



The Coalition Weekly Report Wednesday, May 6, 2020

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Incidents

National Park System Coronavirus Response Update

Parks are slowly and carefully reopening following what appears to be the pandemic's peak. The summary that follows focuses briefly on articles of note on a few large parks and how they're dealing with the reopening. Click on the related URL's for details:

- *Bryce Canyon NP* – Bryce Canyon, the last national park in Utah to close as the coronavirus swept the nation, is poised to be the first to resume operations, which are scheduled to begin today. For the time being, visitors will be restricted to limited reaches of the high-elevation park and services will be all but nonexistent. Source: Brian Maffly, [Salt Lake Tribune](#).
- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – The park is increasing recreational access and services and will reopen many roads and trails on May 9th. Park managers are implementing new safety measures in facility operations and services to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 as areas reopen to the public. Campgrounds, picnic pavilions, visitor centers, and many secondary roads will remain closed during the first reopening phase, which is expected to last for at least two weeks. During that time, the park will conduct disinfectant fogging operations for restrooms and public buildings, install plexiglass shields at visitor centers, issue personal protective equipment to maintenance workers, institute new safety protocols for emergency services staff, and reduce group size limits. While many areas will be accessible for visitors to enjoy, a return to full operations will continue to be phased and services may be limited. Source: Alayna Clay, [WCYB News](#).
- *Olympic NP/Mount Rainier NP/North Cascades NP* – The parks are planning for phased reopenings of certain day-use facilities this month. Sarah Creachbaum, superintendent of Olympic, summarized the situation for Washington parks: "The opening of each of the parks is necessarily predicated on being able to outfit our employees with adequate PPE (personal protective equipment), with adequate cleaning supplies to keep the restrooms clean, and with adequate enforcement to keep people from crowding around restroom areas." Source: Rob Ollikainen, [Peninsula Daily News](#).

For information on the status of other parks in the system, go to the Service's ["Active Alerts In Parks" webpage](#) and use the search engine to find information on a particular site.

Lake Mead NRA Trail Closed Following Multiple SAR Operations

A spike in hiker rescues has prompted the park to temporarily close a trail off U.S. 93 outside of Boulder City. The Lone Palm Trail will be closed through September 30th.

There have been nine search and rescue operations on the trail over the last 45 days, compared to just one about the same time last year. The rescues took an average of four hours to complete, with one lasting nine hours.

The trail is strenuous and people are miscalculating their abilities to complete it. Some hikers have also gotten lost without enough water.

“Providing rescues on this trail during triple-digit heat is endangering their lives and the lives of rescue crews,” said Margaret Goodro, the park’s superintendent. “We will reopen the area in the fall, when temperatures are cooler.”

Source: Kelcie Grega, [Las Vegas Sun](#).

Coronado NM Woman and Dog Attacked By Rabid Coatimundi

A rabid [white-nosed coatimundi](#) attacked a woman and her dog on Saturday, April 18th. It went after the dog first; when the woman tried to pull it off her dog, the coati bit her as well. The woman’s husband then shot and killed the coati.

The animal’s body was taken to a lab by a ranger and a state game officer. Laboratory testing confirmed that the coati had been rabid. Both the woman and dog have received medical treatment for their injuries, including shots for rabies exposure.

Very few white-nosed coatimundi become infected with rabies. Bats, skunks and foxes are the most common carriers of rabies in Arizona, but when rabies activity in those animals “spills over,” other mammals can become infected.

Source: Maddie Capron, [The News & Observer](#).

Rock Creek Park Boy Killed By Falling Branch

A boy died on May 1st when a large tree branch fell on him on or near a trail in a rugged area of Rock Creek Park in Northwest Washington.

The boy, whose age was given as between three and six, was hiking with a relative when the incident occurred. They were along the Soapstone Valley Trail, located on a tributary that juts west from the park.

Rock Creek Park is overseen by the Service, but D.C. police assumed responsibility for the case because it handles death investigations in the District.

Source: Peter Hermann, [Washington Post](#).

