



The Coalition Weekly Report Wednesday, November 13, 2019

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Incidents

Voyageurs NP Fire Destroys Voyageur Park Lodge

The Voyageur Park Lodge, located within the park's boundaries but not a park concession, burned to the ground on Monday, November 11th.

The St. Louis County Sheriff's Office reported it was called to the lodge along with Kabetogama and Little Fork firefighters at 5 p.m. No one was at the lodge at the time of the fire.

The lodge was a two-story building. The resort also has eleven cabins. It's located on a peninsula in Kabetogama Lake on the U.S.-Canadian border.

Source: [Duluth News-Tribune](#).

Kings Canyon NP Body Of Missing Hiker Found

The body of a hiker reported missing early last week has been found in the park.

Alan Stringer, 40, of Huntington Beach, was reported missing by family members a week ago Monday. A search by both Inyo County Sheriff's Office and the California Highway Patrol began on Wednesday. A ground team discovered his body at the top of the Darwin Glacier, near the base of the notch to go up Mount Darwin.

The cause of death has not been determined. The investigation continues.

Source: [YourCentralValley.com](#).

National Park System Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents

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

- *Sagamore Hill NHS* – On November 8th, the NPS released its findings and follow-up corrective action plan on last December's visitor center fire. The NPS investigation into the cause of the fire was inconclusive, but however there didn't appear to be any indications that it was intentionally caused. Accidental causes of the fire were considered, including furnace malfunction, original equipment installation issues, and storage practices. The building had a

monitored fire detection and alarm system and portable fire extinguishers. Park leadership and staff ensured all applicable NPS structural fire policy was followed. The serious accident investigation factual report prepared on the findings is available [at the park's website](#). It includes the investigations, findings, and recommendations from the incident. Source: Tina Boehle, [National Park Service Structural Fire Program](#).

- *Denali NP&P* – According to a National Transportation Safety Board [Aviation Accident Factual Report](#) released in late October, the pilot of a K2 Aviation flightseeing plane that crashed in the park last year, killing five people, was alive and calling his company's Talkeetna office on a satellite phone minutes after the crash, reporting that they'd flown into the side of a mountain in the Alaska Range. He was able to call for help before succumbing to his injuries. None of his passengers survived. The cause of the accident remains unknown. Both the wreckage and the bodies of the five occupants were subsequently buried by a glacial slide. The hanging glacier on which the plane rested separated from the mountain last fall or winter, shedding 4,000 to 6,000 tons of rock, ice and snow to the slopes below. Photos with the article show the incredibly precarious location of the aircraft when it first crashed. Source: Zar Hollander, [Anchorage Daily News](#).

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

November 5 – The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing to examine the nominations of James P. Danly, of Tennessee, to be a Member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and Katharine MacGregor, of Pennsylvania, to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior, after the nominees testified and answered questions in their own behalf.

November 6 – The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy held a hearing on several bills, including the following:

- [S. 1890](#), to provide for grants for energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy improvements at public school facilities.
- [S. 2508](#), to require the Secretary of Energy to establish a council to conduct a survey and analysis of the employment figures and demographics in the energy, energy efficiency, and motor vehicle sectors of the United States.
- [S. 2657](#), to support innovation in advanced geothermal research and development.
- [S. 2660](#), to establish a grant program for wind energy research, development, and demonstration.
- [S. 2668](#), to establish a program for research, development, and demonstration of solar energy technologies.

Testimony was heard from a senator, and Daniel Simmons, Assistant Secretary of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

November 6 – The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs approved a number of bills, including [H.R. 135](#), to amend the Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002 to strengthen Federal antidiscrimination laws enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and expand accountability within the Federal Government.

November 7 – The Senate agreed to [S. Res. 414](#), recognizing National Native American Heritage Month and celebrating the heritages and cultures of Native Americans and the contributions of Native Americans to the United States.

November 7 – The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held an oversight hearing to examine federal revenues derived from energy development on Federal and Indian lands as well as Federal offshore areas and programs that share those revenues with state, local, and tribal governments, including:

- [S. 2418](#), to amend the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006 to modify a definition and the disposition and authorized uses of qualified outer Continental Shelf revenues under that Act and to exempt State and county payments under that Act from sequestration, to provide for the distribution of certain outer Continental Shelf revenues to the State of Alaska.
- [S. 2666](#), to promote the development of renewable energy on public land.

