



## The Coalition Weekly Report Wednesday, December 11, 2019

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### Incidents

#### **Kings Canyon NP Man Pleads Guilty To Significant Theft From Park Lodge**

A Visalia, California, man faces up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine after he pleaded guilty to felony theft in Kings Canyon National Park.

Dallas Fonseca, 43, was indicted by a federal grand jury in October on suspicion of stealing a vintage Rolex and other jewelry from national park-goers.

Between February 9th, and March 11th, while working at the park's John Muir Lodge, Fonseca is suspected of stealing more than \$16,000. In February, a Kings Canyon park employee gave a jewelry purse filled with valuables to the manager of John Muir Lodge for safekeeping. The manager put the jewelry purse in a locked drawer inside his office, located behind the lodge's front desk. On March 11th, the person asked for the purse back. With a witness, the two discovered most of the jewelry was no longer in the purse. The woman made a list of what she believed was stolen, which included a vintage Rolex Oyster Perpetual watch. Ranger Robert Lewis began an investigation.

Management at the lodge told him that only overnight clerks would have been able to go into the manager's office when the office was empty. During the time in which the jewelry could have gone missing, only three people were working. Fonseca had three of the shifts. What sparked investigators' suspicions even more was that Fonseca stopped coming into work after the investigation. A detective subsequently found that Fonseca had been selling jewelry at Visalia Jewelry and Loan in January and February.

Although none of the missing items matched what was sold at the business, the detective told Lewis a few days later that a Rolex had been sold at the business by Lindsay Peterson. Lewis discovered that Peterson and Fonseca knew each other. After viewing the surveillance video from February 20th, Lewis found that Peterson and Fonseca went to Visalia Jewelry together. Fonseca handed Peterson the Rolex, which was sold for \$1,200.

Fonseca is scheduled to be sentenced on February 24th.

Source: James Ward, [Visalia Times-Delta](#).

#### **National Park System Park Operating Status Summary**

A summary of recent openings, closures and other changes in the status of parks and their facilities,

- *Mammoth Cave NP* – The park has suspended tours to two of its most popular attractions while it rehabilitates two miles of cave trails. The Grand Avenue tour will remain closed for the entirety of the project, which is expected to run through at least the spring of 2021. The Wild Cave tour will be closed for the first 12 months of the project, and the Domes and Dripstones and Frozen Niagara tours will be closed for the remaining duration of the work. Source: Caroline Eggers, [Bowling Green Daily News](#).

## 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.

- *NPS Seeks To Increase Access To Public Lands* – On December 4th, the Service announced that it is “seeking the public’s assistance to develop a list of national park lands that would benefit from new or increased access routes.” According to the press release, this effort advances the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (S.47), which was signed into law by President Donald Trump in March 2019. Section 4105 of the Dingell Act instructs the NPS and other federal land management agencies to develop a priority list of lands with no or restricted public access that meet a set requirements and considerations. In the coming months, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will also seek the public’s input to nominate lands within their jurisdictions under similar criteria. The National Park Service’s final priority list will be posted online by March 12th and updated biennially thereafter for ten years. Comments are being taken until January 4th [at the Service’s PEPC web page](#), which also provides criteria for submissions. Source: [National Park Service](#).
- *‘Our National Parks Are In Trouble’* – That was the headline over an opinion piece by former ranger John Waterman that appeared prominently in the November 22nd *New York Times*. Waterman just finished writing a book entitled *Atlas Of The National Parks* “as a celebration of the 103-year-old national park system.” While putting it together, though, he discovered that the NPS is “in deep trouble, with some parks degraded by ruinous overcrowding; invasions of nonnative plants and animals that are upending delicate ecological balances; and a warming climate that is melting glaciers and withering away the rare yuccas that give their name to Joshua Tree National Park. Adding to these woes, the system is badly underfunded and suffering from neglect.” Waterman’s prescription for dealing with these issues is a familiar one: “We need to arrest this decline and make the park system the national priority it should be. We need to assess the health of these magnificent parks and ask some hard questions about their capacity to withstand the millions of visitors who arrive every year.” Source: John Waterman, [New York Times](#).

