



The Coalition Weekly Report Wednesday, February 27, 2019

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Incidents

Golden Gate NRA Woman Killed When Cliff At Park Beach Collapses

Two women who were walking a dog on the beach below Fort Funston last Friday were forced partway up an adjacent 200-foot sandstone cliff, which then collapsed and buried them.

Bystanders freed the dog and one woman, who had been buried in sand up to her shoulders. She had minor injuries but was in shock.

San Francisco Fire Department crews with shovels and tractors searched Friday and Saturday for the other woman, who remains missing and is now presumed to have died. Search dogs also assisted in the efforts.

Source: Don Sweeney, [Sacramento Bee](#)

Yosemite NP Woman Fatally Injured While Hiking On Closed Trail

On Sunday, February 24th, Xuan Wang, 56, was hiking the park's Mist Trail when she was struck and severely injured by falling rock and ice. She succumbed to her injuries soon thereafter.

The Mist Trail follows the Merced River on a steep climb to Vernal Fall and is closed in winter due to icy and hazardous conditions. A gate and sign are placed at the trailhead to stop visitors from entering. Wang ignored the signs and went around the gate.

The incident is currently under investigation.

Source: Amy Graff, [San Francisco Chronicle](#).

Great Smoky Mountains NP Park Roads And Trails Impacted By Heavy Rains

Heavy rains that fell last weekend caused a rock slide that closed U.S. 441 until all the debris could be cleared. The landslide occurred about two miles beyond the Sugarlands Visitors Center on the Tennessee side of the park.

Little River Road, which was also closed, has reopened as well. In Cades Cove, Sparks and Hyatt Lanes remain closed due to flooding, though the main loop road is open.

Rangers are working to assess all the damage in the park from weekend flooding, an effort that could take months due the number of trails in the park.

Source: [WVLT News](#).

National Park System Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents

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

- *Statue of Liberty NM* – Last Fourth of July, protestor Therese Okoumou was arrested following her attempt to climb the statue. The incident led to approximately 4,000 people being evacuated from Liberty Island. The judge who's presiding over her case now wants to see things from the woman's perspective before sentencing her. The judge says that he wants to visit the statue "to better appreciate the risks or hazards created by defendant's conduct," adding that "if it were deemed possible and safe," he'd like a ladder to be made available so both court and counsel can view the surface of the area where the defendant was situated on July 4, 2018. On Friday, the National Park Service granted the judge's request and will arrange for the visit on a future date before or after public visiting hours. Source: Kayla Simas, [Staten Island Advance](#).
- *Hawaii Volcanoes NP* – The park continues to recover from last year's extended eruption of Kilauea, and now hopes to be able to reopen the Thurston Lava Tube this year after improving traffic congestion issues at the location. The lava tube has been closed to the public since the eruption out of concern that the thousands of associated earthquakes might have compromised the tube's structural integrity. Structural analyses have been conducted on the tube, including one by a National Park Service mining engineer who created a 3D laser scan of the tube's interior, and that data is now being compared to a pre-eruption scan of the tube in order to determine what changes have occurred, if any. Initial impressions from the analysis have the park's administration hopeful that the tube can be reopened sometime this year. Source: Michael Brestovansky, [Hawaii Tribune-Herald](#).

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

The Senate was in recess for the Presidents Day holiday from February 18th to February 22nd.

House Actions

February 26 – The House passed S. 47, the Natural Resources Management Act, by a vote of 363 yeas to 62 nays. This bill, which is the most significant parks and public lands legislation since 2014, permanently reauthorizes the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which provides money to the National Park Service to acquire lands within boundaries of national parks as well as to provide grants to state and local governments for recreational opportunities throughout our country. Additionally, the bill authorizes the creation of three new national monuments, redesignates seven units of the national park system, establishes six new national heritage areas, extends two national trails and expands the boundaries of ten national park system units, designates segments of six rivers as part of the wild and scenic rivers system, authorizes additions to the three California desert national parks

and designates additional wilderness at one park, authorizes five special resource studies, and makes a number of management changes for other parks and heritage areas. A summary of the bill's provisions appeared in the last issue and is provided [at this link](#).

