

[View this email in your web browser.](#)



The Coalition Report

Wednesday, August 23, 2023

Coalition Actions

The Coalition issued a [press release](#) celebrating the designation of the Baaj Nwaavjo l'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument.

We signed a [joint letter](#) to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland requesting Minidoka National Historic Site and adjacent Bureau of Land Management lands be protected from the proposed Lava Ridge wind project by designating it an Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

The Coalition is so grateful to all of its supporters - THANK YOU for making this news report possible and all the work done to protect our national parks. If you're not yet a supporter or you are and you would like to give more in support of our efforts, [consider a contribution today](#).

National/Regional NPS Updates

A summary of news pertaining to management and oversight of the NPS, to current trends and issues affecting the National Park System and its programs, or intersecting with the parks on a more regional basis.

- *\$35.5 billion in public lands maintenance backlog* - The Congressional Research Service released a report that estimates that the NPS, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife, combined, have a deferred maintenance backlog of over \$35.5 billion. The NPS, alone, accounts for 59% of

that backlog. It noted that the ways agencies report deferred maintenance and completed projects make it difficult to track the work, including the efforts of the Great American Outdoors Act to address deferred maintenance projects. Source: [FEDweek](#)

- *New record for NPS economic benefit* - On August 21, the NPS released a report, "2022 National Park Visitor Spending Effects," which found that the cumulative benefit for the national economy was a new record at \$50.3 billion. It also found that 378,400 jobs were supported by the National Park System, 314,600 of those in gateway communities. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *NPS and Parks Canada MOU* - On August 9, the NPS and Parks Canada signed a renewed Memorandum of Understanding to continue to partner and collaborate on shared goals. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Michigan Mobility Challenge* - The State of Michigan, in partnership with the NPS, has announced the National Park Michigan Mobility Challenge, which is working to increase electric shuttles, electric charging hubs, and "micromobility" offerings, such as e-bikes, in the state's five national park units. Project proposals for funding are due September 6. Source: [Government Technology](#)
- *Climate change in national parks* - California State University Northridge published [an article](#) about the effects of climate change on national parks that highlighted the perspective of CSUN alumnus Mike Theune, regional fire communications and education specialist for the Pacific West Region. Source: *CSUN Today*
- *Delay of ozone standards puts national parks at risk* - The National Parks Conservation Association published [an article](#) about the Environmental Protection Agency's recent postponement for reconsidering National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ground-level ozone. The article argues that the delay threatens wildlife and ecosystems across the country, particularly those in national parks. The standards will be considered again in Spring 2024. Source: National Parks Conservation Association
- *"Is Congress Too Dysfunctional to Fund the National Parks?"* - *Common Dreams* published [an op-ed](#) by this name, written by Jeff Ruch, Pacific Director for Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. The article indicates a potential 12.5% cut in operating funds for the National Park Service, passed by the House Appropriations Committee (though not passed by Congress). The cut would cause the NPS to lose 1,000 staff positions, with wide-ranging consequences. Source: *Common Dreams*
- *Podcast about "Land Back" movement* - The podcast *Unpacked* published an episode called, "Inside the Movement to Return National Park Land," about efforts

at repatriation of land to Native Americans. Source: [Afar](#)

- *Vintage national park photos* - *National Geographic* published [an article](#) of early tourism photos from national parks, including Yosemite National Park, Kings Canyon National Park, Yellowstone National Park, Glacier National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, Crater Lake National Park, Mesa Verde National Park, and Mount Rainier National Park. Source: *National Geographic*
- *Apple Watch national parks challenge* - Apple announced that a national park-themed Apple Watch Activity Challenge will take place on August 26. The challenges are used to promote the use of Apple Watches for activity tracking, giving each user a virtual award for completion. Source: [Opp.Today](#)

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Bandelier National Monument* - On August 9, the park announced it will increase overnight camping fees at Juniper Campground and Ponderosa Group Campground, beginning October 1. Reservations for some sites at Juniper can also be made online, starting on October 1. Source: [Bandelier National Monument](#)
- *Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park* - *The Valley Breeze* published [an article](#) about groups opposed to a proposed hydroelectric facility at the Ashton Dam on the Blackstone River, including the park. The park's superintendent submitted a letter on June 20 to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, arguing that the new development would "adversely affect the nationally significant historic resources" within the park. Others opposed to the project are the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative, Narragansett Indian Tribe, and Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone. Source: *The Valley Breeze*
- *Cape Cod National Seashore* - On August 14, the Provincetown Select Board submitted a letter to the NPS requesting mediation to help the community understand the NPS' decision making around dune shack leasing. They feel the actions of the NPS have been counter to the 2012 Dune Shacks Historic District Preservation and Use Plan. Meanwhile, *Smithsonian Magazine* published [an article](#) about the history of the dune shacks, including historic use by well-known American artists and writers, as well as the current controversy. Source: [Provincetown Independent](#), *Smithsonian Magazine*
- *Cape Hatteras National Seashore* - *The Island Free Press* published [an article](#) about the projects accomplished by the 2023 Youth Conservation Corps cohort, including repairing and painting fencing, rebuilding boardwalks, maintaining campsites, and building picnic tables. It is the first YCC program at the park since 2017. Source: *Island Free Press*

