



The Coalition Report

Wednesday, January 8, 2025

Coalition Actions

The Coalition is pleased to announce its [2024 awards](#):

- The recipient of this year's George B. Hartzog Jr. Award is Tom Olliff. Tom served as the NPS Intermountain Region Manager for Climate Change and Landscape Conservation, helping over 85 parks better understand climate science and manage climate impacts to park resources.
- Don Hellmann is the posthumous recipient of this year's 1872 Award. Under his leadership, the Coalition developed a vibrant and proactive legislative program. Although Don passed away in October 2024, his legacy lives on in our continued advocacy work on behalf of our national parks.

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.

- *Resource advising during wildfires* - *High Country News* published [an article](#) about the growing use of resource advisors during wildfires to help make fire management decisions that best protect natural and cultural resources. Source: *High Country News*
- *NPT "Year in Review"* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) about its top 2024 NPS stories. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- *NPF grants for inclusive storytelling* - On December 18, the National Park Foundation announced the award of \$4.6 million in Inclusive Storytelling grants. Source: [National Park Foundation](#)
- *Second NPS design book* - A new book, *Parks 2*, by Brian Kelley, was recently published

by Standards Manual. It is a collection of “the iconic designs that went into over 300 national park maps, brochures and other materials over more than 100 years,” and is a sequel to *Parks 1*. Source: [National Public Radio \(KEMC\)](#)

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Big Cypress National Preserve* - On December 30, the NPS released a Record of Decision for the park’s Backcountry Access Plan. Source: [WGCU](#)
- *Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area* - On December 26, the park announced the completion of a project repairing 16 miles of the Cumberland Valley Loop Horseback Riding Trail. The project included reestablishing the eroded trailhead, spreading aggregate, repairing water control measures and directional signage, and removing fallen trees. Source: [Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area](#)
- *Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park* - In August 2024, National Park Partners for Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and Moccasin Bend (NPP) purchased the historic Brown’s Tavern property and the site of the Battle of Brown’s Ferry. The purchase was made with support from the American Battlefield Trust and local businessman Bill Chapin. NPP is fundraising for restoration of the tavern and will continue to manage the property, including programming with local students and community groups. Source: [National Park Friends Alliance](#)
- *Congaree National Park* - On January 6, the park began a project to replace boardwalk sections B, D, and F. The project is being executed by McGary Construction, and is expected to take 18 months to complete. The project will be completed in segments, and detours may be in place throughout the project.
- *Cuyahoga Valley National Park* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) about the park’s success restoring Krejci Wetland from a Superfund site in the 1970s to a thriving ecosystem today. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- *Death Valley National Park* - The park, with support from specialists from the Historic Preservation Training Center, recently began a project to rehabilitate three historic Saline Valley Salt Tram towers. This includes pulling two of the leaning towers back to vertical, then stabilizing them with wooden braces. A third tower was disassembled and removed for more extensive repairs, and will be returned in the spring. This is the tower that was toppled by individuals that were attempting to use it as an anchor to get their car unstuck from mud in April 2024 (see [5/15/24](#) and [5/29/24 Coalition Reports](#)). Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)
- *Death Valley National Park* - The Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF) recently signed a five-year Memorandum of Agreement with the NPS to continue maintenance on the

Furnace Creek, Saline Valley (“Chicken Strip”), and Stovepipe Wells airstrips. RAF coordinates with pilot associations and local groups to arrange for volunteer labor and to raise funds, while the NPS provides the “drag device” to groom the Chicken Strip. RAF has partnered with the park for “nearly 16 years.” Source: [AVweb](#)

- *Denali National Park and Preserve* - On December 22, in a speech at Turning Point USA’s AmericaFest in Phoenix, Arizona, President-elect Donald Trump announced that he would like to revert the name of Denali to Mount McKinley. Source: [Anchorage Daily News](#)
- *Gateway National Recreation Area* - The NPS has opened two Requests for Proposals for a sports and events center and two golf facilities, respectively. Both are open through March 10. Source: [Gateway National Recreation Area](#)
- *Golden Gate National Recreation Area* - In Fall 2024, personnel from the park and Great Basin Institute began a restoration project to enhance coastal grasslands at the Montara Parcel of Rancho Corral de Tierra. The park has created [a storymap](#) about the project. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park* - On December 30, the Department of the Interior closed on the purchase of the 640-acre Kelly parcel from the State of Wyoming’s school trust land inventory for \$100 million. The purchase was funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Grand Teton National Park Foundation, and the National Park Foundation. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Indiana Dunes National Park* - The park recently began a project to renovate the historic Good Fellows Lodge. The project will include a full renovation of one building and partial renovation of two others, allowing the facility to become a meeting and conference space. It is expected to be complete in late 2025. The \$22 million project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act. Source: [Inside Indiana Business](#)
- *Lassen Volcanic National Park* - On December 23, 2024, the NPS signed a Finding of No Significant Impact for the Manzanita Lake Development Concept Plan and Environmental Assessment. Source: [Lassen Volcanic National Park](#)
- *Mammoth Cave National Park* - On January 6, the park began a project to rehabilitate the Heritage Trail, including better trail surfaces and the creation of a small amphitheater for interpretive programming. The project is expected to last nine months. During construction, the Heritage Trail, Old Guides Trail, and visitor center pedestrian bridge will remain closed. Source: [Mammoth Cave National Park](#)
- *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* - *Backpacker* published [an article](#) by Eric Blehm about a backcountry ascent of “Mount Morgenson,” an unofficially named peak in honor of ranger Randy Morgenson, who died while on patrol in the park in 1996. The piece touches on Randy’s life, as well as the lives of backcountry rangers, in general. Former rangers Rick Sanger and John Dittli, and rangers Rob and Laura Pilewski are featured in the article.

