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The Coalition Report

Wednesday, April 17, 2024

Correction: *In the April 3, 2024 Coalition Report, I made a mistake in Michael Soukup's former work for the NPS. Michael received the 2024 Edward B. Danson Award from the National Parks Conservation Association. Michael is a marine ecologist and a former NPS associate director for science and natural resources stewardship. Thank you to Gary Davis for bringing this to my attention. -Editor Katie Wallace*

Coalition Actions

[National Park Week](#) is right around the corner, and the Coalition would like to highlight the incredible contributions our members have made to our national parks and public lands. Throughout National Park Week, we plan to celebrate our national parks by sharing your stories, memories, and photographs. Where have you worked? Do you have a funny story, poignant memory, or gorgeous photo? Please let us know! Just [fill out this form](#), and we'll do the rest. We are asking for all submissions to be in by April 18, 2024.

The Coalition submitted [detailed comments](#) to the Bureau of Land Management on its Draft Utility-Scale Solar Energy Development Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. In sum, the letter identifies numerous positive components of the draft and specifies concerns that it would allow solar energy development on public lands immediately adjacent to the National Park System and other specially protected areas.

We joined with the Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth US, and Rocky Mountain Wild in [protesting](#) two parcel leases in the Bureau of Land Management's New Mexico Office Second Quarter 2024 Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale due to their overlap with

priority wildlife and the low value of oil and gas development.

The Coalition issued a [press release](#) celebrating the issuance of the Bureau of Land Management's Fluid Mineral Leases and Leasing Process final rule.

National/Regional NPS Updates

A summary of news pertaining to management and oversight of the NPS, to current trends and issues affecting the National Park System and its programs, or intersecting with the parks on a more regional basis.

- *Strengthened civil service protections* - On April 4, the Office of Personnel Management announced a final rule that could preempt attempts to invoke Schedule F, a classification of career federal employees that could be fired more easily. Former President Donald Trump has stated that he will implement Schedule F if elected again. The OPM rule can be rolled back but will take time to do so, slowing the implementation of an executive order by six months to a year. Source: [E&E News](#)
- *Supporting neurodiverse visitors at national parks* - AFAR published [an article](#) about the NPS' efforts to support neurodiverse visitors. The article highlights Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks' accessibility film series, which includes ideas for quieter locations for those who are overstimulated in busy environments. It also cites tactile exhibits at the Channel Islands National Park visitor center and the park's online accessibility guide, as well as Death Valley National Park's sensory guide and sensory kits for coping with the rugged environment. Gettysburg National Military Park held its first "sensory friendly day" in 2023, in which it turned off battle sounds in its exhibits and offered a quiet room. They now regularly are hosting these types of days. Source: AFAR
- *Restoration of national park grasslands* - Clarksville Online published [an article](#) about the relationship between the National Park Service and the Southeastern Grasslands Institute of Austin Peay State University. SGI has supported NPS science for over a decade and now will implement an \$8.8 million five-year grassland restoration project across several national park units. The funding comes from the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Source: Clarksville Online
- *"Harassment, retaliation, and discrimination in the NPS"* - National Parks Traveler published [an article](#) about chronic problems in the Department of the Interior and NPS, citing "shocking levels of disfunction, misbehavior, ethical missteps, and even criminal actions." Source: National Parks Traveler
- *Cultural resource protection deficiencies* - The National Parks Conservation Association published [a 20-page report](#) arguing that the National Park System is suffering from a lack of funding for cultural resource protection. The report is asking

the agency to grant \$250 million for cultural resources in honor of the United States' 250th anniversary. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)

- *How people get lost and then found on public lands - Smokymountains.com* published [an article](#) analyzing "over 100 news reports" about the most common reasons people get lost ("wandered off the trail" was #1) and their top four tips for surviving - warmth, shelter, water, and food. Several national park incidents are mentioned in the article. Source: *Smokymountains.com*
- *Movement against public lands - Mother Jones* published [an article](#) about a nonprofit called the American Stewards of Liberty, an organization that champions private property rights and state control of public lands. This includes a movement against the Biden Administration's "30x30" goal, in which they aim to conserve 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. (*Editor note: This is a goal that the Coalition has supported, including advocacy for national monument designations.*) Source: *Mother Jones*

