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The Coalition Report

Wednesday, February 22, 2023

Coalition Actions

The Coalition joined with 10 organizations on [comments](#) to the Orange County, Virginia, Planning Commission expressing concerns that the plan under consideration for the proposed Wilderness Crossing development is inconsistent with the recommendations included in the Preferred Wilderness Gateway Plan developed through a two-year planning process.

We joined with seven other organizations in providing extensive scoping [comments](#) for the Bureau of Land Management Montana/Dakotas State Office oil and gas lease sale slated for June 2023. The comments include the following recommendations: 1) ensuring any parcels included comply with updated Instruction Memoranda; 2) issue additional guidance and reforms before leasing is complete; 3) issue a proposed rule revising BLM's fossil fuel leasing and permitting process; 4) utilize its discretion to defer parcel leasing to prioritize conservation; and 5) properly analyze the effects of leasing.

The Coalition sent a [letter](#) to the Bureau of Land Management requesting a 30 day extension to the comment period for the Lava Ridge Wind Project.

We submitted extensive [comments](#) to Bureau of Land Management in response to its proposed Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement to Evaluate Utility-Scale Solar Energy Planning and Amend Resource Management Plans for Renewable Energy Development.

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maybe a bit of a stretch, but you DO learn things in the Report and donating to make the National Park System better will make your soul happy... [Consider a gift 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.

- *NHA System established* - On February 7, NPS Director Chuck Sams met with members of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas to celebrate the signing of the National Heritage Areas Act, which establishes an official National Heritage Area System and a standardized framework for its administration. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *\$4.48 million for equal rights grants* - On February 9, the NPS awarded \$4.48 million in History of Equal Rights grants for eight projects in seven states. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *\$1.1 million for battlefields* - On February 17, the American Battlefield Protection Program awarded \$1.1 million for four Civil War battlefield projects in three states. The funds come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Multi-country UNESCO proposal* - The NPS submitted the U.S.' first multi-country nomination for the World Heritage List to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The nomination is for Moravian Church Settlements in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Herrnhut in Germany, and Gracehill in Northern Ireland. UNESCO will consider the nomination in Summer 2024. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Aerial firefighting report* - On February 13, the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission released a report that outlines a strategy to meet aerial firefighting equipment needs through 2030. Recommendations include updating aviation resource benchmarks and procurement models; better partner coordination; improvements to appropriations, contracting, and staffing; and the consideration of uncrewed aerial resources. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Wildfire funding analysis* - The Federation of American Scientists published [an article](#) about federal wildfire management funding trends. It notes the complexity of having so many agencies involved and demonstrates that suppression activity spending has grown rapidly and will continue to do so. Source: Federation of American Scientists
- *Twitter as a park monitoring tool* - Researchers from the University of Wisconsin have published a scientific article about the pros and cons of mining data from

Twitter to collect community input about environmental events, decision making, and recreation. In particular, the study analyzed tweet mentions of NPS sites in the Great Lakes region. Source: [Great Lakes Echo](#)

- *LWCF funds underspent* - The *South Florida Sun Sentinel* published [an op-ed](#) by Margaret Everson, former acting director of the NPS and executive director of the Oak Grove Initiative, outlining the ways in which the Land and Water Conservation Fund can do a better job at getting funding into the hands of community conservation efforts. Source: *South Florida Sun Sentinel*
- *Book on George Melendez Wright* - The University of Chicago has published a new book by Jerry Emory called *George Melendez Wright: The Fight for Wildlife and Wilderness in the National Parks*. George was the first person of Latino heritage to work for the National Park Service and was instrumental to the NPS' early use of science in wildlife management. The book includes a foreword by former NPS Director Jon Jarvis. Source: [University of Chicago Press](#)
- *National park music debut* - On February 13, the Violetta Duo debuted their new musical project, "Sky and Earth, Boundless," based on music inspired by the Grand Canyon, White Sands, and Rocky Mountain National Parks. The project was supported by a grant from New Mexico State University and debuted at the Atkinson Recital Hall at NMSU. Source: [New Mexico State Public Media](#)
- *Podcast on attempt to see all national parks in a year* - *Outside Podcast* published [an episode](#) about Emily Pennington's journey to try to visit all the national parks in one year, 2020. She is also the author of a memoir about the journey, called *Feral*. Source: *Outside*

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Badlands National Park* - Starting on March 1, the park will no longer accept cash for park entrance or permit fees. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
- *Big Cypress National Preserve* - On February 8, the National Parks Conservation Association publicly called upon the Environmental Protection Agency to utilize a "rarely used veto" authority under the Clean Water Act's Section 404(c) to end future oil exploration in Big Cypress. The public announcement followed a letter from the NPCA's attorney to the EPA on January 25. Source: [Tampa Bay Times](#)
- *Big Cypress National Preserve, Everglades National Park* - The *Coastal Breeze News* published [an article](#) about the fate of Florida panthers, which are threatened by habitat loss, road mortality, lack of prey, and diseases. Retired NPS biologist Deborah Jansen is quoted in the article. Source: *Coastal Breeze News*

