



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

Wednesday, November 28, 2018

Volume 2

Number 40

Incidents

Yellowstone NP Photographer Under Investigation For Using Drone In Park

A New York photographer is under investigation for using a drone to take an aerial image of Grand Prismatic Spring, which he then posted on his Instagram page.

Photographer Timothy McGurr, who says he didn't know about the ban on drones in the park, described how he got the image in a caption that ran with the photo, which has since been removed from his popular Instagram page.

McGurr flew into Billings, arriving around midnight, then drove straight to the park in order to get an image of the spring at dawn. According to his posting, he arrived at the West Entrance at 6:45 a.m. and "somehow managed to drive right into the park despite the seasonal winter closure," which he claims he also knew nothing about.

Violation of the ban is a misdemeanor with a maximum penalty of six months in jail and a \$5,000 fine. "NPS just wants money," an unrepentant McGurr told a follower. "If I would have offered them 5K to fly for a photo, they would have certainly found a way to make it happen for me."

Deby Dixon, a local wildlife photographer, told the *Wyoming Tribune Eagle* that she's in the park almost daily and that she's noticed laws being ignored more often lately due to the rise of visual-driven social media. Her comment on McGurr's action: "Ignorance of the law is not a defense. There are really good people who love the park and come here and try to do the right thing, and they're getting trampled by people who think they can do whatever they want. It ruins it for everyone else."

Source: [Wyoming Tribune Eagle](#).

African Burial Ground NM Man Arrested For Vandalizing Site With Racist Slur

Ivan Nieves, 57, was arrested on November 20th and charged with defacing a park sign with a threatening racist slur earlier in the month. He was charged with vandalism and disorderly conduct, but not any hate crime, and was released on bond pending further proceedings.

On November 1st, a vandal used a black marker to scrawl “Kill” followed by the slur on a plaque that offers a brief history of the burial ground, which is estimated to contain 15,000 intact skeletal remains of New York’s colonial African-American community.

Investigators used videos from the park’s security cameras to identify Nieves. The investigation continues and additional charges are possible.

Source: [New York Times](#).

National Park System Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents

Below are short follow-ups on incidents previously reported in this newsletter:

- *Blue Ridge Parkway* – The large rock that was in danger of falling from the roof of the Tanbark Ridge Tunnel has been removed. As of November 10th, that stretch of parkway remained closed, though, due to ice and downed trees. Source: [Asheville Citizen-Times](#).
- *Santa Monica Mountains NRA* – Recovery from the Woolsey Fire continues and has taken a new turn. The park is asking people to stop feeding wildlife in the burn area because it can cause them serious harm. Carrots, apples, corn and hay have been left out over recent days. Providing food that animals aren’t accustomed to eating can make them sick, said the park, while putting out water buckets can also easily spread diseases among them. “We understand the inclination to help out,” said the park. “After all, we care about the wildlife, too, and we understand they have suffered from the stress of the fires. There are, however, food and water sources out there for them. They have an incredible ability to survive and adapt. Wildlife are highly resourceful!” Source: [KCAL News](#).

Official Washington

Reports on official actions and activities from Capitol Hill, the White House, the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service and other related agencies.

Congress Weekly Legislative Roundup

New Public Laws

Nothing to report.

Senate

The Senate was in recess from November 19th to November 23rd for the Thanksgiving holidays.

House

The House was in recess from November 19th to November 23rd for the Thanksgiving holidays.

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

Park People, Park Friends

NPS Alumni Passing Of Andy Hutchison

Career NPS ranger and manager Andy Hutchison, 83, died on November 10th in Charlottesville, Virginia.

After serving in the Navy during the Korean War, Andy attended New Mexico State University and graduated from Penn State.

He was a graduate of the FBI National Academy and director of law enforcement for the NPS and DOI. He was serving as superintendent of Lake Clark NP&P when he retired in 1992.

A funeral mass will be held 10 a.m. on Monday, December 3rd, at St. Isidore Catholic Church in Orange, Virginia. A reception will follow at the church social hall. [Preddy Funeral Home of Orange](#) is assisting the family.

Source: [Charlottesville Daily Progress](#).

Submerged Resources Center NPS Archeologist/Diver Receives Wave Maker Award

Jessica Keller, an underwater archaeologist with the Submerged Resources Center, has received the Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) Wave Maker Award.

The Wave Maker Award honors dive professionals for their outstanding achievements and service in any of the following categories – contributing to DEMA’s mission, providing business or community service, or contributing to the growth of the diving industry.

With the assistance of the National Park Service and a small start-up grant from the Women Divers Hall of Fame, Keller developed an educational outreach program called “Underwater Explorer,” designed to reach younger generations and foster an interest in the ocean.

