



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

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Incidents

Minute Man National Historical Park Demonstration Held During Annual Patriot Day Commemoration

A group called Proud Boys New England held what it called a free-speech rally during the [annual Patriot Day celebration held in the park](#) on Monday, April 16th.

The rally was held in an enclosed area surrounded by metal partitions. Outside the barricade stood police officers and rangers from Concord, the National Park Service and the Northeastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council. Counter-protestors looked on from a distance, as they stood behind metal dividers, chanting slogans like “Nazis not welcome” and “Black lives matter.”

Proud Boys New England secured a permit from the National Park Service to hold the rally at one of the designated First Amendment areas inside the park. The event lasted for one hour during a steady rain. Police escorted the Proud Boys out of the park when the rally ended.

The Proud Boys New England Facebook page describes the group: “We are proud Western chauvinists who, like the founding fathers of New England, refuse to apologize for creating the modern World.”

The Southern Poverty Law Center’s website demurs: “Their disavowals of bigotry are belied by their actions: rank-and-file Proud Boys and leaders regularly spout white nationalist memes and maintain affiliations with known extremists. They are known for anti-Muslim and misogynistic rhetoric. Proud Boys have appeared alongside other hate groups at extremist gatherings like the ‘Unite the Right’ rally in Charlottesville.”

Source: [Concord Journal](#).

Haleakala National Park Man Found Guilty Of Assault In Park Campground

On April 18th, a federal jury found 44-year-old Matthew Berckmann guilty of two counts of assault while camping at Haleakala National Park.

Berckmann was found guilty of assault with a dangerous weapon and assault on his spouse by strangulation. He will be sentenced in August and faces up to 10 years in prison on each count.

The incident occurred at Hosmer Grove Campground last October. Berckmann threatened his wife with a large kitchen knife while pinning her to the ground by holding his forearm against her throat.

Two visitors saw the assault and called 911. A park ranger took Berckmann into custody with help from two Maui Police Department officers.

The investigation was led by the National Park Service, with assistance from the FBI and Maui Police Department.

Source: [Honolulu Star-Advertiser](#).

Joshua Tree National Park Search In Progress For Missing 76-Year-Old Man

A search has been mounted for David Sewell, 76, who was declared missing in the park this past Monday.

Sewell began hiking toward Johnny Lang Canyon from Quail Springs Road around 8:45 a.m. on Saturday. He left a note on his car saying that if he had not returned by Sunday, he would need assistance. Park staff found this note around 8 p.m. Saturday and launched the search for Sewell about 6:45 a.m. on Monday.

Sewell's daughter told the national park he had significant health problems that required medication and that he was declared legally blind. About 50 searchers and two K-9 teams are looking for Sewell on the ground, and the California Highway Patrol is providing air support.

Sewell is 5 feet, 8 inches tall with red hair and brown eyes. Anyone with information is encouraged to call the tip line at (888) 294-3666.

Source: [Hi-Desert Star](#).

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center NIFC Goes To Preparedness Level 2

Synopsis

The preparedness level has gone up a step to PL 2. Large fires in eight states burned nearly 390,000 acres last week. The Rhea Fire and the 34 Complex in Oklahoma accounted for most of those acres.

Big Cypress National Preserve

The Avian Complex includes the Buzzard, Vulture and Caracara Fires. Together, they have burned more than 7,193 acres and are 20% contained. An ICT3 (Thatcher) is managing the fires; 111 firefighters and overhead are currently assigned. Status:

- *Caracara Fire* – The fire, which was first reported on April 17th, has burned approximately one acre. Containment has reached 50 percent. The cause is under investigation.
- *Buzzard Fire* – The fire was reported on April 10th. It has burned approximately 7,193 acres and is at 20 percent containment. Isolated rain fell across the fire on Sunday. Firefighters have conducted firing operations in the southeastern portion of the fire area along 11 Mile Road to establish a firebreak and continue to focus on point protection. Helicopters equipped with water buckets are assisting with fire suppression. The fire has been moving primarily in a westerly direction towards the Oasis ORV trail. The cause of this fire has been identified as a lightning strike.
- *Vulture Fire* – The fire, which was first reported on April 10th, has been 90% contained. It was started by a lightning strike.

The priorities for these fires will remain visitor and firefighter safety. Ground and aviation personnel will continue to identify and protect values at risk. A [closure order](#) is in effect. Source: [InciWeb](#).