- *Biscayne National Park, Everglades National Park* - *National Geographic* published [an article](#) about the March 11 opening of the first section of the Biscayne-Everglades Greenway, a 42-mile biking, walking, and equestrian path between the two parks. Source: *National Geographic*
- *Boston National Historical Park* - The Old North Church's underground crypt is undergoing a restoration, renovation, and accessibility project. Contractors are coordinating with the NPS to complete the upgrades. It is expected to be open to the public for tours in July. Source: [WCVB](#)
- *Cape Hatteras National Seashore* - On February 23, the North Carolina Coastal Resources Commission will consider proposed rule changes around the repair, replacement, and relocation of onsite wastewater treatment systems and septic tanks in the park. In Rodanthe, at least two dozen septic or wastewater system failures and discharges onto the public beach have occurred during the past year due to extensive storm erosion. Source: [Coastal Review](#)
- *Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area* - The NPS has signed a Finding of No Significant Impact for the park's Comprehensive Trails Management Plan Environmental Assessment. Source: [RoughDraft Atlanta](#)
- *Cumberland Island National Seashore* - On February 7, the Georgia Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Camden County (GA) must honor the results of a March 2022 voter referendum that rejected county plans to purchase land to be used for Spaceport Camden. The court decision supported the jurisdiction of Probate Judge Robert Sweatt, who validated the special election for the referendum under a "home rule" provision in the state constitution. The county has spent \$11 million to date pursuing the spaceport concept. The NPS has publicly expressed concerns about the project due to its location adjacent to the park. Source: [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)
- *Cumberland Island National Seashore* - The park will soon acquire an additional 173.7 acres of land due to \$8.7 million in funding allocated in the omnibus appropriations bill. The parcel is "one of the last remaining significant privately held lots on Cumberland." The land was purchased by the Nature Conservancy in 1999 and has already been managed by the NPS while the Nature Conservancy retained ownership. Source: [Clayton News-Daily/WABE/Grist](#)
- *Cumberland Island National Seashore* - Purdue University Fort Wayne published [an article](#) about Whitney Hadley Salay's experience as an American Conservation Experience archaeology intern in the park over Summer 2022. Source: *Purdue University Fort Wayne News Center*
- *Death Valley National Park, Joshua Tree National Park, Mojave Desert Preserve* - A new study was published in *Landscape Ecology* that tracked GPS-collared bighorn

sheep to create computer simulations for the ideal overpass locations for wildlife to cross large interstates. The study was conducted by researchers at Oregon State University's College of Agricultural Sciences, with support from the NPS. Source: [Phys.org](#)

- *Federal Lands to Parks Program* (an NPS-administered program) - On February 8, several conservation groups filed a lawsuit against the National Park Service and Department of the Interior for signing off on an agreement to remove 67 acres from all restrictions related to its public lands status under the Federal Lands to Parks Program. The land is owned by Miami-Dade County, which has approved a lease to Miami Wilds to build a water park, retail area, and hotel. The Center for Biological Diversity, Bat Conservation International, Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association, and Tropical Audubon Society are the plaintiffs, claiming that the development threatens the endangered Florida bonneted bat, Miami tiger beetle, two butterfly species, and several endangered plants due to the scarcity of pine rocklands habitat still in existence. The complaint argues that the NPS violated the National Environmental Policy Act and Administrative Procedure Act when it approved the release of restrictions on the project. Source: [Courthouse News Service](#), [U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida: Miami Division](#)
- *Glacier National Park* - The *Flathead Beacon* published [an article](#) about the Glacier Conservancy's efforts to secure a \$493,200 Historic Preservation Grant to rehabilitate and preserve Wheeler Cabin. The grant approval was passed by the Montana State Legislature and is likely to soon be signed off by Governor Greg Gianforte. Source: *Flathead Beacon*
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Lake Mead National Recreation Area*
 - On February 13, the Department of the Interior announced that \$125 million has been set aside for an Upper Basin System Conservation Pilot Program, which will be administered by the Bureau of Reclamation and the Upper Colorado River Commission, which is made up of representatives from Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. It offers to compensate for temporary, voluntary reductions in consumptive water use. The funding comes from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. Source: [KSL](#)
 - *The Washington Post* ran [an op-ed](#) by their Editorial Board, giving a recommendation for avoiding a "complete doomsday" of water shortages from the Colorado River. These include water cuts based on Interior Department definitions for "beneficial use," smarter water use in urban areas, helping agriculture use water more efficiently, and investing in alternative water sources, such as desalinization and water recycling. Source: *The Washington Post*
 - Construction crews have installed a new water intake connection at Glen Canyon Dam to deliver water to nearby communities even if the reservoir falls

to an elevation of 3,362 feet, which is eight feet below Lake Powell's "deadpool." The communities have another emergency intake at 3,462 feet. Their main intake collection is located at 3,480 feet. The current lake level is 3,522 feet, which is the lowest it has ever been since being filled in the 1960s. Source: *KSL* ([1/15](#), [2/17](#))

