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The Coalition Report

Wednesday, November 1, 2023

Coalition Actions

The Coalition is now accepting nominations for the 2023 George Hartzog Award for individuals who demonstrate outstanding support for the mission of the National Park Service. Nominations are due November 30. [Learn more.](#)

We joined with more than 100 organizations in [a letter](#) to President Joe Biden urging him to rescind Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas' waiver of 26 environmental laws to resume construction of a wall along the Southern border of the United States.

The Coalition joined with 60 organizations in [a letter](#) to the U.S. House of Representatives expressing opposition to the current version of H.R. 4821, the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, as it would eviscerate numerous existing environmental protections.

We also joined with 65 organizations in [a letter](#) to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining. The letter comments on three bills: S. 2867, the Promoting Effective Forest Management Act of 2023; S. 2991, the America's Revegetation and Carbon Sequestration Act; and S. 1719, the FIRESHEDS Act.

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.

- *DOI recommendations for law enforcement* - On October 27, the Department of the Interior released [a new report](#) listing 12 recommendations for improving law enforcement across its agencies, including efforts to enhance trust with local communities, support the safety and wellness of officers, and ensure safe and equitable access to public lands. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *National Parks Traveler shuttering* - After 18 years of news coverage about the National Park System, *National Parks Traveler* announced [plans to close](#) at the end of December, but a renewed [campaign for fundraising](#) is currently open. Source: *National Parks Traveler* [Editor note: We thank the staff at National Parks Traveler deeply for their commitment to reporting national park news.]
- *Chuck Sams honored* - The Clemson University Institute for Parks recently gave awards to several individuals for exemplary leadership in addressing environmental issues. NPS Director Chuck Sams received the Walter T. Cox Award for excellence in public service, providing leadership in the administration of public lands, and policy formation related to natural and cultural resources. Lisa Sumption, director of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, received the Fran P. Mainella Award for state and national leadership. She has served as a member of the NPS' System Advisory Board. Source: [Clemson News](#)
- *USGS bat studies in national parks* - The U.S. Geological Survey published [an article](#) about innovative techniques for monitoring bats in Yosemite National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, and Olympic National Park. Source: U.S. Geological Survey
- *"Why Is National Park Service Dragging Its Feet On Plastics?"* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) outlining a position stated by the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility that the NPS has the weakest plan for banning single-use plastics among Interior Department agencies. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- *"When did the National Park Service lose its voice?"* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an op-ed](#) by its editor Kurt Repanshek arguing that the NPS relationship with the media has deteriorated in recent years for a variety of reasons. Source: *National Parks Traveler*

[Around the Parks](#)

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *American Battlefield Protection Program* (an NPS-administered program) - The NPS awarded \$117,333 in Battlefield Interpretation Grants to enhance interpretation of Revolutionary War battlefields in New York and New Jersey. Source: [National Park](#)

[Service Office of Communications](#)

- *Bandelier National Monument* - Construction at the New Mexico State Road 4 and East Jemez Road junction has been extended several months. The project is expected to be complete before the 2024 summer season. The construction will improve traffic flow and safety at the junction, and the park is realigning parking and an access road with the traffic light at the intersection. The Tsankawi Unit remains closed throughout the project. Source: [Bandelier National Monument](#)
- *Boston African American National Historic Site* - *Harvard Magazine* published [an article](#) about the history of the African Meeting House, a National Historic Landmark that is owned by the Museum of African American History and operated in conjunction with the park. Source: *Harvard Magazine*
- *Casa Grande Ruins National Monument* - *Pinal Central* published [a profile](#) on superintendent Dave Carney, who has been at the park for nine years and in the superintendent position for three months. Source: *Pinal Central*
- *Colonial National Historical Park* - The American Battlefield Trust recently created a new virtual driving tour for Yorktown that allows viewers to see the site and hear from historians about the events leading up to the surrender of the British at Yorktown during the Revolutionary War. Source: [The Virginia Gazette](#)
- *Cumberland Island National Seashore* - The NPS is collaborating with All Terrain Georgia to pilot a program that will offer two electric all terrain chairs to individuals with mobility impairments for free. All Terrain Georgia launched in November 2022. It is an initiative of the Aimee Copeland Foundation. They plan to partner with the NPS at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park next. Source: [Cumberland Island National Seashore](#)
- *Cumberland Island National Seashore* - Repairs have begun on Dungeness Dock and Sea Camp Dock, which both were damaged by Hurricanes Matthew and Irma in 2016 and 2017. Source: [The Brunswick News](#)
- *Cuyahoga Valley National Park* - The week of October 23, the park hosted the National Park Friends Alliance for over 250 national park partner leaders and NPS staff. Superintendent Lisa Petit used the opportunity to highlight stories of environmental justice, ecological repair, and community partnership at the park. Source: [Ideastream Public Media](#)
- *Everglades National Park* - The Department of the Interior announced the appointment of Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Shannon Estenoz as chair of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. Shannon traveled to the Everglades on October 27 to highlight Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding for Everglades restoration and to celebrate the newly-reopened Guy