- *Delaware Gap National Recreation Area* - On August 7, Hunter and Wyatt Karch assumed management of the Dingmans Campground for the remaining term of the current concession contract, following the retirement of the previous owner. The Karch brothers grew up camping at Dingmans. Source: [Delaware Gap National Recreation Area](#)
- *Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve* - *The Anchorage Daily News* published [an op-ed](#) by Cyrus Harris, arguing against the Ambler Road project, a proposed 211-mile road that would cross Gates of the Arctic. Cyrus is the co-chair of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group and the founder of the Hunter Support Program of the Maniilaq Association. Source: *Anchorage Daily News*
- *Gateway National Recreation Area* - Fort Wadsworth and Floyd Bennett Field are both being considered, among other locations, for the newest emergency migrant facility site for New York City. The city currently houses 50,000 homeless asylum seekers across 200 shelters. Source: [SILive.com](#)
- *Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve* - The park issued a prospectus for 10-year tour vessel contracts in Glacier Bay. Proposals are due October 20 and the new contracts will begin on January 1, 2024. Source: [Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve](#)
- *Glacier National Park* - On August 11, the NPS signed a Finding of No Significant Impact for the Gunsight Lake trout preservation project. Non-native rainbow trout will be removed and native Westslope cutthroat and bull trout will be translocated to the lake. Source: [KSEN](#)
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area* - The NPS will apply rotenone, a piscicide, to a slough area of the Colorado River below the Glen Canyon Dam starting on August 26. The action is part of a continued effort to protect threatened humpback chub by killing non-native smallmouth bass and green sunfish. The slough will be covered in an "impermeable fabric barrier" to prevent water from entering the river while the effort is underway. The area will be closed for two days. Source: [AP News](#)
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Grand Canyon National Park* - A new study by the U.S. Geological Survey estimates that 68% of archeological sites in the park along the Colorado River have been impacted by increased erosion as a result of Glen Canyon Dam operations. The study utilized 50 years of aerial photography and 30 years of site visit and survey data. Source: [Arizona Daily Sun](#)
- *Grand Canyon National Park* - A new NPS study called "Predicting climate-change induced heat-related illness risk in Grand Canyon National Park visitors" projects that the rate of heat-related illness will increase by 29-137% over the next 80 years, assuming no changes in visitation. Source: [USA Today](#), [PLOS ONE](#)

- *Gulf Islands National Seashore* - On August 14, a group of vendors that make their business on Crab Island asked the Destin City Council (FL) for support against the NPS' efforts to limit the business on the island to a single concession. The City Council passed a motion to draw up a resolution to support the local businesses; the resolution will be brought back at the next council meeting. Source: [The Destin Log](#).
- *Gulf Islands National Seashore* - In early September, the park will begin a project to create new parking spaces, provide new dune crossovers to the sound and the Gulf of Mexico, and create a new multi-use path on Johnson Beach Road. Traffic calming measures will also improve visitor and wildlife safety. The \$2.6 million project is being funded by Gulf Restoration funding associated with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlement, in partnership with the Florida Trustee Implementation Group. The contract was awarded to Wright Brothers, LLC. The project is expected to be complete in February. Source: [Gulf Islands National Seashore](#)
- *Harriet Tubman National Historical Park* - On August 16, the park announced that due to supply chain and staff capacity issues, the opening of Thompson Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church and parsonage will be delayed until Spring or Summer 2024. Restoration on the church and parsonage is ongoing. Source: [auburnpub.com](#)
- *Home of Franklin D Roosevelt National Historic Site* - The park put out a renewed Request For Proposals to lease, operate, and maintain the Hyde Park Drive-In Movie Theatre. A proposal was put out in February, which received notable feedback from the public and potential operators. The park has incorporated these ideas into the new RFP. Applications are due November 3 and the lease would begin in early 2024. Source: [News 10](#)
- *Hopewell Culture National Historical Park* - On August 9, a group of scientists published a review in *Scientific Reports* that refutes a February 2022 paper that claims a comet was responsible for the rapid decline of the Hopewell culture. The new review argues that the evidence utilized for the comet theory is poorly interpreted, non-existent, or intentionally manipulated. Bret Ruby, cultural resources program manager at the park, is on the research team that is refuting the comet theory. Source: [Ball State University](#)
- *Indiana Dunes National Park* - In September, the park will begin a project to improve accessibility, utilities, and amenities at the Lake View picnic facility. Work will continue through May 2024. The area will be closed during the project. Source: [Indiana Dunes National Park](#)
- *Land and Water Conservation Fund* (an NPS-administered program) - In February of 2020, a series of landslides took place in Riverfront Park, located in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The Golding Family donated a 5.5-acre tract to the city to serve as a new Riverfront Park location to replace the damaged park. The original Riverfront

park was developed with LWCF funds, so the NPS is required to review the proposed swap to ensure it is of equal or greater value to the former park. If it is of lesser value, the city and county must reimburse the funds to the NPS. The city and county submitted their application in November 2022, but the NPS has cited staff capacity issues holding up the process. The mayor of Vicksburg has asked the state's Congressional delegation for support in expediting the matter. Source: [The Vicksburg Post](#)

