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The Coalition Report
Wednesday, December 13, 2023

Happy holidays from all of us at the Coalition. We can't do this work without your valuable input and generous gifts. If you haven't already, please make a gift to the Coalition today!

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Coalition Actions

The Coalition and National Parks Conservation Association submitted detailed [comments](#) to Arches National Park on visitor use, access, and experience planning. Among other things, the letter notes this is the third time Arches has requested public input on visitor access and requests permanent action be taken and expresses support for timed-entry reservations.

We joined with numerous organizations in [a letter](#) to the Senate expressing opposition to numerous riders on the Fiscal Year 2024 Interior Appropriations bill which would prohibit the Bureau of Land Management from reforming its oil and gas leasing programs.

The Coalition issued a [press release](#) in support of designating a national monument at Mimbres Peaks in New Mexico.

We submitted detailed [comments](#) on the draft Director's Order 36: Housing Management. The comments support the proposal as it comprehensively addresses needed

improvements in management of government-furnished housing and makes a series of technical recommendations for further improvement.

Along with the Association of National Park Rangers, the Coalition sent [a letter](#) to the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability and the Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce requesting consideration of H.R. 5995, the Federal Retirement Fairness Act. In sum, the bill would permit temporary employees who become permanent to make additional contributions to their retirement benefits to make up for the time when they were not eligible for these benefits.

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.

- *Formalizing Tribal involvement on public lands* - On December 6, the Department of the Interior released its [second annual report](#) on Tribal co-stewardship of federal lands, waters, and wildlife. Additionally, the DOI published [departmental guidance](#) on the inclusion and protection of Indigenous knowledge in decision making and scientific research and a [Best Practices Guide for Federal Agencies Regarding Tribal and Native Hawaiian Sacred Sites](#). Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *\$468 million for fuels management* - On November 30, the Department of the Interior announced that it provided over \$468 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding in Fiscal Year 23 to reduce wildfire risk. The announcement broke down the acres treated for fuel management by state. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Native American history theme study* - On December 6, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced that the NPS will collaborate with Tribes across the United States on a new theme study about the Indian Reorganization Period. The National Park Foundation is contributing to the launch of the study, which will take place in early 2024. It will be written utilizing expertise from external partners, including Tribal leaders, academics, and other experts in the field. *HuffPost* published [an interview](#) with NPS Director Chuck Sams about the importance and future utility of the theme study across the NPS. Source: [Department of the Interior](#), *HuffPost*
- *OPM rule to reform hiring* - The Office of Personnel Management has finalized rules in the *Federal Register* to allow employees at federal land management agencies serving in a temporary capacity in a position to compete for vacant permanent federal positions under merit promotion procedures. Source: [FEDweek](#)
- *U.S. needs "new National Fire Service"* - The *Georgetown Security Studies Review* published [an op-ed](#) arguing that the United States is relying on old methods and

inefficient organizations to coordinate wildfire response and needs to think differently to keep up with the fire regime of global climate change. The op-ed argues that a new National Fire Service under the Department of the Interior would be more effective at managing fire and would let other agencies focus on their core missions. Source: *Georgetown Security Studies Review*

- *National park poster art book* - A new coffee table book, *Ranger Of The Lost Art: Rediscovering The WPA Poster Art Of Our National Parks*," by Doug Leen, was recently published. *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) about the book, as well as the author, who spent 30 years researching and seeking out original posters. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- "Most beautiful national parks" - *Bounce*, a luggage storage app, published [an article](#) that attempts to parse out the "world's most beautiful national parks," based on the number of *Instagram* posts and *TikTok* views, online reviews, and *Google* searches in 2023. The top park was Kruger National Park in South Africa. No national parks from the United States made the top 10. *Bounce* offered a separate list for the top 10 U.S. national parks, with Rocky Mountain, Grand Teton, and Acadia topping the list. [Editor note: It appears the rankings only included "national parks" in-name, not all NPS units or other nations' parks that are not explicitly called "national park."] Source: *Bounce*