Bradley Visitor Center. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

- *Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve* - Doyon, an Alaska Native corporation, announced that it is canceling a land-access agreement with the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority for the Ambler Road project. The three-year agreement has allowed contractors to conduct studies needed to support the project. It ends in April and Doyon has stated they will not extend the agreement or enter into a new one due to "poor treatment" by AIDEA. Lack of access to Doyon lands may negate the possibility of the proposed 200-mile road moving forward. Source: [Anchorage Daily News](#)
- *Gateway Arch National Park* - The park has begun installation of a new lighting system at the arch that will reduce energy usage by 60%, more accurately control focus and color temperature, and reduce light impact for migratory birds. Source: [KMOV](#)
- *Gauley River National Recreation Area, New River Gorge National Park and Preserve* - The NPS recently installed nine fishing line receptacles at popular fishing spots on the New and Gauley Rivers. Funding and fabrication of the receptacles came from the Friends of New River Gorge National Park and Preserve and were mounted by park staff. The Friends group will maintain the units and handle recycling of the fishing line. Source: [Gauley River National Recreation Area](#)
- *Gettysburg National Military Park* - From October 29-31, the park removed flagpoles from Warfield (Longstreet) and Culps Hill observation towers. The towers were closed during the removal. The flagpoles will be restored in a future preservation project. Source: [Gettysburg National Military Park](#)
- *Glacier National Park* - The *Daily Montanan* published [an article](#) about the park's efforts to use a piscicide to kill non-native fish in Gunsight Lake and then restock with native species. The article explores the goals of the project, as well as some of the criticisms by the Friends of the Wild Swan. Source: *Daily Montanan*
- *Glacier National Park* - New research recently presented at the annual meeting of The Geological Society of America by a park Mosaics in Science Diversity Intern shows that aircraft noise has decreased since 2004, but rising park visitation has had additional noise impacts. Source: [The Wildlife Society](#)
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - On October 19, the Department of the Interior released a [Scoping Summary Report](#) related to the recent 60-day public scoping period about Colorado River operations after 2026. The scoping report will be used to inform a draft Environmental Impact Statement to be released for public comment in 2024. This is a separate planning process from the operations planning currently open for public comment about operations through the end of 2026 (see "Open for Public Comment" below).

Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

- *Grand Canyon National Park* - Electric vehicle charging company Electrify America recently installed six DC fast chargers at the park's south entrance. Source: [MSN.com](#)
- *Grand Canyon National Park* - Overnight backcountry permits will go up in cost starting on April 1. The permits will increase from \$12 per person per night to \$15, plus a \$10 charge for each permit (which remains the same as before). Source: [Grand Canyon National Park](#)
- *Grand Canyon National Park* - The podcast "Tapped" published [an episode](#) about Havasupai people's efforts to mitigate and prevent uranium mining on their ancestral lands within and around the Grand Canyon, including newly-designated Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni - Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument. Source: *AZPM*
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - The NPS has signed a Finding of No Significant Impact for the Laurel Falls Trail Management Plan. The park will begin construction on trail improvements starting in 2024. Source: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#)
- *Hopewell Culture National Historical Park* - *Statehouse News Bureau* published [an article](#) debunking long-standing cultural myths that ceremonial mounds and burial sites throughout Ohio have "evil spirits," are "haunted," or cause bad luck. The article argues that those stories are harmful and dehumanize Indigenous culture as "mysterious or indecipherable" rather than relatable or ingenious. Source: *WKSU*
- *Ice Age National Scenic Trail* - From October 25-28, the Ice Age Trail Alliance held an event for nearly 1,000 volunteers and staff to build several miles of new trail in the Cross Plains, Wisconsin, area. The trail is expected to open to the public on October 30. Source: [NBC15](#)
- *Katmai National Park and Preserve* - New research conducted in the park by scientists from the NPS, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Oregon State University shows that wolves will actively hunt marine animals, including harbor seals and sea otters. Previously, it was assumed that wolves scavenged already-deceased sea life rather than actively hunted them. In particular, wolves will eat more marine animals when local ungulate populations diminish. Source: [Oregon State University Newsroom](#)
- *Lassen Volcanic National Park* - *The Guardian* published [an article](#) about the park's recovery from the 2021 Dixie Fire, which burned nearly 70% of the park. Source: *The Guardian*

- *Longfellow House Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site* - The park will begin replacing the roofs and enhancing water-shedding on the Longfellow house and Longfellow carriage house this fall. Work is expected to continue through Summer 2024. Source: [Longfellow House Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site](#)
- *National Heritage Areas* (an NPS-administered program) - The National Parks Conservation Association published [an article](#) about the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area and its efforts to highlight stories of Hispanic, Native American, and African American heritage in the San Luis Valley in Colorado. Source: National Parks Conservation Association
- *Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument* - *Grist* published [an article](#) about Quitobaquito Springs, an important site to Tohono and Hia-Ced O'odham Nations that has been affected by park management, climate change, and border protection efforts. Source: *Grist*
- *Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park* - *Northjersey.com* published [an article](#) about the 2.5-acre expansion of the park, which is expected to be complete in June 2024. The \$7.9 million project will include a river walk, new exhibits, and new access to historical resources. Source: *northjersey.com*
- *Rocky Mountain National Park* - The National Parks Conservation Association bestowed former superintendent Darla Sidles with the Stephen T. Mather Award for her efforts creating employment pathways, implementing the first timed-entry system in the National Park System, and responding to climate change through adaptive park management. Source: [National Parks Conservation Association](#)
- *Rocky Mountain National Park* - On October 20, the park celebrated the completion of the Sprague Lake Boardwalk replacement. In addition to addressing structural deficiencies and replacing deteriorating materials, the new trail is wider to improve accessibility for wheelchairs and strollers. The project was funded primarily through NPS recreation fee dollars with additional support from the Rocky Mountain Conservancy. The project was implemented with support from an NPS trail crew, the Rocky Mountain Conservancy Conservation Corps, the NPS' Denver Service Center, Northern Colorado Helitack, and volunteers from Teens, Inc., and Heli-Pile. Source: [Rocky Mountain National Park](#)
- *Sagamore Hill National Historic Site* - On October 25, the park began the removal of five Kwanzan cherry trees and two apple trees that are in poor condition and have "far exceeded their expected life span." The NPS is removing the trees for visitor and vehicle safety, as well as to prepare the area for replanting the next generation of cherry and apple trees, which will take place in Spring 2024. The project is being funded by the Theodore Roosevelt Legacy Partnership. Source: [Sagamore Hill National Historic Site](#)