National Park System Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents

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

- *Cape Hatteras NS* – The 72-foot fishing vessel *Ocean Pursuit*, which ran aground off Bodie Island on the morning of March 1st, is slowly sinking into the beach. It first became apparent in photos on social media that showed more and more of it disappearing. The park confirmed what seemed to be happening: “The vessel appears to be getting lower and lower in the beach because each tide brings in water which makes the sand soft and malleable. Thus the boat

sinks into the sand a little each day. Northeast winds helped carry the vessel ashore.” The park is counting on the boat’s owners removing it before it completely sinks, but no timetable for its removal has yet been announced. Source: Mark Price, [News & Observer](#).

- *Harpers Ferry NP* – Reconstruction of the park footbridge over the Potomac that was damaged by the train derailment last December is scheduled to begin in mid-May. Heavily used by tourists, hikers and bicyclists, the footbridge is attached to the Goodloe Byron Memorial Bridge train river crossing near The Point lookout where the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers merge. No target date has been given for completion of the project. Source: Tim Cook, [Spirit of Jefferson](#).
- *Lake Meredith NRA* – The search continues for the body of Ryan Kennedy, who has been missing since December 15th. On Friday, April 17th, divers found his boat on the lake bottom at a depth of about 32 feet. Side-scan sonar will now be used in that area in an effort to find his remains. Source: Drew Powell, [KVII News](#).

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center IMT Callout For Pandemic Response Scaled Back

NIFC remains at PL 1. As of May 1st, the center began issuing daily (Monday – Friday) updates rather than weekly summaries.

Only one IMT – Houseman’s NIMO team – remains committed. The team has been assigned to COVID-19 support at Forest Service headquarters in Washington D.C.

National Park Service Fires

Significant fires are currently burning in these national parks:

- *Big Cypress NP* – The Silverking Fire, which burned 610 acres, is now fully contained.
- *Everglades NP* – The Sunday Afternoon Fire, sparked by mistake and fed by drought, has burned more than 1,200 acres and continues to smolder despite pockets of drenching rain over the weekend. It’s burning in sawgrass prairie, melaleuca and Australian pine. The spot where the Sunday Afternoon fire spread west of Miami and south of the Tamiami Trail has been so dry that water has drained to below ground level. Historically water would have remained above or at the surface to sustain an ecosystem that evolved before flood control efforts diverted water from its natural southerly flow out of Lake Okeechobee. Scientists at the water management district and Everglades Foundation have warned the dry conditions could mean the loss of centuries-old peat soil — a building block for life in the Everglades — to either fire or desiccation. Source: [Palm Beach Post](#).

Resource Commitment Trend

Category	April 3	April 24	May 5
Area Command Teams	3	3	0
NIMO Teams	1	1	1
Type 1 Teams	2	0	0
Type 2 Teams	1	0	0
Crews	1	3	0
Engines	80	64	30
Helicopters	0	6	1
Total FF/Overhead	281	495	107

Fires/Acreage

Category	2010-2019 Ave	2020 Total	Difference
United States: YTD Fires	17,931	12,736	- 5,195
United States: YTD Acres	908,013	259,976	- 648,037

Sources: [NICC Incident Management Situation Report](#); [National Interagency Fire Center](#); [IMSR Archives](#); [InciWeb Incident Information System](#).

Congressional Actions

There's nothing to report this week.

National Park Service

National Park System

A summary of articles pertaining to management and oversight of the NPS, to current trends and issues affecting the National Park System, or to either all or parts of the entire system.