Testimony was heard from Gregory J. Gould, Director for the Office of Natural Resources Revenue, Department of the Interior; Laura B. Comay, Specialist in Natural Resources Policy, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress; and public witnesses.

Follow-Up – Last week’s coalition report noted the Senate passage of [H.R. 3055](#), making appropriations for the Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020. This legislation includes funding for the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service for FY 2020. The final bill language was made available after the report was sent out. All funding levels in the Senate-passed bill were the same as recommended by the Senate Appropriations Committee [as outlined in the coalition report for October 23rd](#) (see entry for September 26th), with the following exceptions:

- The Senate bill had a specific earmark of \$3.576 million for the Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers program from the Operation of the National Park System funding of \$2.565 billion (the House bill did not mention this specific earmarked amount).
- The Senate bill appropriates \$16.25 million for competitive grants to preserve the sites and stories of the Civil Rights movement (the House bill had \$5 million) from the Historic Preservation Fund of \$113 million.
- Sec. 426, an extension of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act authority to collect fees on public lands through October 1, 2021 (the House bill had a date of September 30, 2021).

House Actions

The House was in recess during the week of November 4th.

National Park Service

National Park System

A summary of articles pertaining to management and oversight of the NPS, to current trends and issues affecting the National Park System, or to either all or parts of the entire system.

- *PEER Issues Report On Shrinking NPS Workforce* – On November 5th, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility issued a report on the dramatic drop in the number of NPS employees over recent years despite spiking visitation and an ever-increasing workload: “As both the number of parks and visitation have swelled over the past decade, the number of full-time staff employed by National Park Service has been in steep decline, falling by more than 3,500 or 16% since 2011, according to agency figures released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.” Here are some of the numbers – protection is down by 20% (613 fewer rangers), visitor services is down 19% (554 fewer employees); resource stewardship is down by 16% (420 fewer positions). Tim Whitehouse, PEER’s director, had this to say: “Our

national park system is suffering from chronic wasting disease and headed for a serious breakdown. In 2016, our national park system celebrated its centennial but today we see a system stumbling into its second century, without support, a strategy, or leadership.” See the Coalition section below for a statement we issued expressing CPANP’s strong concerns regarding the PEER findings. Source: Kirsten Stade, [PEER](#).

- *Fodor’s Blasts DOI Committee Report* – Fodor’s, publishers of the travel guides that are famed worldwide, has posted an article on its webpage blasting the administration for seriously considering the previously reported findings of DOI’s Made in America Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee, including privatization of campgrounds. Fodor’s is unsparing in its critique of the report, which it calls “moronic and sad.” Here’s an excerpt: “Few things are as indisputably sacrosanct as National Parks. They represent the best the country has to offer. They provide us with the opportunity to unearth the qualities that make up our best selves. They protect and preserve our greatest natural treasures in a modern world actively looking to annihilate our rarest resources all in the name of short term profit. But, instead of protecting this noble tradition, the Trump administration is currently considering changes to the National Parks that can be described, in the kindest possible terms, as brazenly crass... This all falls in line with the Trump administration’s track record of pushing the National Parks Service toward privatization. If the interests of third party money grubbers are allowed to continue to encroach on our parks, we’ll be looking at a dystopian future where you’ll be lucky if you can spot El Capitan through the haze of holographic billboards.” Source: Chantel Delulio, [Fodor’s Travel](#).

Around The Parks

Park reports are in alphabetical order. Included are proposals in the works for new areas or changes in designation for current NPS units.

