



## The Coalition Weekly Report Wednesday, December 16, 2020

Volume 4

Number 44

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### Incidents

No new incident reports received.

#### **National Park System**

##### **Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents**

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

- *Channel Islands NP* – The captain of the dive boat *Conception*, which went up in flames off the park's coastline last year, leaving 34 people dead, was indicted on December 1st on 34 counts of seaman's manslaughter. A federal grand jury alleges that Jerry Nehl Boylan, 67, "was responsible for the safety and security of the vessel, its crew, and its passengers." The indictment alleges that Boylan caused the deaths of 34 people "by his misconduct, negligence, and inattention to his duties." [Full article](#). Source: CNN.
- *Carlsbad Caverns NP* – The family of a man who was shot and killed by a parker ranger at Carlsbad Caverns National Park is suing the federal government and the ranger. Gage Lorentz, a Colorado native, was driving through New Mexico in March when Ranger Robert John Mitchell stopped him for speeding. Following a lengthy interaction and scuffle, Mitchell shot Lorentz, who was unarmed. Body camera video shows that it took Mitchell eight minutes to remove the first aid kit from his truck, and 12 minutes before he rendered aid. The lawsuit claims Mitchell violated Lorentz's constitutional rights by using excessive force and failing to render aid, wasting critical time that could have saved Lorentz's life. The State of New Mexico addresses this and other details of the incident in their completed investigation. [Their findings/news release can be found at this link](#). Source: KOB-TV.
- *Buffalo NR* – On December 10th, two people pleaded guilty in federal court to unlawfully excavating and damaging archaeological resources in the park. Michael L. Walters, 64, and Yvonne Jenay Walters, 55, each pleaded guilty to a criminal information charging violation of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act. On August 29, 2015, rangers spotted the pair digging in the Grinders Ferry area and taking rocks and minerals from a gravel bar. Further investigation revealed the couple had been to the same area previously to dig for rocks and artifacts. Court records state that both were involved in searching for, locating, excavating, trading, and selling artifacts, and actively engaged in social media group communities with the same interests. Michael and Yvonne Walters' sentences will be determined by the court at a later date, following the U.S. Probation Office's completion of a presentence investigation. [Full article](#). Source: KFSM News.

### National Fire Situation

**National Interagency Fire Center  
Fire Activity Largely Confined To California**

The national preparedness level has dropped to PL 1.

NIFC has stopped producing daily reports in favor of a weekly summary. The following was posted on December 11th:

Currently, six large fires are burning in California. Four new large fires were reported last week, and firefighters were able to reach containment goals on five large fires. To date, 52,834 wildfires have burned 9,539,554 acres, the second most acreage burned in the past 10 years.

**Resource Commitment Trend**

| Category           | November 27 | December 4 | December 11 |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Area Command Teams | 0           | 0          | 0           |
| NIMO Teams         | 0           | 0          | 0           |
| Type 1 Teams       | 0           | 1          | 0           |
| Type 2 Teams       | 0           | 0          | 0           |
| Crews              | 11          | 9          | 11          |
| Engines            | 26          | 167        | 32          |
| Helicopters        | 3           | 13         | 2           |
| Total FF/Overhead  | 502         | 1,165      | 539         |

**Fires/Acreage**

| Category                 | 2010-2019 Ave | 2020 Total | Difference  |
|--------------------------|---------------|------------|-------------|
| United States: YTD Fires | 56,440        | 56,077     | - 363       |
| United States: YTD Acres | 6,638,301     | 9,643,106  | + 3,004,805 |

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

**Congressional Actions**

Reports on legislation, upcoming hearings and new public laws of relevance to the national parks, prepared by Don Hellmann, former assistant director, legislative and Congressional affairs for the National Park Service.

**New Public Laws**

**December 3** – The president signed into law:

- [H.R. 1773](#), to award a Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the women in the United States who joined the workforce during World War II, providing the aircraft, vehicles, weaponry, ammunition and other material to win the war, that were referred to as “Rosie the Riveter”, in recognition of their contributions to the United States and the inspiration they have provided to ensuing generations (Public Law 116–195).
- [S. 327](#), to amend the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act to provide for a lifetime National Recreational Pass for any veteran with a service-connected disability (Public Law 116–205).

## **Senate Actions**

**December 11** –The Senate agreed to the conference report to accompany [H.R. 6395](#), to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2021 for military activities of the Department of Defense and for military construction, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, by a vote of 84 yeas to 13 nays. See House action of December 8, below, for provisions that affect the National Park Service. The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law.

**December 11**—The Senate passed [H.R. 8900](#), making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2021. The bill extends funding for all federal agencies through December 18, 2020. The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law.

