



Coalition To Protect America's National Parks Weekly National Park System Report

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Incidents

Denali NP&P

Two Climbers Rescued From Kahiltna Glacier

Rangers responded to two concurrent mountaineering incidents starting in the early morning hours of Monday, June 5th. In addition to a routine medical evacuation, mountaineering rangers and guides rescued a critically injured climber in a labor-intensive, 14-hour crevasse rescue.

In the first incident, ranger Dan Corn and five mountaineering VIPs were descending to the Kahiltna Basecamp around 11:00 p.m. on Sunday when they encountered a sick solo climber at the bottom of Heartbreak Hill at 7,000 feet. VIP medic Elizabeth Keane performed a physical assessment and determined that Michael Metzler, 23, of Carnation, Washington, was suffering from an acute abdominal illness. The team provided pain medication and then assisted Metzler to the Kahiltna Basecamp.

Meanwhile, around 1:30 a.m., rangers were notified via radio that an un-rope climber had fallen 40 feet into a crevasse at 7,800 feet on the West Buttress route. The fall was witnessed and reported by Mountain Trip guide and co-owner Bill Allen, along with assistant guides John Karl Welter and Erin Laine. The three guides established that the fallen climber, 38-year-old Martin Takac of Trnava, Slovakia, was alive and responsive. They then attempted to rescue him from the narrow crevasse, but extraction proved difficult. Due to the force of the fall, Takac and his gear had wedged tightly into the ice in a contorted position with minimal room to excavate in the confined space.

Mountaineering rangers Chris Erickson and Frank Preston were flown from Talkeetna directly to the accident site at 4 a.m. by helicopter pilot Andy Hermansky. The pilot then flew to the Kahiltna Basecamp to shuttle Corn and VIPs Justin Fraser and Stefan Beattie back to the accident site. The five NPS rescuers then began taking individual turns down in the crevasse, slowly chipping away at the ice in order to first secure, and then free, the trapped climber.

While the crevasse extraction work continued at 7,800 feet, Hermansky evacuated Metzler and attendant VIP Keane back to the Talkeetna State Airport, where Metzler was transferred to a ground ambulance.

Bad weather initially kept the helicopter grounded. When flight conditions improved in the early afternoon, Hermansky returned to the crevasse at 7,800 feet along with ranger Mik Shain, VIP Thad Stavn, and VIP medic Jaime Anderson. The relief rescue crew brought a range of power tools to help in the ice extraction, including a pneumatic hammer-chisel on loan from the Talkeetna Volunteer Fire Department.

Around 3:30 p.m., Takac was finally freed from the ice and then raised out of the crevasse. The severely hypothermic and critically injured climber was immediately loaded into the park helicopter and flown to Fairbanks Memorial Hospital.

This was the second major crevasse rescue of the 2017 mountaineering season involving an un-rope climber. A low winter snow pack on the lower glacier resulted in numerous open crevasses that have often been difficult to detect. Climbers are being advised to always travel roped and with adequate flotation, such as snowshoes or skis.

As of this past Monday, there were 1,084 mountaineers registered to climb Denali in 2017, with 527 currently on the mountain. Out of the 386 climbers who have completed their expeditions, 122 reached the summit, equating to a summit percentage rate of 32%. For more information on the 2017 season, including statistics, weather observations, climbing conditions, and other news from the Alaska Range, read *Denali Dispatches* at www.nps.gov/dena/blogs/mountainblog.htm.

Source: [Press Release](#), Maureen Gualtieri, Denali NP&P.

Saguaro NP Hiker's Death Likely Caused By Heat, Dehydration

On the afternoon of Saturday, May 27th, Bradley Hughes of Geneva, Illinois, was found dead on the Gould Mine Trail within the park's Tucson Mountain District. Although the cause of death is not yet known, rangers found that Hughes' hydration bladder was empty and that he had no other water with him when he was found. Heat or dehydration may have been a factor.