- *Saguaro National Park* - *Tucson.com* published [an article](#) about efforts by park scientists to utilize DNA testing to track both rare and invasive animals. Source: *Tucson.com*
- *San Antonio Missions National Historical Park* - U.S. Representatives Joaquin Castro, Henry Cuellar, and Greg Casar submitted a letter to the NPS asking it to "clarify jurisdictional boundaries" and come up with a comprehensive plan to protect the park in the wake of a string of vandalism over the last two years. Source: [San Antonio Report](#)
- *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* - *The Fresno Bee* published [an op-ed](#) by Jeremy Clar, chair of the Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club, and Chad Hanson, a research ecologist with the John Muir Project, arguing against the park's current plan to reseed many sequoia groves in the wake of high-intensity fires. They argue that sequoia seedlings have done much better than originally predicted and the project will negatively impact natural processes and interfere with public enjoyment. Source: *The Fresno Bee*
- *Springfield Armory National Historic Site* - The park recently completed replacement and upgrades of 16 wayside exhibits at Armory and Springfield Technical Community College, Springfield Technology Park, the former Water Shops, and the Quabbin Reservoir. The project began in 2016. The waysides follow a chronological path from the establishment of the Springfield Armory in 1794 to its closing in 1968. Source: [Springfield Armory National Historic Site](#)
- *Theodore Roosevelt National Park* - *Smithsonian Magazine* published [an article](#) about the park's reduction of the South Unit bison herd by 300 individuals for ecological purposes. The bison will be transferred by the InterTribal Buffalo Council to several Tribes. Source: *Smithsonian Magazine*
- *Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) about the toxic and hazardous waste present at the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark within the park. The site has a Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act remediation plan in place (CERCLA, also known as Superfund). Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- *Yellowstone National Park* - *The Powell Tribune* published [an article](#) about the park's new staff housing, which is modular, allowing it to be installed quickly and economically. Source: *Powell Tribune*
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The U.S. Geological Survey published [an article](#) about geologist Ferdinand Hayden, who led the first scientific exploration of Yellowstone in 1871. The article touches on the difficulty of reconciling his scientific and conservation achievements with his racist views on Indigenous people. Source:

U.S. Geological Survey

- *Zion National Park* - The park announced that fossilized skull pieces of a lower Jurassic coelacanth, a prehistoric freshwater fish from over 200 million years ago, were found within the park. They were recovered from their location by a National Park Service and St. George Dinosaur Discovery Site team. It is said to be "the most significant body fossil collected" at the park. Source: [St. George News](#)

Personnel Changes

- *Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, Wright Brothers National Memorial* - Mike Henry was selected as the new chief ranger. Mike has 25 years of NPS experience, most recently as deputy chief ranger at the three parks. He started his new role on October 22. Source: [Cape Hatteras National Seashore](#)
- *Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve* - Tom Schaff has been selected for a year-long detail as superintendent. Tom has worked for the NPS for over 20 years, most recently as Glacier Bay's deputy superintendent. Source: [National Park Service Alaska Region](#)

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

- David "Dave" Michael Casey, 70, passed away on October 12. Dave worked for the NPS for a time. Source: [Legacy](#)
- Gerhard "Jr." E. Hackman, 86, passed away on October 20. Gerhard worked for the National Park Service for a time and "was awarded the National Safety Award in 1994." Source: [Dubois County Free Press](#)
- James "Jim"/"Jimmy" Benjamin Heath, 78, passed away on October 19. Jim's time at the NPS included working on road maintenance at Yellowstone National Park. Source: [The Sundance Times](#)
- James "Jim" P. Kauahikaua passed away on October 8. Jim was the first Native Hawaiian to serve as the scientist-in-charge of the U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, and he worked closely with "the NPS and other organizations to develop ways to communicate that resonated more deeply with the community." He received the Citation for Meritorious Service from the Department of the Interior in 2015. Source: [U.S. Geological Survey](#)