Active Incident Resource Commitments

Category	April 4th	April 11th	April 24th
Area Command Teams	0	0	0
NIMO Teams	0	0	0
Type 1 Teams	0	2	1
Type 2 Teams	0	2	2
Crews	9	39	29
Engines	149	234	251
Helicopters	8	17	15
Total FF/Overhead	876	1,802	1,878

Fires/Acreage

Category	2018 Total	2007-2017 Ave	2018 Variance
Year-to-Date Fires	16,105	17,907	- 1,802
Year-to-Date Acres	955,978	838,791	+ 117,187

Sources: National Interagency Fire Center; NICC Incident Management Situation Report.

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.

Department of the Interior

Order Issued Requiring Increase In Recreational Opportunities On DOI Lands

On April 18th, Secretary Zinke signed two secretarial orders “continuing his efforts to prioritize the Department of Interior’s recreation mission and increase access to public lands.” The following is the heart of the press release announcing the action – the rest of it consists of enthusiastic quotes by the secretary and various leaders of outdoor recreation organizations:

“Secretarial Order 3366 directs certain Interior bureaus to create and deliver plans to the Department within 90 days that focus on developing or expanding recreational opportunities on public lands and waterways. This order also directs bureau heads to designate one full-time employee charged to oversee recreational opportunities....

“Secretarial Order 3365 establishes the position of Senior National Advisor to the Secretary for Recreation to ensure deliberate and active coordination of recreational policy in the U.S. Department of the Interior. The position will be filled by Rick May, who currently serves as a Senior Advisor to the Secretary.

“May, who joined Interior in November 2017, is a retired U.S. Navy SEAL Captain and decorated veteran who served in the Iraq War. Since his departure from active duty in 2010, he has worked with wounded Veterans in various types of recreational activities, helping them to reintegrate back into mainstream America. May is a graduate of Sonoma State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Biology and he also holds a Master of Arts in Human Resource Management....

“The Secretarial Orders come on the heels of Secretary Zinke selecting members of the newly created ‘Made In America’ Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee. A primary charge to the committee is to

advise the Secretary on public-private partnerships across all public lands, with the goal of expanding access to and improving the infrastructure on public lands and waters.”

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

Capitol Hill Weekly Legislative Roundup

New Public Laws

Nothing to report.

Senate

On April 16th, the Senate passed S. Res. 468, designating May 19, 2018, as “Kids to Parks Day”.

On April 17th, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held an oversight hearing to examine deferred maintenance and operational needs of the National Park Service. Lena McDowall, deputy director for management and administration, National Park Service, was the witness for the department. Richard G. Ring, a member of the executive council of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, was also a witness. Dick's testimony noted that the needs of the National Park Service involve more than addressing the maintenance backlog, which can only be met through Congress providing sufficient annual appropriations for operations, land acquisition, and grant and technical assistance programs. Additionally, Congress needs to be concerned about unnecessary actions being taken within the department that impact parks and programs, such as the establishment of a political screening process for grants and cooperative agreements and the censoring of scientific documents removing any mention of humans' role in climate change. [Dick's testimony can be read at this link](#) or in the “Coalition News and Activities” section below.

On April 19th, the Senate passed S. Res. 478, designating the week of April 21, 2018, through April 29, 2018, as “National Park Week”.

House

On April 16th, the House passed the following:

- H.R. 3607, to authorize the secretary of the interior to establish fees for medical services provided in units of the National Park System. Under current law, fees collected for medical services provided to visitors and park employees in about a dozen remote western parks must be returned to the treasury. This legislation establishes a fund within the treasury for these fees, which can then be used at the parks where they are collected. However, the fees will still have to be appropriated by Congress each year, making this legislation less than optimal for the parks involved.
- H.R. 3961, to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate segments of the Kissimmee River and its tributaries in the State of Florida for study for potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.
- H.R. 443, to direct the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of designating the James K. Polk Home in Columbia, Tennessee, as a unit of the National Park System
- S. 167, to designate a National Memorial to Fallen Educators at the National Teachers Hall of Fame in Emporia, KS. The bill passed by a vote of 384 yeas to 1 nay. The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law.

On April 18th, the Committee on Natural Resources approved, among other bills, the following:

- H.R. 1026, to revise the authorized route of the North Country National Scenic Trail to extend it to the Appalachian Trail in Vermont and to modify the route in northeastern Minnesota.