### 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.

- *Golden Gate NRA* – There’s been an interesting new development in the on-going debate over dog management in the park. The following is from the December 8th *San Francisco Examiner*: “Dog owners beware — canine attacks are now consequence-free on federal land in San Francisco. While civil suits can still be pursued against dog owners for furry fracas, the canines themselves cannot be turned in to criminal authorities in the event that their teeth should sink into the flesh of their fellows within the boundaries of a national park. The San Francisco Police Department’s vicious and dangerous dog unit is The City’s go-to canine court. It holds hearings to determine consequences for dangerous dogs, including, in extreme cases, euthanization. However, that agency no longer carries jurisdiction over dog skirmishes on

federal land. Importantly, the National Park Service, U.S. Park Police and Golden Gate National Recreation Area have no such mechanisms, and hold no such proceedings, for dogs.” This problem developed after a recent legal challenge halted an informal agreement between The City and federal authorities that allowed dog cases to be heard by San Francisco police. Efforts are underway to develop a new agreement, but remain a work in progress. Source: Joe Fitzgerald Rodriguez, [San Francisco Examiner](#).

- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – A federal judge is letting a multimillion-dollar lawsuit proceed against the federal government over the November 2016 Chimney Tops 2 fire disaster. The judge declined to support the government's bid to dismiss the case (the government argued the victims didn't have jurisdiction to sue). The lawsuit will focus on the question of whether park officials failed to properly warn the public about the fire's danger. Other claims are being dismissed. Source: John North, [WBIR News](#).
- *Mount Rushmore NM* – Nick Clifford, the monument's last remaining carver, has died at the age of 98. He'd been the last living carver for the last dozen years. During the summers, it wasn't unusual for people to see him at the memorial greeting tourists and signing copies of his book. Source: [KEVN News](#).
- *Rocky Mountain NP* – The park is currently part of a study area included in a proposed project for several Colorado airports, including Denver International Airport, that could alter existing flight paths. According to the project website, “the proposed Denver Metroplex Project would allow for more direct and efficient routing of aircraft into and out of Denver and surrounding airports,” and would also enhance aviation safety and reduce flight delays. “The Project may involve changes in aircraft flight paths and altitudes in certain areas,” says the website, “but would not result in any ground disturbance or increase the number of aircraft operations at any of the above airports.” To see the plan, [go to this website](#); comments, due by December 20th, can be made [at this webpage](#). Source: Avery Martinez, [Estes Park Trail-Gazette](#).
- *Shenandoah NP* – The Piedmont Environmental Council, Shenandoah National Park, and Trout Unlimited held a ribbon-cutting in mid-November to celebrate the opening of the new Cedar Run bridge at the popular Whiteoak Canyon Trailhead. The public-private partnership with the landowners, the Graves family, has already proven to be a win-win; the bridge offers hikers and nature-loving community members improved access to the popular Whiteoak Canyon trailhead, and it opens up three miles of stream habitat to native fish for the first time in decades. The new, 35-foot high-water bridge replaces an undersized low-water concrete crossing that impeded fish movement and frequently became clogged with woody material and river cobble during high flows. Source: [WVIR News](#).
- *USS Arizona Memorial* – Last weekend, divers placed the ashes of former crew member Lauren Bruner inside the hull of the *USS Arizona* – the 44th and last crew member to be interred in accordance with a rare Navy ritual that has permitted the interment of former crew members within the ship. At present, there are three living Arizona survivors, but all three plan to be interred with their families. Bruner was 98 at the time of his death. Source: KVIA News.
- *Wupatki NM* – The NPS is seeking public comments through January on backcountry planning for the park. Currently, public access to Wupatki's backcountry is limited to protect monument resources from unacceptable impacts, such as vandalism and artifact collection. National Park Service staff and volunteers lead small groups of 15 people or smaller into several areas of the national monument on a seasonal basis. Anyone can submit comments at Wupatki's PEPCI site, found [at this link](#). Source: [KNAU News](#).
- *Yellowstone NP* – A peer-reviewed report summarizing the results of the park's 2018 visitor use study has been posted online. The park contracted Otak Inc., RRC Associates and The University of Montana Institute for Tourism Recreation Research to conduct the study to help better understand how visitors experience the park in real time, across the summer season, and across different parts of the park. More than 4,000 people responded to the surveys, one of

the largest in the history of the National Park Service. Yellowstone visitation has substantially increased over the past 10 years, ranging from 3.2 million in 2009 to 4.2 in 2016, and 4.1 million in 2018. The survey results provide a variety of park-wide and site-specific data that the park plans to use to make decisions in upcoming years. Both the executive summary and full report can be found [at this link](#). Source: [ExploreBigSky.com](#).

## **Briefly Noted**

Other matters of interest pertaining to the parks and their people.