The foundation of Keller’s program is a 36-page activity booklet that is now available for free in more than 60 national parks in both English and Spanish.

Source: [Deeper Blue](#).

News Reports and Releases

A brief summary of recent news stories, web postings and agency press releases pertaining to the Service, the federal government, the administration, DOI, and other public land management agencies that have bearing on the NPS.

Administration

Threat Of Partial Government Shutdown Next Week Continues – There’s still a possibility that there will be a partial government shutdown on December 7th, a prospect noted in last week’s edition. “Congress is returning to Washington with a tight deadline to pass seven spending bills and avert a partial government shutdown over President Trump’s demand that lawmakers fund his wall on the Mexican border,” reports *The Hill*. Such a shutdown would affect a number of agencies, including Interior, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, State, Agriculture, Treasury, Commerce, Homeland Security and Justice. But it may not happen, says *The Hill*: “Many think that Congress will get a bill past the finish line despite Trump’s talk. The president has threatened to shut down the government over the wall on numerous occasions since taking office, only to acquiesce to Congress and sign funding legislation.” Source: [The Hill](#).

Department of the Interior

The Continuing Adventures Of Ryan Zinke – The secretary is out of town for the moment, so today’s installment features just one article. “Zinke is dismissing rumors of his departure from the Cabinet,”

says the *Washington Post*, “and plunging into the public debate over forest management...” Although the president has said he’s reviewing the investigations focusing on Zinke, the secretary says he’s not going anywhere. “Zinke [recently] derided ethics probes into his activities as ‘fake news’ and vowed to stay in his job to advance the president’s pro-industry agenda, saying the president backs him ‘100 percent.’” He added that the allegations are “outrageous,” that “everyone knows they’re false,” that people opposed to him have formed a “resistance movement” and are spreading rumors about him, and that the same people have threatened his wife and children. Source: [Washington Post](#),

Possible Zinke Successor Draws Media Scrutiny – Despite Zinke’s assurance that he’s staying on as secretary, media attention is now shifting to David Bernhardt, DOI’s deputy secretary, who many feel could be his successor:

- On November 14th, the Natural Resource Defense Council ran an article on its webpage entitled “Who Is David Bernhardt?” and subtitled “And Why Every Environmentalist Should Care.” Bernhardt’s “long Washington résumé,” says NRDC, “suggests that he would happily continue to carry out the Trump administration’s war on public lands and federal waters—albeit with greater legal sophistication and fewer unforced ethical errors than his predecessor.” Following an examination of Bernhardt and his past activities, NRDC offers this conclusion: “[If] Americans think they’ll be getting a better secretary of the Interior once Zinke’s out, they’re sadly mistaken. They’ll just be getting a shrewder one.” Source: [Natural Resource Defense Council](#)
- The headline in the November 16th *Los Angeles Times* was even more pointed: “Zinke May Soon Be Gone From The Interior Department, But His Successor Could Be Much, Much Worse.” The article assesses his record, abilities and business alliances, and also talks about his potential conflicts of interest. “Bernhardt’s putative conflicts all have the virtue of deniability,” says the *Times*. “At least one or two steps separate Interior actions from benefits flowing to his former clients, so who can say that he’s violating his explicit promises to recuse himself? But that deniability could make an Interior Secretary Bernhardt much more dangerous than the hapless Secretary Zinke.” Source: [Los Angeles Times](#),
- The *Washington Post* ran a story on November 19th on Bernhardt’s numerous potential conflicts of interest. Bernhardt’s relentless work ethic, says the *Post*, helps explain how he’s managed to advance Trump’s pro-industry agenda over the nation’s public lands. But, “[having] worked for years as a lobbyist representing many of the very businesses he now regulates, he walked into the No. 2 job at Interior with so many potential conflicts of interest he has to carry a small card listing them all.” No matter, he was still able to do his job with zeal and vigor: “While Zinke drew headlines over multiple ethics investigations, Bernhardt focused on executing President Trump’s vision to fuel the nation’s energy production.” Source: [Washington Post](#).

National Park Service and System

Stories and articles pertaining to the parks, regions, technical and training centers, and WASO.

Loving The Parks To Death – It seems like there have been stories posted annually about the parks being loved to death ever since the early 50s (and each has been true), but the huge spike in visitation to the parks over the past few years has underscored the criticality of that observation. The November 20th edition of *The Guardian* has a comprehensive overview of the problem entitled “Crisis In Our National Parks: How Tourists Are Loving Nature To Death.” The article provides a good overview of what’s going on in the parks today: “Across America, national parks and public lands are facing a crisis of popularity. Technology, successful marketing, and international tourism have brought a surge in visitation unlike anything seen before. In 2016 and 2017, the national parks saw an unprecedented 330.9 million visitors, the highest ever recorded ...Backcountry trails are clogging up, mountain roads are thickening with traffic, picturesque vistas are morphing into selfie-taking scrums. And in the process, what is most loved about them risks being lost.” The article talks about actions the NPS is taking to cope with this upswing in visitation and includes some revealing photos. Source: [The Guardian](#).