- *Cape Hatteras NS* – Tideland Electric Cooperative plans to begin work next month to install nearly 10,000 feet of additional submarine cable to Ocracoke due to rapid erosion of the south end of Hatteras Island, which increased significantly after Hurricane Sandy in 2012. In early 2020, construction crews will begin installation of a 9,700-foot submarine cable starting at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum. It will be spliced into the existing 20,450 feet of submarine cable that crosses Hatteras Inlet. Depending upon weather and other conditions the construction project will last between one and three months. Source: [OBX Today](#).
- *Golden Gate NRA* – On November 7th, workers broke ground on a project to build a new 14-acre public park on top of two freeway tunnels near the Golden Gate Bridge. When finished in 2021, the unusual project, called Tunnel Tops, will link Crissy Field, on San Francisco’s waterfront, to the Presidio’s Main Post, parade grounds and visitor’s center. That connection was severed more than 80 years ago when the road to and from the Golden Gate Bridge, formerly known as Doyle Drive, split the landscape in half. The new park, roughly the size of 10 football fields, will stretch over the top of the roadway, and be free to the public. Part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, it will include trails, gardens, a campfire circle, community plaza, youth education center, and thousands of native plants, trees and overlooks across San Francisco Bay. Source: Paul Rogers, [Mercury News](#).
- *Grand Canyon NP* – Backcountry users can now find shade and an opportunity to rest at the new Tipoff Shelter along the South Kaibab Trail. Over the past week, a shelter was partially assembled on the South Rim, flown in, and installed at the Tipoff area, which is approximately four miles from the South Kaibab Trailhead on the South Rim and two miles from the Colorado River. This is the only shelter structure along the South Kaibab Trail. The structure is 12 feet by 24 feet with 4-foot overhangs to provide shade around the exterior. It features shade screens to provide airflow, six benches inside, and a lightning protection system to protect the structure and occupants from lightning strikes. There are also two 125-gallon cisterns to provide non-potable water for visitors to use to cool down. Source: [Lake Powell Life](#).

- *Redwood N&SP* – Construction has begun on a 1,300 foot-long elevated walkway through the Grove of Titans in Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park. The walkway will provide access to the grove and an area of the forest deemed "environmentally sensitive" by California State Parks, Save the Redwoods League, Redwood Parks Conservatory and the National Park Service. To date, visitors have walked through the grove on social trails and unofficial pathways, causing considerable damage to the area. The project will take three years to completed and cost \$3.5 million. Source: Brian Beneventi, [KRCR News](#).
- *Yellowstone NP* – Yellowstone Forever, the park's official nonprofit partner, raised a million dollars within three days in early November. The sum will be matched dollar for dollar with federal funds appropriated for the National Park Foundation, delivering \$2 million directly to the park for it's North Entrance project. Traffic has increased significantly at the North Entrance in Gardiner, increasing to 365,397 vehicles in 2018 – up 22% from 2013. Improvements to the entrance will include adding an additional lane and kiosk to improve traffic flow and reduce queuing lines, replacing the existing two buildings with one larger building/station and two kiosks, improving the flow of employee and delivery traffic from Robert Reamer Avenue, improving pedestrian safety by realigning parking along Robert Reamer Avenue, and replacing the water line along Robert Reamer Avenue. Source: Brendan LaChance, [Oil City News](#).
- *Zion NP* – A centennial event celebrating the park's founding 100 years ago is planned for Tuesday, November 19th, at 7:30 p.m. at Dixie State University in St. George. It's free and open to the public, with tickets available online or in person at the university box office. The event will include live performances by several artists, activities with National Park Service rangers, and a screening of a new film about the park. Source: [KTVX News](#).

The Federal Government

News from around the federal government – including DOI, kindred agencies and the courts – of consequence to the NPS.

- *BLM Move Formally Launched* – DOI delivered hundreds of relocation notices to BLM employees yesterday, reports *Government Executive*, starting a 30-day clock for employees to either agree to move to a location in the western United States or face removal. BLM is moving 27 employees to a new headquarters in Grand Junction, Colorado, and about 220 more Washington, D.C.-based workers to field offices in western states. The employees will have until December 12th to agree to their specific new post or they will be placed into removal proceedings. As for the perspectives of affected employees: "Employees currently at BLM have told *Government Executive* they know of very few colleagues who plan to relocate, and even some of those who do are still looking for jobs in Washington and will come back home as soon as possible. Many employees have already found new jobs and departed the agency. The workers all suggested morale at the Washington office has plummeted, mistrust of leadership has grown, and a sinking feeling that the Trump administration is seeking to sideline important work has set in." Source: Eric Katz, [Government Executive](#).

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 – Reports on the national and international climate and conservation crisis.

- *Scientists Declare Climate Emergency* – "A new report by 11,258 scientists in 153 countries from a broad range of disciplines warns that the planet 'clearly and unequivocally faces a climate emergency,' and provides six broad policy goals that must be met to address it,"

reported the *Washington Post* last week. “The analysis is a stark departure from recent scientific assessments of global warming, such as those of the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in that it does not couch its conclusions in the language of uncertainties, and it does prescribe policies. The study, called the [World Scientists’ Warning Of A Climate Emergency](#), marks the first time a large group of scientists has formally come out in favor of labeling climate change an “emergency,” which the study notes is caused by many human trends that are together increasing greenhouse gas emissions.” Source: Andrew Freedman, [Washington Post](#).