- *Manassas National Battlefield Park* - On July 28, Prince William County (VA) officials uploaded rezoning plans to their website associated with the proposed Prince William Digital Gateway project, a large data center development that would be adjacent to the park. This is the third iteration of the rezoning plans. The NPS has opposed the data center project publicly several times, including recent letters to Prince William County officials that ask the county to perform ground radar and other analysis before rezoning to discover potential military burials within the project's footprint. One of the developers has conducted "test pits" through a contractor to search for human remains, but none have yet been found. Source: [Prince William Times](#)
- *Monocacy National Battlefield* - On August 25, the park will officially open two new trails and celebrate improvements on eight miles of the existing trail system. Trail work was completed by the NPS and Appalachian Conservation Corps. Source: [Monocacy National Battlefield](#)
- *Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native Culture and Arts Development Grants* (an NPS-administered program) - The NPS announced \$243,457 in its first-ever grant award under this new program. The first grant was given for traditional canoe making among youth in southeast Alaska. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Niobrara National Scenic River* - The NPS, in partnership with The Nebraska Writing Project at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, received the 2022 Education in Excellence award for the Midwest Region for their program, "Write the River: Creative Writing Float and Art Experience." Source: [KCSR/KBPY](#)
- *Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants* (an NPS-administered program) - The NPS announced \$9.7 million in grants to 13 subgrant programs in 12 states to support historic building preservation in rural communities. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Petrified Forest National Park* - On August 1, Petrified Forest and Ischigualasto Provincial Park formally became sister parks. The two parks share similar paleontological, geological, biological, and archaeological resources, and this arrangement will allow them to exchange professional and technical knowledge to best protect and interpret their respective resources. Source: [Petrified Forest](#)

[National Park](#)

- *Redwood National and State Parks* - *The New York Times* published [an article](#) about the park's efforts, in collaboration with the Save the Redwoods League, to create future climate change-resistant old growth redwood forests by utilizing science-based thinning techniques. Source: *The New York Times*
- *San Antonio Missions National Historical Park* - The park has revitalized old acequia canals at Mission San Juan to irrigate farmland within the park amidst local drought. Produce from the farm is donated to the local community through a partnership with the San Antonio Food Bank. Source: [KSAT12 \(via YouTube\)](#)
- *Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area* - The Trust for Public Land, with the support of a loan from the State of California, recently purchased a 1,250-acre coastal property off Deer Creek Road in Ventura County, which it intends to donate to the park within two years. Federal approval for the \$26 million purchase by the NPS has already been secured. Source: [Ventura County Star](#)
- *Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area* - On August 9, the park held a ribbon cutting celebration for the Cheeseboro Canyon trailhead project, which made improvements to parking, potable water, pathways, available shade, toilets, and storm runoff. The trailhead has been closed for ten months while the work was underway. The project was funded by federal dollars, as well as support from the National Park Foundation, Santa Monica Mountains Fund, and Clifford Holmes Estate. Source: [Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area](#)
- *Shenandoah National Park* - The Southern Shenandoah Borderlands Project recently received \$7 million in Forest Legacy funding from the U.S. Forest Service. The funding will allow the organization to secure conservation easements on four tracts between Waynesboro and Crozet (VA) that border the national park. The initiative was also supported by the Piedmont Environmental Council and Virginia Department of Forestry. Source: [WMRA](#)
- *Shenandoah National Park* - The Shenandoah National Park Trust announced that it has created the Access to the Outdoors Fund to remove barriers to access for young visitors. The fund is supported by \$150,000 from the Christopher Johnson McCandless Memorial Foundation, in honor of Chris McCandless, the individual featured in the popular book and film, *Into the Wild*. Source: [CBS 19 News](#)
- *Springfield Armory National Historic Site* - A Maintenance Action Team with members of the Student Conservation Association have begun a six-month stint in the park to fix windows in the Byers Street Gatehouse and repaint the Iron Boundary Fence. Source: [Mass Live](#)
- *Steamtown National Historic Site* - The park received a generous donation from the

estate of Eric J. Yankovich to fund the restoration of the Atlantic Coast Line #1901, a steam era diesel locomotive in the park's collection. The contract for the restoration was awarded to McHugh Locomotive and Equipment. Support for the project came from the park's partner, the Iron Horse Society. The work is expected to be complete by the end of 2025. Source: [Steamtown National Historic Site](#)

- *Virgin Islands National Park* - The park recently installed new wayside exhibits at the historic Annaberg plantation that better reflect the realities of enslaved life at the site. The exhibits were informed by a community approach and included work with a local artist and historian. The park is working to replace other signage around the park, as well. Source: [Virgin Islands Daily News](#)