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Acadia National Park* - The park will receive \$950,000 in Inflation Reduction Act funds to create a model for addressing climate change vulnerabilities of coastal archaeological sites and resources through both traditional Indigenous knowledge and western science. The project includes the creation of a co-stewardship decision framework and adaptation guidebook utilizing 25 archaeological sites as case studies, a pilot citizen science program for documenting and monitoring sites, and public programs and lesson plans for Wabanaki communities and public audiences. Partners on the project include the Wabanaki Nations, University of Maine, and the Schoodic Institute. Source: [Acadia National Park](#)
- *Appalachian National Scenic Trail* - The Appalachian Trail Museum selected its 2024 class of Hall of Fame inductees. One inductee was Edward Ballard, a field coordinator for the NPS who was instrumental in the multi-agency agreement that led to the Appalachian Trail corridor, as well as the proponent for a chain of overnight shelters that are not standard along the trail. Arno Cammerer also was honored. Arno helped design the route of the trail from Pennsylvania to Georgia. Later, as the NPS director, he helped create Smoky Mountains National Park, including securing the route of the Appalachian Trail through that area. Other inductees included Dave Startzell, long-time executive director of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and Ronald Rosen, a long-time volunteer and supporter of trail planning efforts. Source: [Gettysburg Times](#)
- *Blue Ridge Parkway* - *PBS North Carolina* published [an article](#) about efforts to preserve historic orchards along the parkway via protective easements through the Conservation Trust for North Carolina. The easements serve as wildlife habitat and

for climate change resilience. Source: [PBS North Carolina](#)

- *Bryce Canyon National Park* - Starting on May 8, ranger-led full moon hikes will be available on Recreation.gov, replacing the old system of a 4pm ticket lottery in the park. For each hike, 15 tickets will be release 14 days in advance, with an additional 10 tickets released five days in advance. Source: [Bryce Canyon National Park](#)
- *Cape Cod National Seashore* - The park soon will begin a number of projects aimed at improving visitor safety and park infrastructure, including hazard tree stabilization, a new staircase at Marconi Beach, replacement of fee booths at Race Point Beach and Head of the Meadow Beach, structural stabilization of the Captain Penniman barn, repaving of parking lots, new vault toilets, and the replacement of over 1,000 park signs to reflect NPS sign standards. Source: [Cape Cod National Seashore](#)
- *Cape Hatteras National Seashore* - Following a two-week public comment period, the park decided to not pave a 400-foot-long section of Flowers Ridge Road in Buxton, North Carolina. The park had proposed the project due to resident concerns about maintaining the gravel surface. However, public comments shared concerns around increased speeding and potential confusion for visitors about park access if it were paved. Source: [Cape Hatteras National Seashore](#)
- *Capitol Reef National Park* - On April 29, the NPS, in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration, will begin a \$12 million project to rehabilitate Scenic Drive and several parking lots. The road will be closed during the project. The project is expected to be complete in the fall. It is being executed by Harward and Rees Construction out of Loa, Utah. Source: [Capitol Reef National Park](#)
- *Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument* - On April 15, the historic Young family home was reopened after a two-year, \$5.1 million restoration. The project included restoration of the exterior and interior, accessibility improvements, and new staff office spaces. Source: [Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument](#)
- *Colonial National Historical Park* - The park has asked the Yorktown Arts Foundation, a nonprofit organization that currently holds the concession for the On the Hill Gallery at Burcher Cottage, to stop operating the gallery and to vacate the building at the end of their contract (June 2024) The foundation has held the concession contract since 2014. In 2021, the NPS let the foundation know they would be moving away from a concession toward renting the building with a standard lease. The foundation expressed interest in leasing the building, but the NPS still asked them to vacate. The foundation is currently soliciting public support to negotiate a lease. Source: [Williamsburg Yorktown Daily](#)
- *Congaree National Park* - From April 14-16 and May 16-25, NPS and U.S. Department of Agriculture staff will conduct feral hog culling in the park. The hogs

have created widespread damage to land and water resources both in and outside the park, including extensive damage near the Harry Hampton Visitor Center, and in firefly habitat and longleaf pine restoration areas. Source: [Congaree National Park](#)

- *Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area* - This spring, the park will begin a project to rehabilitate a three-mile segment of Old Mine Road between Mile Marker 6 (the park boundary) and Mile Marker 9 in Hardwick Township. The \$11 million project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act. It is expected to be complete at the end of summer. Source: [Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area](#)
- *Flight 93 National Memorial* - The park, in partnership with the Friends of Flight 93 National Memorial, have started a 10-year project to revitalize the trees within the 40 Memorial Groves and Allée. The project is supported by the work of forestry and soil experts at Cornell University, Pennsylvania State University, and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Source: [Flight 93 National Memorial](#)
- *George Washington Memorial Parkway* - The NPS recently began a project to stabilize the exterior of the Non-Commissioned Officer Quarters at Fort Hunt Park. The park also is getting a new playground and updates to its bathrooms. The project is expected to continue through August 2024. Source: [Mount Vernon Gazette](#)
- *Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve* - On April 8, the park released the results of its 2023 cruise ship monitoring program, in which third-party experts conducted random inspections on 33 occasions. Inspectors found high levels of compliance with operating requirements and applicable laws. The inspection program will continue in 2024. Source: [Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve](#)
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area* - The National Parks Conservation Association and Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance settled and dismissed their lawsuits against the NPS over a 2021 NPS rule that expanded motorized vehicle use in the park. The agreement states the the NPS will propose a revised rule that will limit off-highway vehicles and street-legal all-terrain vehicles in the Orange Cliffs area adjacent to Canyonlands National Park, as well as other restrictions on roads and quiet hours. Source: [National Parks Conservation Association](#)
- *Golden Gate National Recreation Area* - *The Business Journals* published [an interview](#) with Presidio Trust CEO Jean Fraser about the future of the Presidio. Source: *The Business Journals*
- *Grand Canyon National Park* - A new fossil, *Equisetalean strobilius*, was discovered during recent excavation work related to the Transcanyon Waterline project at the Mile-and-a-Half Resthouse. The fossil is of the "spore-producing reproductive