- *Golden Gate National Recreation Area* - On February 9, the California Coastal Commission voted unanimously to approve the park's plan to remove the Tennessee Valley dam. The dam was built in the 1960s by the former landowner to attract waterfowl for hunting. In 2017, the Bureau of Reclamation classified the dam as having a high risk of failure. As a result, the NPS currently closes the Tennessee Valley during storms to protect public safety. The effort to remove it will cost \$10 million and will include the addition of wetlands and repairs to the trail. The project is expected to take several years. Source: [Marin Independent Journal](#)
- *Governors Island National Monument, Statue of Liberty National Monument* - The Federal Aviation Administration and NPS completed commercial air tour management voluntary agreements with all air tour operators for the two parks. Source: [Governors Island National Monument](#)
- *Grand Canyon National Park* - The *Williams-Grand Canyon News* ran [an interview](#) with David Pesnichak, the park's community and transportation planner. Source: *Williams-Grand Canyon News*
- *Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park* - On February 14, a group of federal, state, and local partners met at the park's visitor center to announce the discovery of a home where enslaved people lived on the Thompson Farm, the birthplace of Harriet Tubman. The home is believed to be that of "an enslaved overseer, possibly Jerry Manokey." The discovery of the brick foundation and several hundred artifacts was made on a parcel of private property. The artifacts will soon be on display at the visitor center. Maryland Department of Transportation Chief Archaeologist Dr. Julie Schablitsky and her team have been searching for the homes of those enslaved at the farm for two years, including a discovery of the home of Ben Ross, Harriet Tubman's father, in April 2021 in the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. The excavation and park visitor center are a partnership between the NPS, Maryland Departments of Transportation, Natural Resources, and Commerce, Dorchester County, the National Scenic Byways Program, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Source: [The Washington Post](#)
- *Home of Franklin D Roosevelt National Historic Site* - The park has issued a Request for Proposals to lease, operate, and maintain the Hyde Park Drive-In Movie Theatre. Proposals are due April 14. Source: [Home of Franklin D Roosevelt National Historic Site](#)
- *Indiana Dunes National Park* - The park has opened up applications for two

Commercial Use Authorizations for concession stands at Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk and West Beach. The concessions will run from April 1, 2023, through December 31, 2024. Applications are due March 8. Source: [Indiana Dunes National Park](#)

- *Manassas National Battlefield* - The park is permanently re-routing a section of the Matthews Hill bridle trail, starting on March 1. The trail will be rerouted from the woods to the open, eastern field edge of Matthews Hill in order to prevent erosion and damage to the Matthews House site, as well as better viewsheds for equestrians. Source: [Manassas National Battlefield](#)
- *Mesa Verde National Park* - On February 9, Colorado Preservation, Inc., published its annual list of "Colorado's Most Endangered Places", including the Far View Visitor Center, which has been closed since 2012. The visitor center "incorporates both mid-century modern design and references to the ancient kivas that are a part of the park." Source: [The Denver Post](#)
- *Mount Rainier National Park* - On December 15, Superintendent Greg Dudgeon sent a letter to the Washington Commercial Aviation Coordinating Commission stating that a proposal to place a new airport near the park would impact scenic values, air quality, soundscapes, night sky resources, and wilderness values in the park. Source: [The News Tribune](#)
- *Mount Rainier National Park* - On February 21, the park removed fishing closures on the Ohanapecosh River (except fly fishing) and Ipsut Creek. These rules are in accordance with a 2018 fish management plan that aims to conserve native fish and reduce nonnative fish populations. Source: [Auburn Reporter](#)
- *Mount Rainier National Park* - The park has announced a Request for Proposals for housing to lease for seasonal employees. Proposals are due February 28. Source: [Mount Rainier National Park](#)
- *Muir Woods National Monument* - NPS scientists have had very few salmon observations, both of live individuals and egg nests, in Redwood Creek and other non-NPS-managed creeks in the area this year, likely due to the heavy storms that have hit the region. Source: [Marin Independent Journal](#)
- *National Historic Landmarks* (NPS-administered program) - *The Washington Post* published [an article](#) about brothers Vincent deForest and Robert DeForrest (last names spelled differently due to a name change by one), who advocated for the National Park Service to better recognize landmarks related to Black history. They were successful in getting many landmarks designated and Vincent later became a special assistant to the NPS director. Source: *The Washington Post*
- *National Mall and Memorial Parks* - The NPS has awarded a \$69 million contract to

add an immersive museum beneath the Lincoln Memorial. Construction is expected to begin in March and be completed in 2026. The improvements will create 15,000 square feet of exhibit space and will include new restrooms, a larger bookstore, and refurbished elevator. Source: [National Mall and Memorial Parks](#)