Personnel Changes

- *Acadia National Park* - Matt Outheir was selected as the park's first chief of project management. Matt has 20 years of civil engineering and project management experience, with the last five as a civil engineer in the design and engineering branch at Yosemite National Park. Source: [Acadia National Park](#)
- *Buffalo National River* - Angela Boyers was selected as superintendent. Angela has 26 years of NPS experience, most recently as chief ranger at Grand Canyon National Park. She will begin her new role in September. Source: [Buffalo National River](#)
- *Canaveral National Seashore* - Carmen Thomson was selected as superintendent. Carmen has 22 years of NPS experience, most recently as the inventory and monitoring program manager for the Midwest Region and interim deputy program leader for the Natural Resource Science and Stewardship Directorate's inventory and monitoring program. She will start her new role on September 10. Source: [Canaveral National Seashore](#)
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - Katie Liming was selected as the management assistant. Katie most recently worked as the primary spokesperson for the National Capital Region. Daniel "Boone" Vandzura was also selected as the chief ranger. Source: [Smoky Mountains News](#)
- *Structural Fire Program* - Byron Smith was selected as operations program manager. Byron has worked firefighting roles for the military for 30 years. This is Byron's first role with the NPS. Source: [National Park Service Structural Fire Program](#)
- *Wildland Fire Program* - Casey Teske was selected as the wildland fire science and ecology program lead. Casey has 30 years of interagency fire experience, most recently as the fire management analyst for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Branch of Fire Management at the National Interagency Fire Center. Source:

[National Park Service Wildland Fire Program](#)

Park People

Here we honor deceased park employees, as well as important news about Coalition Members and other former park employees or volunteers. People are listed alphabetically by last name.

Deceased

- June Irene Branner, 101, passed away on July 16. June spent a "lifelong career" with the National Park Service, including time at Yosemite National Park, Yellowstone National Park, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, and San Juan Island National Historical Park, where she retired in 1984. Source: [The Journal of the San Juan Islands](#)
- Michael Ray Brown, 82, passed away on July 26. Michael worked in Yellowstone National Park for a time. Source: [Legacy/Missoulian](#)
- Betty McCormick Hall, 90, passed away on August 11. Betty was an NPS volunteer in Everglades National Park for a time. Source: [WCCS](#)
- Maurine Roberts, 87, passed away on July 30. Maurine worked for the NPS at Zion National Park, Mount Rushmore National Memorial, and Pipe Spring National Monument. Source: [St. George News](#)

Retired

- On September 2, Don Frankfurt will retire, after working 55 seasons at Wind Cave National Park. The park will host a brief retirement ceremony at his last campfire program. Source: [Wind Cave National Park](#)

In the News

- *Portage.Life* published [a profile](#) of Andrea Harbin, who worked for a time doing small mammal population studies at Indiana Dunes National Park. Source: *Portage.Life*
- The Red Wall Art Gallery in Queens, New York, is hosting an exhibition called "Wildlife and Nature in New York City: 40 Years of Photography," featuring the work of Don Riebe. Don previously managed the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge at Gateway National Recreation Area. Source: [Queens Gazette](#)
- Susan Snow, current superintendent at Effigy Mounds National Monument, was appointed to the Regional Planning Affiliation Transportation Enhancement Committee for the Allamakee County (IA) Board of Supervisors. Susan worked with

the NPS to determine whether there would be any concerns or conflicts with her role as superintendent and was given approval to move forward. Source: [The Standard](#)

Open for Comment

Items will stay on this list until public comment has closed.

- *Appalachian National Scenic Trail* - Public comment is [open through August 31](#) on a visitor use management plan for the Virginia Triple Crown segment of the Appalachian Trail. Source: [Appalachian National Scenic Trail](#)
- *Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Curecanti National Recreation Area* - Public comment is [open through September 16](#) on a plan to change camping and boating fees in the parks. Source: [Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park](#)
- *Bryce Canyon National Park* - Public comment is [open through August 31](#) on a proposal to standardize campground reservations and fees, and move full moon hike registration online. Source: [Bryce Canyon National Park](#)
- *Buck Island National Monument* – Public comment is open through August 26 on a proposal to increase anchoring and mooring fees in order to move the system online. Comments may be made by email, mail, or phone. Source: [Buck Island National Monument](#)
- *Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, Fort Matanzas National Monument* - Public comment is open through October 1 on a proposal to charge a \$1 online reservation fee for after-hours special events. The fee increase will be absorbed into other existing ticket costs, so this will only affect tickets for children five-years-old and younger. Comments may be made by email. Source: [Fort Matanzas National Monument](#)
- *César E. Chávez National Monument* - Public comment is [open through August 23](#) on an an accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [César E. Chávez National Monument](#)
- *Glacier National Park* - Public comment is [open through September 8](#) on a plan to increase fees for campgrounds in the park. Source: [Glacier National Park](#)
- *Glacier National Park* - Public comment is [open through September 30](#) on visitor use management at the park, including reservation systems. A [storymap](#) for the project is available. Source: [Glacier National Park](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park* - Public comment is [open through September 4](#) on a plan to change backpacking permit fees. Source: [Snow Brains](#)