- *National Parks As Low-Budget Getaways* – Summer may be over, but lists on various topics pertaining to the parks – best trails, best beaches, lowest visitation – continue. The travel section in the November 21st *New York Times* has one that lists “five reasons (why) national parks are a great option for a low-budget getaway.” Here they are as they appear in the article’s subheads: 1) There’s probably one within driving distance; 2) they are inexpensive (or even free) to visit; 3) there’s a lot of free stuff to do once you’re there; 4) visitors can forgo hotels and restaurants in favor of camping and picnicking; and 5) you can make it a volunteer vacation. Source: Alexandra Pecci, [New York Times](#).
- *Ten Most Beautiful Parks* – Here’s another list, this one published by *Travel and Leisure*. After exploring every national park during a seven-month long road trip, photographers Renee and Matthew Hahnel detailed their experience in a new book entitled *Roaming America*. During an interview with the magazine, they ranked their favorite parks “based on park facilities, trails, scenery, photography opportunities, transport, and crowd level.” Here are the results in order, listed from one to ten – Grand Teton, Kenai Fjords, Wrangell-St. Elias, Denali, Mount Rainier, Yosemite, Glacier Bay, Glacier, Katmai and Lake Clark. You may disagree with the list, but the photos are exceptional. Source: Elizabeth Rhodes, [Travel and Leisure](#).

## **The Federal Government**

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

- *White House, Congress Reach Deal On Paid Family Leave* – “The Trump administration and congressional Democrats reached a tentative deal late last week to provide all federal employees with paid family leave, marking a culmination of years of advocacy on the issue,” reports *Government Executive*. “According to a congressional source familiar with negotiations, the White House agreed to support the provision as part of the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, in exchange for Democrats’ acquiescence on the establishment of the U.S. Space Force as an independent branch of the armed services... The agreement appears to provide 12 weeks of paid leave for the birth, adoption or fostering of a child, but [does not include a] provision allowing for the care of an ailing loved one.” Source: Erich Wagner, [Government Executive](#).
- *Admin To Open Nearly Two Million Acres Of Texas USFS Land To Development* – The Trump Administration is poised to open nearly two million acres of land in U.S. national forests in Texas to oil and gas drilling and fracking, which would allow lease holding companies to drill more than 1,000 horizontal wells and 500 vertical wells over a 20-year time period. The administration’s plan would reverse a 2016 Obama Administration moratorium on drilling on lands in the Sam Houston National Forest, Davy Crockett National Forest, Angelina National Forest, Sabine National Forest, Caddo National Grasslands and LBJ National Grasslands. “The move would result in billions of gallons of wastewater, take the habitat of endangered species, risk groundwater supplies that provide drinking water to communities, and could cause earthquakes,” write the authors. “All to drill for gas which is currently so abundant that prices are low, making development less financially viable than ever. Not to mention the greenhouse gas emissions that would result.” Monica Medina and Miro Korenha, [Our Daily Planet](#).

## 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

Reports on the national and international climate and conservation crisis.

**The Bad News** – Reports on the national and international climate and conservation crisis.

- *Climate Seen To Be ‘Dangerously Close’ To Irreversible Tipping Points* – “In a recent commentary in the journal *Nature*, scientists from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany and other institutions warned that the acceleration of ice loss and other effects of climate change have brought the world ‘dangerously close’ to abrupt and irreversible changes, or tipping points,” reported the *New York Times* on December 4th. “Among these, the researchers said, were the collapse of at least part of the West Antarctic ice sheet — which itself could eventually raise sea levels by four feet or more — or the loss of the Amazon rainforest.” In the report itself, which can be found and read [at this link](#), the authors open with this statement: “Politicians, economists and even some natural scientists have tended to assume that tipping points<sup>1</sup> in the Earth system — such as the loss of the Amazon rainforest or the West Antarctic ice sheet — are of low probability and little understood. Yet evidence is mounting that these events could be more likely than was thought, have high impacts and are interconnected across different biophysical systems, potentially committing the world to long-term irreversible changes.” The writers present evidence supporting their conclusions and add a particularly frightening possibility – “a global cascade of tipping points” that would lead to a less habitable ‘hothouse’ climate state. Source: Henry Fountain, [New York Times](#).
- *Suffocating Oceans* – The largest study of its kind has concluded that oxygen levels in the world’s oceans declined by roughly two percent between 1960 and 2010. Sixty-seven scientific experts from 51 institutes in 17 countries co-authored the largest peer-reviewed study ([available at this link](#)) conducted so far on ocean deoxygenation for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Climate change has been ruled as the primary cause. The Times article on this study details the several consequences of diminishing ocean oxygen, not all of them obvious. Source: Kendra Pierre-Louis, [New York Times](#).