- H.R. 1037, to authorize the National Emergency Medical Services Memorial Foundation to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs.
- H.R. 2991, to establish the Susquehanna National Heritage Area in the State of Pennsylvania.
- H.R. 3400, the Recreation Not Red-Tape Act. Among other provisions, the bill would:
 - ✓ allow for the sale of federal land recreation passes along with the sale of state land recreation passes in one transaction;
 - ✓ require federal land management agencies to sell on-line entrance passes and to allow on-line payment of standard amenity fees;
 - ✓ encourage the federal land management agencies to work with the Defense and Veteran Affairs departments to ensure service members and veterans have access to outdoor recreation and to allow them up to 7 days of service to participate in a program of environmental stewardship or guided outdoor recreation;
 - ✓ encourage federal land management agencies to identify ways to extend the recreation seasons in their land management planning processes;
 - ✓ require the development of an interagency trail management plan across federal agencies to ensure uniform management and maintenance;
 - ✓ codify and expand the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) program. The Public Lands Corps would be renamed as the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps and would expand participation to include veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces in the corps. It would also increase the number of federal agencies authorized to use the program, and would authorize a program specifically for Indian youth to carry out projects on tribal lands.
 - ✓ establish the “Every Kid Outdoors” program, which provides free access for fourth-grade students to federal lands and waters, for a period of seven years. The Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture are directed to issue an annual pass to participating students for access to federal lands and waters where entrance, standard amenity, or day use fees are charged. Each Secretary may collaborate with State park systems to implement a complementary Every Kid Outdoor State Park pass.
- H.R. 4069, to amend the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to clarify the treatment of authentic Alaska Native articles of handicraft containing nonedible migratory bird parts.

Source: Don Hellmann, former assistant director, legislative and congressional affairs for the National Park Service.

Park People, Friends and Allies

NPS Alumni Passing Of Ruth Kirk

Ruth Kirk, who authored more than 35 books on the outdoors, including guides to Mount Rainier, the Olympic Peninsula, Crater Lake and Death Valley, died on Thursday, April 19th, in Seattle. She was 92. The follow is excerpted from her obituary in the *Seattle Times*:

“Kirk was born in 1925 in Los Angeles and married Louis Kirk in 1943. She embraced the outdoors while her husband was a ranger and worked at national parks in South Dakota, North Dakota, California and Washington. The couple and their two sons, Bruce and Wayne, lived in the parks...

“Her first book, published in 1956, was *Exploring Death Valley*, which was illustrated with photographs by Ansel Adams.

“In the 1950s, the Kirks moved to Mount Rainier National Park, while her husband was a ranger. Kirk climbed the 14,411-foot volcano several times and wrote *Sunrise to Paradise: The Story of Mount Rainier National Park* in 1999...

“Her husband died in 1992 and she moved to Olympia. She married archaeologist Richard Daugherty in 2007 at the Makah Tribe reservation. She and Daugherty also wrote *Hunters of the Whale* about a buried Makah Indian village and the excavation that recovered 55,000 artifacts, according to *High Country News*.

“In 2013, Kirk said in *High Country News* that she wrote guidebooks because ‘I take very seriously helping people understand (what they’re looking at). I think if we understand the rhythms and realities of this stage that we dance our lives on, it’s a happier dance.’

“She is survived by her son, Wayne.

“She earned the John Burroughs Medal for natural-history writing and a National Book Award nomination, states the University of Washington. She also received recognition for her writing from both the New York Academy of Sciences and the American Library Association.”

Source: [Seattle Times](#).

Coalition News and Activities

News and actions taken by CPANP on behalf of the National Park Service and National Park System, plus news about members of the Coalition:

CPANP’s Dick Ring Testifies Before Senate Committee On NPS Needs – Dick Ring, member of the Coalition’s executive board, testified on April 17th at a Senate hearing to examine the Service’s deferred maintenance and operation needs. The hearing was held before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. The entirety of Dick’s statement, save for his introduction, follows:

In 2016, during the National Park Service’s Centennial year, a record-breaking 324 million people visited the 417 national park sites throughout our nation. The visitation numbers for 2017 were almost as high, which reflects the importance of these natural, cultural, and historic places to the people of our country. Along with the parks, the National Park Service touches the lives of even more of our citizens through a number of grant and technical assistance programs, which assist in the preservation of our nation’s natural, cultural, and historic resources in a partnership between the National Park Service and hundreds of individuals and organizations throughout the country.

This work would not be possible without regular, annual appropriations from Congress to support over 23,000 employees and 400,000 volunteers who are dedicated to the enjoyment of these special places by the American public. The Coalition was extremely pleased that Congress rejected the large budget cuts presented by the administration in its FY 18 budget, and instead, produced a bipartisan Department of the Interior Appropriations Act as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, which provided \$3.2 billion for NPS, which is \$270 million over the current

FY 2017/Continuing Resolution (CR) levels, and \$648 million over the president's request. This funding level provided NPS with fixed costs, which helps ensure that the funding increases will not be swallowed up by annual recurring costs beyond the control of NPS.

The coalition was particularly pleased to see a boost of \$18 million for historic preservation programs, which will help toward the revitalization of historic neighborhoods and the protection of a number of significant historic structures throughout our nation. Additionally, Congress appropriated an additional \$150 million to the construction account over the FY 2017/CR levels, with the increased money to help address the deferred maintenance backlog. We appreciate the role that the chairman of this committee played in providing this increased funding in her other position as chairman of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, with the support of her colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have been long-time supporters of the national parks.