- *Grand Teton National Park* - Public comment is [open through October 10](#) on visitor use and experience in the park. A [storymap](#) is available. Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#)
- *Isle Royale National Park* - Public comment is [open through September 26](#) on a draft Wilderness Stewardship Plan. Source: [Isle Royale National Park](#)
- *Japanese American Confinement Grant Program* (an NPS-administered program) – Public comment is [open through September 15](#) on the guidelines and criteria for the newly-established Norman Y. Mineta Japanese American Confinement Education Grant Program. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve* - Public comment is [open through September 18](#) on a proposed plan to repair the trail system in Barataria Preserve, which was damaged heavily by Hurricane Ida. Source: [Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve](#)
- *Mammoth Cave National Park* - Public comment is [open through August 25](#) on a Land and River Trails Management Plan. A [storymap](#) and [informational video](#) for the project are available. Source: [Mammoth Cave National Park](#)
- *San Juan National Historic Site* - Public comment is [open through September 5](#) on a free-ranging cat management plan. Source: [San Juan National Historic Site](#)
- *Southeast Regional Office* - Public comment is [open through August 31](#) on the consideration of the Great River Road, located on the west bank of the Mississippi River in Louisiana, to be a National Historic Landmark District. Source: [The Eunice News](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - Public comment has been extended [through August 25](#) on a proposal by the Custer Gallatin National Forest and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to remove nonnative rainbow trout and hybridized cutthroat trout from the Buffalo Creek drainage and reintroduce Yellowstone cutthroat trout. Source: [Buckrail, Yellowstone National Park](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - Public comment is open [through September 25](#) on a bison management plan. Source: [Buckrail](#)
- *Yosemite National Park* – A second round of public comments is [open through September 6](#) on a Visitor Access Management Plan. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
- *Zion National Park* - Public comment is [open through August 31](#) on proposed changes to campground fees and the fees and reservation system associated with wilderness recreation permits. Source: [Zion National Park](#)

Other Department of the Interior News

- *Bears Ears and Grand Staircase upheld* - On August 11, a federal judge dismissed a lawsuit by Utah political leaders that argued the President Joe Biden's restoration of Bears Ears National Monument and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (both managed by the Bureau of Land Management) was unlawful because it was too broad for the Antiquities Act's scope. The Utah lawmakers have stated that they will appeal the ruling. Source: [The Salt Lake Tribune](#)
- *USFWS failed to protect gray wolf* - On August 11, a federal judge sided with the Center for Biological Diversity, ruling that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had failed to develop a nationwide recovery plan for the gray wolf under the Endangered Species Act. The USFWS has treated subpopulations of the gray wolf differently, failing to create a comprehensive nationwide plan. Source: [Courthouse News Service](#)
- *Court sides against BOR on water district contract* - A federal appellate court agreed with a federal superior court ruling that a contract between the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Westlands Water District to access 1.15 million acre-feet of California water was "materially deficient in its failure to specify Westlands' financial obligations under the anticipated contract." The California Water Impact Network and other groups are seeking to invalidate the contract, calling it a "sweetheart deal" between the Trump administration and big farms that imperils the native species of the San Joaquin River Delta. Source: [Los Angeles Times](#)
- *\$50 million for water infrastructure and data* - On August 14, the Department of the Interior announced \$50 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act funding to support drought mitigation efforts in Upper Colorado River Basin states and efforts to improve drought-related data collection. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Secretary Haaland at Paraguay inauguration* - Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland led the U.S. presidential delegation to Paraguay's inauguration of President Santiago Peña. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

Congressional Actions

Reports on legislation, upcoming hearings, and new public laws of relevance to the national parks, prepared by Don Hellmann, former assistant director of legislative and congressional affairs for the National Park Service, and Chris Soller, former superintendent of Fire Island National Seashore and legislative specialist for the National Park Service.

Senate Actions

The Senate was on its annual summer recess during this time. It convened for pro forma

sessions on August 8, 10, 15, and 18; no business was conducted relating to the National Park Service.

House Actions

The House was on its officially designated “district work period,” also known as its annual summer recess, during this reporting time. The House convened briefly on August 8, 11, 15, and 18; no business was conducted relating to the National Park Service.

Incidents

Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.

Blue Ridge Parkway

Staffing gaps close campground

On August 24, the Blue Ridge Parkway will close the Otter Creek Campground for the season, two months ahead of schedule. The closure is necessary due to limited staffing; the park reported it was only able to hire 64% of its planned seasonal employees. Otter Creek is a lower occupancy campground. Visitors with reservations will be contacted about refunds and other options for camping at nearby campgrounds on the parkway.