organ" of an extinct species of horsetail. The fossil is not uncommon in the Grand Canyon, but "discovering the fruiting bodies is unprecedented." Source: [KNAU](#)

- *Grand Canyon National Park* - On April 15, the park reopened the Bright Angel Trail, Tonto Trail, and Havasupai Gardens Campground. They have been closed since December 1 to replace pipeline on the Transcanyon Waterline. The Plateau Point Trail will remain closed through June 20. The pipeline project is ongoing through the end of December 2025, and future closures and intermittent delays on trail are planned. Source: [Grand Canyon National Park](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park* - The *Jackson Hole News and Guide* published [an article](#) about the efforts of the park's snow-clearing crew to open Teton Park Road after the winter. The road opened to visitors on March 29. Source: *Jackson Hole News and Guide*
- *Grand Teton National Park* - The *Cowboy State Daily* published [an interview](#) with Superintendent Chip Jenkins, including his background, day-to-day work, and challenges and opportunities in managing the park. Source: *Cowboy State Daily*
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - The park soon will begin a project to rehabilitate a two-mile section of Newfound Gap Road near Gatlinburg, as well as adjacent parking areas, a bypass bridge, stone masonry, and drainages. Closures and detours may be in effect during the project. It is expected to be complete by September 27. The \$11 million project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act. Source: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#)
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - On April 8, the park began the second phase of a project to repair and rehabilitate Lakeview Drive, including pavement and accessibility improvements to the Noland Creek Trailhead parking area and deck repair on the Noland Creek Bridge. Closures may be in effect during the project. It is expected to be complete in early July. The \$15.7 million project was supported with funding from the Great American Outdoors Act. Source: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#)
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - Starting on April 15, the park will close the Ramsey Cascades Trail on weekdays to allow trail crews to finish an ongoing rehabilitation project. The closures will continue through November 14. The project is being funded by the Friends of the Smokies. Source: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#)
- *Independence National Historical Park* - The park soon will begin a \$14 million project to upgrade and replace the heating and cooling infrastructure and implement new energy conservation measures. The project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act. Temporary closures may be in place at times, though Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell Center are expected to remain open

- throughout the project. Source: [Independence National Historical Park](#)
- *Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail* - The trail released its 2023 Annual Report, including projects completed with partners along the 4,900-mile route. Source: [Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail](#)
 - *Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative* (an NPS-administered program) - On April 15, the NPS, in partnership with Jefferson National Parks Association, opened up applications for cultural heritage and education projects in Lower Mississippi Delta region. Applications are due May 31. Source: [New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park](#)
 - *Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site* - The park is accepting nominations to fill a vacancy on their Federal Advisory Commission through May 2. Terms last four years. Source: [Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site](#)
 - *National Mall and Memorial Parks* - Japan will send 250 cherry trees to be planted at Tidal Basin to replace those that are being removed during a project to repair crumbling sea walls. The original cherry trees in Tidal Basin were also donated by Japan 112 years ago. Source: The Washington Post
 - *Point Reyes National Seashore* - The North Bay Business Journal published [an article](#) about The Nature Conservancy's efforts to buy out remaining leases of dairy farms and cattle ranches in the park. A federal lawsuit against the leases by three conservation groups is ongoing and has been stuck in mediation and settlement negotiations. Source: *North Bay Business Journal*
 - *Point Reyes National Seashore* - The park recently published [a storymap](#) featuring soundscapes for five different trails in the park. Source: *San Francisco Bay Area Network Inventory and Monitoring Program Natural Resources and Science Update, Feb-March 2024*
 - *Shenandoah National Park* - The park currently is working with utility partners to make repairs and upgrade electric infrastructure in the park to proactively mitigate damage from future weather events. Intermittent power outages will occur at Big Meadows. Elkwallow Wayside and Mathews Arm Campground will be delayed in opening for the season. There is no date for completion yet. Source: [Shenandoah National Park](#)
 - *Thomas Edison National Historical Park* - On April 20, the park will reopen the Black Maria, a replica of the world's first motion picture studio. It has been under restoration by an NPS Maintenance Action Team over the last two years. This is the first public access to the Black Maria since the mid-1980s. The project cost \$161,218, and included repairs to floors, windows, and doors, new exterior

sheathing, electrical upgrades, and an accessibility ramp. New exhibits and interpretive panels were also installed. The project was funded by the Great American Outdoors Act and the park's partner, the Edison Innovation Foundation. Source: [Thomas Edison National Historical Park](#)