Much has been written and discussed about the maintenance backlog of the national park service, which is estimated by the National Park Service to be approximately \$11.6 billion in FY 2017. In fact, we sometimes fear that the deferred maintenance backlog is the only issue facing the NPS that gets attention from members of Congress and the public. If we truly want to protect these important natural, historic, and cultural resources under the care of the Park Service, and provide for a worthwhile visitor experience, adequate levels of annual appropriations are needed. It does no good for the visitor experience to reduce funding in other parts of the park and program budget in order to address the maintenance backlog. Funding for both is needed and one cannot be sacrificed at the expense of the other.

Even with the increased appropriations provided in the recent Consolidated Appropriations Act, parks continue to face challenges. For example, among the various park units found in the metropolitan area of Boston, MA, several of them are only open seasonally due to a lack of appropriations and staffing. The John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site, the Longfellow House-Washington Headquarters National Historic Site, and the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site are closed for several months in the winter with the public being unable to visit these areas. Along with the lack of appropriations, the recent crackdown of the Office of Personnel Management on the number of hours worked by seasonal employees has led the parks to be unable to hire the needed seasonal staff for the full period that the site is open and has delayed timely hiring because of the convoluted hiring process that requires sign-off by the Washington office.

And there are a number of grant and technical assistance programs that continue to be shortchanged every time the administration presents a new budget to Congress. NPS continues to have a large backlog in land acquisition. At the end of 2016, this number was \$2.1 billion. These are lands within current park boundaries that have been identified in land protection plans that represent the minimum interest necessary to protect the area and the resources within the park. This administration has adopted a freeze-the-footprint goal, which results in key properties not being acquired. And this continues to go on even though \$900 million a year is being placed in the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) solely for land acquisition purposes.

In a similar manner, a number of historic structures across the country are in danger of being lost because of inadequate appropriations from the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF). As required by law, \$150 million a year goes into the fund, but appropriations have not kept pace with the need. The increased money Congress provided in FY 2018, is appreciated, but the need is much greater.

Likewise, the NPS relies on partnerships with a number of groups and organizations, including educational institutions to carry out cooperative agreements, technical assistance, and grant programs. Unfortunately, grant programs are constantly the target for reductions or being defunded during the annual budget request sent to Congress, which contributes to uncertainty among many long-standing partners.

But funding alone is not the only challenge the NPS these programs are facing. These partnerships are now being threatened by a new process established within the Department of the Interior that creates an unnecessary and unwise layer of political screening of all grants and cooperative agreements. It appears that the goal of imposing these new review requirements is not intended to ensure the wise use of our federal dollars, but rather as a way of imposing a political litmus test on those applying for federal grants or those entering into a cooperative agreement with the federal government. The impact of these new requirements remains in question but we are worried that they will contribute toward a decline in the effectiveness of the operation of these programs within the Park Service.

Further, we were dismayed to hear recently that the department is engaging in censorship of scientific documents to remove any mention of humans' role in climate change, despite the secretary denying before this committee recently that there was censorship taking place. It is no secret that this administration is in denial about the impact of climate change and seems to want to put its head in the sand on ways to address this issue. For the Park Service; however, the issue is very real as there are 118 units of the park system that are along the coasts of this country and for which the impact of

climate change remains at the forefront. If NPS is forced to delay or ignore its potential impact, our country stands to lose a number of important natural, cultural, and historic resources along the way.

We urge the committee not to lose sight of these issues while making an effort to address the deferred maintenance backlog as they all contribute toward the health of our parks, the visitor experience that is provided, and the way the NPS interacts with the communities it works in every day.

Additionally, the coalition believes it is important to recognize the efforts NPS has made over the past several years to bring more resources to our parks and the deferred maintenance backlog. For example, the NPS undertook the Call to Action, carrying out hundreds of projects and programs to engage youth, invest in the visitor experience, increase volunteerism, support local communities, and preserve natural and cultural resources. Several projects and programs used non-federal resources to accomplish park objectives, thus saving taxpayer dollars.

NPS also launched the Find Your Park campaign for its Centennial, which led to increased visitation and increased fee revenue, concession sales, and gift shop purchases. Additionally, the National Park Foundation undertook a capital campaign, raising over \$500 million to benefit the parks.