- *Court Orders NPS, FAA To Complete Air Tour Guidelines* – On May 1st, a federal court, noting that the National Park Service and Federal Aviation Administration have failed for 19 years to develop air tour management plans for national parks, has ordered the agencies to get the work done. The action came in response to a lawsuit filed by PEER that asked the court to order mandatory deadlines for adoption of air tour limits covering seven parks that account for more than half of the overflights – Hawaii Volcanoes, Haleakalā, Glacier, Bryce Canyon, and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, and Muir Woods National Monument. On Friday, the U.S. District Court of Appeals in the District of Columbia agreed that no progress had been made on developing plans for 23 parks. "Although applications have been pending at twenty-five parks for nearly two decades, the agencies have fulfilled their statutory mandate at only two," wrote Judge Thomas Griffith for the unanimous court. "Petitioners seek a writ of mandamus to compel the agencies to regulate air tours at seven parks where they have injured members. Because the agencies have failed to timely do so, we grant the petition." Source: Kurt Repanshek, [National Parks Traveler](#).
- *New Site For HPTC, HFC Being Considered* – The Service is considering a new business park in Frederick, Maryland, as a site for a training center and other facilities, including possible community meeting space. The location would provide a permanent home for the park service's Historic Preservation Training Center and the Harpers Ferry Center-Museum Conservation and Collections facility, a complex that could ultimately bring up to 150 jobs to the city. If the plan ultimately gets approved, the NPS will buy about eight acres of the 135-acre park, which is currently being built along Butterfly Lane on Frederick's southern edge. The tract includes the Hargett farmstead. HPTC is currently housed in three locations, with its administrative offices in a building at the Monocacy National Battlefield, its training center and workshops at a building in the city, and its storage facilities at the farmstead. Source: Ryan Marshall, [The Frederick News-Post](#).

Around The Parks

Park reports are in alphabetical order. Included are proposals in the works for new areas or changes in designation for current NPS units.

- *Cape Lookout NS* – The rustic wooden cabins at Long Point are falling into the ocean and will have to be moved soon if they are to survive. "The NPS cannot sustain the Long Point Cabins

where they are right now,” reports the park. “Twenty years ago, there was over 300 (feet) of beach and dunes between the cabins and high tide. Today, there is 48 (feet) of flat sand. Extreme tides wash under the cabins, and through the camp ... The NPS is not looking to do away with the cabins, but is looking at a better place to locate them that might last, and is better protected.” A photo in the article shows the corners of several cabins now hanging over the ocean at high tide, and waves have cut a small cliff in the sand, known as a scarp. North Carolina’s Outer Banks — a constantly shifting series of barrier islands — have been hit hard by rising sea levels and extreme weather in recent years, including heavy flooding caused by Hurricane Dorian in September. The storm cut 54 new inlets between the ocean and the Pamlico Sound on the other side of the islands. Source: Mark Price, [The Charlotte Observer](#).

- *C&O Canal NHP* – Crews have been working to resurface parts of the towpath along the canal and hope to complete another 14 miles by the end of this year. Parts of the canal’s towpath are in need of resurfacing because of rocks, roots and ruts on it that can be dangerous for hikers and bicyclists, according to the C&O Canal Trust. The trust is a nonprofit partner that works with the park to protect, restore and promote the towpath. Workers have been grading the towpath to improve water runoff, then applying crushed stone dust on it. Stone dust does not retain water and hardens over time, making it less likely to erode. Source: David McMillion, [Herald-Mail](#).
- *Everglades NP* – A long-sought project to raise the Tamiami Trail as it crosses the Everglades between Miami-Dade and Florida’s West Coast moved ahead last week as Governor Ron DeSantis announced the upcoming advertisement for a contract to handle the project’s next phase. The work was to be advertised last week as a low-bid, design-build project allowing qualified contractors to bid on raising 6.5 miles of roadway on the trail. The Florida Department of Transportation is to choose the design-build team during the summer, with work expected to start this year. The project runs through the park and will be managed by the Florida Department of Transportation in coordination with the National Park Service. The Tamiami Trail project is a key component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. Elevating the trail will allow for an additional 75 billion to 80 billion gallons of water a year to flow south into the Everglades and Florida Bay. Source: [Miami Today](#).
- *Grand Teton NP* – On April 24th, the Jackson Hole Airport Board approved a permit for Wind River Air to operate a scenic helicopter tour business out of its airport. Opposition to the helicopter tour operation has come in many forms. Noise and carbon emissions pollution were cited by many, as were concerns over the safety record of the Robinson R-44 he proposes to fly. The board, however, has continually reminded the public that scenic air tours via helicopter or fixed-wing aircraft are already allowed in Teton County, including into airspace over private land, Grand Teton National Park, Bridger-Teton National Forest, and the National Elk Refuge provided an altitude of 2,000 feet above ground is maintained. “I know over the last two years we have heard from many people regarding this issue,” said the board’s president. “While most of us on the board feel personally conflicted, there was no doubt that upholding our contractual obligations and abiding by the law—to be fair and equal to all aviation users—was the only reasonable path forward.” Source: [Buckrail](#).
- *Mammoth Cave NP* – The park has been honored for its commitment to protecting the environment. The National Park Service awarded Mammoth Cave the 2019 Good Neighbor Environmental Achievement Award, which recognizes the commitment to partnerships at the local, state, national and international levels. The partnership facilitates important research of the park’s extensive caves and karst landscape, while preserving the park and surrounding communities. The Nature Conservancy, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife and the Caveland Marketing Association are among those partners. Source: Max Winitz, [WNKY News](#).
- *Mount Rushmore NP* – President Trump plans to visit the park see the fireworks over Mount Rushmore this year. "For 20 years or something it hasn't been allowed for environmental reasons. You believe that one? It's all stone," Trump said in a TV interview. His observation must have come as something of a surprise to park managers who oversee the wide array of