## **House Actions**

**December 8** – The House agreed to the conference report to accompany [H.R. 6395](#), to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2021 for military activities of the Department of Defense and for military construction, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, by a vote of 335 yeas to 78 nays with one answering "present". The following provisions are of interest to the NPS:

- In Division A: Title VI, Subtitle C, Sec. 625, to make the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass available at no cost to members of Gold Star Families. Title X, Subtitle G, Sec. 1083, to authorize modifications to the First Division Monument located on Federal land in President's Park in the District of Columbia in order to honor the members of the First Infantry Division who paid the ultimate sacrifice during United States operations, including Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn, and Operation Enduring Freedom.
- In Division H: Title XCV, Sec. 9501, to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to provide funds from the National Park Service's national recreation and preservation account to the Oklahoma City National Memorial endowment fund.

The conference report dropped the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act, which included language to establish in statute the Curecanti National Recreation Area, and to protect land surrounding the Grand Canyon from new mineral extraction activities; as well as the Protecting America's Wilderness Act, which addressed issues affecting Redwood National Park, established the San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area, and added the Rim of the Valley corridor to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. All of these provisions were in the House version of the Defense Authorization Act, but were not in the Senate version.

**December 8** – The House passed the following bills:

- [S. 1811](#), to provide for improvements to the rivers and harbors of the United States, to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, with amendments. Sec. 324 of the bill provides additional funds for the Central Everglades ecosystem restoration project. The bill now returns to the Senate for further action.
- [S. 1014](#), to establish the Route 66 Centennial Commission. The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law.

**December 9** – The House passed [H.R. 8900](#), making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2021, by a vote of 343 yeas to 67 nays. The bill extends funding for all federal agencies through December 18, 2020.

**December 10** – The House passed the following bills:

- [H.R. 970](#), to direct the Secretary of the Interior to develop a plan for the removal of the monument to Robert E. Lee at the Antietam National Battlefield.

- [H.R. 5458](#), to authorize the Department of the Interior to acquire, by donation, approximately 40 acres of specified nonfederal land for inclusion in Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado.
- [H.R. 5459](#), to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to correct a land ownership error within the boundary of Rocky Mountain National Park by authorizing an exchange of 0.18 acres of land between a private landowner and NPS.
- [H.R. 7098](#), to expand the boundary of Saguaro National Park by approximately 1,150 acres, and to study additional land for future adjustments to the boundary of the park.
- [H.R. 7489](#), to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to convey to the Commonwealth of Virginia or the District of Columbia certain Federal land under the administrative jurisdiction of the National Park Service for the construction of rail and other infrastructure.

**December 10** –The Committee on Oversight and Reform: Subcommittee on Government Operations held a hearing entitled “The Elements of Presidential Transitions”. Testimony was heard from public witnesses. There were no witnesses from federal agencies at the hearing.

## [The Coalition](#)

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.

- *Another FOIA Submitted On Covid Numbers* – The Coalition [submitted another letter](#) seeking information on COVID-19 infection numbers in the NPS. We've filed regular requests since March with no response as of yet.
- *Power Line DEIS Comment Period* – CPANP has [submitted a request](#) to the Army Corps of Engineers regarding the Dominion Power Surry-Skiffes Creek-Wheaton Transmission Line Project DEIS. In it, we asked the Corps to extend the published 45-day comment period to a minimum of 120 days from November 27, 2020. This extension is needed due to the length and complexity of the DEIS; the time period during which it was published; and the relatively short opportunity for the public to comment:

Source: Emily Thompson, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator.

## [Park People](#)

### [NPS Alumni Passages](#)

A listing of the deaths of retired and active NPS employees over the past few months:

- *Bob Peterson* died in Boise on November 29th. Although an official obit is not currently available, the following anonymous tribute has been making the rounds: “The late 1970s and early 1980s were exciting years to work for the National Park Service in Alaska as huge new parks, monuments and preserves were established. Park Service officials selected skeleton staffs for the new areas. At the same time, new issues ranging from subsistence, mining access, and ATV use had to be sorted out. Residents throughout the state held strong, and often conflicting, opinions about the NPS in Alaska, and at every level, political leaders, media, interest groups, and citizens vigorously expressed their strong opinions, often as criticism. Through all of this, Bob Peterson, Alaska associate regional director for operations in the early 1980s and later the deputy regional director, quietly and skillfully provided a treasured source of stability, sage advice, support, and comfort. Throughout his career, Peterson had established a reputation for being a ‘Ranger’s Ranger,’ serving at places like Mount Rainier, Yosemite, Denali/Katmai, Isle Royale, Grand Canyon, Zion, and Everglades. He was among the early rangers to work at Katmai in the summer and at Mount McKinley in winter, so he understood what it was like to be a skeleton staff at a remote area. He was an excellent pilot who was passionate about flying and knew well what it is like to take a plane load of dignitaries through challenging weather conditions. From the beginning, he had a significant amount of what one