The Park Service also matched each of the amounts Congress provided as Centennial Challenge funding over the past several years and permanently enshrined this matching program through the Challenge Fund established as part of the National Park Service Centennial Act. Finally, NPS brought greater order to its fee program by standardizing the tiers of fees across the parks so that similar-sized parks charged similar fees. This revenue, along with private money generated through the Challenge Fund, is focused on addressing the deferred maintenance backlog, along with facilities that provide visitor services, and trail maintenance. We believe the fee program existing within NPS is a much more reasonable for ensuring parks are accessible to all people instead of the large fee increases proposed by the administration at a number of our largest parks. We are pleased this idea has been abandoned after the large public outcry with more modest increases in its place.

While the increased appropriations for construction in the FY 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act will help make a dent in the deferred maintenance backlog, funding remains inadequate to reduce the backlog in a meaningful way. With a backlog of \$11.6 billion, more needs to be done. Half of this backlog is the result of thousands of miles of roads, bridges, and other supporting structures that are in dire need of repair. The Arlington Memorial Bridge is just one example of this backlog.

And it is this large group of assets, with many being decades old, which has contributed to the rising maintenance backlog. With more visitors coming to the parks, this only puts additional stress on the structures found in the parks.

Unfortunately, the Park Service continues to add to the backlog of maintenance as there is inadequate funding available to address it. Superintendents of parks are often faced with bad choices as fixing park buildings and other assets will mean nothing if they do not have the annual funding that is needed to maintain the structures. Over the last several years, annual maintenance funds have not kept up, resulting in further backsliding in addressing the backlog. There are projects ready to go all across the country. The only thing lacking is funding. Completing these projects with an infusion of funding could make an immediate and tangible difference in the parks.

The National Park Service had previously estimated in its FY 2017 budget that \$400 million a year was needed to restore and maintain in good condition all of its highest-priority non-transportation assets within ten years. Because it is unlikely that annual appropriations will increase by this much, the National Park Service needs a dedicated source of funding to address the backlog. Similar to the structure of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Historic Preservation Fund, the coalition believes a dedicated source of revenue for a maintenance backlog fund is required. There will be no reduction in the backlog if the revenue is unreliable from year to year. And this revenue must be in addition to current annual appropriations and not supplant annual funding.

Various proposals are now pending in the Senate and House and this appears to be an issue that members of both parties can get behind to find a solution. We are concerned about some of the

pending proposals, including one being promoted by the administration, which seem to rely on opening up as many public lands as possible to oil and gas drilling in order to generate revenues to go toward a maintenance backlog fund. This appears to be a myopic view by this administration toward nearly every issue that comes up. We rarely, if ever, hear of the importance of preserving the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the national parks. On the contrary, developing energy, regardless of the impact on the existing public lands seems to be the only priority.

We understand the committee will be looking at specific bills to address the maintenance backlog at a later date. We will be glad to continue to work with you during this process in order to help ensure a dedicated source of revenue to move the Park Service ahead in addressing the backlog.

Other CPANP news, including Coalition actions, can be read about in the April edition of [Coalition Briefs](#).

Other Reports and Releases

A brief summary of other recent news stories, web postings and agency press releases pertaining to the federal government, the administration, DOI, the National Park Service, public lands and the environment.

Government and Administration

Change In Interpretation Of Hiring Rules Hits Home With NPS Seasonals – *Government Executive* ran a story entitled “Many Lose Jobs After National Park Service Changes Interpretation of Seasonal Work Rule” on April 20th. Here’s what’s going on: “In 1994, the Office of Personnel Management established a rule that agency ‘subdivisions’ can appoint and rehire employees in seasonal jobs, provided they worked for less than 1,040 hours during a given service year. For years, the Park Service interpreted this rule to be a cap on seasonal workers’ employment at an individual park, but allowed and encouraged those employees to effectively double up: work at one park for the summer months, and then at a different park during the winter. But this spring, NPS has apparently changed that policy, interpreting the 1,040 hour-per-year rule to be Park Service-wide. Regional offices have been enforcing the change, which has not been formally announced, by stripping workers of their rehire status, which allows managers to bring back past seasonal workers without going through the competitive hiring process. Enforcement has also been inconsistent and retroactive, advocates for the affected workers said.” No word yet on how – or if – this problem will be solved. Source: [Government Executive](#).

