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**The Coalition Report**  
**Wednesday, November 29, 2023**

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Nominations for the 2023 George Hartzog Award are being accepted through tomorrow, **November 30**. The award is given annually to an individual who demonstrates outstanding support for the mission for the National Park Service.

**Make a Nomination**

**Coalition Actions**

Coalition Chair Mike Murray was quoted in a *National Parks Traveler* [article](#) discussing the negative impacts of the proposed budget cuts on the National Park Service and the practical implications, should they be adopted.

The Coalition submitted [a letter](#) to President Joe Biden expressing support of the Pit River Nation's request for national monument status of more than 200,000 acres of federally managed land in the Medicine Lake Highlands in Northern California, also known as Sáttítla.

We joined with the National Parks Conservation Association and Association of National Park Rangers in submitting [a letter](#) to the Office of Personnel Management in support of their proposed rule upholding civil service protections and merit system principles.

The Coalition submitted [comments](#) on Theodore Roosevelt National Park's Livestock

Plan, giving support for alternatives that remove herds of livestock in both units to align with the National Park Service's conservation goals and the park's enabling legislation.

We joined a coalition of conservation groups in signing [a letter](#) opposing H.R. 6009, the Restoring American Energy Dominance Act, because of its far-reaching consequences for administrative process and agency decision making, and its rollbacks of recent important updates to the federal onshore oil and gas leasing program.

The Coalition joined several other groups in submitting [comments](#) to the Bureau of Land Management Wyoming Office about their FY24 second quarter oil and gas lease sale, urging the agency to adopt program reforms and provisions under the proposed Fluid Mineral Leases and Leasing Process Rule.

### **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.*

- *Interagency pass moves to single signature* - Beginning on January 1, the Interagency Annual Pass will contain a single signature line instead of two. This will standardize passes across agencies and protect against misuse. Source: [Olympic National Park](#)
- *Selma to Montgomery special resource study* - The NPS has transmitted a special resource study for the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail to Congress. The study specifically identifies opportunities for establishing a national historical park while retaining the existing trail. It found that several sites are nationally significant, feasible as sites, and meet a need for NPS management or partnership. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Ocmulgee River special resource study* - The NPS has transmitted a special resource study for the Ocmulgee River Corridor. The study found that the study area is nationally significant, but did not meet the criteria for feasibility due to land acquisition challenges and the fact that there is already significant public lands access and management through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The study identified opportunities for partnerships and other types of designations to expand conservation and public enjoyment of the river corridor. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Volunteers needed for Revolutionary War archive* - The NPS and U.S. National Archives are recruiting volunteers to transcribe pension records for over 80,000 veterans and their widows to contribute to the historical records for the 250th anniversary of the country's founding. Source: [National Park Service Facebook](#)

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## **Around the Parks**

*Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.*

- *Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park* - The park recently replaced over 2,000-linear-feet of split-rail fencing around the park. The work was completed by an NPS Maintenance Action Team, in partnership with a work crew from the American Conservation Experience. The project was funded by Great American Outdoors Act. Source: [The News-Enterprise](#)
- *Alaska Region - Alaska Wildland Fire Information* published [an article](#) about two all-female Student Conservation Association fire crews stationed in Alaska over the summer. The crews were trained by both the NPS Alaska Region and the Bureau of Land Management Alaska Fire Service. Source: *Alaska Wildland Fire Information*
- *Badlands National Park, Mount Rushmore National Memorial* - On November 17, the NPS and Federal Aviation Administration completed an air tour management plan for the two parks. The plan prohibits commercial air tours over the parks and within a half-mile of park boundaries. Source: [DRG News](#), [National Parks Traveler](#)
- *Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area* - On November 27, the park announced it will increase camping fees at Bandy Creek and Blue Heron Campgrounds and day use fees at Blue Heron Overlook Gazebo, starting on January 1, 2024. Source: [Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area](#)
- *Biscayne National Park* - In July, an NPS marine archaeologist and two interns from the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture's Slave Wrecks Project found one of the anchors of a 118-foot paddle steamer ship, the *St. Lucie*. The boat sank in 1906 during a hurricane, killing 26 people. During the hurricane, the captain attempted to drop the ship's large anchors close to shore to ride out the storm, but the vessel capsized. Through archival research, the NPS team was able to positively identify the anchor as belonging to the ship. The anchor will remain in place, and the park is planning to produce and post a 3D digital rendering of the object online. Source: [Divernet](#)
- *Bryce Canyon National Park* - On November 28, the park announced that reservations at Sunset Campground will now be available on *Recreation.gov* 14 days in advance during peak season, and all campsites in the park will be \$30 per night, starting on December 28. Source: [Bryce Canyon National Park](#)
- *Cape Hatteras National Seashore* - On December 7, the park will host a groundbreaking event for repair of the Double Keepers' Quarters and other structures at the Ocracoke Light Station. This \$3.6 million project is being supported by the NPS, Hyde County (NC), and the North Carolina State Historic