Phil Francis, chair of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, expressed his thanks to Congress "for working together to ensure continued protection of our national parks and public lands." Phil's full statement can be read [at this link](#) or in the Coalition section below.

The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law.

National Park Service

National Park System

NPS Looking At Cutting Back LE Training – Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) reported early this week that the Service "is quietly moving to reduce the training required of its permanent law enforcement rangers" and that PEER "is asking...Congressional oversight committees to weigh in before this stealth downgrade is completed." PEER has produced a report that details how the NPS is taking steps to abandon mandatory attendance by its permanent law enforcement rangers at FLETC and instead seeking to principally rely on seasonal law enforcement training programs independently operated at non-NPS facilities, such as community colleges, across the country. The shift would reverse a nearly 50-year trend towards steadily upgrading the training and professionalism in the NPS law enforcement ranger corps. The purpose of the plan, says PEER, "is to reduce training costs by compressing a 16-week training regimen into 12 weeks; forcing rangers to pay for their own basic training...and skimping on facilities and equipment." Under this plan, the Service would be the only federal land management agency not using FLETC. [The full PEER report can be read at this link](#). Source: Kirsten Stade, [PEER](#).

Gateway Ranger Hits The Jackpot (Literally) – Ranger Judith Smith, who works at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island in Gateway NRA and only recently was among the many NPS employees on furlough, purchased the winning ticket to a December 17th New Jersey lottery with a jackpot of \$29.5 million. The announcement was made last week. The family kept the winning ticket in a safe place, hired an attorney and sought financial advice before filing a claim for the largest Pick-6 jackpot in New Jersey since May 2004. Source: Chris Sheldon, [NJ.com](#).

Around The Parks

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

- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – Although its already the nation's most-visited national park, with a record 11.4 million visitors in 2018, visitation has grown due to the November opening of the new section of the Foothills Parkway between Walland and Wears Valley. Nearly 200,000 visitors drove the parkway over about two months, resulting in record-setting visitation in November and December. The 1.65-mile section of the parkway, known as the "Missing Link," opened to motorists and cyclists on November 10th. Source: Amy J. Vellucci, [Knoxville News Sentinel](#).
- *Lowell NHP* – The Lowell National Historical Park quarter was officially launched by the U.S. Mint on February 6th. The coin is the 46th release in the America the Beautiful Quarters Program and the first of five new designs slated for 2019. The reverse, depicting a mill girl working at a power loom, reflects Lowell's role in the Industrial Revolution. A view of Lowell, including the Boott Mill clock tower, is seen through the window. Source: [Numismatic News](#).
- *Saint-Gaudens NHS* – Blow-Me-Down Farm, which was acquired by the park in 2010 as another of the estates belonging to artists who were part of the 19th century Cornish Colony, is now host to Opera North. The opera company put together a proposal three years ago – accepted by the park – that would make the farm a venue for opera, musical theatre and other

performances. Last year, the company secured a 30-year lease on what remains of the farm's buildings and seed money from the Northern Border Regional Commission to launch an initial phase of building restorations. Saint-Gaudens will be the first arts park in the region. Source: Anders Morley, [New Hampshire Magazine](#).

- *Yellowstone NP* – The park is seeking public comment on a proposal to develop seasonal housing for concessions employees at the West Entrance and Canyon Village. The EA looks at two alternatives – one in which no additional seasonal housing would be constructed, the other in which includes construction of up to 25 recreational vehicle sites and a bathhouse adjacent to the Yellowstone General Stores warehouse near the West Entrance. The proposal would also redevelop and modify an abandoned loop at the Canyon Campground to house Canyon Lodge and Cabins employees. A combination of up to 14 RV sites and six modular homes would be integrated into the camper loop, and existing comfort stations would be rehabilitated to provide shower and laundry facilities. Comments are being accepted through February 28th at the park's [PEPC website](#). Source: Morgan Warthin, [Yellowstone NP](#).
- *Yosemite NP* – The satirical newspaper *The Onion* posted a humorous piece on February 15th on the park expanding its lodging with new log cabin high-rises: “In an effort to make one of the country’s most celebrated natural wonders more accessible to the public, Department of the Interior officials announced Friday that Yosemite National Park would expand its lodging options by constructing dozens of new log cabin high-rises...” The “rustic penthouse(s)” would be built entirely from rough-hewn logs; each “all-wood skyscraper would hold enough cots to comfortably bed 4,000 visitors.” On the downside, there won’t be any electricity and you’ll have to descend as many as a hundred flights of stairs to relieve yourself in the woods. “[What’s] more, these buildings will blend in perfectly with the surrounding environment because they will be constructed from giant sequoias sourced right here in the park.” Source: [The Onion](#).