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Acadia National Park* - The park has selected Acadia by Carriage, LLC, to operate Wildwood Stables under a 10-year concession contract, starting in early 2024. Source: [Acadia National Park](#)
- *Andersonville National Historic Site* - The NPS signed a \$190,000 contract with Georgia Southern University to conduct an ethnographic overview and assessment of the cultural resources. Source: [Georgia Southern University Newsroom](#)
- *Arches National Park* - On November 29, the Moab (UT) City Council held a special meeting about the Arches timed-entry system, which was recently open for public comment. The council voted 5-0 to write a letter of support for the system to continue. Source: [The Times-Independent](#)
- *Big Bend National Park* - On December 6, the park announced that it has selected Casa Grande Hospitality, LLC, a subsidiary of Aramark, to provide concession services. The 15-year contract will begin on July 1, 2024. Aramark has been the incumbent operator since acquiring Forever Resorts in 2022. Source: [Big Bend National Park](#)
- *Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Curecanti National Recreation Area* -

On January 1, campground and boat launch fees will be increased. Source: [Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park](#)

- *Buffalo National River* - On December 11, the park announced that it canceled the solicitation of concession proposals for canoe and kayak rental and shuttle services, citing that it had "generated numerous questions which need to be addressed in the prospectus." The NPS anticipates it will open a new prospectus in first quarter of 2024. Source: [Buffalo National River](#)
- *Cape Cod National Seashore* - *The Provincetown Independent* published [a profile](#) of new superintendent Jennifer Flynn, who began her role on November 28. Source: *The Provincetown Independent*
- *Cape Lookout National Seashore* - The park recently started a project to replace the boardwalk adjacent to the Cape Lookout Lighthouse, Keepers Quarters Museum, and Light Station Visitor Center. The project is expected to be complete by April 1, 2024. Source: [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#)
- *Cedar Breaks National Monument* - The park recently completed a project to install a new warming visitor station at the North View Overlook. The project was funded by the Zion Forever Project. The parking lot at North View Overlook will stay plowed and operable throughout the winter. Source: [St. George News](#)
- *Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area* - The NPS has completed a land swap to obtain a 1.4-acre tract in the park's Orrs Ferry unit. The new parcel, called Crayfish Creek, was the site of a pilot streambank restoration project in 2020 done via permitted access on the then-private parcel. The swapped park land is a 1.3-acre parcel in the Palisades unit off Riverview Road, and includes the historic Collins-Yardum House. The individual who arranged the swap did so in pursuit of owning the home, which has been vacant since 2000. Source: [RoughDraft Atlanta](#)
- *Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park* - The park has installed a large fence at a place known as "Graffiti Cliffs," a set of bridge abutments that are remnants of the Potomac Aqueduct. The location has been closed "for over a decade" due to concerns that people can easily fall into the river, which is "difficult to swim in." In 2017, two individuals died after jumping into the river from the abutments. Until this month, a chain link fence with "No Trespassing signs" had been in place and had been vandalized, allowing people to enter the area. The location had been a popular spot for local visitors. Source: [DCist](#)
- *Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park* - The *Chattanooga Times Free Press* ran an op-ed series about the Moccasin Bend National Archaeological District, including its history, efforts to incorporate more of the district into the park, and current efforts to relocate a state mental health facility and police training ground within the boundaries of the district. (See [9/20/23 Coalition Report](#) for an

article about the state's pending approval.) Source: *Chattanooga Times Free Press* ([11/11](#), [11/18](#), [11/25](#), [12/2](#), [12/9](#))