Preservation Office, and executed by Terra Site Constructors, LLC. The project will raise many buildings to protect against storm surge, repair interior and exterior features, remediate hazardous substances, and install an accessible boardwalk. The project is expected to take 12 months. Source: [Cape Hatteras National Seashore](#)

- *Cape Lookout National Seashore* - The park recently completed a rehabilitation project on the Guthrie-Ogilvie House, including the roof, siding, doors, trim, and windows, and repairs to interior surfaces and finishes. The \$200,000 project was funded by the Great American Outdoors Act and completed by park staff and two interns from the Traditional Trades Advancement Program. The work was completed through the park's new historic preservation wood shop. Source: [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#)
- *Channel Islands National Park* - The *VC Star* published [an article](#) about the mysteries still surrounding a rare mammoth fossil found on Santa Rosa Island in 2014. Jim Mead, the former research director at The Mammoth Site in Hot Springs, South Dakota, presented on the skull recently at the California Islands Symposium. Scientists hope DNA evidence may lend clues to how the species fits, evolutionarily, with other prehistoric mammoth species. Source: *VC Star*
- *Crater Lake National Park* - On November 16, the Center for Biological Diversity submitted an emergency legal petition to protect the Crater Lake newt under the Endangered Species Act. Non-native signal crayfish, which were introduced in the lake in 1915 to serve as a food source for non-native fish, have both predated the newt and competed with the newt for habitat and food resources. Warming lake waters due to climate change have allowed crayfish populations to thrive. The crayfish are also thought to negatively affect lake clarity because they eat the invertebrates that consume plankton, allowing more algae growth. Source: [Oregon Public Broadcasting/Jefferson Public Radio](#)
- *Dry Tortugas National Park* - The NPS has selected Yankee Freedom III, Inc., as the contracted concessioner to provide interpretive ferry service to the park. The new contract begins November 1 and will last ten years. Yankee Freedom has been the concessioner since 1999. Source: [Dry Tortugas National Park](#)
- *Federal Lands to Parks Program* (an NPS-administered program) - On November 14, the Office of the Miami-Dade Mayor released a memo asking county commissioners to rescind the lease on Miami Wilds, a proposed entertainment park on former federal lands. The lease was approved in October 2020, pending approval by the NPS through the Federal Lands to Parks Program to remove land-use restrictions on the property. The NPS approved the changes in February. Shortly after approval, three environmental groups sued the NPS (see [2/22/23 Coalition Report](#)). The memo says that Miami Wilds has failed to fulfill multiple contractual obligations. The lease requires them to commence construction by the

end of the year and various preliminary tasks, such as zoning and land use applications, have not yet been completed. It also states that a federal court is likely to side with the environmental groups next month, requiring the NPS to perform required legal review and consultation before approving the release of the deed restrictions. The county commission will take a vote on the project on December 12. Source: [CBS News](#)

- *Fossil Butte National Monument* - *The Baltimore Sun* published [a photo collection](#) of work that the U.S. Army and Idaho National Laboratory have done to support the park in identifying rare fossils. They utilized a digital radiography and computed tomography unit to create composite X-ray images of two specimens: a hyaenodontid and *Hyopsodus wortmani* (both small prehistoric mammals). The U.S. Army typically uses this machinery to analyze recovered chemical munitions. Source: *The Baltimore Sun*
- *Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve* - *The Anchorage Daily News* published [an op-ed](#) by Ramzi Fawaz, the president and CEO of Ambler Metals, arguing that the environmental impact report for the Ambler Road project has inaccuracies and omissions that do not reflect the positive outcomes of the project. [Editor note: *The park is not mentioned in the op-ed, but the proposed road would cross the park.*] Source: *Anchorage Daily News*
- *Gateway National Recreation Area* - A temporary electrical vehicle charging station and energy storage unit was installed at Floyd Bennett Field. The project is part of a citywide pilot program and is supported by the Jamaica Bay-Rockaway Parks Conservancy and Resilient Energy Studio, a pilot program run by Newlab in partnership with the New York City Economic Development Corporation and Con Edison. Source: [Gateway National Recreation Area](#)
- *Gateway National Recreation Area* - On November 27, The White House stated that it "strongly opposes" legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives that would ban the use of federal funds to provide temporary shelter to undocumented immigrants on federal lands. The bill would also specifically revoke a lease between the federal government for portions of Floyd Bennett Field. The bill will be considered this week. Source: [NBC News](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park* - On November 28, the park announced that backcountry fees will be increased, starting on January 10, 2024. 30% of backcountry permits for the 2024 camping season will be available on *Recreation.gov* on January 10, and the other 70% will be available one day before the start of the trip as walk-up permits in-person at the park. Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#)
- *Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - The park has moved their backcountry permit reservations online to *Recreation.gov*. 75% of permits are now available up to 90

days in advance. The remaining 25% are available in-person at the park's backcountry office. Source: [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#)