Federal Government And Congress

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 ‘Books’ Lincoln Memorial For Celebration – As noted in the last edition, the president is intent on having a special Fourth of July gathering on the National Mall. Here’s the latest on his plans, as reported by the Associated Press: “President Donald Trump says he’ll host a July Fourth celebration at the Lincoln Memorial. And though the event he’s calling ‘A Salute to America’ is months away, he’s boasting it’ll be one of the city’s biggest Independence Day gatherings – ever. Trump tweeted Sunday: ‘HOLD THE DATE! We will be having one of the biggest gatherings in the history of Washington, D.C., on July 4th. It will be called “A Salute To America” and will be held at the Lincoln Memorial. Major fireworks display, entertainment and an address by your favorite President, me!’” No additional details are yet available. Source: [Associated Press](#), via KTLA News.

Department of the Interior

OIG Asked To Investigate Ethical Misconduct At DOI – “A government ethics watchdog has called for the Interior Department’s Office of Inspector General to launch a formal investigation into violations of federal ethics rules by six high-ranking agency officials who maintained close ties to former employers,” reports the Huffington Post. The [19-page complaint](#) was sent to DOI OIG Mary Kendall by the D.C.-based nonpartisan nonprofit Campaign Legal Center (CLC). Said CLC in its letter: “It appears that former Secretary Zinke’s disregard for ethical norms has sent a signal to Interior employees that skirting ethical rules, including violating a signed ethics pledge, is tolerated at the Department of the Interior.” See the article for details on the allegations against the six employees. Source: Chris D’Angelo, [Huffington Post](#).

Supreme Court

SCOTUS Rules In Favor Of Feds Regarding Retirement Taxes – On February 20th, the Supreme Court issued a ruling “with potentially far-reaching impacts for former federal employees, finding they should not face disparate tax treatment compared to their state counterparts,” reports *Government Executive*. Here are the first paragraphs of their story on the ruling: “In a unanimous decision, the court said it had ‘little difficulty’ ruling in favor of a U.S. Marshals Service retiree who sued the state of West Virginia for violating the 1939 Public Salary Tax Act. West Virginia violated the law and the related intergovernmental tax immunity precedent, the court ruled in *Dawson v. Steager*, in making the annuities of certain state law enforcement officers tax free but not granting the same benefit to James Dawson, the Marshals retiree. The state law ‘unlawfully discriminates against Mr. Dawson,’ the court said in an opinion authored by Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch. There is no discernable difference between the job performed by Dawson and the state employees enjoying the tax benefit, Gorsuch wrote. The court also found West Virginia’s argument that it was only trying to help state law enforcement retirees and not harm federal retirees to be immaterial.” Source: Eric Katz, [Government Executive](#).

House and Senate

Federal Retirement Benefit Bills Introduced – “House lawmakers, led by Rep. Gerry Connolly, D-Va., introduced several of bills last week that would improve the retirement benefits earned by federal workers during their time in public service,” reports *Government Executive*. For details on the particulars of each bill, see the link below the listing or click on the bills themselves:

- The Equal COLA Act ([H.R. 1254](#)) would increase the annual cost of living adjustment provided to retirees in the Federal Employees Retirement System to match the COLA given to Civil Service Retirement System retirees.
- The Federal Firefighter Pay Equity Act ([H.R. 1255](#)) would bring the retirement benefits for more than 15,000 federal workers in line with their counterparts in state and local government.
- The First Responder Fair RETIRE Act ([H.R. 1256](#)) would extend full retirement benefits to a variety of federal law enforcement and public safety employees if they are injured while at work.