- David Nathanson, 77, passed away on October 14. David worked for the NPS for 32 years as a library archivist. Source: [Stauffer Funeral Homes](#)
- John Philip Notar, 71, passed away on August 25. John worked for the NPS for about 30 years in roles focused on air quality and visibility. He retired from the NPS in 2022. Source: [Legacy/Horan & McConaty - South Denver](#)
- James "Jim" Lawrence Sherald, 77, passed away on October 9. Jim worked for the NPS for 35 years, including a stint as the chief of natural resources and science for the National Capital Region. He retired from the NPS in 2010. Source: [Legacy/The Washington Post](#)
- Charles M. Travers, 91, passed away on September 9. Charles worked as a seasonal ranger for several summers while in college, including at Olympic National Park and Denali National Park and Preserve. Source: [The Daily World](#)

In the News

- Gerard Baker, also known as Yellow Wolf or Zaa-sha-shee-dish, was interviewed for the documentary, "The American Buffalo," by Ken Burns. Gerard was formerly superintendent at Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, and the Chickasaw National Recreation Area, as well as the NPS' "assistant director for American Indian relations." He retired from the NPS in 2010. He is a registered member of Three Affiliated Tribes. Source: [The South Dakota Standard](#)
- Frank and Penny Starr were interviewed for *The Oregonian's* "Northwest love stories" feature. The piece focuses on various facets of their relationship, including their later-in-life pivot to careers with the National Park Service. Frank and Penny both worked at Jewel Cave National Monument, Yosemite National Park, Katmai National Park, and the Noatak National Preserve. Source: *The Oregonian*

Open for Comment

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

- *Anacostia Park* - Public comment is [open through December 1](#) on preliminary management concepts for the future of the park. Source: [Anacostia Park](#)
- *Anacostia Park* - Public comment is [open through November 9](#) on a plan to demolish Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium. The stadium is owned by the District of Columbia, on land administered by the NPS as part of Anacostia Park. Washington Convention and Sport Authority (Events DC) has been responsible for its operation and management. It has not been utilized since 2019. Source: [National](#)

[Park Service Region 1: National Capital Area](#)

- *Arches National Park* - Public comment is [open through December 1](#) on a visitor access and experience update, including the possibility of a more permanent timed-entry system. Source: [Arches National Park](#)
- *Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area* - Public comment is open through November 1 on a plan to increase campground and picnic shelter fees, to open the Blue Heron Overlook Gazebo for reservations, and to add campsites to *Recreation.gov* for advance reservations. Comments can be submitted via mail or email. Source: [Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area](#)
- *Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park* - Public comment is [open until November 12](#) on a development concept plan for the Whites Ferry area. Source: [Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical 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](#)
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Grand Canyon National Park* - The Bureau of Reclamation has [opened public comment through November 3](#) on a notice of intent to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement that will analyze flow options to prevent smallmouth bass and other warm water invasive nonnative fish from establishing below Glen Canyon Dam. Source: [AZ Central](#)
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - The Bureau of Reclamation has opened public comment through December 11 on a [revised draft supplemental environmental impact statement for near-term Colorado River operations](#). The revision takes into account improved and newer hydrology data that affects the environmental impacts evaluated in the previous operations plan, as well as a concession of 3 million acre-feet funded for conservation in the Lower Basin States. Source: [Department of the Interior](#) [Editor note: An online comment platform wasn't available as of publishing, though a Notice of Availability has been filed, signaling that comment is open. See the [Federal Register](#) for more information.]
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - The National Park Service and Federal Highway Administration have [opened public comment through November 18](#) on a proposal to construct/extend a section ("8D") of the Foothills Parkway from Wears Valley to the Spur near Gatlinburg. Source: [WBIR](#)
- *Haleakalā National Park* - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources have [opened public comment through](#)

- [November 22](#) on a plan to do a pilot release of ‘ālalā, or Hawaiian crow, in east Maui. The draft plan was done in coordination with Haleakalā staff and other partners. Source: [Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources \(Ka 'Oihana Kumuwaiwai 'Āina\)](#)
- *Mammoth Cave National Park* - Public comment is [open through November 29](#) on a plan to replace housing for seasonal employees. Source: [WBKO](#)
 - *Mount Rainier National Park* - Public comment is [open through November 30](#) on an Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [NBC Tri-Cities Yakima](#)
 - *National Capital Parks - East* - Public comment is [open through December 9](#) on a design concept for a 1.25-acre park known as Parkland, located in Congress Heights. Parkland was identified as a priority for the community during a 2020 development concept plan for the Shepherd Parkway. Source: [National Capital Parks - East](#)
 - *North Cascades National Park* - The NPS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have [opened public comment through November 13](#) on a proposal to reintroduce grizzly bears to the North Cascades Ecosystem. Source: [Conservation Northwest](#)
 - *Obed Wild and Scenic River* - Public comment is open through November 1 on a plan to increase overnight camping fees at Rock Creek Campground. Comments can be submitted by mail or email. Source: [Obed Wild and Scenic River](#)
 - *Olympic National Park* - Public comment is [open through November 22](#) on a plan for downstream mitigation during the replacement of the U.S. 101 Elwha River Bridge. An Environmental Assessment for the bridge was completed in 2021; this comment period is focused on improving river channel dynamics and providing salmonid habitat as compensatory mitigation. Source: [Olympic National Park](#)
 - *Rock Creek Park* - Public comment has been [extended through November 4](#) for the Rock Creek Golf Course rehabilitation plan. Source: [Rock Creek Park](#)
 - *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](#)
 - *Theodore Roosevelt National Park* - Public comment has been [extended through November 24](#) on a Livestock Plan for the park. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
 - *Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve* - Public comment is [open through November 10](#) on a Kennecott Operations and Management Plan. Source: [Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve](#)