- *Jimmy Carter National Historical Park* - On November 19, former First Lady Rosalynn Carter passed away at age 96. She will be buried in a plot located at the family home, which is in the park in an area closed to the public. She was actively involved in the park for many years. The internment will be private, but the public is welcome to line the family motorcade route from the funeral service at Maranatha Baptist Church to the park. Source: [E&E News](#)
- *John Muir National Historic Site* - The NPS published a Finding of No Significant Impact for the Mt. Wanda Comprehensive Site Management Plan. Source: [John Muir National Historic Site](#)
- *Joshua Tree National Park* - The *Los Angeles Times* published [an op-ed](#) by Mark Butler, a Coalition Member and retired 38-year employee of the NPS, in support of the establishment of Chuckwalla National Monument and extension of Joshua Tree, currently proposed in the U.S. House of Representatives. Source: *Los Angeles Times*
- *Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - The NPS published a Finding of No Significant Impact for the Sustainable Low Water Access Plan, which would maintain a mix of motorized and non-motorized lake access "to the degree financially feasible and cost-effective" in the event lake levels decline to 950 feet. Source: [Lake Mead National Recreation Area](#)
- *Manzanar National Historic Site* - Over Veterans Day weekend, a group of park staff and 37 volunteers cleared three acres of tumbleweed to restore the historic baseball field at the camp. The restoration is expected to be complete in early Summer 2024. The project is being funded by The Fund for People in Parks. Source: [Manzanar National Historic Site](#)
- *Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park* - On November 27, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, birth home closed for a major renovation project, including updates to fire suppression, electrical, and HVAC systems. The park will be closed through November 2025. The collections stored in the home will be stored off-site during the project. The Ebenezer Baptist Church and Fire Station No. 6 will remain open. Source: [Atlanta News First](#)
- *Minidoka National Historic Site* - The *Seattle Times* published [an article](#) with personal stories of people who attended the 2023 Minidoka Pilgrimage, including former incarcerated and descendants of former incarcerated. The article chronicles the different emotions around visiting the site and different ways families and individuals have coped with their experiences there. Source: *The Seattle Times*



- *Minidoka National Historic Site* - *HuffPost* published [an article](#) about the tension around the Lava Ridge wind project between the need for renewable energy projects and the "cultural erasure" of placing a wind farm within the historic footprint of the Minidoka WWII incarceration site (on Bureau of Land Management land adjacent to the NPS site). [Editor note: *The Coalition has actively opposed the wind farm.*] Source: *HuffPost*
- *Natchez Trace Parkway* - On November 17, the parkway released a series of [three safety videos](#) on the theme, "Drive Safe the Park Way." Source: [Natchez Trace Parkway](#)
- *National Mall and Memorial Parks* - On November 21, the NPS completed a major rehabilitation of the Rear Admiral Samuel Francis Dupont Memorial Fountain at Dupont Circle. Source: [DCist](#)
- *New River Gorge National Park and Preserve* - On January 1, the park will close the Canyon Rim Visitor Center to undertake an extensive renovation, including new exhibits, a new sales area, new auditorium seating, and other interior improvements. The new exhibits will include orientation to New River Gorge, as well as Gauley River National Recreation Area, and Bluestone National Scenic River. The renovation is expected to last through early March 2024. It is the first major upgrade to the facility since its opening in 1991. Source: [New River Gorge National Park and Preserve](#)
- *Obed Wild and Scenic River* - On November 28, the NPS announced that it will increase the nightly fee at Rock Creek Campground from \$10 to \$15, starting on January 1, 2024. Source: [Obed Wild and Scenic River](#)
- *Olympic National Park* - On November 27, the park temporarily closed the Queets, Salmon, and Quinault Rivers to sport fishing due to a low forecast of wild steelhead. Source: [Olympic National Park](#)
- *Piscataway Park* - The NPS is negotiating a long-term lease with a potential operator for the Fort Washington Marina, including the restaurant and boat repair shop. The park hopes to have a lease in place by February 1. Source: [Piscataway Park](#)
- *Point Reyes National Seashore* - The park has acquired a beach wheelchair for use at Drakes Beach, available free on request via an online reservation. The chair was funded by the Point Reyes National Seashore Association. Source: [Point Reyes National Seashore](#)
- *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* - On November 17, a group of environmental organizations filed an addendum to a lawsuit in federal court against the NPS for its efforts to plant giant sequoia seedlings in burn areas within

designated wilderness. The litigants argue that replanting the trees is unnecessary to the species' regeneration. The addendum is tacked onto a suit filed earlier in the year against the park's strategy of thinning and burning forests around sequoia groves in wilderness areas to reduce wildfire risk. The litigants include the John Muir Project, Wilderness Watch, Sequoia Forestkeeper, and the Tule River Conservancy. Source: [San Francisco Chronicle](#)