Source: Erich Wagner, [Government Executive](#).

Climate and Conservation

This section will resume in the next issue.

The Coalition

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

Coalition Applauds House Passage of Public Lands Bill – Coalition Chair Phil Francis issued the following statement yesterday following the House’s passage of S.47, the Natural Resources Management Act. The full text follows:

“The Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks is praising the House of Representative’s passage of S. 47, the Natural Resources Management Act. This bipartisan package negotiated last year, recently passed the Senate by a vote of 98-2.

“Coalition Chair Phil Francis says, “We celebrated when the Natural Resources Management Act passed the Senate and we are thrilled by its passage in the House today. The protection of our irreplaceable natural and cultural resources is truly a bipartisan issue and we applaud Congress for working together to ensure continued protection of our national parks and public lands.”

“The bill, which includes over 100 parks and public lands bills, also establishes the permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), our nation’s primary source for preserving nationally significant public lands and providing recreational opportunities in communities across the country.

“Francis says that although permanent reauthorization of LWCF is a huge step forward, the Coalition will continue to advocate for the full funding of LWCF, as it is a critical investment not only in our quality of life and the continued protection of our public lands, but also in the American economy. S. 47 will protect more than two million acres of public land and greatly impact national parks and National Park Service programs. Among other provisions, S. 47 designates three new national monuments in Mississippi and Kentucky, including the home of civil rights leader Medgar Evers, and creates a new historical park and National Historic Network to mark the Reconstruction Era in South Carolina.

“Other provisions of the bill include; the designation of several river segments as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System; additional wilderness designation and boundary expansions for the three California desert national parks; and the authorization of special resource studies at locations such as “Amache”, a Japanese American relocation site in Colorado during World War II, and in the neighborhood where Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall lived in his youth. S. 47 also makes permanent the program begun during the Obama administration to provide free admission to all national parks and public lands for every fourth grader and their accompanying adults.”

Source: [CPANP](#).

Park People

NPS Alumni

Deny Galvin To Be Honored By NPCA

The National Parks Conservation Association will be honoring past deputy director and acting director Deny Galvin with its Centennial Leadership Award at its 38th annual “Salute to the Parks,” which will be held on April 3rd at the National Building Museum in Washington. The event will also mark NPCA’s 100th anniversary.

“NPCA is honored to pay special recognition to Deny Galvin, who has dedicated his career and life to protecting America’s national parks,” said NPCA’s Kristen Bengel. “Deny has had a storied career with the National Park Service...His passion and knowledge are respected in the halls of Congress, amongst his peers on the National Parks Second Century Commission, and on planning committees for new parks and park projects. Deny has also given generously of his time and expertise to NPCA, serving for 16 years on the Board of Trustees.”

Source: NPCA.

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:

- *Channel Islands NP* – Ethan McKinley has been selected to serve as the next superintendent of Channel Islands. He’s been serving as the park’s acting superintendent since July, following the June retirement of Russ Galipeau. He came to Channel Islands from First State National Historical Park in Delaware, where he had been the superintendent since 2015. Before that, he served as Northeast Region’s chief of commercial services. He has also worked at Mount Rainier, Yosemite, Glacier, and Gettysburg. He got his start with the agency as a Student Conservation Association intern in 2006. Source: Yvonne Menard, [Channel Islands NP](#).

- *Lincoln Boyhood NM* – Rhonda Schier is the park’s new superintendent. A fifteen-year veteran of the NPS, Schier is currently chief of museum services and interpretation at Gateway Arch. She will assume her new role mid-March. Source: [Lincoln Boyhood NM](#).
- *Klondike Gold Rush NHP* – Jason Taylor, the regional chief of natural resources for Alaska Region, has been selected as the park’s superintendent. Before moving to Alaska, he was the chief of natural resource management at Cape Cod NS. Jason has also held several positions with the Bureau of Land Management, including posts in Alaska and Colorado. All told, he has fifteen years of combined federal and local government service. He will takeover at the park in mid-April. Source: Peter Christian, [Alaska Region](#).
- *Branch of Fire and Aviation Management* – The NPS office at NIFC has selected Nicholas “Nic” Strohmeier as the Service’s new helicopter specialist. In his role as a helicopter specialist, he will focus on policy and oversight of helicopters that are owned and operated by the NPS. He will also represent the NPS on various committees and working groups to develop policy and guidance to ensure the helicopter program operates in a safe and effective manner now, and in the future. Source: Bill Gabbert, [Fire Aviation](#).