Other Department of the Interior News

- *Alaska sues DOI over leases* - On October 18, the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority filed a lawsuit against the Department of the Interior for its decision to scrap seven oil and gas leases in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. They argue that the decision violates a 2017 Congressional mandate in a tax bill to open the Arctic to drilling. Source: [Reuters](#)
- *\$327 million for water projects in Tribal communities* - On October 26, the Department of the Interior announced \$327 million in funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Reclamation Water Settlements Fund for ensuring water resources for 11 projects with Native communities. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Central Valley dam project* - On October 20, the Department of the Interior and the San Luis and Delta-Mendota Water Authority approved a plan to raise the B.F. Sisk Dam to expand water storage in San Luis Reservoir by 130,000 acre-feet. The project is expected to provide water supply for over two million people, one millions acres of farmland, and 135,000 acres of wetlands in the Central Valley of California. The project is being funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Coral reef task force meeting* - The week of October 23, the United States Coral Reef Task Force, an interagency effort, met for their 47th annual meeting. Discussions focused on "strategies for enhancing management and restoration and addressing the challenges facing corals and their ecosystems." Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *New DOI appointees* - On October 23, the Department of the Interior announced the following new appointees: Torend Collins, senior advisor for infrastructure strategy; Thomas Franco, deputy director of intergovernmental and external affairs; Alejandro Oms, advisor to the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs; and Jacob "Jake" Steel, special assistant to the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs. On October 31, the agency named Laura Daniel-Davis to be the acting Deputy Secretary of the Interior, filling the vacancy left by the departure of Tommy Beaudreau. Source: [Department of the Interior](#), [Federal Times](#)
- *Op-ed in favor of King Cove Road* - Leaders from King Cove and the Belkofski Tribe wrote [an op-ed](#) published in the *Anchorage Daily News* asking the Department of the Interior to allow a proposed land swap of Izembek Wildlife Refugee land for the purpose of constructing a single-lane gravel road to King Cove to be used for emergency services. (Editor note: See [3/22/23 Coalition Report](#) about the DOI's most recent denial of the land swap.) Source: *Anchorage Daily News*

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

October 17 – The Senate agreed to S. Res. 411, to constitute the majority party's membership on certain committees for the One Hundred Eighteenth Congress, or until their successors are chosen. Among those of interest to the National Park Service are:

- Committee On Appropriations: Patty Murray (Chair), Dick Durbin, Jack Reed, Jon Tester, Jeanne Shaheen, Jeff Merkley, Chris Coons, Brian Schatz, Tammy Baldwin, Chris Murphy, Joe Manchin, Chris Van Hollen, Martin Heinrich, Gary Peters, Kyrsten Sinema
- Committee On Energy And Natural Resources: Joe Manchin (Chair), Ron Wyden, Maria Cantwell, Bernie Sanders, Martin Heinrich, Mazie Hirono, Angus King, Catherine Cortez Masto, John Hickenlooper, Alex Padilla.

October 24 – The Senate agreed to S. Res. 426, designating November 4, 2023, as "National Bison Day."

October 25 – The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining concluded a hearing on several bills, including the following that affect the National Park Service, among other Department of the Interior bureaus and the U.S. Forest Service:

- S. 1764, to improve federal activities relating to wildfires.
- S. 2855, to modernize and streamline the permitting process for broadband infrastructure on federal land.
- S. 3045, to provide for the transfer of administrative jurisdiction over certain federal land in the state of California. The bill transfers about 160 acres of land from the U.S. Forest Service to the National Park Service to be managed as part of Yosemite National Park and an almost equal amount of NPS land to the U.S. Forest Service in exchange.
- S. 3062, to provide for the removal of small-diameter trees in fire hazard areas.
- S. 3079, to establish a policy regarding appraisal and valuation services for real property for a transaction over which the Secretary of the Interior has jurisdiction.

Testimony was heard from Nada Wolff Culver, Principal Deputy Director, Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior; Jacqueline Emanuel, Associate Deputy Chief, Forest Service, Department of Agriculture; and Mark Boshell, Utah Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office, Salt Lake City.

October 25 – The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs ordered favorably reported the following bills, among several others:

- S. 2685, to make data and internal guidance on excess personal property publicly available, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute.
- S. 2866, to improve the customer experience of the federal government, ensure that federal services are simple, seamless, and secure, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute.
- S. 3029, to amend title 5, United States Code, to increase death gratuities and funeral allowances for federal employees, with an amendment. The bill increases the death benefit available to the survivors of federal employees who die in the line of duty from \$10,000 to \$100,000.
- S. 2414, to require agencies with working dog programs to implement the recommendations of the Government Accountability Office relating to the health and welfare of working dogs, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute.

October 26 – The Senate agreed to S. Res. 436, expressing support for the designation of the week of October 24, 2023, to October 31, 2023, as "BatWeek." The resolution acknowledges the important role bats play as pollinators and pest control for agriculture; and the role that the National Park Service and other federal land management agencies play in conserving bat species and their habitat; and in working to defeat the disease known as white-nose syndrome.