- *Valles Caldera National Preserve* - The park has opened up a contract opportunity for horse-mounted, trespass cattle wrangling services during the 2024 summer and fall seasons. The park is located adjacent to several U.S. Forest Service grazing allotments, which has created issues with cattle wandering into the park. Quotes are due April 30. Source: [Valles Caldera National Preserve](#)
- *Valles Caldera National Preserve* - Ana Steffen received the posthumous 2023 Regional Professional Achievement in Archaeological Management Award. She was the long-time archaeologist and science communicator at the park. She passed away in February 2024. Robert Parmenter received the 2023 Regional Director's Award for Professional Excellence in Natural Resources. He also worked in Valles Caldera for 21 years in science and resource management. He recently retired (see [3/20/24 Coalition Report](#))
- *Wind Cave National Park* - On May 1, the park will begin a \$2 million project to replace the elevator system. Cave tours will be closed during the project, which will run through the summer. The funding comes from NPS fee revenue. The elevator has broken several times over the last five years, and this project is expected to fix these problems. Source: [South Dakota Searchlight](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The park has expanded fishing to year-round access on sections of the Madison River and Gardner River. Source: [Yellowstone National Park](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - On April 3, the scientific journal *PLOS Climate* published new research by the U.S. Geological Survey, Utah State University, and Clemson University, showing that tourism to Yellowstone produces 1.03 megatons of carbon dioxide emissions each year, 90% of which can be linked to transportation to and from the park. 72% of emissions related to travel were made by 35% of all visitors - those who utilized airfare to access the park. Source: [The Hill](#)
- *Zion National Park* - The park recently began a project to rehabilitate the South Campground, including new bathrooms and water systems, improved sewer infrastructure, better stormwater drainage, and new food storage boxes. The project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act, disaster recovery appropriations, and visitor entrance fees. Source: [Zion National Park](#)
- *Zion National Park* - The park put out a press release highlighting the two-year anniversary of the Angels Landing Pilot Permit Program. The announcement

includes statistics about the program's success. Source: [Zion National Park](#)

Personnel Changes

- *Antietam National Battlefield* - Andrew Banasik was selected as the new superintendent. Andrew has over 25 years of NPS experience, most recently as the superintendent at Monocacy National Battlefield. He begins his new role on May 19. Source: [National Park Service National Capital Area Region](#)
- *Fire and Aviation Management* - Rhiannon Touchette was selected as the new visual information specialist for the Branch of Communication and Education of the NPS Division of Fire and Aviation. Rhiannon is a former wildland firefighter with over 15 years of communications experience, most recently at the National Wildfire Coordinating Group at the National Interagency Fire Center. Source: [National Park Service Fire and Aviation Management](#)
- *Harpers Ferry National Historical Park* - Tanya Gossett was selected as the new superintendent. Tanya has 30 years of NPS experience, most recently as the associate regional director for resources stewardship and science for the National Capital Region. She begins her new role on May 19. Source: [National Park Service National Capital Region](#)
- *New Philadelphia National Historic Site* - Christopher "Chris" Collins was selected as the new superintendent. Chris has over 20 years of NPS experience, most recently as the superintendent at Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park. He will begin his new role later this spring. Source: [New Philadelphia National Historical Park](#)

Park People

Here we honor deceased park employees, as well as important news about Coalition Members and other former park employees or volunteers. People are listed alphabetically by last name.

Deceased

- Michael "Mike" Ray Barker, 68, passed away on March 27. Mike worked at Joshua Tree National Park for many years, retiring in 2018. Source: [Visalia Times Delta](#)
- Robert "Bob" Edward Belletdeaux, 83, passed away on April 2. Bob worked for the National Park Service "in Florida" for a time. He also spent time working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management. Source: [Broadus-Raines Funeral Home](#)
- Bernice Kame Coolidge, 94, passed away on March 9. During her college years, she worked as waitstaff in Sequoia National Park. Source: [Visalia Times Delta](#)

- John N. Hicks, 71, passed away recently. He worked for the NPS for a time, including involvement in firefighting. Source: [Bedford Bulletin](#)
- Harry W. Mason, 69, passed away on April 3. He worked for a time as a ranger at Mount Rainier National Park. Source: [The News-Herald](#)
- Dayton Lavern Olson, 91, passed away on March 9. Dayton volunteered at Rocky Mountain National Park "in the Elk Bugle Corps and Bighorn Sheep Patrol." Source: [Estes Park News](#)
- William "Bill" K. Sefton, 81, passed away on March 26. Bill volunteered with the National Park Service. Source: [Dayton Daily News](#)