- *Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore* - The park has begun a project to remove several thousand cubic yards of spoil material from the Platte Point area that were placed on the beach and dunes while dredging the Platte River. The river was dredged from the 1960s through 2013 to allow boats to enter Lake Michigan at Platte Bay. Once spoils are removed, the site will be "reshaped" and planted. Some closures in the area and nearby parking will be enacted. The project is expected to wrap up by January 3, 2024. Source: [UpNorthLive](#), [National Park Service Planning, Environment & Public Comment](#) [Editor note: The two sources give different dates for the past dredging; the dates here are cited from the NPS PEPC site.]
- *The White House and President's Park* - On November 11, the NPS removed the National Christmas Tree at the park because it had developed needle cast, a fungal disease that causes needles to turn brown and fall off. A 40-foot Norway spruce was cut on the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia to be the new National Christmas Tree. It is the first cut Christmas tree to be used since the 1970s. The NPS and event partners will re-evaluate whether to use a cut tree or plant a new tree after this year's holiday season. The National Christmas Tree Lighting will take place on November 30 on the Ellipse. Source: [The White House and President's Park](#)
- *The White House and President's Park* - A group of U.S. senators and representatives from Kansas sent a letter to President Joe Biden and U.S. Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle requesting approval of an NPS proposal to add 631 names to the First Division Monument, which is located on the White House grounds. In 2018, Congress passed legislation that authorized the NPS to add names of First Division soldiers killed in action during Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn, and Operation Enduring Freedom. The First Infantry Division is based in Fort Riley and is the oldest and longest continuously serving active duty division in the U.S. Army. Source: [U.S. Senator Roger Marshall](#)
- *Theodore Roosevelt National Park* - A petition for the North Dakota Legislature to pass a resolution supporting the retainment of feral horses within the park has almost 4,000 signatures thus far. The NPS recently closed public scoping for a livestock plan in which one consideration is to remove the feral horses to protect native flora and fauna. The proposal has been controversial and garnered robust media and political attention. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)



- *Valles Caldera National Preserve* - The *Santa Fe New Mexican* published [an article](#) about cow trespass in the park, an issue that almost resulted in a lawsuit by environmental groups in 2022 and prompted the NPS and U.S. Forest Service to fix fencing along the northern border. Cattle continue to leave their permitted grazing areas due to gaps in fencing, possibly due to individuals cutting them. Source: *Santa Fe New Mexican*
- *Vicksburg National Military Park* - On November 18, the park hosted a rededication ceremony for the Rhode Island Memorial, which was damaged during two tornadoes in April 2019. The monument has been restored through support from the Friends of Vicksburg National Military Park and Campaign. Source: [Vicksburg National Military Park](#)
- *Virgin Islands National Park* - On November 16, the park held a public meeting to provide updates on two projects. The first is about a plan to install a plaque at Ram Head that commemorates the 1733 rebellion of enslaved people in St. John, as outlined in the 2022 Omnibus Public Law. The second is a plan to remove asbestos-containing materials from above-ground hurricane debris at Caneel Bay and legally dispose of them in a permitted facility in the continental U.S. The contractor was expected to start that project on November 28 and finish around the end of the year. Source: [Virgin Islands National Park](#)
- *Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve* - *National Parks Traveler* published [a short biography](#) of the life of George Flowers, a Black man who traveled from Mississippi to Alaska by rail and foot at the turn of the 20th century. He settled at Long Lake, which is now part of the park. Source: *National Parks Traveler*

## Personnel Changes

- *Harriet Tubman National Historical Park* - Brittany Lane was selected as the park's first lead interpretive park ranger. She has eight years of NPS experience, most recently as a ranger at Booker T Washington National Monument. She started her new role on November 19. Source: [Harriet Tubman National Historical Park, AuburnPub.com](#)
- *Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument* - Kathy Faz Garcia was selected as the new superintendent. Kathy has many years of NPS experience, most recently as the program manager of interpretation, education, and visitor services at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. She began her new role on October 12. Source: [Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument](#)

## 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**

- Paul Henderson, 67, passed away on November 17. Paul worked for the NPS for 39 years, including time at Craters of the Moon National Monument and as the "assistant superintendent" of the Southeast Utah Group, where he retired in 2014. Source: [Moab Sun News](#)
- Bertram "Bert" S. Herbert, 75, passed away on November 15. Bert worked for the NPS for many years as an archaeologist. He retired in 2015 at Gettysburg National Military Park. Source: [Franklin County Free Press](#)

## **Retired**

- Judy Forte, superintendent of Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, is retiring at the end of 2023. Source: [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)