Eric Blehm is the author of *The Last Season*, about the life and disappearance of Randy Morgenson. Source: *Backpacker*

- *Tuzigoot National Monument* - On January 13, the park and a Flagstaff Historic Preservation Training Center Regional Support Team will begin a project to abate lead and asbestos on the historic wood windows in the visitor center. The project is expected to last through February 7. During that time, the park will be closed weekdays and will be open on weekends for walking the trails. The visitor center is expected to remain closed through late February to complete window and carpet replacement. Source: [Tuzigoot National Monument](#)
- *Weir Farm National Historical Park* - The park released a “2024 Year in Review” report about park visitation, programming, and park highlights. Source: [Weir Farm National Historical Park](#)
- *Wrangell - St. Elias National Park and Preserve* - New research by glaciologists from the NPS and several universities shows that *Sít’ Tlein*, also known as the Malaspina Glacier, is predicted to lose significant mass on its piedmont lobe over the next 50 years. This may affect the boundaries of the park as terrestrial glacier habitat is replaced by marine waters, which would “constitute the largest removal of park lands in the history of the National Park System.” Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - New research by the U.S. Geological Survey published in *Nature* shows that future magma eruptions are more likely to take place in the northeastern end of the Yellowstone Caldera. Source: [Science Alert](#)

Personnel Changes

- *Steamtown National Historic Site* - Jeremy Komasz was selected as the new superintendent. Jeremy has 28 years of Navy SEAL experience, and “nearly two decades” as a business development executive. He begins his new role on January 19. Source: [Steamtown National Historic Site](#)

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

- James “Jimmy” Earl Carter, Jr., 100, the 39th President of the United States, passed away on December 29, 2024. President Carter will be buried in his family plot, located at the Carter home, which is now a part of Jimmy Carter National Historical Park. President Carter signed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, which set aside over

43 million acres of national park land. Source: [Jimmy Carter National Historical Park](#)

- Cobey Allen Clark, 26, passed away on January 4. Cobey was a wrangler at Yellowstone National Park for four years. Source: [Legacy/Moody-Daniel Funeral Home](#)
- Jesse "Deen" Moore, 86, passed away on December 25, 2024. Deen was "instrumental" in installing the first phone system in Mammoth Cave National Park. Source: [Legacy/The Paducah](#)
- Phyllis Jo "P.J." Polumbo, 65, passed away on December 24, 2024. She worked for several years as a "national park naturalist in Mississippi." Source: [GoErie](#)
- Donald Keith Smith, 75, passed away on December 3. Donald worked for the NPS in maintenance at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area for many years. Source: [Legacy/WFMZ-RV 69 News](#), Randy Turner
- Barbara L. Zwalley, 89, passed away on December 15. She was a "land requisitioner" for the National Park Service, including time at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. Source: [Pocono Record](#), Randy Turner

Open for Comment

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

- *Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Curecanti National Recreation Area* - Public comment is [open through February 6](#) on a fire management plan for the two parks. Source: [Curecanti National Recreation Area](#)
- *Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area* - Public comment is [open through January 14](#) on a proposal to increase fees. Source: [Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area](#)
- *Dinosaur National Monument* - Public comment is [open through January 14](#) on a draft fire management plan for the park. Source: [Dinosaur National Monument](#)
- *Glen Echo Park* - Public comment is [open through January 24](#) on a management plan amendment focused on expanding programming, improving accessibility, exploring environmental sustainability, and addressing wayfinding and circulation issues. Source: [Glen Echo Park](#)
- *Grand Canyon National Park* - Public comment is [open through January 30](#) on a proposal to increase non-commercial river trip costs. Source: [Grand Canyon National Park](#)
- *National Capital Parks - East* - Public comment is [open through February 10](#) on design concepts to restore 10 acres of habitat at Kingman Lake within the Anacostia River Watershed. Source: [National Capital Parks - East](#)