House Actions

October 17 – The House tried again to elect a new Speaker after the Speaker's position was declared vacant on October 3, but was unsuccessful in doing so. Therefore, no legislative activity was able to be completed on the House floor.

October 18 – The House tried again to elect a new Speaker after the Speaker's position was declared vacant on October 3, but was unsuccessful in doing so. Therefore, no legislative activity was able to be completed on the House floor.

October 18 – The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held a hearing on several bills including H.R. 4770, the "Chesapeake Bay Science, Education, and Ecosystem Enhancement Act of 2023." Among other provisions, the bill authorizes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the Department of Commerce to further the development and implementation of the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System and associated monitoring assets to improve weather and ecological forecasts, monitor habitat conditions for living marine resources, and to support the establishment and implementation of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail managed by the National Park Service.

Testimony was heard from Representative John Sarbanes; Robert T. Caccese, Director of Policy, Planning and Communications, Fish and Boat Commission, Pennsylvania; Carrie

Selberg Robinson, Director, Office of Habitat Conservation, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce; Stephen Guertin, Deputy Director for Program Management and Policy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior; and public witnesses.

October 18 – The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing titled "Securing Our Border, Saving Our National Parks." Testimony was heard from Michael Reynolds, Deputy Director, National Park Service, Department of the Interior; Chris French, Deputy Chief, National Forest System, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture; John Nores, Jr., Special Operations, Marijuana Enforcement Team, California Department of Fish and Wildlife; and public witnesses.

October 19 – The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing on the following:

- H.R. 1727, the "Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Commission Extension Act."
- H.R. 5283, the "Protecting our Communities from Failure to Secure the Border Act of 2023."
- Yet-to-be-introduced legislation named the Trash Reduction And Suppressing Harm from Environmental Degradation at the Border Act.
- Yet-to-be introduced legislation named the Ensuring Border Access and Protection on Federal Land Act.

Testimony was heard from Joann Ariola, Council Member, 32nd District, New York City Council, New York; Troy Heithecker, Associate Deputy Chief, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture; George Lewis, Chair, Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Federal Advisory Commission, National Park Service, Department of the Interior; and a public witness.

October 20 – The House tried again to elect a new Speaker after the Speaker's position was declared vacant on October 3, but was unsuccessful in doing so. Therefore, no legislative activity was able to be completed on the House floor.

October 25 – The House resumed proceedings from Tuesday, October 17th, Wednesday, October 18th, and Friday, October 20th. The House conducted an additional vote to elect a Speaker, from which a majority was ascertained, and a Speaker was elected. During the final vote for Speaker, Mike Johnson received 220 votes and Hakeem Jeffries received 209 votes. Mike Johnson of Louisiana was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives, and he was administered the oath of office.

October 25 – The Committee on Natural Resources began a markup on several bills, including the following of interest to the National Park Service:

- H.R. 4770, the "Chesapeake Bay Science, Education, and Ecosystem Enhancement Act of 2023." Among other provisions, the bill authorizes the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the Department of Commerce to further the development and implementation of the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System and associated monitoring assets to improve weather and ecological forecasts, monitor habitat conditions for living marine resources, and to support the establishment and implementation of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail managed by the National Park Service.

- H.R. 5283, to prohibit the use of federal funds to provide housing to specified immigrants on any land under the administrative jurisdiction of the federal land management agencies.

October 25 – The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held a hearing on several bills, including:

- H.R. 520, to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to provide that artificially propagated animals shall be treated the same under that Act as naturally propagated animals;
- H.R. 5504, to require the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to withdraw proposed rules relating to the Endangered Species Act of 1973;
- H.R. 5509, to modernize permitting systems at the Department of the Interior, and for other purposes.

Testimony was heard from Representatives Tom McClintock, Suzanne Bonamici, Dan Newhouse, Katie Porter, and Juan Ciscomani; Gary Frazer, Assistant Director for Ecological Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior; and public witnesses.

October 26 – The Committee on Natural Resources concluded a markup on several bills, including the following of interest to the National Park Service:

- H.R. 4770, the "Chesapeake Bay Science, Education, and Ecosystem Enhancement Act of 2023." Among other provisions, the bill authorizes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the Department of Commerce to further the development and implementation of the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System and associated monitoring assets to improve weather and ecological forecasts, monitor habitat conditions for living marine resources, and to support the establishment and implementation of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail managed by the National Park Service.
- H.R. 5283, to prohibit the use of federal funds to provide housing to specified immigrants on any land under the administrative jurisdiction of the federal land management agencies.

H.R. 4770 and H.R. 5283 were ordered reported, as amended.

Incidents

Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.

Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area

Structural issues with bridge

On October 19, a bridge safety inspection by the Federal Highway Administration identified structural issues with the pier's bridge decking on the historic Blue Heron Tipple Bridge. The bridge is now closed, and the FHA and NPS are developing a plan for repairs and stabilization. Source: [Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area](#)

Blue Ridge Parkway

Violent encounter

On September 28 at around 3:15am, two people were sitting in a parked car at the Waterrock Knob Overlook at Milepost 455. A separate car accelerated around the parking lot once, sped toward the parked car, and abruptly stopped in front of it. A 22-year-old opened the passenger door of the parked car and pointed a semi-automatic gun at the two individuals. The suspect pulled one of the individuals out of the car by their hair and arm, threatening to hurt them if they didn't comply. The victim asked if the suspect planned to rape them and the suspect nodded. The suspect then hit the individual in the face, causing bruising and temporary hearing loss, and fired the gun in the air before re-pointing it at the two victims. The second victim eventually convinced the suspect to let them go. The victims reported the incident to law enforcement and one of them said they knew the suspect through Snapchat and believed the individual had used the app's location sharing feature to find them. The following day, the suspect was interviewed and claimed that they had drunk excessively and woken up with no recollection of what had happened. Upon further questioning, the suspect said they had been "friends with benefits" and had exchanged nude photos with one of the victims. On the night of the crime, the suspect had texted that person to hang out and they had responded they were tired and planned to be at home. Later, the suspect saw the individual was on the parkway based on their Snapchat location. This upset the suspect, who decided to go scare them. The suspect was arrested and formally charged by a grand jury with one charge of kidnapping, two counts of assault with intent to commit a felony, two counts of assault with a dangerous weapon with intent to do bodily harm, and possession and discharge of a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence. The individual remains in federal custody. Source: [Citizen Times](#)

Blue Ridge Parkway

Bear feeding incidents

On October 30, the parkway closed an eight-mile stretch between Craggy Gardens Picnic Area (Milepost 367.6) and Ox Creek Road (Milepost 375.6) due to multiple reports of visitors feeding and "attempting to hold" a young bear at the Lane Pinnacle Overlook. NPS staff are hopeful the closure will cause the bear to lose interest in the area before habituation creates an unsafe situation for visitors and the bear. Source: [Citizen Times](#)

Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park

30-foot fall

On October 28, a 22-year-old took a 30-foot fall off the edge of a bluff on Lookout Mountain near Sunset Rock. Rescuers from the Lookout Mountain Fire Department and Chattanooga-Hamilton County Rescue responded and utilized a wheeled litter to carry the individual off the trail. A doctor on scene assessed the individual, who "didn't appear to have severe injuries." The individual was taken to a hospital for further treatment. Source:

[The Charlotte Observer](#)

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park

Vehicle crashes into building

On October 24, a vehicle crashed into the north side of the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center and Aviation Trail Parachute Museum. The intersection was closed for three hours while the accident was investigated. There "is no indication of any injuries associated with the crash." The historic entrances to the Setzer and Hoover block buildings sustained damages, and efforts to secure and repair the structures are underway. The visitor center has remained open. The Dayton Police is investigating the cause of the accident. Source:

[Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park](#)

Death Valley National Park

Vehicle crash

On October 29, a camper van braked suddenly to avoid hitting a tarantula crossing the road on Highway 190 east of Towne Pass. A 24-year-old motorcyclist travelling behind crashed into the van. The motorcyclist was taken for medical treatment in Pahrump (NV) by NPS staff. Source: [KOLO](#)

Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area

Rockslide closure affecting businesses

In December 2022, heavy rainfall led to a rock slide on Route 611 in Monroe County, Pennsylvania, including a section within the park. A three-mile stretch of the road has been closed ever since. Repairs are said to have been delayed by NPS permitting. Pennsylvania Department of Transportation completed a walk-through of the site on October 17 and submitted a revised plan to start the work. There is currently no estimated date for when the work will be begin. One business, Asparagus Sunshine, has stated publicly that their business has become unviable due to the delays, and it will shutter on December 30. Source: [WNEP](#)

Gateway National Recreation Area

Protestors

On October 23, several dozen protestors gathered outside Floyd Bennett Field to rally against recent agreement between the federal government and New York City to house asylum seekers in the park (see [9/20/23 Coalition Report](#)). Source: [News 12 Brooklyn](#)

Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve

Whale trapped by line

On October 7 or 8, a three- to four-year-old humpback whale got snagged on 450-feet of heavy line attached to a 300-pound crab pot near Pleasant Island in Icy Strait. On October 10, local residents informed the NPS of a whale making unusual sounds and having trouble moving. Several NPS staff who had been trained in disentanglement by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Alaska Large Whale Entanglement Response network responded in an NPS boat to gather information and assess the situation. When contacted, the owner of the crab pot said it had gone missing some time between October 7 and 8. Based on the situation, the team secured authorization to begin a rescue from NOAA. A disentanglement expert with the Alaska Whale Foundation flew in the following day and joined a team to approach the whale. An FAA licensed drone pilot was able to capture footage to show the manner in which the whale was caught in the line. The team utilized a specially designed knife mounted on a long pole to make cuts in the line while remaining at a distance to the whale. After many hours, the whale was freed and swam rapidly away. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)

Glen Canyon National Recreation Area

Houseboat fire

On October 26, a number of houseboats caught fire at Bullfrog Marina. Five boats "were completely destroyed" and another "suffered heavy damage." The dock also "suffered extreme devastation." Several people were on scene and made efforts to isolate the original burning boat, but their efforts led to the fire spreading to several other boats. Several people on scene were treated for smoke inhalation, with one person airlifted to a nearby hospital. The incident is currently under investigation. Source: [KMYU](#), [The Salt Lake Tribune](#)