## **In the News**

- Lindsay Robertson, a professor emeritus at the University of Oklahoma College of Law, presented on "Rights Protection in Indian Country" at the Oklahoma City Human Rights Commission meeting on November 28. Lindsay currently serves on the National Park System Advisory Board. Source: [KOKH/Fox25](#)
- On November 16, Jennifer Werner was announced as the Economic Development Administration's new chief financial officer and chief administrative officer. Jennifer previously worked as the deputy comptroller and budget officer for the National Park Service for a time. She most recently served as the director of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act Program Management Office at the Department of the Interior. Source: [U.S. Economic Development Administration](#)

## **Open for Comment**

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

- *National Park System* - Public comment is [open through January 16](#) on a draft Wilderness Stewardship Reference Manual governing the management of climbing activities in wilderness areas in the National Park System. The U.S. Forest Service also simultaneously [opened public comment through January 16](#) on its own climbing management directives. Source: [Missoulian](#), [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Anacostia Park* - Public comment is [open through December 1](#) on preliminary management concepts for the future of the park. Source: [Anacostia Park](#)

- *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](#)
- *Everglades National Park* - Public comment is [open through November 30](#) on a plan to make improvements to the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida Osceola Camp so that the infrastructure there does not flood under restoration efforts taking place through the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and Central Everglades Planning Project. Source: [Everglades National Park](#)
- *Everglades National Park* - Public comment is [open through December 12](#) on a plan to rehabilitate water and wastewater systems in the park. Source: [Everglades National Park](#)
- *Fire Island National Seashore* - Public comment is [open through December 4](#) on a driving regulation and management plan for off-road vehicles. Source: [News 12 Long Island](#)
- *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, 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](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park* - Public comment is [open through January 11](#) on a master plan for the management and use of Colter Bay. Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#)
- *Kaloko-Honokōhau National Historical Park* - Public comment is [open through December 23](#) on a draft Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [Big Island Video News](#)
- *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](#)
- *Pu'uohonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park* - Public comment is [open through December 23](#) on a draft Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [Big Island Video News](#)
- *Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site* - Public comment is [open through December 22](#) on a draft Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [Big Island Video News](#)
- *Rocky Mountain National Park* - Public comment is [open through December 14](#) on a day-use visitor access plan, including a timed entry reservation system. Source: [Estes Park News](#)
- *Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve* - Public comment has been [extended through December 10](#) on the Kennecott Operations and Management Plan for the NPS-owned portions of the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark. Source: [Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve](#)

### **Other Department of the Interior News**

- *Open comment on BLM temporary safety closure rules* - The Bureau of Land Management has opened [public comment through January 22](#) on two proposed rules related to temporary safety closures. One would allow the agency to utilize modern communication tools, rather than a *Federal Register* announcement, to notify the public. The other would allow closure and restriction orders to take immediate effect upon signature. Source: [Sierra Sun Times](#)
- *MOU banning cyanide bombs* - On November 22, the Bureau of Land Management signed a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service banning the use of M-44 devices, also known as cyanide bombs, across all of its public lands for a minimum of five years. The devices have typically been used by land managers to kill wildlife that prey on livestock, but have been known to kill non-targeted animals and domestic dogs. Source: [Buckrail](#), [Montana Free Press](#)
- *USFWS proposes killing owls to save owls* - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has [opened public comment through January 16](#) on a proposed strategy that would shoot about 400,000 invasive barred owls over a 30-year period to protect endangered northern and California spotted owls. Source: [The Bulletin](#)
- *\$140 million for America the Beautiful Challenge* - On November 14, the

Department of the Interior and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation announced \$141.3 million for 74 grants across 46 states, three U.S. territories, and 21 Tribal Nations, awarded through the America the Beautiful Challenge. Grants are focused on high-priority "landscape-level" restoration projects on public and private lands. Funding comes from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, other federal conservation programs, and private sources. The program is a collaborative partnership between the DOI, NFWF, the Departments of Agriculture and Defense, and Native Americans in Philanthropy. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

- *\$51 million for water resources* - On November 15, the Bureau of Reclamation announced \$51 million for 30 new Environmental Water Resource Projects in 11 states. Projects are locally-led and focused on water conservation, water management, and watershed restoration. Funding comes from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *\$50 million for water and energy efficiency* - On November 14, the Bureau of Reclamation announced \$50 million available through the Water and Energy Efficiency Grants Program, focused on water savings and renewable energy. Applications are due in February 2024. Funding comes from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *6th offshore wind project* - On November 21, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management announced approval of the Empire Wind project, located offshore of Long Island, New York, and Long Branch, New Jersey. It is the sixth commercial-scale offshore wind energy project approved under the Biden administration. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Environmental justice listening sessions* - On November 13, the Department of the Interior announced it is holding three listening sessions on November 30 and December 1, and [opening public comment through December 15](#), to inform its Environmental Justice Strategic Plan. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *DOI at GEO summit* - The week of November 13, Assistant Secretary for Insular and International Affairs at the Department of the Interior Carmen G. Cantor and U.S. Geological Survey Director David Applegate attended the intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations Ministerial Summit in Cape Town, South Africa. The summit focused on data-based approaches to climate change science and conservation. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

### **Congressional Actions**

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

## **Senate Actions**

**November 14** – The Committee on Environment and Public Works: Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife, concluded a hearing to examine challenges and opportunities to facilitate wildlife movement and improve migration corridors after receiving testimony from Charlton Bonham, California Department of Fish and Wildlife Director, Sacramento; Richard King, Wyoming Department of Fish and Game, Chief Game Warden, Cheyenne; and Madeleine West, Center for Public Lands, Washington, D.C.