Source: [Blue Ridge Parkway](#)

Cape Lookout National Seashore

Visitors trapped on island

Due to the filling in of sediments, the gap between Shark Island and Cape Lookout has become connected by a narrow bar of sand during the lowest tides. As a result, two separate incidents in August have had visitors crossing at low tide and becoming trapped as the tides rise behind them. In both instances, complex, multi-agency rescues were needed to extract the visitors. Source: [The News and Observer](#)

Death Valley National Park

Truck fire

On August 10, an off-duty NPS employee driving on Highway 190, leaving Towne Pass, noticed flames come out from underneath a semi-truck in front of their vehicle. Since there is no cell phone service, the employee used a park radio to report the fire. The truck pulled off the road onto a shoulder and the driver used a fire extinguisher to put out the fire. A fire truck arrived on scene from Furnace Creek and escorted the semi-truck down the highway in case the brakes set on fire again. The brakes did catch fire again and the truck pulled over at Emigrant Junction, and NPS staff were able to extinguish the fire. One tire was destroyed in the fires. No injuries or other equipment damage was reported. This is the third vehicle fire in Death Valley this year. Source: [KTNV](#)

Death Valley National Park, Joshua Tree National Park, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Manzanar National Historic Site, Mojave National Preserve

Hurricane/Tropical Storm closure

Most of the above parks announced preemptive closures between August 18-20 due predicted flooding from Hurricane/Tropical Storm Hilary. It is the first official National Weather Service Tropical Storm Warning in history for the region. Source: [KTLA](#), [Desert Sun](#), [Lake Mead National Recreation Area](#), [Manzanar National Historic Site](#)

Joshua Tree reopened on August 22 for day use, only. Road crews are still clearing roads of sand and further assessments and repairs of the campgrounds will take place later this week. Source: [Joshua Tree National Park](#)

Lake Mead reopened on August 22. The Las Vegas Boat Harbor (concession-operated) was severely damaged and the Callville Bay Marina is still without power, as of August 22. Source: [Lake Mead National Recreation Area](#)

Death Valley closed on August 20 due to active flooding. They received over an inch by midday and another inch that evening. As of August 21, the park was searching for stranded people in remote areas of the park and assessing impacts. Caltrans and the NPS are working to clear an exit route on Highway 190 from Stovepipe Wells to Death Valley Junction so visitors and employees can safely exit the park. As of August 22, there were approximately 400 people sheltering in place in the Furnace Creek, Stovepipe Wells, and Panamint Springs areas. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#), [Death Valley National Park Facebook page](#), [National Parks Traveler](#)

Denali National Park and Preserve

Plane crash

On August 9, a Piper PA-18 Super Cub aircraft that was transporting hunters in the park was reported overdue. The National Guard's Rescue Coordination Center initiated a search based on locator beacon coordinates, but the search aircraft had to turn around due to bad weather. That evening, a crew with the 176th Wing of the Alaska National Guard located the wreckage "in a narrow ravine" in the southwest preserve area of the park. They were unable to land at the accident site due to the steep terrain, but they observed that "survivability of the crash was unlikely." A flight the following morning (Aug 10) confirmed the wreckage belonged to that aircraft and searched for survivors (none were found). That afternoon (Aug 10), two NPS mountaineering rangers were flown to the site to assess the conditions for the use of a short-haul technique, which was deemed too hazardous. While the assessment was in progress, Alaska State Troopers received word that a hunter was stranded at a remote airstrip outside the southern border of the preserve because their pilot had failed to arrive to pick them up. The hunter communicated to friends utilizing satellite device. The stranded hunter was picked up and provided further details about the crash: the pilot had been transporting another hunter in their party to Dillinger River airstrip and was supposed to return to pick them up, but never arrived. Based on investigation, it appears the plane never reached Dillinger airstrip. On August 11, a National Transportation Safety Board investigator and NPS staff

landed on a tundra plateau above the crash site ravine. The NTSB investigator utilized a drone to collect imagery of the wreckage and further assess the terrain. Upon review of the imagery, several overflights, and testing experimental procedures, the NPS, NTSB, Alaska State Troopers, and Alaska Air National Guard Rescue Coordination Center have determined that a recovery of the individuals' bodies and aircraft is too high of a risk for responders at this time. In the future, when the river's volume is lower or frozen, allowing the site to be accessed on foot, a recovery may be possible. Source: [Anchorage Daily News](#), Denali National Park and Preserve ([8/12](#), [8/21](#))

Grand Canyon National Park

Teen takes long fall

On August 8, a 14-year-old fell 70 feet off a cliff at Bright Angel Point on the North Rim. A helicopter was unable to reach the individual. An NPS rope rescue team was able to extract the individual, and they were flown to a pediatric trauma center for evaluation. The individual's condition was said to be stable. Source: [USA Today](#)

Grand Teton National Park

Hiker fatality

On August 11, a hiker fell off the west side of Teewinot Mountain. The hiker was one in a group of eight climbing the mountain. Upon arrival on scene, NPS rangers found the individual deceased due to "significant injuries during the fall." The individual's body was carried by helicopter short-haul from the scene and turned over to the Teton County (WY) Coroner's Office. The seven other members of the party were flown to the Jenny Lake Search and Rescue Cache at Lupine Meadows and transported to their vehicles at the trailhead. Source: [Buckrail](#)