- *New Philadelphia National Historic Site* - A new short documentary has been released, called "New Philadelphia Illinois: a Racially Diverse Community on the Illinois Frontier." It is part of the "Looking for Lincoln Stories" series of videos and podcasts highlighting different stories from the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. Source: [Herald-Whig](#)
- *North Cascades National Park* - [GoSkagit.com](#) published [an interview](#) with Superintendent Don Striker, outlining his three priorities for the park this year: budgeting shortfalls, the relicensing for three Seattle City Light dams on the Skagit River, and the possible reintroduction of grizzly bears into the park. Source: [GoSkagit.com](#)
- *Olympic National Park* - On February 24, the Hurricane Ridge Mountain View Cafe, Gift Shop, and Rental Shop will close in preparation for the upcoming rehabilitation of the Hurricane Ridge Day Lodge. The lodge will remain open on weekends until the end of the winter season and then will be closed from Spring 2023 until Spring 2024. The \$10.8 million project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act and will include infrastructure fixes, as well as accessibility and efficiency improvements. Source: Olympic National Park ([12/5/22](#), [2/17/23](#))
- *Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial* - The Fiscal Year 2023 Omnibus Appropriations Bill is providing \$3 million for a new interagency visitor center at Thurgood Marshall Regional Park, which will highlight the history of nearby Port Chicago and the region. Source: [East Bay Times](#)
- *Prince William Forest Park* - The park has announced that infrastructure improvements at the park's RV campground are requiring them to damage concrete barriers related to the original Mission 66 infrastructure, an official "adverse effect" they must report in accordance with National Historic Preservation Act obligations. Source: [Prince William Forest Park](#)
- *Rock Creek Park* - The lower level of Meridian Hill Park, also known as Malcolm X Park, has reopened for the first time since December 2020. The area has been closed to increase accessibility, repair damage to historic walls, walkways, and stairs, and complete landscaping and drainage work. Source: [WUSA9](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - In January, the NPS and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service transferred 112 Yellowstone bison to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana. It was the largest single transfer under the park's Bison Conservation Transfer Program. All of them completed two phases of brucellosis

quarantine protocol and will finish "assurance testing" (phase three) at Fort Peck. Other partners involved in the program are the State of Montana, InterTribal Buffalo Council, Yellowstone Forever, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. Source: [Yellowstone National Park](#)

- *Yellowstone National Park* - In October, Yellowstone was chosen to be included among the [first 100 "Geological Heritage Sites,"](#) as designated by the International Union of Geological Sciences at their 60th anniversary celebration. Source: [U.S. Geological Survey](#)

Personnel Changes

- *DeSoto National Memorial* - Joseph Brehm was selected as the new superintendent of the park. Joseph has 28 years of NPS experience, most recently as chief of interpretation at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site for the last seven years. He starts his new role on February 26. Source: [DeSoto National Memorial](#)
- *Friends of the Smokies* - Dana Soehn has been selected as the new executive director and president of the organization. She will begin her new role on April 3. Dana has worked for Great Smoky Mountains National Park for over 30 years, most recently as the park spokesperson and management assistant in the superintendent's office. Source: [WATE](#)
- *Region 1 (North Atlantic-Appalachian Region)* - Therese Picard has been selected as the new branch chief of law enforcement and emergency services for the region. She has worked for law enforcement at the NPS for 20 years, most recently as chief ranger at Acadia National Park. Source: [Mount Desert Islander](#)
- *Virgin Islands National Park, Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument* - The parks have three new staff. Scott Simmons is the new deputy superintendent. Scott has served as the acting deputy superintendent for two years after two years previously spent in the NPS' Bevinetto Fellowship. Ludric Smith is the new division chief of visitor and resource protection. Ludric has 13 years of NPS law enforcement experience. Ahmad Toure is the new division chief of interpretation, education and volunteers. Ahmad has many years of NPS experience, most recently as the supervisory interpretive ranger at National Capital Parks - East. Ahmad is also a two-time recipient of the Freeman Tilden Award. Source: [The Virgin Islands Daily News](#)
- *Wildland Fire Program* - Sara Sink has been named the new national training specialist. Sara has over 20 years of wildland fire experience, most recently as the fuels specialist at the Spokane District Bureau of Land Management. 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

- Sebastian "Sib" J. DiMeglio, 92, passed away recently. He served as the President and CEO of Guest Services, with hotels, resorts, restaurants, and recreation facilities in 12 states, including Mount Rainier National Park and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. He also served on the National Park System Advisory Board for a time. Source: [Legacy/Virginia Gazette](#)
- Richard "Rick" Wade Hostrup Jr., 72, passed away on November 5. In his 20s, he worked for the NPS in Everglades National Park, Yellowstone National Park, and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. Source: [Legacy](#)
- Amy Jean (Kipp) Miller, 87, passed away on January 26. She worked for 17 years at the Beaver Meadows entrance station at Rocky Mountain National Park. Source: [Estes Park News](#)
- James "Jim" D. White, 75, passed away on January 31. Jim was a water maintenance engineer at Hot Springs National Park for a time before his retirement. Source: [The Sentinel-Record](#)