**November 15** – By a vote of 87 yeas to 11 nays, the Senate passed H.R. 6363, making further continuing appropriations for Fiscal Year 2024, 60 Senators having voted in the affirmative, after agreeing to the motion to proceed to consideration of the bill. The bill extends funding for some federal agencies through January 19, 2024, and others through February 2, 2024. Funding for the National Park Service is extended through February 2. The bill now goes to the President to be signed into law.

**November 17 – November 24** – The Senate was in pro forma session for the Thanksgiving holidays.

## **House Actions**

**November 3 (Update since last *Coalition Report*)** – The House passed H.R. 4821, the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2024, making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies for the Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2024, and for other purposes, by a yeas-and-nays vote of 213 yeas to 203 nays. The House bill reduces funding for the National Park Service in FY24 by \$436 million or a 13% cut from FY23. The Senate committee-reported bill is \$18 million or a .52% reduction from FY 2023. Action by the full Senate on this bill is pending. *[Editor note: For more details of the House-passed appropriations for the National Park Service, see the [8/9/23 Coalition Report](#) under "House Actions" for July 19. The Report also shows funding levels proposed by the Senate appropriations committee for the National Park Service under "Senate Actions" for July 27.]*

**November 14** – The House agreed to suspend the rules and pass H.R. 6363, amended, making further continuing appropriations for Fiscal Year 2024, by a 2/3 yeas-and-nays vote of 336 yeas to 95 nays. The bill extends funding for some federal agencies through January 19, 2024, and through February 2, 2024, for other agencies. Funding for the National Park Service is extended through February 2.

**November 14** – The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing on the following:

- H.R. 4235, to direct the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to establish a wildfire technology testbed pilot program;



- H.R. 4353, to amend Public Law 91–378 to authorize activities relating to Civilian Conservation Centers;
- H.R. 4717, to amend the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 with respect to third-party contracts for wildfire hazard fuel removal, to amend the National Forest Management Act with respect to the threshold for advertised timber sales;
- H.R. 5582, to provide for white oak restoration;
- H.R. 5665, to require a comprehensive assessment of certain federal trails, campsites, boat docks, and outdoor recreation facilities to determine the accessibility options for individuals with disabilities;
- H.R. 6070, to amend the Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1999 to clarify the authority of Department of Defense to conduct certain military activities at the Nevada test and training range, and for other purposes; and legislation on the BIOCHAR Act.

Testimony was heard from Chairman Bruce Westerman, and Representatives Young Kim, Andrea Salinas, Doug Lamborn, Melanie Stansbury, and Mark Amodei; Dwayne McFall, Commissioner, District 3, Fremont County, Colorado; Jim Topoleski, Division Chief, Air and Wildland Division, San Bernardino County Fire Department, Redlands, California; Jeff Rupert, Director, Office of Wildland Fire, Department of the Interior; Jaelith Hall-Rivera, Deputy Chief, State, Private, and Tribal Forestry, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture; Edwin Oshiba, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Energy, Installations, and Environment, Department of the Air Force; and public witnesses.

**November 15** – The Committee on Natural Resources held a markup on several bills, including the following:

- H.R. 1727, the "Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Commission Extension Act."
- H.R. 5509, to modernize permitting systems at the Department of the Interior.

H.R. 1727 and H.R. 5509 were ordered reported, as amended.

**November 15** – The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure held a markup on several bills, including H.R. 1586, the "Forest Protection and Wildland Firefighter Safety Act of 2023." The bill authorizes the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to discharge a fire retardant, a chemical, or water for fire suppression, control, or prevention activities. No National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit shall be required for such activities or for similar activities conducted by the Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a state or political subdivision thereof, or a tribal government. H.R. 1586 was ordered reported, as amended.