High temperatures on Saturday were in the mid-90s, though it is not uncommon for temperatures to reach into the 100s during the months of May and June. The combination of very hot and very dry weather can quickly lead to dangerous situations.

Source: [Press Release](#), Andy Fisher/Ray O'Neil, Saguaro NP

Mount Rainier NP Climber Rescued From Crevasse On Mount Rainier

On Sunday, May 28th, rangers rescued a climber who fell into a crevasse while descending from the summit of Mount Rainier. The climber was retrieved from 12,300 feet elevation on the Emmons Glacier, located on the mountain's east side, by the park's exclusive-use A-Star B3 helicopter.

The park received word of the accident on Saturday afternoon via a 911 cell phone call. A party of three had climbed the mountain that morning and were descending by skis and snowboard when one member of the party, a 24-year-old woman, fell into a crevasse.

Six rescuers arrived by helicopter and employed rope rescue techniques to raise the injured but responsive climber 100 feet to the surface of the glacier by nightfall. Two rangers spent the night with her on the mountain while the others descended with her companions.

On Sunday morning, the A-Star helicopter returned to retrieve the injured climber, who was lifted from a 35-degree slope using short haul techniques and delivered to a waiting medical unit at White River Ranger Station around 11:00 a.m. The woman, who had unspecified pelvic and back injuries and head lacerations, was brought to Good Samaritan Hospital in Puyallup.

Source: [Press Release](#), Kevin Bacher, Mount Rainier NP.

Glen Canyon NRA Investigation Underway Into Possible Homicide-Suicide

Early on the morning of June 2nd, the park received a report of two bodies found near the Wahweap swimming beach parking area.

Rangers responded along with deputies from the Coconino and Kane County sheriffs' offices. They found the bodies of Matthew Franklin, 37, and Raelle Begay, 25, both of whom had evidently died of gunshot wounds. Both were from nearby Page, Arizona. Their deaths are being investigated as a possible homicide-suicide.

Due to the close proximity of the Utah/Arizona state line, this incident is being investigated through coordinated efforts of the Coconino County Sheriff's Office, Kane County Sheriff's Office, Coconino County Medical Examiner's Office, and the National Park Service.

Source: [Press Release](#), Mary Plumb, Glen Canyon NRA.

Great Smoky Mountains NP Man Dies In Fall From Top Of Waterfall

A 37-year-old man died this past Sunday after falling from the top of the Ramsey Cascades, a 100-foot-high park waterfall.

The man was hiking alone and was seen climbing across the top of the waterfall on Sunday afternoon before falling. Rangers responded immediately and determined that he'd died in the fall. The man's body was recovered on Monday.

Ramsey Cascades is the tallest waterfall in the park. The park warns visitors on its website not to climb to the top of the falls because several people have died doing so.

Source: [WSPD News](#).

Yellowstone NP Follow-up: Reward Increased For Info On Wolf Shooting

Yellowstone National Park is now offering a reward of up to \$25,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for shooting a wolf on the north side of the park near Gardiner, Montana. It's believed that the incident took place sometime between April 10th at 1 a.m. and April 11th at 2 p.m.

"Due to a tremendous desire by groups and individuals to donate for this reward, the park has established a Yellowstone Resource Rewards Fund through our charitable partner, Yellowstone Forever," said Superintendent Dan Wenk. "Up to \$25,000 from this fund will pay for the reward in this case if there is a conviction. Any money left over will be held for future resource violation cases in the park."

Anyone with information about this incident is asked to contact the park's Investigative Services Branch. Tips will be kept confidential:

- Calls – The ISB Tip Line, 888-653-0009
- Text – Send to 202-379-4761
- Online – Go to www.nps.gov/isb and click "Submit a Tip"
- Email – Send to nps_isb@nps.gov
- Facebook – Send a message via Facebook @InvestigativeServicesNPS
- Twitter – Send to @SpecialAgentNPS

Source: [Press Release](#), Morgan Warthin, Yellowstone NP.