Grand Teton National Park

Bear encounters

Black bears have accessed human food several times recently along lakeshores in the park, including an incident with an unattended backpack on August 11 at Phelps Lake. The park is working to educate the public on not leaving food unattended, particularly while swimming, and reporting bear-human interactions to park staff. Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#)

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Hiker rescue

On August 15, a hiker about 1.5 miles west of Clingmans Dome requested medical support for "a severe illness." NPS staff arrived on scene to render first aid. A medical flight crew from the Tennessee Army National Guard extricated the individual via hoist to a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter and flew them to the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville. Source: [Clarksville Online](#)

Lake Mead National Recreation Area

Boat crash fatalities

On August 12, two individuals were killed in a boat crash at the Callville Bay boat ramp. One of the individuals was identified as a 48-year-old, and the Clark County coroner's office said they died of blunt force trauma and that the death was "ruled an accident." Details about the others' death have not been released. An individual involved in the crash was arrested on charges of operating a vessel while under the influence. Source: [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#)

Mammoth Cave National Park

Vandalism

The historic Joppa Missionary Baptist Church was marred by "repeated acts of vandalism" between July 5 and August 4. Vandalism included broken windows, kicked-in doors, and painted graffiti on church walls. The NPS has released two photos of a group of suspects and a vehicle, and the park is looking for any information the public can provide. Source: [Mammoth Cave National Park](#)

Mount Rainier National Park

Stargazers trample meadows

During the Perseid meteor shower, thousands of visitors flocked to the park for stargazing, resulting in multiple reports of damage to wildflowers in subalpine meadows at Sunrise. The park is currently assessing the damage. Source: [KATU](#)

Rocky Mountain National Park

Climbing accidents

On August 11, a 64-year-old was climbing the Ledges on the Keyhole Route on Longs Peak when they took a 60-foot tumbling fall. A bystander provided critical care until NPS personnel arrived on scene. The park's Search and Rescue team provided advanced medical care. Due to the severity of injuries and ruggedness of the terrain, they requested extrication of the patient by a hoist operation by a Colorado Air National Guard helicopter. Rocky Mountain Rescue Group assisted in the hoist operation. The patient was flown to Upper Beaver Meadows and transferred to a Flight for Life air ambulance, which flew them to Medical Center of the Rockies.

On August 12, a 21-year-old and a 25-year-old were descending the Flying Dutchman couloir between Longs Peak and Mount Meeker when they both fell about 300 feet. The 21-year-old died from injuries incurred in the fall. Bystanders utilized a cell phone and satellite device to request emergency support, and they provided initial care to the 25-year-old. NPS staff and an Estes Park Health paramedic provided advanced medical care upon arrival on scene. Due to the severity of the individual's injuries, they requested a

hoist extrication from the Colorado Air National Guard helicopter. Rocky Mountain Rescue Group assisted in the hoist operation. The individual was flown to Upper Beaver Meadows and transferred to a Flight for Life air ambulance, which flew them to Medical Center of the Rockies. The 21-year-old's body recovery was delayed by weather until August 14, supported by the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control helicopter. Their body was transferred to the Boulder County Coroner's Office for the determination of death.

Source: [Estes Park News](#), [Rocky Mountain National Park](#)

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

Missing backpacker

On August 9, a 76-year-old began a backpacking trip, entering the Cottonwood/Trail Pass Trailhead in the Inyo National Forest, intending to hike north along the John Muir Trail and meet up with family at Bullfrog Lake on August 12. Their family watched the individual's progress via a satellite tracker and the last updates were near the west end of the Caltech Peak ridgeline in Sequoia National Park. The individual accidentally deviated from their intended route due to snow and afternoon thunderstorms, and they lost their satellite tracker while descending the west side of Caltech Peak. They found their way to the Lake South America Trail and ran into another hiker on August 14. The other hiker let them use their satellite device to contact their family, and a park search team located the individual 10 minutes later. The individual was in good health. Source: Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks Facebook page ([8/13](#), [8/14](#))

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

Sexual assault charge

On July 31, an individual entered a person's cabin in the park and committed one act of sexual assault and acts of abusive sexual contact. On August 17, a 46-year-old suspect was indicted by a federal grand jury on both counts. Source: [United States Attorney's Office Eastern District of California](#)

Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

Car burglaries

On July 22, two visitors reported break-ins to their vehicles and stolen items in the East Beach Area. On August 9, two individuals were caught on camera making fraudulent transactions using stolen credit cards associated with those victims at a business in Redding, California. The business caught images of the the individuals and their vehicle, which have been released to the public. The NPS is looking for any information the public can provide. Source: [KRCR](#)

Wildfires

- *Denali National Park and Preserve* - On August 5, the Clear Creek Fire (#277) was identified. As of August 16, the fire was 52,966 acres. Approximately 1,000 acres