**November 17 – November 24** – The House was in pro forma session for the Thanksgiving holidays.

## **Incidents**

*Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.*

### **Big Bend National Park**

#### **Missing hiker found alive**

A 25-year-old arrived to the park on November 9 and then did not show for their camping reservation that evening at Chisos Basin Campground. They were reported missing by their family when they did not return home from the trip. Their vehicle was found at the Lost Mine Trailhead. On November 15, a search began, including ground and air teams from the NPS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Texas Game Wardens, Los Diablos fire crew, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and Texas Department of Public Safety. On November 17, the individual was found "alive and talking," about a quarter mile below the summit of the Lost Mine Trail. The individual was extracted and transported to a local hospital. The Lost Mine Trailhead was closed during the search and has since reopened. Source: [Big Bend National Park, USA Today](#)

### **Blue Ridge Parkway**

#### **Fire closure**

On November 15, the parkway closed the section from Milepost 66.3 near Highway 501 to Milepost 85.9 at Virginia Route 43 to assist crews fighting the Matt's Creek Fire in the Jefferson National Forest. Source: [Blue Ridge Parkway](#)

### **Canyonlands National Park**

#### **Rockfall**

Over the weekend of November 25 and 26, precipitation and freeze-thaw cycles triggered a "sizable" rockfall along the White Rim Road, north of the Labyrinth campsites. Several boulders block the roadway. The road is temporarily closed to all traffic, including bicyclists and hikers, between the park boundary at Mineral Bottom and the Labyrinth Canyon. The closure will remain in effect until park staff can assess the stability of the cliffs, remove boulders, and stabilize the roadway. Source: [Canyonlands National Park](#)

### **Congaree National Park**

#### **Feral hogs**

A number of visitors observed feral hogs showing less fear toward humans, including blocking trails in popular areas. As a result, on November 15 and 16, the park culled 18 hogs. Culling hogs is a regular part of wildlife management in the park. Source: [The State](#)

### **Death Valley National Park**

#### **Rescue on closed road**

On November 18, two individuals on motorcycles bypassed a locked gate, concrete

barriers, and closure signs on Titus Canyon Road, which has been closed since August due to damage related to the record flood event. One of the individuals crashed, breaking a collarbone and sustaining other non-life-threatening injuries. The individuals used a satellite phone to call for help. A U.S. Navy helicopter responded from Naval Weapons Station China Lake and transported both individuals to Ridgecrest Regional Hospital. The individuals stated they were following a map app that showed the road was open, so they bypassed the closure. Charges are pending. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)

## **Gateway National Recreation Area**

### **Dismembered body found**

On November 17, a human body missing its arms and its head washed up on a beach near the Silver Gull Beach Club at Rockaway in the park. It is believed to be the body of a 44-year-old who was reported missing on November 4 while riding their bike to the Rockaways. The individual's bike was found "double locked" nearby, and they were known to enjoy swimming in the ocean. Law enforcement suspect the deceased individual drowned and was dismembered by sharp rocks, waves, and wildlife. The Rockaway Medical Examiner is conducting an autopsy to determine the cause of death and a DNA test is being conducted to confirm the individual's identity. Source: [New York Daily News](#)

## **Grand Canyon National Park**

### **Hiker fatality**

On November 16, a 65-year-old utilized a satellite device to alert emergency services of needing help on the Bright Angel Trail, about 1.5 miles north of Havasupai Gardens. The individual was attempting to hike from the South Rim to the Colorado River and back in one day. NPS rescuers responded. The individual was pronounced deceased on scene. An investigation will be done by the NPS and Coconino County Medical Examiner. Source: [USA Today](#)

## **Grand Teton National Park**

### **Balloon landing**

In July, a hot air balloon carrying six passengers landed in the park. The pilot said that they were trying to return to their launch point at Snake River Ranch, but an unexpected wind took the craft into the Jackson Hole Airport airspace. Airport staff directed the balloon to land immediately, which they did. The pilot was charged with a Class B misdemeanor for illegally landing in the park. The bench trial for the incident occurred on October 17 and additional arguments were filed on November 7. A verdict has not yet been announced. Source: [Cowboy State Daily](#)

## **Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

### **High winds, wildfires, arson**

On November 19, a small brush fire was discovered at Look Rock. The fire was put out by Blount County firefighters. The cause is under investigation.

On November 20, a wildfire was spotted near the intersection of Old Cades Cove Road and Rich Mountain Road. Aerial and ground crews responded to contain the blaze. As of that evening, the fire was estimated between five and seven acres. Local homes were put under "voluntary evacuation" early on the morning of November 21. The evacuation has since been lifted. The fire was considered 100% contained as of November 22. An initial investigation indicates that two fires were started in the area by an unknown arsonist. The park is looking for any information the public can provide.

Also on November 20, a construction crew witnessed an individual setting two fires to grass and brush on the road shoulder of Lakeview Drive. The individual was arrested and federal and state charges are pending. It is unclear whether the above fires were all related to the same individual.