In the News

- Danielle Jackson, a former NPS ranger, wrote [an article](#) for *Business Insider* about "6 favorite national parks to visit." Source: *Business Insider*
- Jaiden Stansberry was selected as one of this year's Truman Scholars, a program that provides recipients with \$30,000 in funding for graduate studies, leadership training, career counseling, and special internship opportunities within the federal government. Jaiden is a graduating senior at the University of Montana. She has spent several summers as a wildland firefighter in Yosemite National Park and will work in Glacier National Park this summer. Jaiden grew up with her father in the National Park Service. Source: [University of Montana News](#)

Open for Comment

Items will stay on this list until public comment has closed.

- *Golden Gate National Recreation Area* - Public comment is [open through April 30](#) on an NPS easement and special use permit to the City and County of San Francisco for a project at South Ocean Beach that will fix an issue with wastewater system infrastructure due to eroding bluffs and rising sea levels. Source: [Golden Gate National Recreation Area](#)
- *Ice Age National Scenic Trail* - Public comment is [open through May 12](#) on a proposed re-route of the trail in Rusk County (WI) within the Rusk County Forest. Source: [Ice Age National Scenic Trail](#)
- *Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve* - Public comment is [open through April 19](#) on a draft trail improvement plan at Barataria Preserve. Source: [Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve](#)
- *Kenai Fjords National Park* - Public comment is [open through April 30](#) on a plan for

- next steps in the Glass-Heifner Mine clean-up project. Source: [Kenai Fjords National Park](#)
- *Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - The NPS and Federal Aviation Administration have [opened public comment through April 19](#) on a proposed commercial air tour management voluntary agreement. Source: [Lake Mead National Recreation Area](#)
 - *Lava Beds National Monument* - Public comment is [open through May 5](#) on a proposal to increase camping fees at Indian Well Campground and Group Campsite and to make the group site reservable on *Recreation.gov*. Source: [Lava Beds National Monument](#)
 - *Natchez Trace Parkway* - Public comment is [open through April 18](#) on a wetlands statement of finding for revetment construction and bank stabilization of Lindsey Creek at a pipeline crossing the parkway near Clinton, Mississippi. Source: [Natchez Trace Parkway](#)
 - *Theodore Roosevelt National Park* - Public comment is [open through April 28](#) on a plan to increase campground fees at the Cottonwood Campground and Group Site, Juniper Campground and Group Site, and the Roundup Group Horse Camp. Source: [Theodore Roosevelt National Park](#)
 - *Thomas Edison National Historical Park* - Public comment has been [reopened through May 1](#) on a proposed fee schedule for its electric vehicle charging stations. A January public comment period press release incorrectly transposed the proposed rate per kilowatt hour. Source: [Thomas Edison National Historical Park](#)

Other Department of the Interior News

- *Bundy cattle still roam free* - *E&E News* published [an article](#) about the 10-year anniversary of the armed standoff between Bureau of Land Management agents and the Bundy Ranch in Bunkerville, Nevada. Bundy Ranch was accused of \$1 million in overdue grazing fees and trespass fines, and the agency's attempt to roundup their cattle for auction after two court orders to do so turned into an armed standoff that is now a symbol of anti-government protest. Bundy Ranch cattle continue to roam without permits and in areas retired from use as grazing allotments. The Bundy Ranch claims they have rights to ranch unimpeded and that it is against the Antiquities Act for the federal government to own such large swaths of land as Gold Butte National Monument and Lake Mead National Recreation Area, where they graze their cattle. The Bureau of Land Management has several lawsuits pending accusing it of improperly managing federal lands by allowing the illegal grazing to continue and delaying a management plan for Gold Butte. Criminal trials of Ryan and Ammon Bundy have been dismissed or lost to mistrial. Source: *E&E News*

- *LA Times op-ed against spotted owl plan* - The *Los Angeles Times* published [an editorial board op-ed](#) against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's proposed plan to kill nearly half a million barred owls over the next 30 years in order to boost the population of spotted owls in the Pacific Northwest. Source: *Los Angeles Times*
- *Closure of USFWS visitor center due to erosion* - On April 10, demolition began on the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge visitor center and office buildings on Morris Island in Chatham, Massachusetts. Some nearby areas "had lost about 30 feet per year to erosion." The visitor center had been there about 50 years. Source: [Cape Cod Times](#)
- *Final rule for oil and gas* - On April 12, the Bureau of Land Management finalized the Fluid Mineral Leases and Leasing Process rule, which will "increase returns to the public and disincentivize speculators and irresponsible actors." Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Rule to improve ESA* - On April 11, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service finalized revisions to the Endangered Species Act to improve participation in voluntary conservation programs by clarifying and simplifying permitting. Source: [Department of Interior](#)
- *\$79 million for wildfire mitigation and recovery* - On April 8, the Department of the Interior announced \$79 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding for revegetation efforts, increased fuel management, and improved radio communications systems for wildland firefighting. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *\$19 million for solar over canals* - On April 4, the Department of the Interior announced \$19 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Funding to install solar panels over irrigation canals in California, Oregon, and Utah to decrease evaporation and advance clean energy goals. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

Congressional Actions

Reports on legislation, upcoming hearings, and new public laws of relevance to the national parks, prepared by Don Hellmann, former assistant director of legislative and congressional affairs for the National Park Service, and Chris Soller, former superintendent of Fire Island National Seashore and legislative specialist for the National Park Service.