- *Crater Lake National Park* - On December 11, U.S. Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) submitted a letter to NPS Director Chuck Sams arguing that the Crater Lake concessioner, Aramark (doing business as Crater Lake Hospitality), has "continually failed to fulfill the requirements" of its contract. Senator Wyden argues that the concessioner has created unsafe living conditions for staff and visitors, and failed to perform required maintenance. The letter comes after complaints by constituents and an in-person assessment by the senator's staff. Source: [Senator Ron Wyden](#)
- *Cuyahoga Valley National Park* - On December 18, the park will close a 1.5-mile section of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail just north of the Station Road Bridge Trailhead on weekdays in order to stabilize the river bank. It will remain open to visitors on weekends. The project is part of a larger \$14 million effort to stabilize the trail and the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad tracks from erosion. The work on this section is expected to be complete on May 3. Source: [Akron Beacon Journal](#)
- *Everglades National Park* - Starting on January 1, 2024, the park will increase entrance fees. Source: [Everglades National Park](#)
- *Federal Lands to Parks Program* (an NPS-administered program) - On December 11, a federal judge found that the NPS violated the Endangered Species Act and National Environmental Policy Act when it released land-use restrictions on a Federal Lands to Parks Program site for the Miami Wilds water park. The NPS failed to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about documented species habitat on the parcel. The development agreement between Miami Wilds, LLC, and Miami-Dade County (FL) is now considered invalid, and the county intends to cancel the lease. The ruling is the result of a lawsuit brought by the Center for Biological Diversity, Bat Conservation International, Tropical Audubon Society, and Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association. Source: [Center for Biological Diversity](#)
- *Gateway Arch National Park* - A two-year study of location-based mobile device data indicates that visitors to the park have been undercounted. A 1990s social science study had indicated that for every four people who visited the visitor center, an additional person visited the park without stopping into the visitor center. The newer study showed that it is closer to a 1:1 ratio of visitors who stop into the visitor center and those who do not. The study "went through academic peer review and was approved by the NPS Social Science Program." Source: [Riverfront Times](#)
- *Gateway Arch National Park* - *PBS News Hour* published [an article](#) about the park's ongoing \$380 million CityArchRiver project to revitalize and upgrade park facilities through community-led efforts and a partnership between the NPS, Gateway Park

Arch Foundation. Source: *PBS News Hour*

- *Glacier National Park* - Starting in Spring 2024, some wilderness permits will be available by an advance lottery online. Other permits will continue to be available via the "general on-sale system" and through walk-in permitting. Source: [Glacier National Park](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park* - On December 7, the Wyoming Board of Land Commissioners decided to push back a vote about auctioning off the "Kelly Parcel," a tract owned by the State of Wyoming in the park that the NPS has long-sought to acquire. There has been much public outcry about selling the parcel to developers. The board voted unanimously to delay the vote so that it could create a working group to explore other avenues, such as trading the parcel with the federal government for mineral rights. It could come to a vote "next fall or winter." Source: [Wyoming Public Media](#)
- *Ice Age National Scenic Trail, New England National Scenic Trail, North Country National Scenic Trail* - All three scenic trails have become official units of the National Park Service. These trails were previously established by Congress as national scenic trails, and the designation aligns the three with the other three national scenic trails that are units of the NPS (Appalachian, Natchez Trace, Potomac Heritage), as well as the five national scenic trails administered by the U.S. Forest Service. The additions bring the National Park System to a total of 428 units. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Isle Royale National Park* - The park announced that it has moved its Commercial Use Authorization process online. This year's process for seaplane and water-based CUAs will open for one month, starting on February 1, 2024. Source: [Isle Royale National Park](#)
- *Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - On December 4, the Bureau of Reclamation announced an agreement with the Imperial Irrigation District to provide \$77.6 million in exchange for the conservation of 100,000 acre-feet of water in Lake Mead. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area* - The park is discontinuing the online reservation system for annual boat launch permits. They now are available only in-person at six local venues. Weekly boat permits are still available online. Source: [Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area](#)
- *National Register of Historic Places* (an NPS-administered program) - A proposal to add sites to the National Register in commemoration of the Black Panther Party in Chicago has been met with resistance from the chairman of the Black Panther Party Cubs, citing that it will add to misunderstandings about the role of the party in the Civil Rights movement. The NPS expects to have a final decision by December