On November 20, the park closed Elkmont and Cades Cove campgrounds and "most park roads" to protect visitors, staff, and park resources from high wind gusts and extreme fire risk. After assessing conditions and removing debris, the park reopened roads and campgrounds on November 21 and 22. Source: Great Smoky Mountains National Park ([11/20](#), [11/21](#), [11/22](#), [Knox News](#))

## **Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park**

### **Volcano activity closures**

On November 21, the park closed Chain of Craters Road at the intersection near Devastation parking lot, as well as the Devastation Trail and the Keanakāko'i Crater side of Kīlauea caldera, due to increased seismic activity in the upper East Rift Zone near Puhimau Crater on Kīlauea volcano. Seismic activity subsided that evening and the areas reopened on November 22. The Mauna Iki Trail and a section of the Ka'ū Desert Trail have been closed since October due to volcanic activity, and they remain closed. Source: Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park ([11/21](#), [11/22](#))

## **National Mall and Memorial Parks**

### **Beaver damages iconic cherry trees**

A beaver or group of beavers have damaged at least 15 cherry trees at the Washington Tidal Basin near the Jefferson Memorial. The NPS has stated they have no plans to remove beavers from the area and that some attrition of the basin's 1,700 trees occurs each year due to environmental factors. The sea wall on the south end of the basin is low and collapsing and is in the process of being replaced, starting in May 2024. This will prevent beavers from entering the area in the future. Source: [The Washington Post](#)

## **U.S. Park Police**

### **Officer-involved shooting**

On November 22, a U.S. Park Police officer contacted an individual for a suspected narcotics violation near 12th Street and Massachusetts Avenue NW. The suspect fled on foot, and the suspect and officer exchanged gun fire, resulting in both parties getting shot. Responding officers rendered aid to both the individual and officer, and they were both transported to nearby hospitals. The suspect was pronounced deceased at the hospital. An investigation is being conducted by the Metropolitan Police Department. Body cam footage will be released within 30 days. The officer is on paid administrative leave while the investigation is conducted, in alignment with U.S. Park Police policy. Source: [United States Park Police](#)

### **Yellowstone National Park**

#### **Chronic wasting disease**

On November 14, the park and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department announced that they have confirmed a positive detection of chronic wasting disease in the carcass of an adult mule deer buck found near Yellowstone Lake. The buck was outfitted with a GPS collar for population monitoring, and the collar alerted the WGFD that the animal died in mid-October. The NPS and WGFD will increase monitoring for chronic wasting disease throughout the park. Visitors are reminded to not touch or handle sick or dead wild animals. Source: [Yellowstone National Park](#)

### **Zion National Park**

#### **Rockfall**

On November 14, park staff received a report of rockfall near Weeping Rock. Upon arriving on scene, rangers encountered a dust cloud on the road. The dust cloud interrupted shuttle service for about an hour. No one was injured in the event. The Weeping Rock shuttle stop, parking area, and trail are closed until further risk analysis can be done. Source: [Zion National Park](#)

### **Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents**

- *Death Valley National Park* - On November 20, the park reopened the southeast entrance and the southern end of Badwater Road. On November 21, the park reopened roadside camping and backpacking on Echo Canyon Road, Hole in the Wall Road, Cottonwood Canyon Road, Marble Canyon Road, and Greenwater Valley Road. Deadman Pass and Gold Valley Roads also are open but have not been maintained. Gold Valley Road "may be challenging even for vehicles with 4x4 high clearance." The roads were closed due to damage sustained during record flash flooding in August. Flood recovery is ongoing by the NPS, Federal Highway Administration, Caltrans, and Inyo County. Source: *Death Valley National Park* ([11/20](#), [11/21](#))
- *Glacier National Park* - On November 13, a declaratory ruling was issued,

determining that the Flathead Conservation District has jurisdiction over the home built along McDonald Creek without the requisite 310 permit (see [3/22/23, 11/1/23 Coalition Reports](#)). The district's board had previously determined that the home must be removed and the stream bed remediated by April 1, 2024. A lawyer for the homeowners said they will appeal the decision. Source: [KPAX](#)

- *New River Gorge National Park and Preserve* - As of November 20, the Steep Valley Fire was 100% contained at 2,206 acres. A personal drone temporarily grounded helicopters involved in dropping water on the fire during the incident. On November 21, the closed section of the park reopened, but park officials have warned visitors to exhibit caution due to weakened hazard trees. Source: [MetroNews](#), [Inciweb](#), [New River Gorge National Park and Preserve](#)
- *Olympic National Park* - Hurricane Ridge Road reopened on November 23. It has been closed since October so that crews could demolish and remove the remainder of Hurricane Ridge Day Lodge, which burned in May (see [5/10/23 Coalition Report](#)). Source: [The Seattle Times](#)
- *Shenandoah National Park* - On November 22, the park reopened all trails in the Rapidan Camp area. The trails were closed due to the Quaker Run Fire. On November 17, the fire was declared 100% contained at 3,937 acres, with about 700 acres located in the park. Source: [Shenandoah National Park](#)

## [Acknowledgments](#)

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- Regular Correspondent: Don Hellmann, Chris Soller
- Issue Contributors: Mike Murray, Dan Sakura, Bill Walters

If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to [report@protectnps.org](mailto:report@protectnps.org).

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