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Car fire

On October 22, a car fire broke out near the entrance of Cades Cove. The road was temporarily closed and the fire was contained by emergency responders. There were no evacuations, injuries, or affected structures. Source: [WVLT](#)

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

Volcanic activity

On October 25, the park closed the Mauna Iki Trail and the Ka'ū Desert/Footprints Trail, past the Footprints exhibit to the Mauna Iki Trail intersection due to volcanic "episodic

unrest" in the area south of the Kilauea summit. Source: [Big Island Video News](#)

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

Wildfire

On October 17, a fire started on land "separate from the Barataria Preserve" and bordering the Wetland Trace parkland. As of October 30, it had burned 150 acres and was 52% contained. The cause is unknown. Salt levels in local water ways are currently high due to a "saltwater wedge" that is making its way up the Mississippi River, so firefighters have decided not to flood the area with river water because it could harm local flora and fauna. Instead, firefighters are targeting hotspots with hoses. Source: [Nola.com](#)

Mammoth Cave National Park

Domestic violence indictment

On May 1, a 39-year-old was observed and charged with committing domestic assault within the park. The individual had two prior convictions of assault in the fourth degree against a spouse or intimate partner. The individual was indicted by a federal grand jury on October 11. The case is being investigated by the NPS and prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Bowling Green Branch Office. Source: [U.S. Attorney's Office: Western District of Kentucky](#)

Natchez Trace Parkway

Vehicle crash

On October 20, a vehicle veered off the road and hit a tree between I-55 northbound and Rice Road. The 47-year-old driver died on scene. The road was closed for a time for the investigation and has since reopened. Source: [WLBT](#)

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

Mountain lion attack

On October 24, a young mountain lion attempted to attack a small, leashed dog at Solstice Canyon. The dog's owner intervened in the attack, resulting in a puncture wound and scratch on their hand. The dog was uninjured. NPS staff responded and provided the hiker with first aid. The trail was closed until October 26 while wildlife biologists "examined the area and assessed the situation." Source: [News Nation](#)

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

Hiking fatality

On October 17, an individual began a hike from Whitney Portal up the Mountaineering Route of Mt. Whitney. The individual was reported missing the following day when they missed a flight. That day, flyover searches were conducted in the area. On October 19, ground searches by the NPS and Inyo County Search and Rescue revealed "clues" that a

hiker may have fallen off a cliff in an area on the route known as "The Notch." An NPS helicopter searched the area and located a motionless hiker with clothing matching the description provided. The individual had fallen about 1,000 feet. That evening, the individual's body was recovered via helicopter and transferred to Tulare County Sheriff's Office, and their identity was confirmed. Source: [Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks](#)

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore **Hundreds of dead birds**

Over the weekend of October 28-29, an estimated 300 dead birds were found along beaches in the park. Park staff have said that they likely died due to type-E botulism ("avian botulism"), a bacteria-produced toxin that infects invertebrates and small fish, and then is eaten by waterfowl. The majority of the deceased birds were long-tailed ducks; other species included loons and mergansers. Avian botulism is not uncommon on the Great Lakes in the fall, but these are some of the highest fatality numbers reported in over a decade. The park has reminded visitors to not touch wildlife and to exercise caution with pets. Source: [mLive](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Death Valley National Park* - On November 1, the park will reopen Mud Canyon Road and Daylight Pass (the Beatty entrance) for the first time since record flash floods in August due to the remnants of Hurricane Hilary (see [8/23/23](#), [9/6/23](#), and [9/20/23 Coalition Report](#)). Emergency repairs were funded by the Federal Highway Administration's Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads program. Only emergency repairs were completed thus far on these roads; more permanent repairs will begin in a few months time. Most of the park's secondary roads and backcountry remain closed. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)
- *Glacier National Park* - The inholding property built along lower McDonald Creek that is currently being disputed in court over streambank permitting ([see 3/22/23 Coalition Report](#)) is being permitted by the Flathead Conservation District to winterize its windows and roof. The court case is likely to go on for months or years, and the board is allowing this limited work to avoid the owners seeking further damages incurred by weather due to the district's cease and desist order. Source: [Hungry Horse News](#)
- *Redwood National and State Parks* - The Six Rivers Forest Lightning Complex and Redwood Lightning Complex Fires were 100% contained at 50,198 acres, as of October 29. Source: [Inciweb](#)
- *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* - The 46-year-old individual who was accused of entering a cabin and committing non-consensual acts of sexual

conduct on July 31 (see [8/23/23 Coalition Report](#)) pleaded guilty to abusive sexual contact on October 23. The individual and the victim were both employees in the park (employer unnamed). The individual will be sentenced on February 26, 2024. Source: [U.S. Attorney's Office: Eastern District of California](#)

- *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* - As of October 22, the Redwood Fire was 2,248 acres and 70% contained. It is not currently threatening established containment lines and features. Source: [Inciweb](#)
- *Yosemite National Park* - On October 30, the 29-year-old who was charged with being a felon in possession of a firearm and ammunition while squatting on private property in Wawona in Summer 2021 (see [5/24/23 Coalition Report](#)) was sentenced to five years and three months in prison. Source: [U.S. Attorney's Office: Eastern District of California](#)

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- Issue Contributors: Jessica Howell-Edwards, David Manski, Mike Murray, John Quinley

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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