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center Fire Activity Continues In Southeast

NIFC remains at Preparedness Level 2, the second of five preparedness levels.

Eleven new large fires were reported on Monday – six in Alaska, three in Idaho and one each in Arizona and Florida – bringing the national total of active large fires to 13. No large fires are burning in NPS areas.

As of yesterday, 25,540 fires had been reported nationwide, compared to the average year-to-date annual total of 27,656 fires for the period from 2006 to 2016. Those fires had burned 2,263,813 acres, almost twice the annual year-to-date average of 1,287,821 acres for the same period.

Source: NIFC Situation Report, plus individual park press releases.

Natural and Cultural Resources

Grand Canyon NP Comment Period On Initial Bison Herd Reduction EA Extended

The park has announced that it will extend the public comment period on the initial bison herd reduction environmental assessment, which evaluates management actions for bison on the North Rim. The EA will now be available for public review and comment through June 14th.

The comment period is being extended because the NPS Planning, Environmental, and Public Comment (PEPC) website, which is being used to accept electronic comments on this EA, was shutdown for maintenance for several days.

Interested parties can still submit comments electronically on the PEPC website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca_bison. Parties can also submit comments anytime through June 14th via mail to Grand Canyon National Park, PO Box 129, Attn: Bison Management Plan EA, Grand Canyon, AZ 86023.

The EA was prepared in collaboration with cooperating agencies — the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the InterTribal Buffalo Council.

The bison on the park's North Rim descended from animals brought to northern Arizona in 1906. In the 1990s, the bison herd, which the Arizona Game and Fish Department has managed in the House Rock Wildlife Area on the Kaibab National Forest since 1929, began venturing onto the North Rim of the park. Most of the bison herd now spends a majority of its time inside the park.

Biologists estimate that since the early 1990s the herd has grown from approximately 100 bison to between 400 to 600 bison that currently roam the Kaibab Plateau. Estimates also show that this bison herd could grow to nearly 800 bison in the next three years and as large as 1200 to 1500 animals within ten years if further management actions are not taken.

Given the current bison distribution, abundance, and density and the expected growth of this herd, the NPS is concerned about increased impacts on park resources, such as water, vegetation, soils, and archaeological sites, and on values such as visitor experience and wilderness character.

The purpose of the actions evaluated in this EA are to (1) quickly reduce bison population density in collaboration with other agencies with jurisdiction for bison management on the Kaibab Plateau, and (2) protect Grand Canyon National Park resources and values from the impacts of a steadily growing bison population.

Through the preferred alternative, the NPS, working together with cooperating agencies and partners, would reduce the bison herd to fewer than 200 animals using lethal culling with skilled volunteers and non-lethal culling through capture and removal. Considering the size of the current bison population, the proposed herd reduction could be achievable over a period of three to five years and is consistent with recommendations for a herd size that would reduce or prevent impacts on park resources.

Source: Press Release, Emily Davis, Grand Canyon NP. [More information.](#)

News From Around Washington

Reports from Capitol Hill, the White House, the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service and other related agencies and NGO's.

House of Representatives Oversight Hearings Held On Federal Natural Resource Laws

On May 24th, the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held the first of a series of oversight hearings “to examine the impacts of federal natural resources laws gone astray.” The panel focused on three laws in particular – the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), the Wilderness Act and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).

The tenor of the hearing can be gauged from a comment made by Raúl Labrador (R-ID), the subcommittee chairman, at the opening of the session: “For too long, federal agencies have been permitted to disregard congressional intent and implement the laws Congress passes, sometimes ignoring the law’s original purpose. We must look to curb abuse by the Executive Branch and reassert power over the unelected bureaucracy.”

The press release below contains more comments and observations and also includes a link to a website with the full testimony of each person who testified.

Source: [Press Release](#), House Committee on Natural Resources.