Zinke Watch – Here’s the latest on Secretary Zinke and his merry band at DOI:

- *Zinke and the Alleged Avocation* – CNN ran an article on April 17th about Secretary Zinke’s alleged past career as a geologist. “Since becoming leader of the 70,000-employee agency,” says the report, “Zinke has suggested that he was a geologist or former geologist at least 40 times in public settings, including many under oath before Congress...Zinke, however, has never held a job as a geologist.” He majored in geology at the University of Oregon and got a degree in that field, but has said in his autobiography that he selected geology by “closing my eyes and randomly pointing to a major from the academic catalog.” Professional geologists demur regarding his claim: “Several geologists who CNN has spoken with have flagged his comments as disingenuous, saying that someone with a 34-year-old degree who never worked in the field is not considered a geologist.” Source: [CNN](#).
- *Zinke and the Secretarial Banners* – You’ll recall that the secretary has arranged to have his own flag flown above the Department of the Interior whenever he’s in town, which has drawn a lot of humorous and/or critical comments. They might have been more pronounced if the flags had appeared as planned. According to an article in *The Hill*, “the Interior Department took estimates for setting up four flag poles outside its main building in Washington, D.C., to fly personal flags for Secretary Ryan Zinke at a cost as high as \$200,000, according to internal

emails released [on April 16th] by the agency.” The department ultimately decided against installing the new poles, says *The Hill*, choosing to instead use three smaller, existing poles on top of its building. Source: [The Hill](#).

- *BFF: Zinke and Big Energy* – A *Huffington Post* headline from its April 16th edition – “Ryan Zinke oversees the most business-friendly Interior Department in recent memory” – will hardly come as a surprise to anyone keeping up with DOI actions and decisions these days, but the article further expands on what we know about the secretary’s links with extractive industries. It concerns the strong link between the Western Energy Alliance and Zinke’s Onshore Work Group, charged with recommending how Zinke ought to regulate federal lands available for fossil fuel development – the president of the former is the chair of the latter. Previously, Zinke created a wildlife conservation advisory group dominated by people with links to trophy hunting and a public lands advisory group with connections to the outdoor recreation industry. What we’re seeing, says John DeCicco, a University of Michigan research professor who has worked for the Environmental Defense Fund, is a situation in which “certain powerful interests, moneyed interests...have the ear of policymakers who are running roughshod over due process and running roughshod over important checks and balances that are supposed to be there.” Source: [Huffington Post](#).
- *Zinke and the House on Pennsylvania Avenue* – “Over the most recent congressional recess, a conservative political group ran a campaign-style TV advertisement in Washington (DC) that is adding to the speculation that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has loftier political aspirations,” reports the *Huffington Post*. The American Economic Freedom Alliance, a secretive political nonprofit with ties to Vice President Mike Pence, paid for the ads, which ran only in the Washington area. One conservation group lobbyist postulates that “the ad was aimed at helping to ‘get Zinke’s name in the public sphere’ ahead of a future candidacy,” possibly for president and possibly for governor of Montana. Source: [Huffington Post](#).
- *Zinke’s Staffers, Part III* – Over the last few issues, we’ve had the opportunity to highlight the various deeds and misdeeds of the secretary’s staff and have another name to add to the list – this time not for doing something outrageous or illegal, but for demonstrating the axe man roll that Zinke’s staffers take in anti-environmental decision making. “A top Interior Department employee with ties to the energy industry took credit for delaying the endangered species designation for a species of mussel, internal emails between the official and an industry trade group show,” reports *The Hill*. “Two weeks after Vincent DeVito and Secretary Ryan Zinke met with officials with the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA), an industry trade group, DeVito began corresponding with an IPAA staffer about delaying the listing of the species, according to internal emails...” The result was a six-month delay in the designation. “DeVito had earlier made no secret of his desire to foster a better environment for energy. At a speech last summer at Americans for Prosperity, which is backed by GOP mega-donors Charles and David Koch, DeVito described his role at Interior as ‘the office of energy dominance.’” DeVito subsequently added the following: “The war on American energy is over...and, matter-of-fact, if there is a war, we’re going to win it and we’re going full bore.” [The Hill](#).

National Park System

New Park Added To System – “The oldest settlement in the state established by Europeans” will become a national historic park, reports *Missouri Life*. Ste. Genevieve was established in 1735 by French-Canadian colonists. The bill that made Ste. Genevieve an NHP was signed into law on March 23rd after repeated past efforts to get the historic town recognized failed. The Felix Valle House in Ste. Genevieve is already a state historic site managed by the Department of National Resources, and Ste. Genevieve has been a national historic landmark since 1960. Ste. Genevieve will be the seventh site in Missouri managed by the National Park Service, not including national historic trails. The others include the Gateway Arch, Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site, and George Washington Carver National Monument. It becomes the 418th site in the National Park System. Source: [Missouri Life](#).