26. Source: [Black Enterprise](#)

- *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* (an NPS-administered program) - On December 6, the Department of the Interior announced a final rule to streamline requirements for museums and federal agencies to inventory and identify Native American human remains and cultural items in their collections. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Ozark National Scenic Riverways* - On December 12, the park published a final rule on motorboat horsepower in the *Federal Register*. Starting on January 11, there will be a 150 horsepower limit between the southern boundary on the Current River to the southern end of Van Buren Gap. There now are also seasonal non-motorized zones on upper stretches of both the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers during peak season. The rule also legalized the use of 60/40 horsepower motors with jet propulsion. Source: [Ozark National Scenic Riverways](#)
- *Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore* - The park opened Commercial Use Authorization applications on December 7 for guided backpacking, kayaking, photography, ice climbing, and transportation services. Applications are due January 31. Applications will be online this year for the first time. Source: [Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore](#)
- *Point Reyes National Seashore* - An American badger with leucism, a genetic condition that causes a partial loss of pigmentation, was photographed in the park. The condition is a rare occurrence. Source: [San Francisco Chronicle](#)
- *San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park* - The NPS gave an award to Alice Watts for 40 years of service as a park and San Francisco Maritime National Park Association employee and volunteer. Alice was "integral" to the Association's Age of Sail Program and has been a long-term volunteer at sea chantey sing-along events at the park. Source: *San Francisco Maritime National Park Association December Newsletter*
- *San Juan National Historic Site* - On November 28, the NPS announced that it will move forward with a plan to remove over 200 stray cats living at the park. It will contract with an animal welfare organization for the first six months and, if unsuccessful at removing all of them, will hire a contractor for final removal. Source: [Watertown Daily Times/Associated Press](#)
- *Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site* - *Rocky Mountain PBS* published [an interview](#) with Kaden Walksnice and Cinnamon Kills First, descendants of survivors from the Sand Creek Massacre, about the 5-day, 180-mile Spiritual Healing Run. The event "preserves the past, strengthens the present, and brings hope for the future." Source: *Rocky Mountain PBS*

- *Shenandoah National Park* - The park announced that the backcountry permit system will be moved online at *Recreation.gov*, starting on January 11. Source: [Shenandoah National Park](#)
- *Virgin Islands National Park* - In early 2024, contractors will begin a project to remove asbestos-containing material from Caneel Bay Resort. [*This is a later date from a previous news release from the park, cited in the last Coalition Report.*] The project is expected to take three to four weeks. A future project will remove material from the site's landscaping, maintenance, and engineering area, as well as the landfill near Honeymoon Beach. Source: [Virgin Islands National Park](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - New lidar data from the U.S. Geological Survey has revealed detail about the "extensive and complex distribution of fault scarps of the Emigrant fault that extends nearly continuously for more than 33 miles (54 km) between Tom Miner Creek Road and Livingston, Montana." This will allow scientists to better predict hazards and seismic activity in the region. Source: [U.S. Geological Survey](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The *Daily Montanan* published [an op-ed](#) by Stephany Seay, the co-founder of Roam Free Nation, arguing for a closure of bison hunting in Beattie Gulch due to concerns for public safety and a desire to protect Yellowstone buffalo. Source: *Daily Montanan*
- *Yosemite National Park* - On December 14, the Ahwahnee Hotel reopened its dining room after a nearly one year long closure due to a seismic retrofit project. Source: [The Business Journal](#)
- *Zion National Park* - Starting on January 1, the park will raise campground and wilderness use fees and will move wilderness reservations online. Source: [Zion National Park](#)

Personnel Changes

- *Badlands National Park, Minuteman Missile National Historic Site* - Abigail Aldrich was selected as the new deputy superintendent of Badlands and superintendent of Minuteman Missile. Abigail has 10 years of NPS experience, most recently as the project manager for the Midwest Region with the Harpers Ferry Center for Media Services. She starts her new role in January. Source: [Badlands National Park](#)
- *Cape Lookout National Seashore* - Nick Pulfer was selected as the new chief of visitor and resource protection. Nick has 11 years of NPS experience, most recently as the field operations supervisor at Denali National Park and Preserve. Source: [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#)
- *César E. Chávez National Monument* - Erin Gates was selected as the new

superintendent. Erin has many years of experience at California State Parks, including a stint as the deputy superintendent at Redwood National and State Parks. Erin will start her new role on January 14. Source: [César E. Chávez National Monument](#)