Retired

- Chad Fisher retired after 33 years of federal fire service, most recently as the acting chief for the Division of Fire and Aviation and branch chief for NPS Wildland Fire. In 2013, he received the Paul Gleason Lead by Example Award. Source: [National Park Service Fire and Aviation Management](#)
- Brian Hoduski retired after 36 years at the National Park Service, with stints at Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, and as the curator at Keweenaw National Historical Park for the last 24 years. He was fundamental to the establishment of the NPS Lake Superior Collection Management Center, which has consolidated the museum and archival collections of Keweenaw, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, and Isle Royale National Park. Source: [Keweenaw National Historical Park Facebook page](#)

In the News

- On February 1, Alan "Al" Henry was sworn in as the Upper Delaware Council's secretary-treasurer. Al worked for the NPS for 32 years, 29 of those with the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River. He retired there in 2009 as the park's chief ranger. He has previously served as UDC's secretary treasurer for two other stints, from 2013-2014 and 2016-2022, and as UDC's chair in 2015. Source: [River](#)

Reporter

- The *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* published [an article](#) about the career of architect John Mott, who recently received Preserve Arkansas' 2022 Parker Westbrook Award for Lifetime Achievement. John was a historic preservation specialist who helped conduct the first historic structures report for the Washington Monument. Source: *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*
- Pat Pilcher wrote [an article](#) for *Travel Awaits* called "I've Worked in 7 National Parks - Here Are My 6 Favorite National Park Service Spots to Visit." Source: *Travel Awaits*

Open for Comment

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

- *Alaska Region* - Public comment is [open until March 10](#) on a proposal to reverse the 2020 Alaska Hunting and Trapping rule on national preserve lands in Alaska. The rule currently allows specific sport hunting practices, including bear baiting across the state of Alaska, and this reversal of the regulation would only apply to national preserves. Source: [National Park Service Alaska Region](#)
- *Everglades National Park* - Public comment is [open until February 26](#) on a Gulf Coast Site Plan, which seeks to make improvements related to damage inflicted from Hurricane Irma and future climate change resiliency. Source: [Everglades National Park](#)
- *Fort Dupont Park* - Public comment is [open until March 2](#) on a plan to restore 18,600 linear feet of Fort Dupont Creek and its tributaries, as well as stabilize stormwater outfall flows. The project is a joint effort of the NPS and the District of Columbia's Department of Energy and Environment. Source: [WUSA9](#)
- *Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve* - Public comment is [open until March 17](#) on a draft Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan. The park has created [a storymap](#) to inform the public comment process. Source: [Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve](#)
- *Grand Portage National Monument* - Public comment is [open until March 4](#) on a proposed project to realign a segment of Mile Creek Road/County State Aid Highway 17 and construct a new bridge across Grand Portage Creek. The project is proposed in collaboration with Cook County (MN) and the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (Ojibwe). Source: [Grand Portage National Monument](#)
- *Haleakalā National Park, Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has [opened public comment until February 27](#) on the designation of critical habitat for the federally threatened 'I'iwi on the islands of Kaua'i, Maui, and

- Hawai'i, including Haleakalā and Hawai'i Volcanoes. Source: [Kaua'i Now](#)
- *North Cascades National Park* - Public comment is [open until March 8](#) on an environmental assessment for two projects: 1) a rerouting of the Brush Creek Trail and 2) a relocation of the Graybeal Hiker and Stock Camps and the construction of additional backcountry accommodations at Six Mile Camp and Bridge Creek Camp. Source: [North Cascades National Park](#)
 - *Padre Island National Seashore* - Public comment is [open until March 14](#) on possible beach management options ("pre-NEPA civic engagement") at the park. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
 - *Rocky Mountain National Park* - Public comment is [open until March 5](#) on a proposal to construct a new housing complex in the park that would replace housing lost in the 2020 East Troublesome Fire. Source: [Rocky Mountain National Park](#)
 - *Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway* - Public comment is [open until March 15](#) on management and visitor opportunities at Fairy Falls Day Use Area. Source: [Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway](#)
 - *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* - Public comment is [open until March 4](#) on a tree hazard mitigation plan for KNP Complex Fire burn areas. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
 - *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* - Public comment is [open until March 18](#) on a plan to re-seed severely burned giant sequoia groves in the two parks. Source: [Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks](#)
 - *Virgin Islands National Park* - Public comment is [has been extended until March 6](#) on a plan for the redevelopment and management of the Caneel Bay area. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#), [The St. John Source](#)
 - *Wupatki National Monument* - Public comment is [open until March 2](#) on a wilderness study for the park, which will seek to refine the boundaries of an area that reflects wilderness character for consideration of a future wilderness designation. Source: [KNAU](#)
 - *Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve* - Written public comments are open until March 20 on a request to amend a concession contract for hunting services at Upper Seventymile airstrip, including increases to number of clients and consecutive camping days. Source: [Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve](#)