[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.

- *Glen Canyon NRA* – In 1990, a backcountry patrol ranger discovered that a significant archeological site on the Escalante River had been looted. The remote and virtually inaccessible alcove site was discovered and its visible contents documented in May of 1987. Because the site was pristine and difficult to reach, the artifacts were left in place pending proper excavation. One of the items taken was a large, intact corrugated Anasazi storage jar. Following an 18-month-long investigation based on information received from a confidential informant, that storage jar was recently found and seized from a private residence in Escalante, Utah. The residence is the home of one of the suspect's parents. Numerous felony charges against four individuals are being coordinated through the U.S. attorney's office. Submitted by Chief Ranger Tomie Patrick Lee.
- *Grand Canyon NP* – On the evening of February 14th, a park maintenance crew returning from Jacob's Lake discovered the frozen body of a man next to the North Rim entrance station. They summoned North Rim paramedics, who determined that he had frozen to death. Investigation revealed that the 37-year-old Pennsylvania man, who was wearing a light jacket and street shoes, had been backpacking that day and that he was not prepared for either hiking in the backcountry or for winter weather. In addition, his backcountry permit did not authorize travel to the North Rim. It was determined that he'd hiked out of the canyon from the South Rim in up to three feet of snow. He then started towards the developed area of the North Rim, but for some reason turned away, made his way past the entrance station, then set up a small camp. He later left that camp and returned to the entrance station, where his body was found. His remains were taken to Flagstaff. Submitted by Barbara Brutvan.
- *Glacier Bay NP&P* – The *Westerly*, a 72-foot fishing vessel out of Petersburg, Alaska, sank in the park on February 15th. The vessel, which was laden with Tanner crab pots, ran into 50-knot winds and seas of six to ten feet while passing northeast of Strawberry Island and began to experience severe stability problems, possibly caused by the failure of a bulkhead. High seas quickly caused the boat to founder, and the crew had to abandon ship within minutes. The *Arete*, the park's 26-foot patrol boat, responded from Bartlett Cove, but had to turn back because of extreme weather and sea conditions. A nearby fishing vessel, the *Northwyn*, was able to rescue all crew members within minutes, however, and no injuries were reported. All crew members had donned immersion suits before entering the ocean, where water temperatures were in the low 40s. The *Westerly*, which carried an estimated 1,500 to 2,000

gallons of diesel fuel in its tanks, sank in about 40 fathoms of water east of Strawberry Island without a trace. Although no evidence of fuel leakage has yet been spotted, park and Coast Guard officials will continue to monitor the scene closely and will be working with the owner to attempt to locate and salvage the vessel. Submitted by District Ranger Chuck Young.

Acknowledgements

This newsletter comes to you through the efforts of a number of people:

- Production: Steve Pittleman
- Regular Correspondents: Don Hellmann, Dennis Burnett, Rick Smith, Emily Thompson, and Duncan Morrow

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

"Parks are an attribute of sovereignty and, of course, were known for hundreds of years prior to the establishment of America's first national park. Always those parks belonged to the sovereign - the king, the queen, (or) the emperor...In the United States, the people are the sovereign. America's national parks are the special creations of the people through their elected representatives in the Congress...A myth endures that the park service alone preserves the national parks. That is its aspiration, but not the reality. If one reads the journals of the citizen conservation organizations, one may conclude that they preserve the parks. That is their objective, but not the reality. There are even some romanticists who suggest that the park service and the citizen conservation organizations, together, preserve the parks. That, certainly, is their endeavor, but not the reality. The reality is that the people through their elected representatives in the Congress preserve the parks - or destroy them."

[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. 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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