species and the dense forest that covers most of the park's 1300 acres. Source: Lisa Kackze, [Sioux Falls Argus Leader](#).

NPS Projects

A listing of significant National Park Service projects which are currently open to public comment, plus due dates and URL's to related sites. Park/agency names for new entries are in **boldface**.

- *Cape Hatteras NS* – The park is preparing an EA for a sediment management framework that will include certain sediment management activities implemented by the seashore and by local jurisdictions, state agencies, and other federal agencies. [Comments may be made until May 10th](#).
- *Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania NMP* – The National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000, as amended, requires that all persons conducting or intending to conduct a commercial air tour operation over a unit of the National Park system apply to the FAA for authority to undertake such activity. Helmet and Goggles Adventures, Inc., a fixed-wing tour operator, has requested permission to conduct tours over the park. As part of the air tour voluntary agreement process, a 30 day public review and comment period must occur prior to the execution of the agreement. [Comments will be taken until May 17th](#).
- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – Great Smokies is seeking public feedback on several transportation and recreation planning efforts that will address visitor access, safety, transportation, and recreation in the Sevier County portion of the park. [Comments can be made on the relevant documents until May 22nd](#).
- *Lake Roosevelt NRA* – The park is in the process of evaluating potential management strategies for improving visitor experience at nine priority sites – Evans, Marcus Island, Kettle Falls, Keller Ferry, Spring Canyon, Porcupine Bay, Gifford, Hunters and Fort Spokane. [Comments are being taken on the plan through May 30th](#).

Briefly Noted

Other matters of interest pertaining to the parks and their people.

- *Correlating New DOI Regions With Old NPS Regions* – Questions continue to arise concerning the new DOI regions and how they correlate with the former NPS regions and their respective RD's. [Click on this link](#) for a two-page PDF file that contains both a map of the new regions and a listing showing which regional directors are now overseeing parks in which states in those regions.
- *Future Of National Parks – Conde Nast Traveler* has an article in its April 30th edition entitled "I'm a Park Ranger and I'm Worried About the Future of National Parks." In it, a seasonal ranger talks about her several worries going into this coming summer, including economic impacts to seasonals caused by delayed hiring, the dangers of coronavirus infection in ranger dorms, diminished entrance fee returns, and the challenges of social distancing in crowded visitor centers. Source: Ashlee Halpern, [Conde Nast Traveler](#).

Coalition Actions

Summary of recent developments within the Coalition, including some of the actions that CPANP took on your behalf. Links to specified documents are embedded in each entry.