- *Chickasaw National Recreation Area* - A 2-year-old German Shorthaired Pointer K9 ranger, Cowboy, has joined the law enforcement team at the park. Cowboy has been training with, and will continue to be partnered with, ranger Kat Grubb. Cowboy's training was funded by the Friends of Chickasaw National Recreation Area. Source: [Chickasaw National Recreation Area](#)
- *Pacific West Region* - David Szymanski was selected as the new regional director. David has over 30 years of NPS experience, most recently as the superintendent of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. David will begin his role in the new year. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Reconstruction Era National Historical Park* - Laura Waller was selected as the new superintendent. Laura has been an NPS employee for many years, most recently as the natural and cultural resources division manager at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. She will begin her new role on January 14. Source: [Reconstruction Era National Historical Park](#)

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

- Robert Taylor Hoskins, Jr., 83, passed away on November 28. Robert grew up living in parks, as his father was a superintendent at Mammoth Cave, Carlsbad Caverns, and Shenandoah National Parks. Robert served on the board of the Friends of Mammoth Cave National Park. Source: [Legacy/Moser Funeral Home, Inc.](#)
- Florence Ann (Cahill) Sullivan, 91, passed away on November 29. Florence's husband, Art, had a long career in the National Park Service, and in their retirement, they both worked as volunteers in several parks, including Cape Lookout National Seashore. Source: [Legacy/Greene Funeral Home](#)

Retired

- Dan Morford, superintendent at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument and Scotts Bluff National Monument, will retire on December 30. He has 23 years of NPS work experience, as well as five years of firefighting at the U.S. Forest Service. Source: [Scotts Bluff National Monument](#)

Open for Comment

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

- *National Park System* - Public comment is [open through January 16](#) on a draft Wilderness Stewardship Reference Manual governing the management of climbing activities in wilderness areas in the National Park System. The U.S. Forest Service also simultaneously [opened public comment through January 16](#) on its own climbing management directives. Source: [Missoulian](#), [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Bryce Canyon National Park* - Public comment is [open through December 31](#) on a plan move private horse riding reservations online at *Recreation.gov*. Source: [Bryce Canyon National Park](#)
- *Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve* - The Bureau of Land Management has [opened public comment through December 19](#) on a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Ambler Road project. Source: [Anchorage Daily News](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park* - Public comment is [open through January 11](#) on a master plan for the management and use of Colter Bay. Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#)
- *Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - Public comment is [open through January 11](#) on a Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan for accessibility. Source: [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#)
- *Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area* - Public comment will be [open from December 18 to January 31](#) on a plan to replace and improve houseboat docks at Keller Ferry Marina. Most of the marina was destroyed in a storm in 2017. Source: [Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area](#)
- *Kaloko-Honokōhau National Historical Park* - Public comment is [open through December 23](#) on a draft Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [Big Island Video News](#)
- *Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore* - Public comment is [open through December 31](#) on plans to open a backcountry cabin for public reservations near Twelvemile Beach Campground and increase fees at the Au Sable Light Station. Source: [Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore](#)
- *Pu'uuhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park* - Public comment is [open through December 23](#) on a draft Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [Big Island Video News](#)

- *Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site* - Public comment is [open through December 22](#) on a draft Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [Big Island Video News](#)
- *Rocky Mountain National Park* - Public comment is [open through December 14](#) on a day-use visitor access plan, including a timed entry reservation system. Source: [Estes Park News](#)