Other Department of the Interior News

- *\$728 million for drought and climate resilience* - On February 13, the Department of the Interior announced \$728 million in funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 for water conservation and reliable water supplies. \$125 million of that is for the Upper Basin System Conservation Pilot Program (see "Around the Parks" above). \$278 million will fund rural water infrastructure projects in six states. \$325 million was allocated for drought resilience projects, which is complimented by \$25 million from the Department of Agriculture in WaterSMART funds to support water conservation by farmers and ranchers. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Proposed Endangered Species Act rules* - On February 8, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed a rule change to Section 10 of the Endangered Species Act that would encourage more individuals and companies to engage in voluntary agreements that benefit endangered species. They also have proposed technical and administrative changes to reduce bureaucracy to support voluntary permit applications. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *BOR fights state agreement over Rio Grande* - On February 6, the Department of Justice asked a federal judge to reject the proposed Rio Grande consent decree, a three-way agreement over the river's water between New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado. The states have engaged in a legal battle over the river's flow and the 1938 river compact since 2013. The Justice Department has argued that the agreement between the three states would effectively end the Rio Grande Project, which is administered by the Bureau of Reclamation and provides irrigation water to 200,000 acres of land, as well as a local power plant. Source: [E&E News](#)
- *Proposed delisting of wood stork* - On February 14, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that they are proposing to remove the wood stork from the federal list of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. The wood stork population faced extinction in the 1980s and has now doubled its nesting pair population and expanded its range. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *New DOI staff* - The Department of the Interior announced four new appointees: Sara Cawley, advisor to the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement; Lily Greenberg Call, special assistant to the chief of staff; Justin Horn, press assistant; and Lynn Trujillo, senior counselor to the secretary. 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.

February 7 - The U.S. House and Senate met in Joint Session to receive a State of the Union Address from the President of the United States

Senate Actions

February 9 – The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a business meeting and adopted rules of procedures for the 118th Congress.

February 15 – The Senate Committee on Appropriations announced subcommittee assignments for the 118th Congress. Assignments for the Subcommittee on Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies are Senators Jeff Merkley (Chair, D-OR), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Jack Reed (D-RI), Jon Tester (D-MT), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Gary Peters (D-MI), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), John Hoeven (R-ND), Deb Fischer (R-NE), and Katie Britt (R-AL).

House Actions

February 7 - The Committee on Natural Resources held a business meeting and adopted the Committee's Authorization and Oversight Plan for the 118th Congress.

February 9 - A letter from Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) was read, wherein he designated the period from February 10 through February 24 as a "district work period" under section 3(z) of House Resolution 5.

Incidents

Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.

Big Bend National Park

Hiker fatality

On February 18, a 56-year-old visitor hiking with a scout troop experienced chest pains. Other individuals in the party called for emergency assistance and began CPR immediately. Bystanders and park volunteers assisted in the effort until rangers arrived on scene with an AED. None of the attempts at resuscitation were successful. Source:

[KWTX/KOSA](#)

Blue Ridge Parkway

Motorcycle fatality

On February 14, a 67-year-old was driving a motorcycle northbound in a curve near milepost 90, close to the Upper Goose Creek Valley Overlook, when they drifted into the southbound lane and into the path of an oncoming motorcycle. The driver of the southbound motorcycle attempted to avoid colliding, but was unsuccessful. The

northbound driver was found deceased on the scene, while the southbound driver suffered minor injuries and was transported to a local hospital. The crash is under investigation. Preliminary investigations indicate that the northbound driver may have suffered a medical emergency. Source: [WYFF](#)

Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park

Illegal hunting

On November 2, individuals illegally shot an 8-point white-tailed deer in the park from the intersection of Alexander Bridge Road and Brotherton Road. The shooting was observed by an eyewitness who provided limited information about the incident. The park does not allow any hunting within its bounds. The park is offering a financial award for anyone who can provide information leading to an arrest. Source: [Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park](#)

Death Valley National Park

Two hiking rescues in same day

On February 5, an individual in their 30s broke their tibia and ruptured their ACL while hiking in Mosaic Canyon. Other members of the individual's party stayed with them while a bystander hiked out and called for emergency assistance. NPS employees and interns from the American Conservation Experience extracted the individual to the parking lot via a wheeled-litter, and the individual was transported to the Stovepipe Wells helipad by a park ambulance. A private helicopter ambulance flew the individual to a hospital in Lancaster, California.

Later that day, an individual in their 60s was hiking the Wildrose Peak Trail with a hiking club. The individual was close to the summit when they decided to stay back due to head and body aches. The group agreed the individual would wait for the group's return and descend together. However, the individual got cold and decided to descend on their own. The individual lost the trail, descending and ascending multiple times to try to regain it. The group hiked down, assuming the individual had done the same, and then found that the individual was not at the parking lot. They did a quick search, then drove to Stovepipe Wells Resort and reported the missing hiker. The missing individual also called 911 around the same time as the report came in. The individual said they had no food, no warm clothing, and did not feel well. The NPS sent a hasty response team and put California Highway Patrol and the Naval Air Weapons Station in China Lake on standby. The individual was located by the hasty response. The individual's fitness watch showed the lost hiker walked a total of 18 miles on what would have been an 8.4-mile round-trip hike. Source: [Pahrump Valley Times](#)