Sundry Actions and Updates – Here, in brief, are additional reports on parks, culled either from park press releases or from newspapers:

- *Yellowstone NP* – Mountain Journal has an article about bison culling entitled “Killing The Yellowstone Icons They Are Charged To Protect,” and subtitled “Park Superintendent Dan Wenk talks about how his rangers loathe having to destroy bison to appease the Montana Department of Livestock.” They do so, as you’ll recall, due to the possibility that bison, as carriers of the bovine disease brucellosis, represent a “grave and imminent threat” to private cattle herds in the state. “In summer 2017, the National Academies of Sciences released its long-awaited report showing that, in fact, bison represent a miniscule menace of transmitting disease and that the big risk is wild, free-ranging elk that also carry it,” reports the magazine. “Every single one of the cases involve brucellosis being passed from wildlife to domestic cattle have involved elk. Still, over 11,000 iconic Yellowstone bison, survivors of a near brush with species extinction at the end of the 19th century, have been shot or sent to slaughter.” It concludes with a video of Dan Wenk talking about how his employees feel about the operation – in short, “heartsick.” Source: [Mountain Journal](#).
- *Gates of the Arctic NP&P* – A new book has been published on the park – *Gates of the Arctic National Park: Twelve Years of Wilderness Exploration* by Joe Wilkins. Here’s an excerpt from the short review in High Country News: “Wilkins recounts his adventures in America’s second-largest national park. His exploits read like a conversation with a well-adventured friend, equal parts memoir and informative guide. From encounters with charging bears to witnessing the seasonal caribou migration, Wilkins gives readers a sense of what it’s like to be immersed in a remote wilderness. Insider knowledge and logistics are sprinkled throughout, giving a sense of the preparation needed to survive adventures like his. Wilkins’ accompanying photographs capture the park’s unique glacier-carved valleys and scenic rivers...” Source: [High Country News](#).
- *Stonewall NM* – The National Park Service is asking New Yorkers to explain what the Stonewall means to them as it develops its mission for the new national monument. The park sits across the street from the Stonewall Inn, 53 Christopher St., home of the 1969 uprisings in response to a police raid on the LGBT bar. The agency is in the midst of creating a "foundation document" that, once completed, will help determine the core of the national monument's mission and its ideal visitor experience. Comments are being accepted through April 30th at [the park’s PEPC site](#). Source: [West Village Patch](#).
- *Yosemite NP* – The park is launching a pilot program to address traffic congestion. The program will be tested on the Highway 140 corridor between Thursday, April 26th, and Sunday, April 29th, and from Thursday, May 3rd, to Sunday, May 6th. This pilot is an initiative to test a new way to pace and send vehicles to the Arch Rock Entrance Station, improving visitor safety and access while enhancing the overall visitor experience on busy traffic days. Working with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the California Highway Patrol (CHP), vehicles entering the park via Highway 140 will be queued approximately five miles east of the Ferguson Slide Bridges in El Portal. Vehicles will be incrementally sent to the entrance station to allow for minimal delays at the Arch Rock Entrance Station. This will greatly reduce the number of vehicles stopped in a rockfall zone along El Portal Road, enhancing visitor safety and access to the park. Source: [Yosemite National Park](#).
- *Blue Ridge Parkway* – The Linn Cove Viaduct was closed for surface repaving and bridge maintenance on March 1st and will remain closed through May 24th. Crews are removing and replacing the asphalt pavement, waterproofing membrane and joints on the bridge and repairing the supporting structure, stone curb, railing and drainage features. The Linn Cove Viaduct was completed in the mid-1980s, and is commonly known as the “missing link” that signaled the completion of the entire 469-mile parkway. The Linn Cove Viaduct is often celebrated as an engineering marvel with the road wrapping around the contours of Grandfather Mountain. It is 1,243 feet long, contains 153 segments weighing 50 tons each, and is supported by seven permanent piers. Source: [Blue Ridge Parkway](#).

- *Mesa Verde NP* – Mesa Verde is seeking public comment on a plan to remove free-roaming horses and cattle from the park’s interior. Currently, about 80 “trespass horses” and 12 feral cattle roam the backcountry of Mesa Verde, which is known for its ancestral Puebloan ruins. The animals are not considered wildlife, and the park does not allow livestock grazing under its management policy. On April 13th, a livestock removal environmental assessment was released for a 30-day public comment period. The park’s preferred alternative includes a phased, proactive approach to remove all livestock within five years and improve the park’s boundary fencing over the next 10 years to prevent livestock from reentering the park. Comments may be made at the [park’s PEPC site](#) through May 13th. Source: [Durango Herald](#).