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

- *World War Zero Proclaimed* – “John Kerry, the former senator and secretary of state, has formed a new bipartisan coalition of world leaders, military brass and Hollywood celebrities to push for public action to combat climate change,” reported the *New York Times* on November 30th. “The name, World War Zero, is supposed to evoke both the national security threat posed by the earth’s warming and the type of wartime mobilization that Mr. Kerry argued would be needed to stop the rise in carbon emissions before 2050. The star-studded group is supposed to win over those skeptical of the policies that would be needed to accomplish that. Former presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter are part of the effort. Moderate Republican lawmakers like Arnold Schwarzenegger, the former governor of California, and John Kasich, the former governor of Ohio, are on the list. Stars like Leonardo DiCaprio, Sting and Ashton Kutcher round out the roster of more than 60 founding members. Their goal is to hold more than 10 million ‘climate conversations’ in the coming year with Americans across the political spectrum.” Source: Lisa Friedman, [New York Times](#).

### National Park System Issues

**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:



- *Systemwide* – CNN reported last week that a new study warns that the unaddressed problem of invasive (non-native) animal species in national parks is threatening many of them: that they are now being overwhelmed with rats, domesticated cats, feral hogs and many other non-native animals that also thrive there. Scientists from within the Department of Interior and several universities found that of the 1,409 reported populations of invasive species in National Parks, only 11% are under control. The report is entitled “The Unaddressed Threat Of Invasive Animals In U.S. National Parks” and can be read [at this link](#). Source: Elizabeth Wolfe and Brian Ries, [CNN](#)

**Ecosystems and Habitat** – News about actions that affect park and adjoining ecosystems and habitat:

- *Delaware Water Gap NRA/Upper Delaware S&RR* – The governors of three of the four states abutting the Delaware River – Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware – signed a proclamation in Philadelphia this past spring reaffirming their commitment to work together to make the river fishable and swimmable, ensure high drinking-water quality standards, and keep the tidal shorelines and waters of the river accessible to the public (the governor of New York had to miss the event due to a scheduling issue). The Delaware River flows 330 miles from the Catskills to the Atlantic Ocean, much of it through Delaware Water Gap and Upper Delaware. It is the longest undammed river east of the Mississippi and has 2,000 tributaries, which create its 13,539-square-mile watershed. According to the proclamation, the governors hope to make the Delaware River Basin a national model for “sustainable economic development, drinkable clean water, healthy fish and wildlife populations, outdoor recreation, and nature-based climate resilience.” Source: Frank Kummer, [Philadelphia Inquirer](#).

## The Coalition

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

- *CPANP Op-Ed On LWCF* – Coalition Executive Council member Brenda Barrett wrote an op-ed on the impacts of LWCF in Pennsylvania. It was published this week in the *Reading Eagle* and can be read [at this link](#).
- *Second CPANP Op-Ed On LWCF* – Coalition Executive Council member Mike Murray recently met with the editorial staff at the *Portland Press Herald* to discuss the importance of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The *Herald* published this editorial following their conversation. It can be read [at this link](#).

Source: Emily Thompson, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator.

## Park People

### **NPS Alumni And Friends Passing Of Dr. Jim Wugler**

Dr. Jim Wurgler of Williams, Arizona — known to his friends as JW, J-dub, or Doc — passed away on November 13th in Flagstaff after suffering a stroke. He was instrumental in establishing and maintaining the park clinics at Yosemite and Grand Canyon.

Jim practiced medicine for more than four decades, dedicating himself to community service, health, and wellbeing. He earned a bachelor of arts degree from Southern Methodist University and a doctor of medicine degree from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School. He demonstrated his ongoing commitment to the community from his Army service as a physician in Vietnam through his leadership of the Yosemite Medical Clinic, the Grand Canyon Clinic, and, finally, the Williams Health Care Center in Williams, Arizona.

Mentoring was very important to JW. He revitalized Yosemite's EMT training program in 1978, teaching advanced emergency medicine for several years to the park's rangers. One of his proudest moments was receiving an honorary park ranger award and the title "The Ranger's Doctor."

Doc's last major effort was to assist North Country HealthCare in establishing a family practice residency in rural medicine. He relished the opportunity to help aspiring doctors understand and appreciate rural medicine. He was going to lead the first group of residents on "rural grand rounds" in summer 2020. Doc was very proud and excited about this project.

Jim is survived by his wife of 59 years, five children, fifteen grandchildren, and eight great grandchildren. He is also survived by two sisters, many nieces, nephews and beloved friends.

In lieu of flowers to the Wurgler family, please consider a contribution to the North Country HealthCare Foundation to support Family Medicine Residency (2920 N. 4th St, Flagstaff, AZ 86004), or an alternative nonprofit such as the Grand Canyon Conservancy, (PO Box 399, Grand Canyon, AZ 86023), Mono Lake Committee (PO Box 29, Lee Vining, CA 93541), or any historical railway restoration project.