George Washington Memorial Parkway

Guilty plea to road rage

On February 7, a 58-year-old pleaded guilty to assault with a deadly weapon, in

connection with an incident on the George Washington Memorial Parkway on November 1, 2022, along the Arlington portion of the parkway. The individual was involved in a motor vehicle accident with a dump truck. The individual then drove their vehicle in front of the dump truck, came to a complete stop in the righthand lane, walked up to the truck, opened the driver's side door, and brandished a knife while attempting to retrieve the keys of the truck. The individual then returned to their vehicle, obtained a baseball bat, then struck the driver's side window, which shattered. The victim was sitting inside the truck during the incident. U.S. Park Police arrived on scene and found the perpetrator standing outside their vehicle, holding the key to the dump truck in the air. The individual is scheduled for sentencing on May 25. Source: [U.S. Attorney's Office: Eastern District of Virginia, ARL Now](#)

Gettysburg National Military Park

Unexploded ordnance

On February 8, the park discovered an 1863 unexploded artillery shell within the Little Round Top rehabilitation project area. The device was handled by the U.S. Army 55th Ordnance Company team from Fort Belvoir, Virginia, who removed it and destroyed it off-site. Local roads were closed after the discovery and have since reopened. Source: [yahoo!news/WHTM](#)

Glacier National Park

Diving death negligence suit settled

On February 8, a civil case, related to the death of an 18-year-old SCUBA diver in Lake McDonald in November 2020, was settled between the family of the deceased, Gull Dive of Missoula, Montana, and the Professional Association of Diving Instructors. The victim was a student in a diving course when they passed away due to high pressure and suffocation. The individual was outfitted with a dry suit that did not work properly, was not given a diving light, and weights caused them to sink. Another participant attempted to rescue the individual after they fell off a ledge to a depth of 85 feet, but was unable to lift the victim before they began to run out of oxygen and returned to the surface. It took two subsequent rescue dives to find the deceased individual. Federal investigators found that the incident took place in the park without a permit, but they declined to press charges because they could not "prove beyond a reasonable doubt that [the instructor] was criminally culpable." An attorney has stated publicly that the federal investigation was poorly executed and wants it reopened. Source: [KPAX](#)

Haleakalā National Park

High wind and flood closures

On February 9, the park closed the Hosmer Grove Campground and the nature trail located in the Summit District due to high winds causing tree hazards. The campground was reopened after February 11. Source: [Haleakalā National Park](#)

On February 17, the park closed the Kīpahulu District due to a risk of "extreme flash flooding." It was reopened on February 18. Source: Haleakalā National Park ([2/16](#), [2/18](#))

Joshua Tree National Park

High speed chase

On January 10, law enforcement attempted to make a stop of a vehicle driving on the wrong side of the road within the park. The individual refused to pull over, and a pursuit began. NPS staff requested assistance from the local sheriff's office. The individual left the park, passing through the towns of Joshua Tree and Twentynine Palms, then the Sheephole Valley Wilderness, before heading south on Route 177. The vehicle exceeded 100 miles per hour at times during the pursuit. Due to high winds, law enforcement was unable to use a helicopter. They eventually deployed a "Pursuit Intervention Technique," in which a patrol car physically impacts the suspect's car at a slow speed to force the individual to stop driving. After the vehicle was stopped, the 47-year-old driver refused to exit the vehicle. Deputies broke the car's windows and removed and arrested the individual for felony evasion. The individual received minor cuts from the broken glass. They were booked into the Morongo Basin Jail. Source: [Z107.7 FM](#)

Mesa Verde National Park

Heavy snow closure

On February 14, the park closed due to a significant storm in the forecast. It remained closed February 15-16 to clear over a foot of snow from key roadways and was able to reopen on February 17. Source: [OutThere Colorado](#)

Ozark National Scenic Riverways

Murder sentence given

On February 14, a 31-year-old was sentenced in connection with the murder of their spouse. On May 20, 2020, the individual met up with their estranged spouse at the Buck Hollow Access Area along the Jacks Fork River. The two got into an argument and the perpetrator stabbed their spouse several times in the chest. The individual hid the victim's body in a remote location. For nine days, the individual claimed innocence, until admitting to the crime and revealing the location of the victim's body on May 30. On May 10, 2022, the individual pleaded guilty to one count of murder in the second degree. The individual was sentenced to 21 years and 10 months in federal prison without parole. Source: [U.S. Attorney's Office: Western District of Missouri](#)

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

Missing ice climber found deceased

On February 7, a 31-year-old was climbing on ice in the Miners Castle area when they took a fall. The individual's climbing partner reported the fall. Personnel from the NPS, Alger County Rescue 21 team, and the Coast Guard responded, including an ice rescue

team and MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter. Difficult weather conditions prevented the ice climbing team from launching to the site, and helicopter searches on February 7 and 8 were unable to sight the individual. The search was suspended due to poor weather conditions. On February 12, weather and wave conditions on the lake allowed a search utilizing an unmanned aerial vehicle operated by the Alger County (MI) Sheriff's Department. The individual was found deceased underwater about 30 meters offshore from where they fell. A Michigan State Police dive team conducted the recovery with support from the U.S. Coast Guard. Source: [United States Coast Guard News](#), [CBS Detroit](#)

