers from numerous federal, state and local agencies served arrest and search warrants on Harold Mark Huddleston, 51, of Gresham, Oregon, who is suspected of committing over 1,200 burglaries of vehicles belonging to visitors camped in NPS, California state park, Forest Service and other camping areas around the United States, including Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Rocky Mountain, Crater Lake, Lassen Volcanic, Glacier and about 20 other NPS units. He's also suspected of committing hundreds of auto burglaries in dozens of California parks. Huddleston is currently being held on a federal detainer for violation of probation and cannot be released from jail. Over the next few days and weeks, Huddleston will be charged with numerous counts of theft, burglary, and other related criminal offenses. Additional charges may be filed following analysis of truck loads of evidence seized during the execution of the warrants. Tens of thousands of dollars worth of suspected stolen property was taken from his home and a storage locker in Oregon. NPS investigators have been working for approximately three years on this single investigation, which was initiated by the NPS and California State Park Service but eventually evolved into a multi-agency task force effort. The following agencies participated in the investigation: National Park Service, California State Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Gresham Police Department (Oregon), Regional Organized Crime Narcotics Agency (Oregon), California Highway Patrol, California Department of Justice, California Department of Forestry, FBI, Multnomah County Office of the District Attorney (Oregon), Hillsboro Police Department (Oregon), Washington County Sheriffs Department (Oregon), Oregon State Police, and numerous California county law enforcement agencies. Submitted by Special Agent Paul Ducasse.
- *White Sands NM* – Due to weather disturbances along most of the path of Tuesday's annular solar eclipse and the high altitude and desert climate of the park, White Sands found itself hosting over 300 astronomers, who set up telescopes, cameras and video recorders at the visitor center and in the dunes. A local astronomy club provided a live feed to a video projector for visitor viewing. Astronomers from Belgium, England, Canada, Mexico and from throughout the United States visited White Sands for the event. Submitted by Chief Ranger Bob Appling.
- *Denali NP* – A 33-year-old Canadian woman was killed on the morning of May 15th when she and her 28-year-old American boyfriend fell more than 800 feet at the 18,000-foot level of Mount McKinley. He was seriously injured. The two had reached the mountain's summit and were descending through Denali Pass when the accident occurred. According to the man, they were both tired and stumbling along just before the fall. He said that he was unconscious for five to six hours, then waited another two hours before he was discovered by another climbing party. A member of that group radioed air taxi operators at the Kahiltna Glacier base camp, and the park's high-altitude Lama helicopter was dispatched from its base in Talkeetna to the seasonal ranger camp at 14,200 feet to pick up a ranger and a volunteer physician. The Lama then flew to the climbing party's camp at 17,200 feet, where the ranger and physician climbed up to the scene and evacuated the victims. The man, who lost his gloves during the fall, is in serious condition with severe frostbite to all of his fingers and toes. The temperature was 40 below zero at the time of the accident. The woman was the first person to be killed on McKinley this year. Last year was one of the safest on the mountain, with only one fatality out of 1,108 climbers; the previous year was one of the most deadly, with 11 climbing fatalities. Reported in the *Anchorage Daily News*.

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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. Please don't submit them via his personal email address or Facebook page.

A Closing Observation

"The National Park Service is operated with three levels of management: the director's office in Washington, which is responsible for translating the secretary's objectives into action; regional offices [which are] responsible for coordination of field management; and the parks, each in the charge of a superintendent, [which are] responsible for on-site accomplishment of the service mission, namely: preserve the park resources and serve the visitor. The operation is not nearly as smooth as the outlines of the organization chart. Park people are intensely committed to their mission, hard working, strong-willed and fiercely independent. Dr. Stanley Cain, a former assistant secretary and a former chairman of the secretary's Advisory Board on National Parks, once likened the director's job to that of a university president. 'They each,' he said, 'have a job that requires the skill to herd wild hogs on ice.'"

Director George Hartzog, *Battling for the National Parks*, 1988

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The *Coalition Weekly Report* is a publication of [The Coalition To Protect America's National Parks](#). 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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If you'd like to contact the Coalition regarding any particular issue or action, please use the form found on the Coalition web page ([click on this link](#)).

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