Department of the Interior Secretary Zinke Meets With Agriculture Secretary Perdue At NIFC

Secretary of the Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue met at NIFC last Friday for a tour and briefing on the upcoming wildfire season.

Following the events, the secretaries sent a memorandum to wildland fire leadership highlighting the importance of interdepartmental collaboration in protecting communities and managing public lands.

You can read the full memo by clicking on [this link](#).

Source: [Press Release](#), Department of the Interior.

Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service Deputy Director Appointed

Greg Sheehan has been selected to fill the newly-created position of deputy director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Prior to his appointment, Sheehan served as director of the Utah Division of Wildlife Service.

Before his tour with the State of Utah, Sheehan worked with the Air Force for six years as a civilian, where his focus was on correcting inefficiencies in cost and pricing between the Air Force and major DoD government contractors.

Sheehan is a lifelong hunter, angler, and aspiring wildlife photographer. He will begin in mid-June and will serve as the acting director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service until a director is nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

Source: [Press Release](#), Department of the Interior.

Park People, Friends and Allies

Nothing this week.

Other News And Notes

Systemwide National Park Service In The News

A selection of additional recent news stories pertaining either directly or indirectly to the operation of the National Park Service:

- **Canaveral NS** – The *Daytona Beach News-Journal* reports that the park's former chief ranger "has agreed to perform 50 hours of community service and write an apology letter to resolve a misdemeanor battery charge after he was accused of kissing and touching another ranger against her will." Submitted by member Dennis Burnett. [Full story](#).
- **National Monuments** – One of the more notable among the many newspaper stories about the national monuments controversy is a piece in the May 25th *Huffington Post* by Will Rogers, president of the Trust for Public Land, entitled "Secretary Zinke: Please Leave Our National Monuments Alone." Says Rogers: "Our public lands and waters help define who we are as a nation by telling the story of our historical, cultural, and natural heritage. This attempt to roll back protections for national monuments is unprecedented and terribly misguided." [Full story](#).
- **Big Bend NP** – On June 6th, *USA Today* ran a story about the impacts of the proposed border wall on Big Bend National Park and on the local reaction: "That possibility has provoked a wave of activism rarely seen in the sparsely populated desert towns on the park's edge." [Full story](#).

Systemwide Upcoming Events

Upcoming events and activities of potential interest to members of the Coalition:

- **June 12** – Due date for comments in the White House review of federal agencies, which solicits public “ideas and suggestions on how the government can be better organized to work for the American people.” [More](#).
- **June 14** – Due date for comments on Grand Canyon NP’s initial bison herd reduction environmental assessment.
- **July 10** – Due date for comments in DOI review of all national monuments but Bears Ears NM. [More](#).
- **August 4** – The Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Maine 2017 Conference will be held in Waterville, Maine, on the week of August 4th. [More](#).
- **August 3-4** – Along with the above, an Art and Land Conservation Symposium will be held on August 3rd and 4th at Colby College in Waterville, Maine.
- **October 18-22** – Ranger Rendezvous 40, Association of National Park Rangers, YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colorado. [More](#).

A Closing Observation

"There is nothing so American as our national parks. The scenery and wildlife are native. The fundamental idea behind the parks is native. It is, in brief, that the country belongs to the people, that it is in process of making for the enrichment of the lives of all of us. The parks stand as the outward symbol of this great human principle."

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, radio address from Two Medicine Chalet in Glacier National Park on August 5, 1934. [Click here](#) for the full text.

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The *Weekly National Park System Report* is a publication of The Coalition To Protect America’s National Parks. It is prepared by Coalition member Bill Halainen, former editor of the *NPS Morning Report*, and produced and disseminated by Coalition staffer Susannah Albert-Chandhok. Tips on and links to park-related stories are appreciated; please send to Bill at BHalainen@gmail.com.

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 the coalition. Any current, retired or former salaried (GS, wage grade, seasonal, temporary, or SES) employee of the National Park Service can join the Coalition. For more information, click on [this link](#).

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