Senate Actions

April 1-5 – The Senate met in pro forma sessions this week as part of its Easter break. No official business was conducted.

April 9 – The Committee on Appropriations announced the following subcommittee assignments for the 118th Congress:

- Subcommittee on Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies: Senators Merkley (Chair), Reed, Tester, Van Hollen, Heinrich, Peters, Sinema, Murkowski, McConnell, Capito, Hoeven, Fischer, and Britt. Senators Murray and Collins are ex officio members of each subcommittee.

April 10 – The Senate agreed to H. Con. Res. 85, authorizing the use of Emancipation Hall in the Capitol Visitor Center for a ceremony to present the 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 and who 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.

April 10 – The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs ordered favorably reported the following business items, among other bills:

- S. 4042, to amend title 44, United States Code, to reform the management of federal records, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute.
- S. 2871, to advance federal government innovation through the implementation and use of multi-cloud computing software technology, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute.

House Actions

April 1-5 – The House met in pro forma sessions this week as part of its Easter break. No official business was conducted.

April 9 – The House agreed to suspend the rules and pass H.R. 6492, amended, to improve recreation opportunities on, and facilitate greater access to, federal public land. This bill is the result of over a year's worth of hearings and markups that combines several public lands bills with the goal of encouraging more people to enjoy the outdoors and to benefit the outdoor recreation economy. Known as the Explore Act, this bill might be the vehicle for a more comprehensive parks and public lands bill later in this Congress.

As passed by the House, the following sections affect the National Park Service, among other land management agencies:

Title I

Subtitle A: Outdoor Recreation Policy

- Sec. 112-114 – Requires the Secretary of the Interior to conduct an inventory and assessment of federal recreational lands and waters; and establishes a Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation, of which the NPS is a member, to coordinate issues related to outdoor recreation.

Subtitle B: Public Recreation on Federal Recreational Lands and Waters

- Sec. 121 – Requires the identification by the Secretary of at least 10 long-distance bike trails (of at least 80 miles in length), and no fewer than 10 other areas in which

- a long-distance bike trail could be completed or developed.
- Sec. 122 – Requires the Secretary to issue guidance for recreational climbing on public lands, which shall include guidance on the placement and maintenance of fixed anchors in wilderness areas, including those already in existence in those areas on the date of enactment of this act.
- Sec. 125 – Prohibits the Secretary from requiring a permit or charging a fee for filming on national park lands that involves fewer than six people, requires the issuance of a de minimis permit promptly without a fee for similar activities involving between six to eight people, and requires a permit and a reasonable fee for similar activities when it involves more than eight people.
- Sec. 126 – Amends the authority of the NPS to donate meat from wildlife management activities on park lands to include the donation of meat, antlers, and any other part of the animal removed during these activities.
- Sec. 128 – Authorizes the head of each federal land management agency, including the NPS, to carry out inspections of and decontamination of vessels entering or leaving federal land within its jurisdiction to help manage aquatic nuisance species.

Subtitle C: Supporting Gateway Communities and Addressing Park Overcrowding

- Sec. 131 – Requires the Secretary to work with community partners to identify needs and economic impacts in gateway communities, including housing shortages, management of sustainable visitation, and bolstering visitation at underutilized areas.
- Sec. 132 – Requires the Secretary to establish a single annual visitation data system for each unit of federal recreational lands and waters.
- Sec. 133 – Requires the Secretary to establish a pilot protocol at no fewer than 10 land management units to model recreation use patterns.

Subtitle D: Broadband Connectivity on Federal Recreational Lands and Waters

- Sec. 141 – Requires the Secretary to complete an assessment of the National Park System to identify locations in greatest need of broadband internet access and cellular service and to complete a plan within three years to extend those services at appropriate locations.
- Sec. 143 – Authorizes the Secretary to enter into cooperative agreements to carry out activities related to communications sites on federal land.

Subtitle E: Public-Private Parks Partnerships

- Sec. 152 – Amends the cooperative management authority of the NPS to allow for the cooperative management of a park system unit or land near a park system unit. The language of this authority appears to be intended to allow for more of these agreements with Tribes.
- Sec. 154 – Requires the Secretary to increase and improve parking opportunities for those recreating on federal public lands. The authority further directs the Secretary to increase and improve the function, cleanliness, and availability of restrooms for those recreating on federal public lands.