individual called “street cred” when it came to the NPS and to Alaska Region. Trips from the field to the regional office in Anchorage typically involved plans to contact a long list of individuals in that office. Their plans also included an equally long list of items to purchase or a variety of tasks on behalf of family and friends. Every day around 4:00 p.m. these visitors from the field would begin showing up at Peterson’s office to discuss the various issues, concerns, complexities, and conundrums they were facing. Some of their questions, for example, included: When is a D-4 bulldozer a piece of equipment or when is it an ATV? How should one load his shotgun when entering bear country? What skills are most critical in a multi-million acre park/preserve? Peterson always conducted these conversations in a manner that helped his team reach consensus without direction. His team always knew he would back their collective decisions. He also kept them focused and enthusiastic, even in the darkest days when ranger stations and airplanes were being burned and rangers threatened or assaulted. Many individuals contributed to the establishment of a vast new set of park areas in Alaska; however, few, if any, had as wide and profound an effect on the eventual success of these park units as Peterson.”

- *Katherine Anne (Kate) Hanrahan*, 65, passed away from cancer at her Florida residence on December 4th. Katherine and William Hanrahan were married in August, 1979, at St. Francis Parish in Traverse City. Following her marriage in 1979, she was a stay-at-home mom to her four children. The family settled in Hancock, when her husband took a position with Isle Royale National Park. After raising her family, Katherine worked as a secretary to the board of directors at Michigan Tech Fund and then became a purchasing agent and property technician with Isle Royale and Keweenaw National Parks. She retired in 2015 from the National Park Service. A celebration of her life will take place in Traverse City next spring. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made in Kate’s honor to her favorite charities: Homes for Autism, PO Box 904, Birmingham, MI 48012, The National Park Foundation, Doctors Without Borders and Treasure Coast Food Bank. [Full article](#). Source: *Daily Mining Gazette*.
- *Herman “Herm” Hoops*, 74, a legendary river runner and advocate for protection of the rivers of the Colorado Plateau, died on November 23rd. Herm worked for the National Park Service at Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Carlsbad Caverns and Guadalupe Mountains national parks, Gateway National Recreation Area, Rocky Mountain Regional Office and Dinosaur National Monument. He also worked for Pea Island and Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuges. According to his obituary, Herm likely “died of a broken heart for not being able to do more” for Colorado rivers; “Herm was the quintessential hippie, surrounding himself with friends and memories rather than money or special treatment.” Online condolences may be shared at [www.ashleyvalleyfuneralhome.com](http://www.ashleyvalleyfuneralhome.com). In lieu of flowers, the family would like you to consider donating to one of the following organizations in Herm’s name: the River Management Society (<https://www.river-management.org/donate>) or the American Battlefield Trust (<https://www.battlefields.org/help-save-battlefields>). [Full article](#). Source: *Moab Sun News*.
- *Ray Leon Claycomb*, 84, passed away Monday, November 16th at his home. Ray joined the National Park Service as an interpreter and was stationed at Grand Canyon National Park, Gettysburg National Military Park, Fort Necessity National Monument, Pipestone National Monument and the Natchez Trace Parkway. Per Ray’s wishes, cremation rites have been accorded and there will be a memorial service at a later date. Memorials are suggested to be made to Blessing Hospice. Online condolences may be left to the family at [www.nieburfh.com](http://www.nieburfh.com). Niebur Funeral Home in Pittsfield is handling the arrangements. Charitable donations may be made in Ray’s memory to Blessing Hospice. [Full article](#). Source: Niebur Funeral Home.

### **NPS Management Changes**

Here’s a listing of recent personnel changes in the NPS. Click on the links following the brief summaries for additional details:

- *Dan Brown* will retire from Gulf Islands National Seashore on January 2nd. He arrived at the park in 2010 just as oil from the Deepwater Horizon spill washed ashore and was tasked with removing four million pounds of it from the park’s 106 miles of beaches. Deputy

Superintendent Steve McCoy will act as superintendent until a replacement for Brown is chosen. Brown started with the National Park Service in 1975 and has worked in 11 national park areas. Among his career highlights were living on a live volcano on Hawaii's Big Island as well as experiencing 48 degrees below zero temperatures at Great Sand Dunes National Park and more than 120 degrees at Death Valley National Park. Brown previously served as park superintendent at Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area and Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park. He also was an interim deputy regional director who oversaw 23 parks in the Southeast Region and worked in at the National Park Service Congressional Affairs Office in Washington D.C. [Full article](#). Source: *Pensacola News Journal*.