Other Department of the Interior News

- *Wolverines listed as threatened* - On November 29, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that the North American wolverine is now a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Less than 300 individuals are estimated to live in the contiguous United States. Source: [CBS News](#)
- *Canada lynx recovery plan* - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has developed a draft recovery plan for the Canada lynx in the United States. The U.S. population of the species is considered threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Public comment on the plan is open through January 30, via email. Source: [National Park Traveler](#), [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#)
- *Willow oil project continues through lawsuit* - On December 1, a federal judge rejected requests from environmental groups to halt winter construction on the Willow oil project in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska while an appeal is pending on a lawsuit challenging the project's approval. Source: [Anchorage Daily News](#)
- *\$72 million for Salton Sea restoration* - On December 7, the Department of the Interior announced \$72 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding to restore aquatic habitat, suppress dust, and conserve water by expediting implementation of the State of California's Salton Sea Management Plan. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *\$16.5 million for Tribes in drought* - On December 12, the Bureau of Reclamation announced the availability of \$16.5 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding and annual Native American Affairs Program funding to expand access to reliable water for Tribes experiencing drought. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *\$5.65 million for Gila River solar* - On December 8, the Department of the Interior announced \$5.65 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding for the Gila River Indian Community to construct and install solar panels over the Casa Blanca Canal, which both reduces evaporation losses and generated renewable energy. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Offshore Atlantic wind proposal* - On December 11, the Bureau of Ocean Energy

Management announced the proposal of a wind lease sale for two areas in the Central Atlantic: one offshore of Delaware and Maryland, and the other offshore of Virginia. Public comment is currently open on the proposed sale notice. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

- *3 million acres to Tribes through land buy-back* - On December 4, the Department of the Interior announced the conclusion of the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations, a 10-year effort. Over the course of the program, \$1.69 billion was paid to 123,000 interested individuals to acquire 3 million acres in 15 states that were consolidated and restored to Tribal trust ownership. The program focused on titles owned by individual Tribal members that had been divided among many heirs over generations, resulting in a highly fractionated ownership and creating challenges to sovereignty. 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.

House Actions

November 30 - The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing on legislation, H.R. 6492, the EXPLORE Act (Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act), an act "to foster and encourage recreation on federal recreational lands and waters, to the extent consistent with the laws applicable to specific areas of federal recreational lands and waters, including multiple-use mandates and land management planning requirements." Testimony was heard from Katherine Andrews, Director, Office of Outdoor Recreation, Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism, Arkansas; Chris French, Deputy Chief of the National Forest System, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture; and Michael T. Reynolds, Deputy Director for Congressional and External Relations, National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

December 5 - The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing entitled "Limiting Access and Damaging Gateway Economies: Examining the National Parks Air Tour Management Program." Testimony was heard from Raymond Sauvajot, Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science, U.S. National Park Service, Department of the Interior; and public witnesses.

Incidents

Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.

Arches National Park

Hiker fall

On December 10, a 26-year-old was climbing down a sandstone fin on the Devils Garden Primitive Trail when the rock collapsed. The individual injured their lower leg in the fall. Paramedics from Grand County (UT) EMS and the park's search and rescue team carried the individual over a mile of rugged terrain via a wheeled litter to an ambulance. Source: [Idaho Statesman](#)

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Parking tag scam

A website mimicking that of the Great Smoky Mountains Association has been selling fraudulent parking tags for the park. An individual "posing as the National Park Service" has been directing web traffic to the site. The NPS is investigating the scam. Source: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#)

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

Nesting nēnē

The park has temporarily closed part of the parking lot at Uēkahuna and a short stretch of Crater Rim Trail to protect a nesting pair of nēnē. Source: [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#)

Hot Springs National Park

Officer shooting

On July 28, 2019, a 33-year-old individual entered the park along Bath House Row, east of Central Avenue, carrying a 12-gauge shotgun. Others on scene called 911. Officers from the Hot Springs (AR) Police Department approached the individual, who fired into the ground in the direction of the officers. The street was crowded at the time. The two officers and their working dog approached the individual and ordered them to drop the shotgun. The individual did not comply, turned toward the officers, and discharged the weapon. One of the officers fired at the individual, striking them, multiple times. A second round by the suspect struck the sidewalk in front of the officers, and a bullet fragmented and struck one of the officers and the police dog. Both sustained injuries from the strike. The suspect was treated and later arrested at a local hospital. On April 14, 2023, the individual pleaded guilty to two counts of a seven-count indictment. On November 27, 2023, the individual was sentenced to twenty years in federal prison and three years of supervised probation. Source: [U.S. Attorney's Office: Western District of Arkansas](#)

Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park

Attempted arson

On December 7, two visitors observed an individual pouring a liquid in the porch area of the Martin Luther King, Jr., birth home. They thought the individual was watering shrubs. The individual then began yanking on the screen door, trying to get into the house. The two visitors approached the individual to ask what they were doing. The individual didn't

respond, and then dumped the liquid contents of a five-gallon container onto the porch, threw it into the bushes, and grabbed a lighter they had left just below the porch. One of the visitors blocked the individual with their body as they attempted to move back to the porch and called 911. The suspect turned around and quickly walked away down the street. One of the visitors yelled at two other individuals down the street that the suspect had been trying to set the house on fire and they should follow. Those two individuals were off-duty police officers from out of state, and they restrained the individual. After local officers arrived, four family members of the suspect arrived, saying they had tracked the suspect by phone location. They stated that the suspect had been experiencing mental distress. The suspect was charged with attempted arson and interference with government property. Atlanta Fire Department sent a hazardous materials team to clean the property and stated that no damage had been sustained. Source: [New York Times](#)

Natchez Trace Parkway

Impaired drivers

On November 29, nine individuals pleaded guilty to driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Each of the defendants was sentenced to serve a probationary period. Source: [Natchez Trace Parkway](#)

Noatak National Preserve

Illegal commercial transportation

On December 1, a 66-year-old and a 60-year-old were charged with engaging in business without a permit, failure to follow a lawful order, providing false information, and violation of provisions of a permit for illegally transporting caribou hunters in the preserve in 2019 and 2020. Source: [Kobuk Valley National Park](#)

Pinnacles National Park

Lack of staff closes buses

On December 1, the park announced that it has suspended shuttle services due to "unexpectedly losing" both its shuttle drivers. The park clarified that they were lost as employees and no deaths were involved. Applications for positions will open soon. Source: [SFGate](#)

The White House and President's Park

National Christmas Tree falls over

On November 26, the National Christmas Tree fell over due to strong winds. It had recently been brought in from the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia to replace the planted tree on-site that has traditionally been the National Christmas Tree because it had succumbed to needle cast (see [11/29/23 Coalition Report](#)). White House staff utilized a crane to right the 40-foot tree and fixed a snapped cable. The National Christmas Tree lighting ceremony took place as planned on November 30. Source: [The New York Times](#),

[AP News](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Death Valley National Park* - Inyo County repaired roads leading to Eureka Valley and Saline Valley, allowing them to open on November 30. They have been closed since record flooding in August. Saline Valley Road's South Pass and Steel Pass Road past Palm Springs remain closed due to flood damage. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)
- *Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - Pepeiao Cabin and the Ka'ū Desert Trail have reopened. They closed in October due to increased seismicity in the area south-southwest of Kīlauea caldera. Unrest in the volcano continues, mostly southeast of Kaluapele, the Kīlauea summit caldera. The Mauna Iki Trail remains closed. Source: [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#)
- *Shenandoah National Park* - On December 6, the NPS lifted its parkwide fishing closure, which was implemented on August 31 due to extremely dry conditions and low stream flows. Rainfall has improved conditions. Source: [Shenandoah National Park](#)
- *Tuzigoot National Monument* - On December 7, the park gave an update on Tavasci Marsh, which has been closed since April due to the Tuzigoot Fire. The fire burned about 106 acres, creating risks to the public from hazardous trees. The park has completed compliance to execute hazard tree removal starting in mid-January 2024. The marsh remains closed and a reopening date has not yet been announced. Source: [Tuzigoot National Monument](#)
- *Zion National Park* - The park has reopened Kolob Canyon Roads. The road was damaged after a landslide earlier this year (see [4/5/23 Coalition Report](#)). Source: [ABC4](#)

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- Editor: Katie Wallace
- Tech and Production Support: Theresa Manthripragada, Steve Pittleman, Emily Thompson
- Regular Correspondent: Don Hellmann, Chris Soller
- Issue Contributors: Bill Walters

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

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The Coalition is a non-profit organization of past and current NPS employees and their allies that "studies, educates, speaks, and acts for the preservation and protection of the National Park System and mission-related programs of the National Park Service."

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