The Good News – Reports on efforts to mitigate the national and international climate and conservation crisis.

- *Senators Announce Bipartisan Climate Caucus* – “With most Americans now viewing climate change as a major threat, a group of senators announced the first bipartisan climate caucus to address the crisis,” reported CBS News last week. “But the senators are short on specifics and seem to be taking small steps toward action...” The caucus is made up of four Democrats, three Republicans and an Independent; most are quoted on what needs to be done and why they joined the caucus. Utah Senator Mitt Romney offered this observation: "I do believe that old saying is true, which is, when they feel the heat, they'll see the light. People who might otherwise be more inclined to slow things down are going to say, 'We've got to respond.'" Source: Nancy Cordes, [CBS News](#).

National Park System Issues

Climate Change – News concerning the impacts of climate change on park lands, waters, species and other assets.

- *Outer Banks Group* – On November 9th, the *Washington Post* ran a long article on the impacts of storms, floods and rising sea levels on Ocracoke Island, the prospect of these forces getting worse in the future, and the issues being faced by residents who are looking at the prospect of having to move as the island rapidly erodes away. A Duke University professor is quoted on the island’s future: “Virtually everyone from Virginia Beach south to the U.S./Mexico border is going to be in the same situation in the next 50 years. And it’s only going to get worse after that.” Source: Frances Stead Sellers, [Washington Post](#).
- *Mesa Verde NP* – “Conversations about the impacts of climate change usually focus on what may or may not happen in the future,” reported the *Durango Herald* in September. “But at Mesa Verde National Park, the effects of an increasingly hot and dry climate are happening now and are only slated to get worse, park managers say.” Severe drought and drought-driven fires over the past few decades have been the biggest issue – the mesa’s forest has been transformed into a “tree graveyard,” invasive species have moved in, native species have disappeared, and the ecosystem that supported the Puebloan residents has been largely lost. According to a UNESCO report, the park is one of the most at-risk World Heritage sites across the globe. And a recent NPS study found the hot and dry conditions that have persisted in recent years in the park are beyond the historical records of climate fluxes in the past: “Ongoing and future climate change will likely affect all aspects of park management, including natural and cultural resource protection, as well as park operation and visitor experience.” Source: Jonathan Romeo, [Durango Herald](#).

Native Flora and Fauna – Recent news pertaining to the protection, propagation and advancement of species now or formerly native to the national parks – or removal of those that aren’t:

- *Isle Royale NP* – The park resumed its wolf translocation project in September, moving a 70-pound male captured on the Upper Peninsula via amphibious aircraft to the island, where it was released. The action marked the beginning of the second year of an ongoing effort to establish a population of 20 to 30 wolves on the island. The new wolf joined 14 others already on the island. Source: [WTIP News](#).

The Coalition

Summary of recent developments within the Coalition, including some of the actions that CNPCA took on your behalf.

- *CPANP Utah Action Group* – Phil Brueck is setting up a work group in conjunction with NPCA to deal with NPS issues in Utah. If you live in the state and are interested in getting involved, contact Phil at pbrueck@gmail.com.
- *DOI Employee Morale And Declining Staff Numbers* – The Coalition released a statement in response to the recent PEER reports on DOI employee morale and declining NPS staffing numbers. It can be read [at this link](#).

Source: Emily Thompson, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator.

Park People

NPS Alumni Passing Of Wayne Merry

Ranger and legendary climber Wayne Merry, 84, recently passed away in Atlin, British Columbia.

Wayne was a member of the first climbing team to successfully ascend “The Nose” of El Capitan in Yosemite in 1958, 61 years ago. He was also the founder of the Yosemite Mountaineering and Climbing School. He worked early in his career as both an NPS park ranger-naturalist and park ranger, with perhaps his last park being Denali.

An article about Wayne appeared recently in *Mountain Life* magazine; it can be read [at this link](#).

