



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

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Incidents

Grand Canyon National Park Three Killed, Four Injured In Helicopter Crash On Hualapai Lands

A helicopter crashed this past Saturday evening in Quartermaster Canyon on Hualapai Nation lands in the Grand Canyon, killing three and critically injuring four people, including the pilot. All but the pilot were visitors from England.

The helicopter, which belonged to Boulder City-based Papillon Grand Canyon Helicopters, crashed around 5:20 p.m.

First responders had difficulty reaching the four survivors because of windy, dark and rugged conditions. Rescuers got help from military aircraft from Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas and were eventually able to fly all four of the injured to the University Medical Center in Las Vegas.

Sources: [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#), [CNN](#).

Rocky Mountain National Park Speeders Surprised To Find Rangers On Duty During Shutdown

Drivers who decided to ignore speed limits in Rocky Mountain National Park during the first federal government shutdown were surprised to find rangers still patrolling the roads. Rangers pulled over more drivers than usual for speeding during the Saturday-through-Monday shutdown.

Visitors centers and other services were closed during the shutdown, but entrances remained open and some rangers were on duty. Services returned to normal on Tuesday but most roads were closed at the entrance stations because of ice and blowing snow from a weekend storm.

Park roads were closed on the night of Saturday, January 20th, because plows didn't operate during the shutdown. Crews resumed work on Tuesday.

Rangers ticketed five people on Sunday for driving on closed roads.

Source: [Denver Post](#).

Zion National Park Hiker Dies In Fall In Refrigerator Canyon

A woman's body was found in Refrigerator Canyon along the West Rim Trail on the afternoon of Monday, February 5th. Rangers and the park's SAR team responded.

The woman's injuries were consistent with a high elevation fall, possibly from the Angels Landing Trail. The Washington County Sheriff's Office is leading the investigation.

Source: [Zion NP news release](#).

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.

Capitol Hill Weekly Legislative Roundup

New Public Laws

Nothing to report.

Senate

On January 30th, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved for a second time the nominations of Susan Combs of Texas to be assistant secretary for policy, management and budget, and Ryan Douglas Nelson of Idaho to be solicitor, Department of the Interior. Both candidates needed to be renominated, as the Senate failed to act on their nominations by the end of the first session of the 115th Congress in December, 2017.

On February 5th, the Senate was notified by the White House of the withdrawal of the nomination of Kathleen Hartnett White of Texas to be chair of the Council on Environmental Quality.

On February 7th, the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining held a hearing on several bills, including:

- H.R. 995, to require the Department of the Interior to modernize terms used to describe the racial background or place of origin of people in regulations concerning the 1974 development plan for Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC, among other provisions.
- S. 1481, to make technical corrections to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Sec. 4 of the bill would require the Secretary of the Interior to grant the Shishmaref Native Corporation a perpetual easement of approximately 300 feet that crosses the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve to permit a surface transportation route between the Village of Shishmaref and the general area of Ear Mountain, Alaska.

Brian Steed, deputy director for policy and programs, Bureau of Land Management, was the witness for the Department of the Interior.

On February 8th, by a vote of 71 yeas to 28 nays, the Senate passed H.R. 1892, to authorize the U.S. flag to fly at half-staff in the event of the death of a first responder who dies while serving in the line of duty, by a vote of 240 yeas to 186 nays. The bill was used by the House as a vehicle to pass the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. (See House action on H.R. 1892, below, for a further description of the contents of the act.) The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law. Passage of H.R. 1892, allowed the federal government to reopen after an overnight shutdown.

House

On February 5th, the House passed H.R. 2888, to establish the Ste. Genevieve National Historic Site, Missouri.

On February 6th, the House passed H.R. 1892, a bill authorizing the U.S. flag to fly at half-staff in the event of the death of a first responder who dies while servicing in the line of duty by a vote of 245 yeas to 182 nays. The bill was used by the House as a vehicle to make further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2018, for federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior, through March 23, 2018, among a host of other provisions involving military spending, health care, and tax provisions.