- *Mike Tranel* will become the new deputy superintendent of Yellowstone National Park early in February. Tranel, a 35-year veteran of the National Park Service, is currently the superintendent of the Powder River Group and oversees Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, Little Bighorn Battlefield and Devils Tower national monuments and Fort Laramie National Historic Site. He has served in that position since 2018. As deputy superintendent, Tranel will essentially serve as the chief operating officer of the park. Yellowstone is one of the largest operations in the NPS with 750 employees and a total budget exceeding \$65 million. [Full article](#). Source: KGWN News.

## **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.

- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – On the evening of Friday, December 8th, rangers were notified that Jennifer Dates, 18, a student at the University of Tennessee, had failed to return from a day hike to Rainbow Falls. Dates had been hiking on the 5.5 Mile trail with three companions, but became separated from them at the base of the falls. Her friends thought she'd begun the downhill return hike ahead of them and expected to find her at the trailhead. Rangers immediately began a search for her in difficult terrain and through very treacherous weather - a mix of driving rain, sleet and snow, with temperatures below freezing. The search was halted at 3 a.m. on Saturday, then resumed a few hours later with an additional 20 ground searchers and eight dog teams. The first significant winter cold front arrived that evening, and temperatures plummeted into the single digits that night. Concerns for Dates were high, as she was lightly dressed in corduroy pants, a fleece pullover and a toboggan cap. On Sunday, a Tennessee Highway Patrol helicopter with infrared detection equipment joined the search along with numerous state searchers and volunteers. The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) provided logistical support. As searchers were deploying, Dates, to searchers collective amazement, appeared at a trailhead parking lot, suffering only cold feet and dehydration. She was being debriefed at the time of the report. District ranger Kenny Slay was IC. Submitted by Chief Ranger Jason Houck.
- *White Sands NP* – Two hikers taking sunset photographs in the park failed to return to the vehicle by park closing time on the evening of December 5th. Ranger Kathy Denton, assisted by resident volunteers, began a search for the two men. After tracking them for two-and-a-half hours, it became apparent that they were heading away from the road and into a remote, roadless desert. Winds were increasing, and temperatures dropped to a low of 37 degrees. Ranger Barry Majjala joined the search and coordinated patrols of the park's perimeters with military police from the adjacent base. The two men appeared to be heading towards an area known to be littered with unexploded military ordnance. Majjala located the two hikers just after 10 p.m. as they were crossing the park boundary into that area. One of the men wore hiking shorts; both were dressed lightly, with no water, food or extra clothing. Although they were in good condition and unharmed, they were extremely thirsty and tired. The two men had carried a tripod and heavy camera gear through 13 miles of soft sand after becoming disoriented and discovering that their compass was malfunctioning. They were still five miles from the nearest installation when they were found. The hikers were in good physical

condition and travelled faster than average, which contributed to the urgency of the search. Submitted by Kathy Denton and Barry Majjala.

- *Service-wide* – Due to a budget impasse and government shutdown, Ranger Activities produced a special issue around midday on Saturday, December 16th, with these particulars: The following notice has just been issued by the Washington Office. In accordance with instructions received this morning from the Office of Management and Budget, all National Park Service areas are to shutdown operations immediately. Employees who came to work today who are NOT designated as excepted or emergency personnel should be sent home. Employees who begin their normal work week on Sunday who are NOT designated as excepted or emergency personnel should come to work on Sunday, close down operations, then return home. Employees are allowed three hours to accomplish this task. Instructions regarding operations for the regular work week, beginning on Monday morning, will be forthcoming. Please contact your Field Director's office for details. Contacts are as follows. Please note that the designated contact for Pacific West has changed from the list disseminated on Friday afternoon: Alaska – Marcia Blaszak; Intermountain - Bob Reynolds; Midwest - Ed Carlin; National Capital – Carole Treon; Northeast – Denny Beach; Pacific West - Stan Albright; Southeast – Charlie Powell. WASO Ranger Activities will be staffed during normal operating hours (8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.) through the weekend to serve as a point of contact for emergency purposes and as a point of contact for field staff to reach Washington officials. The number to call is 202-208-4874. This is NOT a general information number - general questions should be directed to the above Field Area contacts.

## A Closing Observation

"The young people of today are the lawmakers, the scientists, the industrialists, the conservationists, the cattlemen, and the lumbermen of tomorrow. It is vitally important that they learn today the values of the national parks, and the principles underlying their preservation. For they will have the say tomorrow as to what becomes of these properties of the people."

Director Newton B. Drury

## Acknowledgements

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

- Production: Steve Pittleman
- Regular Correspondents: Don Hellmann, Emily Thompson, Dennis Burnett, Rick Smith, Duncan Morrow and Mark Forbes
- Issue Contributors: Tom Haraden, John Townsend, Randy Turner

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](mailto: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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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](#).

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