A celebration of his life is being planned for late winter or early spring. Per Doc's wishes, there will be no funeral or religious services.

Source: [Williams News](#).

### **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:

- *Wind Cave NP* – Vidal Dávila, the park's current superintendent, will retire on December 31st after nearly 45 years of service with the National Park Service. He's been the superintendent at Wind Cave since October 1, 2007. A retirement dinner will be held on the evening of January 4th at the Red Rock River Resort in Hot Springs, South Dakota. Reservations can be made by calling 745-4600. Source: [Rapid City Journal](#).
- *Glen Canyon NRA/Rainbow Bridge NM* – Lance Mattson has been selected as the parks' new chief ranger. He will begin this new post officially on December 22nd and is currently acting in the position while Angela Boyers transitions to a position at Yosemite National Park. Lance has served as the emergency services manager at Glen Canyon NRA since 2015; prior to that, he served as the chief ranger at Great Sand Dunes. He's been with the NPS for 25 years. Source: [Lake Powell Life](#).
- *Guilford Courthouse NMP* – James Hill took over as superintendent of Guilford Courthouse in August. He came to the position from Agate Fossil Beds, where he served as superintendent as ten years, with details as superintendent to Fort Laramie, Scotts Bluff and Badlands. Hill is married to Dena Sanford, an architectural historian with Historic Preservation Partnerships in Midwest Regional Office. Source: [Augusta Chronicle](#).
- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – Lisa McInnis has been named the new chief of resource management and science at the park. She will oversee fisheries, wildlife and vegetation management; inventorying and monitoring of air, water and biological resources; and coordination of a myriad of research activities. Source: [Blount County Daily Times](#).

### **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.

- *Channel Islands NP* – Jim Robinson, 40, a commercial sea urchin diver from the Santa Barbara area, was diving at Talcott Shoals off of San Miguel Island on December 9th when he was attacked by a shark, probably a great white. His tender got him back on board their boat, then contacted the Coast Guard. A helicopter was dispatched to the scene and transported Robinson to a hospital in Goleta. Although Robinson was still conscious when he was picked up, he died before arriving at the hospital. Submitted by Superintendent Mack Shaver.
- *Crater Lake NP* – On the afternoon of December 7th, Klamath Falls police advised the park that they'd received a call for help from two skiers via cellular phone and ham radio. The skiers said that they were exhausted from traveling in deep snow, that they were concerned about avalanche danger, and that one of them was suffering from pain from an artificial hip. A four-person park rescue team headed out to find them the following morning and contacted the two men early in the afternoon. Both were in good condition and were able to ski out on their own. The pair had headed out on a trip around the rim on December 4th. Although informed of conditions, they didn't appreciate the degree of effort required to break trail through soft snow (the park received a record snowfall of about 190 inches in November). They were closely counseled about winter skiing realities before being released. Submitted by Chief Ranger George Buckingham.
- *Natchez NHP* – On the evening of December 13th, a contracted security alarm company notified the superintendent that an alarm signal had been received from the park's administrative headquarters. The company had also contacted Natchez police, who discovered that the building had been burglarized. After the burglar cut the building's exterior phone lines, he or she unsuccessfully attempted to enter the building through a window, then gained entry by kicking in the rear door. Although the phone lines had been cut, the alarm rang; the thief silenced it by removing the alarm key pad from the wall and removing the audio speaker. The burglar then unscrewed all the interface cables from a computer CPU, but was foiled by one cable which required a small screwdriver. The only item stolen was a modem. The investigation continues. Submitted by Superintendent Bob Dodson.

## Acknowledgements

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- Production: Steve Pittleman
- Regular Correspondents: Don Hellmann, Dennis Burnett, Rick Smith, and Duncan Morrow
- Issue Contributors: Bob Martin, Cathy Halainen

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

"The national parklands have a major role in providing superlative opportunities for outdoor recreation, but they have other 'people serving' values. They can provide an experience in conservation education for the young people of the country; they can enrich our literary and artistic consciousness; they can help create social values; contribute to our civic consciousness; remind us of our debt to the land of our fathers."

Secretary of the Interior [Stewart L. Udall](#)



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.”

To receive a copy of this free publication, join or support the coalition. Any current, retired or former salaried employee (GS, wage grade, seasonal, temporary, or SES) of the National Park Service can join the Coalition ([click on this link](#)). Coalition supporters can also join and receive the newsletter ([click on this link](#)). If you need to contact the Coalition office on other matters, including changes of address, [click on this link](#).

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