On Tuesday, February 6th, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing on the following bills:

- H.R. 835, to update the map of, and modify the maximum acreage available for inclusion in, the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument, CO.
- H.R. 857, to provide for conservation and enhanced recreation activities in the California Desert Conservation Area. The bill makes several changes to the California Desert Conservation Act, including provisions to:
 - ✓ Expand the Death Valley National Park Wilderness by 65,033 acres (the Senate bill, S. 32, proposes 92,000 acres);
 - ✓ Transfer 35,292 acres from BLM to NPS to add to the boundary of Death Valley National Park (S. 32 proposes 40,000 acres);
 - ✓ Transfer 25 acres from BLM to NPS in Mojave National Preserve where an NPS-owned maintenance facility exists (S. 32 has the same provision);
 - ✓ Transfer 2,900 acres from BLM to NPS along the northern boundary of Joshua Tree National Park, and the adjustment of the boundary for a donation of 1,600 acres from the Mojave Desert Land Trust (S. 32 has the same provisions);
 - ✓ Authorize NPS to acquire the Joshua Tree Visitor Center outside the boundary of the park, now owned by the Joshua Tree National Park Association (S. 32 has the same provision);
 - ✓ Designate as part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, 7.5 miles of Amargosa River and 7 miles of Surprise Canyon Creek, both near Death Valley National Park (S. 32 has the same provision).
- H.R. 4895, to establish the Medgar Evers National Monument in Mississippi.

There was no witness from the Department of the Interior at this hearing.

On February 6th, the House Oversight and Government Operations Committee approved, among other bills:

- H.R. 4887, to modernize reporting by recipients of Federal grants and cooperative agreements by creating and imposing data standards for the information that grants and cooperative agreement recipients must report to the Federal Government.
- H.R. 3076, to amend the Privacy Act of 1974 to require each executive agency to establish a system that allows an individual to electronically submit a release form that grants another entity access to information in such system pertaining to the individual.

On February 7th, the House passed S. 1438, to redesignate the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial as the Gateway Arch National Park (the National Park Service had recommended the park be redesignated as the Gateway Arch National Monument). The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law.

On February 8th, the House passed H.R. 1892, again, to authorize the U.S. flag to fly at half-staff in the event of the death of a first responder who dies while serving in the line of duty, by a vote of 240 yeas to 186 nays. The bill included different text than was passed by the House on February 6th as it was used by the House as a vehicle to pass the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. Among other provisions, the bill included:

- Division B, Subdivision 1 – to provide supplemental appropriations of \$50 million from the Historic Preservation Fund for grants to areas impacted by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, with no matching requirement for these grants; and \$207.6 million for the National Park Service for construction related to the hurricanes, with the money being available until expended.
- Division B, Subdivision 3 – to make further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2018, for federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior, through March 23, 2018. This date will allow the appropriations committees of the House and Senate to divide up the additional domestic discretionary spending that Congress provided for FY 18 in Division C of the bill.
- Division C – to increase the budget caps enacted in 2010 for domestic discretionary spending for FY 18, by approximately \$63 billion. However, Congress has stated its intention that this money will be spent for a number of specific priorities, and until the House and Senate Appropriations Committees decide on the final figures for each annual appropriations bill, it is unclear what amount of this additional funding, if any, will be provided to the Park Service. This same division of the bill increases the domestic discretionary spending caps by approximately \$65 billion in FY 2019.

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

Park People, Friends and Allies

Mount Rainier National Park Chip Jenkins Is The Park's New Superintendent

Chip Jenkins, who launched his career at North Cascades National Park, will be Mount Rainier's new superintendent. He replaces Randy King, who retired in January.

Jenkins is the deputy regional director for Pacific West Region. He is based in Seattle but has been on assignment since March at Yosemite National Park, where he is the acting superintendent.

Jenkins got his start as a seasonal ranger at North Cascades. His career has taken him to Yosemite, Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, and parks in California, Colorado and Indiana. He served as superintendent at North Cascades National Park and worked as a special assistant to the director in WASO.

His wife, Laurie Lee Jenkins, also work for the NPS. They have two sons, Hayden and Logan. Hayden attends the University of Washington and Logan is in high school.

Jenkins is scheduled to start his tenure at Rainier in mid-March. Tracy Swartout is the park's acting superintendent.

Source: [The News Tribune](#).

NPS Alumni Death Of Chuck Rafkind

On February 10th, police in Newport News, Virginia, responding to a family request for a welfare check, discovered the body of former career NPS employee Chuck Rafkind inside his home on Rivers Edge Circle north of Fort Eustis. He had been dead for several years. Detectives said that there was no sign of foul play.

Member Dennis Burnett reports that Chuck became very reclusive about ten years ago. For unknown reasons he stopped answering his phone, stopped communicating via email, rejected all correspondence from friends and family, and never answered his door.

Additional information will appear in this newsletter when and if it becomes available.