Rock Creek Park

Contamination investigation requested

U.S. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) wrote an official letter to the NPS, requesting an investigation into possible soil and groundwater contamination at Fort Totten Park. In 2020, a World War I chemical weapon was found on the Fort Totten Trail, and she had requested an investigation at the time, but later found out that only a partial investigation was completed. In the letter, she cited an NPS study that found elevated levels of arsenic in excess of the Environmental Protection Agency's "generic regional screening levels" for residential and industrial soil in an area around a toxic soil dump. Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner Zachary Ammerman noted that the NPS had only tested a small portion of the park and that there are concerns that toxic soil is more prevalent in the park, putting residents at potential risk. Source: [WUSA9](#)

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

Missing person found deceased

On February 1, the Thousand Oaks (CA) Police received a call about a 22-year-old who had failed to show up for work two days prior. A friend of the individual said they had used a cell phone app several days prior to try to locate the individual, which had indicated they were in the Boney Mountain area. Law enforcement was able to locate the individual's car based on that information and began a search, utilizing a ground team of law enforcement and East Valley Search and Rescue, as well as a helicopter with night-vision goggles and a California Office of Emergency Services fixed-wing aircraft with infrared devices. Authorities asked for help on social media, which turned up an image the individual had sent to friends via cell phone. The image allowed rescuers to narrow the search. On February 2, rescuers from Ojai Valley and Fillmore Search and Rescue joined the search, now focused on an off-trail area with boulders they thought the individual might have been scouting for rock climbing. Within five minutes of arriving in that area, they found the individual deceased, probably due to a fall from the cliffs above the area. The Ventura County Medical Examiner's Office confirmed the individual died due to blunt force injuries and ruled the death as accidental. Source: [VC Reporter](#)

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

Another mountain lion vehicle death

On February 14, a 4-year-old mountain lion was found with an injury to one of its legs on the side of the Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife was called to assess the animal, and as they were preparing to immobilize the individual for capture, it died from its injuries. This comes just three weeks after the individual known as P-81 was found dead along a different section of the Pacific Coast Highway due to a vehicle collision. It is unclear whether the individual was collared.

Source: [ABC7](#), [KTLA](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Blue Ridge Parkway* - The NPS has reopened the parkway north of Roanoke between Route 460 and Peaks of Otter. It had been closed since a December rockslide, and reopening was delayed by further winter storms. Source: [WDBJ](#)
- *Death Valley National Park* - On February 9, the park reopened the North Highway to Mesquite Springs Campground and Ubehebe Crater for the first time since record flashflooding in August 2022. The project was made possible through the Federal Highway Administration's Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads program. Mud Canyon, Racetrack Road, and the two-way end of Titus Canyon Road are still closed and expected to reopen by late February. Scotty's Castle will remain closed through August 2024. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park, Yellowstone National Park* - The 52-year-old who led law enforcement on a high speed chase through Grand Teton on January 27 after receiving a citation hours earlier in Yellowstone (see [February 8, 2023 Coalition Report](#)) has now been reported missing by friends and family. The individual has not been seen since January 30, the day they were released from Teton County Jail. The individual is due to appear in federal court on February 28 for an arraignment. Source: [Jackson Hole News and Guide](#)
- *Haleakalā National Park* - In a press conference on February 6, the U.S. Space Force explained the cause of the 700-gallon diesel fuel spill on the summit of Haleakalā on January 29 and apologized for the incident. Indo-Pacific Commander Brigadier General Anthony Mastalir explained that a power surge damaged a float that would normally stop excess pumping and sound an alarm about tank overflow. "Words cannot describe the tremendous remorse that I and the rest of the team here at the summit have experienced over the past week. We have a solemn responsibility to protect this sacred ground upon which we have the privilege to operate, and it is a privilege, not a right. You expect more from us, and last week, we let you down, and for that I am truly sorry." The U.S. Space Force will remediate 200 cubic yards around the generator, analyze contamination, and then determine next steps. They have stated they will do an "above and beyond" clean-up of the area. Source: [The Maui News](#)

- *National Mall and Memorial Parks* - On February 13, several dozen individuals arrived at the U.S. Department of the Interior to protest the planned evacuation of unhoused people from McPherson Square, scheduled for February 15 (see [February 8, 2023 Coalition Report](#)). Individuals were concerned about the risks the closure put on people during "hypothermia season." The forced removal was enacted on February 15, as planned. Social workers, volunteers, and nonprofit employees helped unhoused individuals pack their belongings and any abandoned items were cleared by the NPS. The removal was said to be "peaceful." Source: [WTOP, NBC Washington](#)
- *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* - The Generals Highway reopened to Giant Forest on February 11. It had been closed since early January due to damage from a series of storms. A section of the highway is still single-lane and is not expected to be repaired until May. The section between Giant Forest and Kings Canyon remains closed for the winter. Source: [The Philadelphia Inquirer](#)

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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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