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 Wednesday, October 27th, Mark Huddleston was found guilty of violation of probation and possession of stolen property while on probation in a federal hearing in Portland, Oregon. Special agent Paul Ducasse represented the National Park Service at the hearing and presented evidence concerning the over 1,200 burglaries that Huddleston had committed in National Park Service and California state park campgrounds. Ducasse also presented information about the approximately 9,000 items of stolen property and evidence seized following the execution of a search warrant in May, 1994. The recovered stolen property had a minimum aggregate value of over \$125,000. The probation hearing examiner (a federal judge) found Huddleston guilty, said that he found there was overwhelming evidence to believe Huddleston was responsible for the thefts and in possession of a significant amount of stolen property, and gave him to maximum possible sentence of 50 months in custody. Huddleston will have to serve an initial 27 months, which will automatically expand to 50 following his conviction in any other court – a prospect deemed highly likely since Huddleston still faces felony charges in Oregon and in California, the latter of which has a "three-strikes-you're-out" provision which makes Huddleston a probable candidate for a minimum sentence of 25 years in prison. Huddleston will likely be prosecuted in Oregon this year and in California in early 1995. Since his arrest, the number of car clouts in national and state parks has decreased significantly; there hasn't been a single auto burglary with his M.O. during that time. Huddleston is believed to have burglarized campgrounds in California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, and possibly Idaho. The investigation which lead up to his arrest took approximately three years and involved dozens of NPS rangers and investigators from all

over the system. Ducasse was the lead investigator and coordinated the efforts of numerous state, federal and local agencies, including the FBI and California and Oregon State Parks. Without his ability to conduct a consolidated effort, including the final intensive surveillance which led to Huddleston's arrest, it is unlikely that Huddleston would have been caught, and highly likely that he would still be victimizing visitors to national, state and county parks. Submitted by Regional Chief Ranger Phil Ward.

- *Delaware Water Gap NRA* – Early this fall, Lt. Col. John Murray approached park staff to seek support for a program to commemorate prisoners of war and MIAs through the lighting of memorial watch fires at several locations in the park on October 22nd. Murray represented several veterans organizations and had the support of the United States Army National Guard; he had also made arrangements for retired General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, to speak at the occasion. The event was held on the arranged date amid considerable fanfare. General Westmoreland gave the keynote speech before about 200 veterans at Smithfield Beach and the memorial watch fires were lit there and at three other locations. Prior to the event, however, chief ranger Doyle Nelson, law enforcement specialist Bob Wilson, and criminal investigator Bob Van Nortwick, all of whom served tours in Vietnam, began to have suspicions about Murray's Army service. They began an investigation that led to the discovery of several significant errors in Murray's story. While this investigation was still underway, Murray was involved in a drunk-driving accident and was arrested by local police. During subsequent questioning, Murray confessed that he was a complete fraud and that he had never spent a day in the military. Park staff are now working with FBI agents and Army authorities to determine Murray's real identity and find out how he came to hold legitimate Army identification cards. Murray, who had an imposing military presence, wore a number of ribbons and several medals, including the Silver Star. Until challenged, he had convinced military officers of all ranks of his authenticity. Murray said that he had served as Westmoreland's briefer in Vietnam in 1966, that he'd been captured while on a recon mission in 1968, and that he helped keep fellow POWs inspired and alive by making a small flag from a piece of clothing, blood and the juice of berries. Murray is still being held; bail has been set at \$25,000, considered to be a record for a drunk driving case. He was scheduled to head a local Veterans Day parade next week, but it appears unlikely that he will be available. Submitted by Bill Halainen.
- *Joshua Tree NP* – On November 12th, a ten-month-long wildlife poaching case culminated in the filing of charges against two people for poaching in the park. The investigation, which was conducted jointly by rangers from Joshua Tree and Channel Islands and BLM, state and county officers, centered on an individual who was leasing a parcel of land within the park. Last February, members of the park's staff discovered that the lease holder had constructed a hunting blind and a cement watering basin on the property in violation of the lease and that he was actively hunting in the area. Informants told investigators that the lease holder had killed numerous animals, including deer, bobcats and owls. Surveillance was begun, and officers were able to photograph two individuals hunting from the blind over a salt lick next to the watering hole. On November 12th, search warrants were obtained and executed for three houses. Numerous items of evidence were seized from two of them, which led to the filing of state charges against two individuals and administrative action against the lease holder for violation of his lease agreement. Names are being withheld until charges are filed. Submitted by Criminal Investigator Todd Swain.

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- Issue Contributors: Bob Martin, Bill Walters

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

"It is important to scientific study and to the health and sanity of man that there be preserved some unique areas for scientists to observe nature's continuing evolution; for future generations to know historic landmarks as they were when history marked them; for dwellers in a crowded planet to have resort to the grandeur and peace of nature."

[Samuel H. Ordway, Jr.](#)

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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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