Around The Parks – Brief reports on parks and regions, culled either from park press releases or from newspapers, with links to the source news articles. The reports are in alphabetical order by park name:

- *Devils Tower NM* – The park has just released an EA on a proposal to bring the visitor center and Tower Trail up to modern accessibility standards. The EA is open for review and comment on the [park's PEPC page](#) until December 16th. Source: [Wyoming Public Media](#).
- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – A lot of people in the area around the park opted out of last Friday's shopping madness by getting outdoors. Visitors reportedly packed the park on Black Friday, opting to spend the day "in the great outdoors instead of checkout lines." The story includes both a video and pictures. Source: [Knoxville News 10](#).
- *Petroglyphs NM* – The park has come up with a draft plan to preserve its grounds and trails. Because of its proximity to the city, it has endured years of vandalism, ORV activity, and the development of numerous social trails. Public comments on the plan will be taken until November 30th at the [park's PEPC webpage](#). Source: [KRQE News](#).
- *Point Reyes NS* – The long history of farming in the park has just been formally recognized. "After decades of working on the proposals, the National Park Service this month successfully listed the ranchlands on the National Register of Historic Places, a list of the places that the park service prioritizes for preservation," reports the *Point Reyes Light*. "Classified as a 'rural historic district,' the Point Reyes Peninsula Dairy Ranches include 22,000 acres that encompass 17 working ranches in the seashore's boundaries. In April, the park listed another 14,000 acres that includes 19 ranches between Point Reyes Station and Bolinas as the Olema Valley Dairy Ranches." Source: [Point Reyes Light](#).
- *Rocky Mountain NP* – On November 16th, the *Fort Collins Coloradoan* ran an article on how the unprecedented number of search and rescue operations in the park this year have "put a spotlight" on the "deadly allure" of the park's peaks. It begins with an overview of the 26-day-long search for Brian Perri that ended with the discovery of his body, then talks about the dangers of Long's Peak and the spike in SAR operations in the park. In all, Rocky Mountain National Park had 165 search and rescue incidents in 2017, the third most in any national park. The article also reports on the impacts so many SARs have had on park staff. Source: [Fort Collins Coloradoan](#).

The Conservation Crisis

This section covers the myriad interconnected, conservation-related threats that are transforming the national parks, their ecosystems, and the world ecosystem, often simultaneously.

Administration Climate Report Says Climate Change Damage Intensifying – On November 23rd, the federal government released a report entitled [Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II: Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States](#). The *Washington Post* summarized the researchers' key finding in its article on the report: "The effects of climate change, including deadly wildfires, increasingly debilitating hurricanes and heat waves, are already battering the United States, and the danger of more such catastrophes is worsening." The *Post* goes on: "The report's authors, who represent numerous federal agencies, say they are more certain than ever that climate change poses a severe threat to Americans' health and pocketbooks, as well as to the country's infrastructure and natural resources. And while it avoids policy recommendations, the report's sense of urgency and alarm stands in stark contrast to the lack of any apparent plan from President Trump to tackle the problems, which, according to the government he runs, are increasingly dire." Source: [Washington Post](#).

Drilling On Public Lands Produces A Quarter Of US Greenhouse Gases – A "first-of-its-kind" [USGS study](#) that came out last Friday, reports *The Hill*, "found that emissions from fossil fuels produced on

federal lands and offshore areas represent an average of 24 percent of all national emissions of carbon, a major contributor to air pollution and climate change.” The article quotes Chase Huntley, senior director for the Energy and Climate Program at The Wilderness Society: “The US government has kept the American public in the dark for far too long on the climate impact of subsidized oil and gas drilling and coal mining on our public lands. We know this administration’s relentless push to dramatically increase production by recklessly drilling and mining anywhere and everywhere has already threatened important wildlife habitat, recreation areas, and drinking water. Now top government scientists are clear that this foolhardy favoritism of polluters over people is also making the climate crisis even more severe.” Source: [The Hill](#).