- Sec. 156 – Authorizes in statute the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program with a grant program to acquire and develop outdoor recreation opportunities for young people and low-income individuals.
- Sec. 157 – Extends the American Battlefield Protection Program to include Tribes as eligible entities under the grant program.

Title II

Subtitle A: Access for People with Disabilities

- Sec. 211 – Requires the Secretary, within five years of enactment of this act, to carry out a comprehensive assessment of federal recreational lands and waters to determine which facilities are accessible to disabled individuals and to make the information available on the public websites of those agencies.
- Sec. 212 – Requires the Secretary to conduct an assessment of high-priority trails and their specific features and to make the information available on the public websites of those agencies to better inform individuals with disabilities.
- Sec. 213 – Requires the Secretary to enter into a trial program to develop more accessible trails.
- Sec. 214 – Requires within a year of enactment of this act that the Secretary select a location for at least three new accessible trails on land managed by the land management agencies, including the NPS.
- Sec. 215 – Requires within a year of enactment of this act that the Secretary select a location for at least three new accessible recreational opportunities on land managed by the land management agencies, including the NPS.
- Sec. 216 – Authorizes the Secretary to enter into agreements for assistive technology availability on federal public lands.

Subtitle B: Military and Veterans in Parks

- Sec. 221 – Requires the Secretary to develop educational and public awareness materials to disseminate to members of the military and veterans to access federal public lands free of charge, the availability of public lands for individuals with disabilities, and other programs and resources available to these members and veterans.
- Sec. 222 – Requires the establishment within the Department of the Interior the position of Military Veterans Outdoor Recreation Liaison.
- Sec. 223 – Requires the Secretary to enter into partnerships to promote military and veteran recreation.
- Sec. 224 – Requires the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation to make a strategy to increase visits to federal recreational lands by members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and Gold Star family members.
- Sec. 225 – Adds a representative of veteran organizations to the Recreation Resource Advisory Committee.
- Sec. 226 – Requires the establishment of a pilot program to employ veterans in positions related to the conservation and resource management activities of the Department of the Interior.

Subtitle C: Youth Access

- Sec. 231 – Requires the Secretary work with the Secretary of Agriculture to make a strategy to increase the number of youth recreation visits to federal recreational lands and waters.
- Sec. 232 – Extends the Every Kid Outdoors Act through September 30, 2031.

Title III

Subtitle A: Modernizing Recreation Permitting

- Sec. 311 – Modifies special use recreation permits and fees.
- Sec. 312 – Requires the Secretary to simplify the process for issuing special use recreation permits.
- Sec. 313 – Requires the Secretary to establish guidelines that allows the the holder of a special use recreation permit to engage in similar activities for which the permit was authorized.
- Sec. 314 – Requires the Secretary to publish on its website available recreation visitor-use days available for allocation to recreation service providers or outfitters and guides.
- Sec. 315 – Authorizes the Secretary and the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct joint projects, planning, permitting, leasing, contracting, and other activities in a new Service First Initiative.
- Sec. 317 – Requires monitoring of long-term special use recreation permits.
- Sec. 318 – Authorizes the adjustment of visitor use days allocated to a recreation service provider.
- Sec. 319 – Authorizes the Secretary to require that a recreation service provider have a commercial general liability insurance policy.
- Sec. 320 – Authorizes the Secretary to charge a reasonable fee to recover the cost of providing a recreation service permit.
- Sec. 321 – Encourages the Secretary to work with State and local recreation agencies to allow the purchase of a federal, state, and local recreation permit in one transaction.
- Sec. 322 – Requires the Secretary to establish an online digital version of the America The Beautiful - The National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass.

Subtitle B: Making Recreation a Priority

- Sec. 331 – Requires the Secretary to work with state and local entities to identify opportunities to extend the time federal lands and waters are open to the public.

Subtitle D: Recreation Not Red Tape

- Sec. 351 – Authorizes the Secretary to enter into a good neighbor agreement with a governor, Tribe, or county to carry out authorized recreation services. Of concern with this provision is that it for the first time includes the National Park Service and the ability to enter into these agreements that include timber cutting and the sale of the timber on park land.

- Sec. 353 – Requires the Secretary to submit a report to Congress within three years that describes the use of special recreation permits by underserved communities.

April 10 – The House agreed to suspend the rules and pass H.R. 3250, to recognize the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum in Rochester, New York, as the National Museum of Play, by a 2/3 yeas-and-nays vote of 385 yeas to 31 nays. The text of the bill states that the museum is not a unit of the National Park System and the designation shall not be construed to require or permit federal funds to be expended for any purpose related to the Museum.