- are within the northern boundary of Denali, along the Toklat River and the rocky ridges to its west. Based on weather and current fire behavior, the fire is not expected to grow. The fire is currently in "monitor status." Source: [Denali National Park and Preserve](#), [Alaska Interagency Coordination Center](#)
- *Mojave National Preserve* - On July 28, the York Fire started in Caruthers Canyon in the New York Mountain Range. As of August 20, the fire was 100% contained at 93,078 acres, with 22 personnel assigned. The cause of the fire is under investigation; it started on a private land inholding inside of the park. Many roads and campgrounds in the park are closed until further notice. Source: [Inciweb](#), [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#), [Mojave National Preserve](#)
 - *North Cascades National Park* - On August 15, the park closed several trails, camps, and backcountry zones in the Bridge Creek and Blue Lake area due to the Blue Lake Fire, which is burning near State Route 20 milepost 160, 30 miles west of Winthrop, WA, on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Source: [North Cascades National Park](#)
 - *Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site* - On August 8, the park closed due to brush fires near the historic heiau (temple) that required evacuations in local communities. The fires did not enter the park. However, local roads closed and damaging winds left debris strewn about the park. The park remained closed for several days for cleanup and repairs and reopened on August 11. Source: [Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site \(8/9, 8/11\)](#)
 - *Ross Lake National Recreation Area* - On July 29, the Sourdough Fire was detected. It was started by a lightning strike near Diablo, Washington. As of August 20, the fire was 5,618 acres and 12% contained, with 404 personnel assigned. The Sourdough Trail is closed to the junction with Big Beaver Trail. Sourdough and Pierce Mountain camps are also closed. On August 4, State Route 20 (the North Cascades Highway) between Newhalem and Rainy Day Pass was closed. There is no estimated reopening date yet. Source: [North Cascades National Park \(7/29 - first report, second report, 7/30, 7/31\)](#), [Inciweb](#), [Idaho Statesman](#)
 - *Saguaro National Park* - On August 13, lightning ignited a fire on Rincon Mountain, northeast of Spud Rock. As of August 13, the fire was 0.1 acres in size. Due to the remote and rugged nature, as well as predictions of incoming rain, staff are only monitoring the fire at this time. Source: [KOLD](#)
 - *Yellowstone National Park* - On July 28, a visitor observed the Hitching Post Fire about 0.5 miles east of the Lamar River Trail and 5.5 miles south of the park's Northeast Entrance Road. The fire is believed to have been ignited by lightning on July 25. Crews were able to confine it to 0.5 acres. Source: [Yellowstone National Park \(7/28 news release, current fire conditions\)](#)

- *Yosemite National Park* - As of August 17, the Pika Fire was 100% contained at 841 acres. The fire started June 29 due to lightning. Some smoke is still present and the fire area is closed to the public. Source: [Sierra Sun Times](#), [Inciweb](#)
- *Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve* -
 - On July 24, the Biederman Fire #192 was discovered north of Biederman Bluff on the Yukon River, five miles northwest of the Kandik-Yukon Rivers confluence. The fire is being monitored by Alaska Fire Service aircraft. As of August 18, it was 76 acres. Source: [Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve](#), [Alaska Interagency Coordination Center](#)
 - On July 27, the Ruby Creek Fire #282 was discovered by reconnaissance aircraft, located in the Upper Charley River, south of Three Fingers airstrip. As of August 18, it was 60 acres. It is being monitored by Alaska Fire Service aircraft. Source: [Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve](#), [Alaska Interagency Coordination Center](#)
- *Maui fire recovery* - NPS staff from around the island have joined an interagency effort to support local communities in the aftermath of the Maui wildfires, including search and rescue, medical response, logistics, public information, cultural resource assessment, and evacuation center support. Haleakalā National Park remained closed through the morning of August 22. Source: [Department of the Interior](#), [Haleakalā National Park](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Arches National Park* - Further details have been released about the 66-year-old who was found dead in the area of Sand Dunes Arch parking lot ([8/9/23 Coalition Report](#)). The individual was found 2.5 miles from the parking lot, off-trail. They likely went on a longer hike that morning and perished on a second, shorter hike that afternoon. Their water bottle was empty, they were taking a medication that leads to dehydration, and temperatures were over 100°F. An official cause of death has not been determined, but heat and altitude are considered "relevant factors." Source: [Associated Press](#)
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - On August 17, a federal appeals court ruled in favor of allowing victims of the 2016 Gatlinburg Fires to continue their lawsuits against the National Park Service. The fires killed 14 people and damaged or destroyed 2,400 buildings. The plaintiffs argue that the NPS failed to adequately react to the fire and notify residents. Source: [News Channel 9](#)

Acknowledgments

This newsletter is supported through Coalition staff and invaluable volunteers:

- Editor: Katie Wallace
- Tech and Production Support: Theresa Manthripragada, Steve Pittleman, Emily

- Thompson
- Regular Correspondent: Don Hellmann, Chris Soller

If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to report@protectnps.org.

* * * * *

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 (GS, Wage System, Seasonal, Temporary, or SES) National Park Service employee or volunteer who served under a signed volunteer agreement can join the Coalition. Coalition supporters who do not qualify under those criteria [may also join](#) and receive the newsletter.

--- ### ---

Copyright © 2023 Coalition To Protect America's National Parks, All rights reserved.