- *National Trails System* - Public comment is [open through February 15](#) on a Buckeye National Scenic Trail Feasibility Study to evaluate potential inclusion in the National Trails System. Source: [National Park Service Midwest Region](#)

Other Department of the Interior News

- *Protections for Ruby Mountains* - On December 30, the Department of the Interior approved a petition to initiate a two-year trial withdrawal of a 264,000-acre area in the Ruby Mountains from oil, gas, and geothermal development while it considers a 20-year withdrawal. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Protections for Rapid Creek watershed* - On December 26, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland signed Public Land Order 7956, which finalizes a 20-year withdrawal of 20,510 acres of the Black Hills National Forest at the Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed from all mineral exploration and development and land sales. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

Congressional Actions

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

New Public Laws

Nothing to report. [*Editor note: There were several new bills signed into law after our January 3 Congressional news deadline for this Report, including the EXPLORE Act, Jackie Robinson Ballpark National Commemorative Site Act, and ACE Authorization Act, that we will report on in more depth in the 1/22/24 Coalition Report.*]

Senate and House Actions

As the Senate and House were either in Pro Forma Session or on recess during the last two weeks, there is nothing to report.

On January 3, both the Senate and the House were in session and convened the new 119th Congress. John Thune was elected Majority Leader of the Senate and Mike Johnson was re-elected Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Incidents

Listed alphabetically by park.

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park

Winter Storm Blair

On January 6, the park closed due to heavy snow and freezing rain from Winter Storm Blair. The park partially reopened on January 7, though the picnic area, Knob Creek, and all park trails remained closed. Source: Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park ([press release](#), [Facebook post](#))

Death Valley National Park

Vehicle fire

On December 29, a semi-truck driving down Towne Pass on CA-190 had its brakes overheat, igniting a fire. Fire personnel from the NPS and Beatty (NV) responded and extinguished the fire. The driver was cited for driving on a suspended license. This is the eighth vehicle fire in the park this year, six of which were caused by overheating brakes. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)

Yellowstone National Park

Snow coaches go off the road

On December 23, a concession snow coach containing only the driver went off the road near Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel. The driver was not hurt in the incident. On December 25, a concession snow coach containing a driver and seven passengers slipped off the same section of road. The snow coach landed on its right side and slid several feet down an embankment alongside the road. Passengers climbed out of the roof hatch to exit the vehicle. Emergency personnel responded to the scene and treated several passengers for minor injuries. Both incidents are under investigation by the NPS and Xanterra, the snow coach concessioner. Source: [Cowboy State Daily](#)

Yellowstone National Park

Montana sues over bison plan

On December 31, the State of Montana filed a lawsuit in federal court against the NPS, claiming it improperly executed its 2024-approved Environmental Impact Statement for bison management. It claims the NPS rescinded a previous requirement for brucellosis vaccination and increased herd numbers, saying they were “not materially different than current park practices”, despite a 2000-era agreement that included vaccination and a cap of 3,000 individuals. The State also argues that they were not properly given timely consultation opportunities during the planning process. Source: [Daily Montanan](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Death Valley National Park* - On January 6, the park closed Emigrant Canyon Road for road repairs. It was damaged by severe flash flooding during Hurricane Hilary in August 2023. A temporary fix was put in place in Spring 2024, which allowed the road to reopen. However, in order to better protect the road from future flooding, more extensive repairs

are needed. The project is being funded by the Federal Highway Administration's Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads program and the NPS' Disaster Supplemental funding. Emigrant Canyon Road will remain closed throughout construction, with no road access to the Wildrose area until March 2025. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)

- *Yellowstone National Park* - Further details have been released via court filings about the fatal shootout between an individual and park law enforcement in July 2024 (see [7/10/24](#) and [7/24/24 Coalition Reports](#)). The individual allegedly made inflammatory statements about immigrants, African Americans, and Jews during the incident, and the federal government has called the suspect's actions an act of terrorism. Source: [ABC News](#)

Acknowledgments

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- Editor: Katie Wallace
- Tech and Production Support: Steve Pittleman, Debbie Reed, Emily Thompson
- Regular Correspondent: Chris Soller
- Issue Contributors: Randy Turner, Bill Walters

If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to:

report@protectnps.org.

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

To receive a copy of this free publication, [join or support the Coalition](#). Any current, retired, or former-salaried (GS, Wage System, Seasonal, Temporary, or SES) National Park Service employee or volunteer who served under a signed volunteer agreement can join the Coalition. Coalition supporters who do not qualify under those criteria [may also join](#) and receive the newsletter.

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