- *Great Basin NP Water Rights* – There is good news to celebrate in the long struggle against the Southern Nevada Water Authority's (SNWA) proposed groundwater pumping and pipeline project in Eastern Nevada, which would have caused significant impact to Great Basin National Park. Following a 30-year battle, the SNWA has decided not to appeal the March 2020 court

decision to deny a significant portion of the water rights SNWA sought for the project, which he said could result in “water mining.” The Coalition, which has been involved in this case since 2007, issued [a statement on the decision](#).

- *Joshua Tree NP Water Pumping* – The Coalition [signed on to a letter](#) expressing our opposition to an amendment to legislation directing the procurement by the California Independent System Operator of expensive long-duration bulk storage, such as the proposed Eagle Crest pumped energy storage project in the Eagle Mountains, surrounded by Joshua Tree National Park.
- *FY 2021 Appropriations* – The Coalition joined several partners in [two sign-on letters](#) sent to Congressional leadership regarding FY 2021 appropriations. One letter encourages Congress to increase funding for the NPS and ensure exclusion of all policy riders that harm our national parks within the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill for FY21. The second letter encourages Congress to increase funding for the Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects Program in the FY21 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) Appropriations bill.
- *Grand Teton NP Heli-Tours* – Coalition member Joan Anzelmo's [op-ed piece](#) about the airport board's failure on the heli-tour question ran in the *Jackson Hole News and Guide*:

Source: Emily Thompson, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator.

From The Archives

This section contains incidents taken from *Morning Report* issues published during the corresponding week (approximately) 25 years ago in 1995. All entries appear in the original verb tense; “submitters” are those people who originally submitted the incident report.

- *Lake Meredith NRA* – The sister and parents of Thomas Fine, who was charged last year with the murder of his brother-in-law, Billy Dean Bratcher, have been indicted on twelve counts of conspiring to commit murder and committing mail fraud in an attempt to defraud Bratcher's insurance company. Fine's sister was married to Bratcher. Bratcher and Fine were crossing the lake in an inflatable raft around 1 a.m. on April 9, 1994, when Bratcher reportedly fell out of the raft. Rangers recovered Bratcher's body from the lake ten days later. A joint investigation into the incident was begun by the park and county sheriff's department when inconsistencies were detected in Fine's story of the incident. Investigators also learned that Bratcher's spouse took out a substantial life insurance policy on him during the winter of 1993-1994. Submitted by Chief Ranger Larry Neilson.
- *Death Valley NP* – On April 29th and 30th, participants in the Death Valley 400 Sport Motorcycle ride passed through the park despite lacking a permit for the event. Park staff had informed the promoter, Jerry Counts of Canoga Park, California, of permit requirements, but Counts ignored requests from the park for the application fee, a performance bond, and an accurate map of the event route. Counts contended that the park had neither the authority nor the need to issue a permit for a "self-guided" ride for 150 motorcyclists. Rangers developed a monitoring plan to protect sensitive resources and to provide for visitor safety along the route. One motorcyclist crashed, and it took rangers 45 minutes to locate the accident due to the lack of an event map. The rider was taken to a hospital in Lone Pine and treated for a fractured clavicle and multiple rib fractures. Legal action against Counts is pending. Submitted by District Ranger Mark Maciha.
- *Saguaro NP* – On May 3rd, Jon Pearce, 42, of Tucson, pled guilty to felony possession of stolen property in federal district court and was sentenced to seven months in prison, six months in a half-way house, 36 months supervised probation, mandatory therapy, restitution to his victims, and banned from all NPS areas. Pearce was arrested by rangers in January and connected with over 30 car clouts in the park's Tucson Mountain District and another 50 or

more in the adjoining county park over the last year. For the past five months, Pearce's movements have been monitored through an electronic ankle bracelet in order to stem his "passion" for breaking into vehicles. The county attorney's office has also filed felony theft charges for the offenses that occurred in the state park. Submitted by District Ranger Robert E. Stinson.

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- Issue Contributors: Bill Fitzgerald, John Townsend

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.

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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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