Conservation and Public Lands

Stopping The ‘GOP’s Conservation Demolition Crew’ – Environmental reporter James Tobias has an op-ed piece in the April 5th *New York Times* on the conservation “demolition crew” in the House Committee on Natural Resources, led by Rep. Rob Bishop (R-UT). Although this administration has “destroyers everywhere, from the White House on down,” says Tobias, the committee needs our particular attention because “it is intent on erasing the great edifice that we call American conservation.” For more than a century, he writes, “the people of the United States have been at work building this country’s conservation system. Like a family of visionary architects laboring over many generations, citizens here have erected a system of ideas and policies meant to ensure our society’s future by protecting it from ecological devastation. This system is built atop a few foundational laws: the Antiquities Act of 1906, the Wilderness Act of 1964, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973, among others. Destroy this architecture of environmental sanity, and you destroy our conservation heritage. The destruction is already well underway. Even as I write, Mr. Bishop and the other members of the House Committee on Natural Resources are waging a relentless assault on each and every one of these essential laws. If they succeed, our priceless public lands, water and wildlife will suffer irreversible damage.” Their motivation? “Collectively, the Republican members of the committee have taken more than \$6 million in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry over the course of their careers. Mr. Bishop alone has taken \$400,000. Its members are also awash in money from the mining, timber and agriculture industries. Many have ties, too, to the political network of the billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch, among other interests ardently opposed to environmental regulation.” Source: [New York Times](#).

Climate and The Environment

Great Barrier Reef Damage Deemed Irreversible – Although Australia is a long way from the nearest U.S. national park, it has one thing in common with many of our island areas – reefs, and most particularly the Great Barrier Reef. All of them are seeing damage caused by climate change and rising ocean temperatures, and a report issued last week says that the impacts on the Great Barrier Reef have now been determined to be irreversible. “An underwater heat wave that damaged huge sections of Australia’s Great Barrier Reef two years ago spurred a die-off of coral so severe that scientists say the natural wonder will never look the same again,” reports the *New York Times*. “Scientists said nearly one-third of the reef’s coral were killed when ocean temperatures spiked in 2016, a result of global warming...” Source: [New York Times](#).

From The Archives

This section contains news and incidents taken from Morning Report issues published during the corresponding week 25 years ago. This week we go back to April, 1993:

- *Hawaii Volcanoes NP* – Around 9 p.m. on April 19, 1993, a series of significant phreatic (steam) explosions occurred where lava is entering the ocean at Lae Apuki, killing one visitor and injuring 14 others - all of whom were in an area which was posted as closed to the public. Following an initial explosion, a bench of lava which extended into the ocean collapsed, causing more explosions and throwing rocks over a quarter of a mile into the air. The visitor who was killed had walked out on the bench after the first explosion, and disappeared into the ocean. Injuries were caused by scalding ocean water and by the rocks which were thrown into the air. All 14 were able to make it either to the Volcano House, where they were treated by rangers, or

to a hospital in Hilo. At the time of the report, a joint park - Coast Guard search was underway along the shoreline to find the victim who fell into the ocean.

- *Padre Island NS* – A severe thunderstorm struck the park's Bird Island Basin area with little warning on April 14th. Winds were clocked at over 90 mph on an anemometer before the instrument broke. Two trailers were overturned, including a 29-foot mobile home which flipped upside down, landing on a portable toilet and trapping the occupant in the mobile home's bathroom. Pop-up campers and vehicles were severely damaged or destroyed. Many sailboards and other items of personal property have not been recovered. Several persons were injured, but none seriously. Damage is estimated at \$150,000.
- *Golden Gate NRA* – Late on the morning of April 18th, ranger Steve Prokop spotted the 40-foot fishing boat *Lindy Su* in distress off the north end of Baker Beach. The boat was drifting dangerously close to the surf line; although it dropped anchor, the boat was swept onto the rocks by six-foot-high shore breakers and the crew and passengers abandoned ship and attempted to swim to shore. All were wearing life preservers. Five made it safely to the beach and were pulled from the water, but the captain had difficulty staying upright. Prokop entered the heavy surf to assist him; although both were severely buffeted, they were able to make it shore without injury. Rangers Milestone and Strickfaden, who had been dispatched to assist, initiated a high-angle cliff rescue with the help of Park Police officers and local fire departments and retrieved two victims who were stranded on offshore rocks. All seven victims were uninjured, but the boat could not be salvaged and broke up on the rocks.

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If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to Bill Halainen at the Weekly National Park System Report: BHalainen@gmail.com. Please don't submit them via his personal email address or Facebook page.

A Closing Observation

This week's observation, made by Rachel Carson 56 years ago, remains as valid today as it was then, particularly if you add 'climatologists' to her listing of scientists:

"The distinguishing feature of man's activities [over time] is that they have almost always been undertaken from the narrow viewpoint of short-range gain, without considering either their impact on the earth or their long-range effect upon ourselves. They have been distinguished, also, by a curious unwillingness to be guided by the knowledge that is available in certain areas of science. I mean especially the knowledge of biologists, of ecologists, of geneticists, all of whom have special areas of competence that should allow them to predict the effect of our actions on living creatures, including, of course, man himself."

Rachel Carson, speaking at Scripps College, July 1962

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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 member Steve Pittleman.

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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