Source: [Newport News Daily Press](#),

Washington Office **Jeremy Barnum Selected As Chief Of Public Affairs**

On January 30th, Jeremy Barnum became the Service's chief spokesperson and chief of public affairs.

Barnum will be responsible for the development, implementation and management of national communications strategies for the National Park Service while providing guidance to public affairs officers at the National Park Service's 417 parks and community assistance programs nationwide.

Barnum has served as a public affairs specialist for the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. since 2015.

Prior to joining the NPS, Barnum was a Foreign Service officer at the U.S. Department of State with a public affairs focus and served at U.S. embassies in New Delhi, India; Quito, Ecuador; and Helsinki, Finland.

A Utah native, Barnum is a graduate of Weber State University in Ogden, Utah.

Source: Rebecca Post, Office of Communications, Washington Office.

Reports and Releases

A summary of recent news stories, web postings and agency press releases pertaining to the department, the Service, public lands and the environment.

Administration

Environmental Rollbacks Will Face Stiff Challenges In Court – On January 31st, the *New York Times* posted a story with this headline: “Trump’s Environmental Rollbacks Were Fast. It Could Get Messy in Court.” The tenor of the article can be gauged from its opening paragraphs: “As the head of the federal agency controlling billions of acres of public lands and waters, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has spent the past year making bold policy proclamations to advance President Trump’s energy agenda: He would open coastal waters to drilling, shrink national monuments, lift Obama-era fossil fuel regulations and reduce wildlife protections. But legal experts say many of the moves were made without fully considering the laws and procedures governing changes like these, making them vulnerable to legal challenges that could delay or block them. They say many of the proposals may follow the fate of other bold and hasty moves by the Trump administration, such as the attempts to limit travel from countries with sizable Muslim populations on security grounds.” [Full story](#).

Western Governors Seek Consultation On Proposed DOI Reorganization – The Associated Press reports that 19 Western governors, representing both parties, have written a letter to Secretary Zinke, complaining that he failed to consult with them about major plans for reorganizing the agency and asking him to delay implementing the proposal until he speaks with them. “The Feb. 1 letter from the Western Governors Association said the group had asked Zinke in April 2017 to be consulted on any reshuffling of the department, which wields considerable authority over public lands in the West. They said last week that Zinke has still not sought the views of its members, who represent every state in the western half of the nation, from Texas to Hawaii.” [Full story](#).

National Park System

Arizona Pledges To Keep Grand Canyon Open During Future Shutdowns – The state of Arizona will be developing a process to use state money to keep the canyon open during any future government shutdown, says the *Arizona Republic*: “After two government shutdowns in less than a month, Gov. Doug Ducey issued an executive order [last] Friday to keep the Grand Canyon open should Congress fail to pass a spending bill again. In a release, Ducey cited ‘continued dysfunction in Washington, D.C.’ and announced the Grand Canyon Protection Plan. He said it would provide predictability in the event

of another shutdown by creating a strategy for operations in the Grand Canyon National Park, determining the operation strategy's cost, [and] establishing a process to pay the Department of the Interior with funds from state coffers to keep the park open.” [Full story](#).

Ranger Offers Guidance On Visiting Parks During Shutdowns... - In anticipation of the federal government closing again last week, *Popular Science* offered “a park ranger’s guide to visiting national parks during a government shutdown.” Written by former ranger Mark Kaufman, the short article answers the questions most commonly asked by the public, particularly regarding what’s open and what’s closed. [Full story](#).

And High Times Magazine Offers Guidance On Smoking Dope In Parks – The January issue of *High Times* has an article entitled “Are You Allowed To Smoke Weed In A National Park?” The author offers a “short history of cannabis and national parks” and explains NPS rules regarding toking up on park lands. [Full story](#).

Sundry Actions and Updates – Here, briefly, are activities recently reported by parks, culled from park press releases. In each case, additional details can be found in those releases:

- *Hawaii Volcanoes NP* – A 222-acre property has been transferred from The Nature Conservancy to Hawai‘i Volcanoes National Park. TNC purchased the property to preserve it for conservation. The parcel extends along 1.6 miles of Highway 11 between the towns of Ocean View and Nā‘ālehu in the Ka‘ū district. The park’s press release includes a map and additional details. [News release](#).
- *Jefferson Expansion National Memorial* – The park may soon have a new name – Gateway Arch National Park. Legislation to rename the site passed the Senate on December 21st and the House on February 7th. [News story](#).
- *Denali National Park* – The park is in the process of changing its rules on human waste disposal on Denali’s West Buttress route, having found that it is not degrading or being ground up by glaciers as previously thought. The new reg will require either removal or – on the upper mountain – disposal in a single NPS-specified crevasse. It’s estimated that 150,000 pounds of human waste have been left in crevasses along the route since it was pioneered in 1951. [News story](#).
- *Lincoln Memorial* – The National Park Service has released proposed plans for Lincoln Memorial renovations that would vastly expand exhibit space, add a second elevator and upgrade bathrooms. Public comments are being accepted through March 7th and may be made at [this PEPC webpage](#). [News story](#).
- *Springfield Armory National Historic Site* – The U.S. Army has officially turned over control of the Colonel Benton small arms collection to the National Park Service. Previously, the Army technically had control over the small arms in the museum, but not the historic site itself. [News story](#).
- *Death Valley National Park* – The park had 1,294,827 visitors in 2017, only 1,456 fewer than the park record set in 2016. The high number of visitors in 2016 was attributed to publicity related to the centennial of the National Park Service and a rare “super bloom” of wildflowers in the park. Surprisingly, visitation stayed at about the same high level in 2017 without these factors. By contrast, Death Valley only had 9,970 visitors when it was first established as a national monument in 1933. [News release](#).

Public Lands

Bill Would Remove Wilderness Area Protection – An article published jointly by *High Country News* and *The Guardian* details another attack on wilderness lands: “In early December, Senator Steve Daines, a Republican, introduced a bill that would eliminate wilderness protection from the Big

Snowies as well as from another 358,500 acres in Montana that have been shielded from development since the 1970s. They are known as wilderness study areas (WSAs) because the government is considering them for permanent protections, and they are ‘wilder than half of all national parks’ in the lower 48 states, according to a Wilderness Society ecologist, Travis Belote. The five landscapes in Daines’s bill represent over a third of the wilderness study acreage on US national forests, and their loss would mark the biggest reduction of protected public lands in Montana history.” [Full story](#).

“Pop Stars Are Ruining Our Parks And Wildlife” – Need a little humor? Check out an article with that headline by Amy Zimmer, allegedly a park ranger, which appears in the current issue of *The New Yorker*. “In the spirit of preservation, I say to you: this new trend of pop stars’ rural reinventions must end now,” says Zimmer. “Pop stars are ruining our national parks and wildlife. Our forests, mountains, and countrysides are dying, owing to a sudden overpopulation of pop stars seeking authenticity. Pop stars have left their coastal habitats and migrated inward. This shift has caused a massive ecological imbalance, as these environments are not suited to handle the appetites of U.S. pop stars.” [Full story](#).

The Environment

Climate Change Is Triggering Bigger And Faster Glacial Avalanches – The *New York Times*’ January 23rd edition has a story about two major glacial avalanches – one in western Tibet, the other in the Caucasus Mountains in southwest Russia – that scientists say were caused by climate change and are harbingers of more such avalanches to come. The article provides details on the causes of such avalanches and the impacts they had in those two instances. The findings were reported in a recently-released scientific study which “suggests that in addition to the known risks posed by a warming climate, such as sea level rise, we may also be in line for some cataclysmic surprises.” [Full story](#).

Notices

This section has been created to capture short notes from members on subjects relevant to the Service, the Coalition, alumni affairs and so forth. Send submissions to BHalainen@gmail.com.

- **Hotshot Association Founded** – The newly-formed U.S. Hotshots Association is an organization that’s been created “to support, promote, protect and preserve all hotshot crews and hotshot crewmembers, whether current, former, or future.” According to its webpage, it “has also formed with an intent to directly influence innovation and advancement across the major quarters of wildland fire culture, policy, and operations: safety, leadership, suppression and management.” The webpage (<https://www.usshotshots.com/>) has details on how to join.

Acknowledgements

This newsletter comes to you through the efforts of a number of people. First are our “regulars”:

- Producer: Steve Pittleman
- Congressional Correspondent: Don Hellmann
- At Large Correspondent: Dennis Burnett

Thanks also to the following people who also sent along stories or tips for this issue:

- Larry Frederick
- Duncan Morrow
- Joan Anzelmo
- Ernie Urvater

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

"One of the motives for preserving places of historic interest and natural beauty is to cultivate in our people the historic sense, the vivid realization of the life of our ancestors and all the former inhabitants...as a reality lovingly pictured in the mind, not merely an abstract read of in history books."

[Freeman Tilden](#), *The Fifth Essence*

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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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