National Park Challenges and Successes – Here’s a summary of news stories about park-specific conservation and climate-related issues:

- *Pinnacles NM* – The park will release three more California condors into the wild next month, marking another step in the successful recovery of this once very threatened bird. In 1987, they were on the brink of extinction; now, the condor program manager at the park speculates that it’ll be possible to remove them from the endangered species list within ten years. The story includes a video interview and photos. Source: [Arizona PBS’ Cronkite News](#).
- *Glen Canyon NRA* – The state of Utah will join the federal government this month in a study to determine the extent of mining pollution in Lake Powell on the Utah-Arizona border. Heavy metals washed into Lake Powell over the decades by flash flooding will be dug up from the river deltas to assess metal concentrations. The study will provide information about how mining affects the lake and the fish that live in it. Researchers will test for levels of arsenic, cadmium, copper, mercury and lead. Source: [The Deseret News](#).
- *Grand Teton NP* – [Chronic wasting disease](#), which affects deer, elk and moose, has appeared in the park, found in an adult buck mule deer that was killed by a vehicle. Chronic wasting disease causes animals to behave oddly and become emaciated. It is similar to mad-cow disease and has spread to at least 23 U.S. states since its discovery over 50 years ago. “The detection in Grand Teton raises concern the disease could spread rapidly at feed grounds where wildlife managers provide food pellets to elk during the winter,” reports the Associated Press. Source: [Associated Press](#).
- *Buffalo NR* – “Federal research in the Buffalo River’s watershed shows increased pollution in the groundwater, according to a U.S. Geological Survey presentation prepared this month,” reports the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*. “The Buffalo, the country’s first national river, had 70 miles of algae this year, disrupting tourists’ late summer trips down the waterway. That’s about half of the 150-mile Buffalo River, 135 miles of which are in the national park.” Research into the source(s) is still underway, but runoff from a large local hog farm is suspected. Source: [Arkansas Democrat Gazette](#).

From The Archives

This section contains incidents taken from *Morning Report* issues published during the corresponding week (approximately) 25 years ago in 1993. All entries appear in the original verb tense; “submitters” are those people who originally submitted the incident report.

- *Ocmulgee NM* – On the morning of Sunday, November 7th, a patrol ranger spotted a man emerging from a wooded area in the park. His clothing and hands were muddy and he showed signs of nervousness. When asked what he’d been doing, he said that he’d been digging for arrowheads. During the interview, the ranger noticed a muddy plastic sheet covering items in the back of the man’s Blazer. An inspection led to the discovery of camping gear, a loaded .357 magnum revolver, and over \$1.6 million in cash, gold and platinum. At that point, the man changed his story; he now claimed that he’d had this property buried in another cache some distance away, that he’d decided to move it to a safer place, and that intended to bury it in the park. He was placed under arrest for possession of a firearm, false reporting, and violating the

Archeological Resource Protection Act. An investigation is being conducted by the park, the FBI, the IRS and the U.S. Attorney's Office. Other charges may be filed. Recent changes in the law also permit the seizure of assets in misdemeanor, felony and civil ARPA cases. Submitted by the park's superintendent.

- *Grand Canyon NP* – A 24-year-old visitor from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, fell to his death on November 9th while taking photographs at the First Trail View overlook. He was beyond the safety fence when he lost his footing and fell. Fifteen other visitors witnessed the incident. Submitted by dispatch office
- *Canaveral NS* – During a resource protection surveillance operation in the pre-dawn hours of November 4th, rangers utilizing night vision equipment located and contacted the operator of a vessel running without lights in park waters. The boat's occupant was wanted under a federal warrant for failure to appear after rangers caught him selling oysters which had been gathered from polluted waters to a local restaurant. The sale of such oysters is a serious public health problem in Florida, and in this man's case was compounded by the fact that he owns a wholesale fish house. Rangers determined that he had been on his way to retrieve an illegal gill net. The 100-yard net, approximately 400 fish, and the vessel were seized. The man appeared in federal court later that day and pled guilty to illegal commercial fishing. He was fined \$500, and a trial date was set for the charge of selling contaminated oysters. He is currently on state probation, which will likely be revoked. The man and his two sons and son-in-law are all known for their anti-government opinions and lifestyle. Other developments are expected. Submitted by Bill DeHart.

Acknowledgements

This newsletter comes to you through the efforts of a number of people:

- Production: Steve Pittleman
- Regular Correspondents: Don Hellmann, Dennis Burnett, Rick Smith, and Duncan Morrow
- Issue Contributors: Bill Walters, Maureen Finnerty, Mike Murray

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

“Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things natural, wild and free.”

Conservationist and author [Aldo Leopold](#)

* * * * *

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.”

To receive a copy of this free publication, join or support 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 (click on [this link](#)); Coalition supporters can also join and receive the newsletter (click on

[this link](#)). If you need to contact the Coalition office on other matters, including changes of address, click on [this link](#).

--- ### ---