April 10 – Rep. Paul Tonko introduced the Cultural Resource Challenge Act of 2024. This legislation is intended to empower the NPS to expand its historic preservation efforts. The bill would:

- Require the NPS to address staff shortages, update guidance on cultural resources research and engagement, advance resource preservation and interpretation, provide technical assistance, and encourage interdisciplinary work and skills sharing.
- Direct NPS to develop curriculum to provide training to all park managers and staff with responsibilities for managing and preserving cultural resources on management best practices and cultural competency.
- Establish a competitive grant program focused on the resiliency and accessibility of cultural resources that prioritizes projects that address the role of climate change, involve underrepresented groups in historical preservation, engage with storytelling, and empower future generations to engage in historic preservation.
- Authorize appropriations of \$250 million for Fiscal Years 2025 through 2030 to carry out the Act.

This legislation is intended to provide additional funding to NPS to manage cultural resources similar to the Natural Resource Challenge that the NPS undertook in the late 1990s. The author of the legislation, Rep. Tonko, has been a long-time supporter of preserving historic cultural sites, stories, and resources. He was the author of the National Heritage Area Act, P.L. 117-339, which was signed into law on January 5, 2023, at the end of the 117th Congress. This law established in statute after many years of work, the National Heritage Area System, a program managed by the NPS and now codified in Title 54 of the U.S. Code.

April 11 – The Clerk read a letter to the Speaker from Representative Granger wherein she resigned as Chair of the Committee on Appropriations.

April 11 – The House agreed to H. Res. 1133, electing Members to certain standing committees of the House of Representatives, including Rep. Cole as the Chair of the Committee on Appropriations, as well as stating that the following named Member be, and is hereby, ranked as follows on the Committee of Appropriations: Rep. Granger, after Rep. Rogers (KY).

Incidents

Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.

Andrew Johnson National Historic Site

Historic gun removal

The park decided to remove an MG08 machine gun that sits near the entrance to the Andrew Johnson National Cemetery because it is a "potential safety risk" in its current condition. The gun was donated by American Legion Post 64 in 1936. Due to weathering, some of the metal components have worn down and "broken free." The gun will be placed into storage until decisions can be made about what conservation work is needed, the funding associated with restoration, and where and how to best exhibit the gun in the future. Source: [WGRV](#)

Bryce Canyon National Park

Hiker fatality

On April 1, a 72-year-old took a fall while hiking in the park, incurring "massive trauma" to the head. Visitors from the public supported the individual before first responders came on scene. The individual was taken by ambulance to Garfield Memorial Hospital, then by air to St. George Regional Hospital. Responding agencies included the NPS and Garfield County. The individual passed away from their injuries the following day. The individual was well-known as the spouse of the President of the Florida State Senate. Source: [Outdoors.com](#), [Florida Senate President Pro Tempore Dennis Baxley](#)

Carlsbad Caverns National Park

Human remains found

On April 11, human skeletal remains were found on the Yucca Canyon Trail. The Eddy County (NM) Sheriff's Office is investigating and has sent the remains to the Office of the Medical Investigator. There was no immediate evidence to match the remains to missing person cases. The trail closed for a couple days for the investigation and reopened on April 13. Source: [Alamagordo Daily News](#)

Casa Grande National Monument

Stinknet outbreak

From March 28 to April 30, the park closed the picnic area due to the presence of stinknet, a plant that can cause breathing issues and skin rashes. The invasive plant currently is rapidly spreading through southern Arizona. Source: [Midland Daily News](#)

Cumberland Island National Seashore

Rescue from sinking vessel

On April 5, a boat with four passengers, located in St Marys Inlet began taking on water. The boat sent out a distress call. NPS staff and Camden County (GA) Sheriff's Office Marine Unit responded and were able to rescue the individuals and pump water out of the boat. Source: [Live Now Fox](#)

Fort Raleigh National Historic Site

Possible arson

On April 14, two wildfires were started adjacent to the Freedom Trail. Due to quick response by the NPS, Roanoke Island Volunteer Fire Department, Dare County (NC) Sheriff's Office, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the North Carolina Forest Service, the fires were contained quickly. The fires burned a cumulative 0.13 acres. The fires are suspected to be human caused and the NPS is looking for any information the public might have. Source: [Fort Raleigh National Historic Site](#)

Golden Gate National Recreation Area

Fall down cliff

On March 31, an individual tumbled down "50 to 60 feet" off a cliff near the Battery Alexander Trail. A helicopter was able to locate the individual with thermal-imaging cameras. The individual was "clinging to the gravel rock face." An officer from the Sonoma County (CA) Sheriff's Office was lowered by ropes and placed the individual into a harness, and the helicopter lifted both individuals into the air and dropped them at the top of the cliff. Staff from the Southern Marin Fire District evaluated the individual for injuries. A video of the incident showed the individual had cuts and abrasions on their feet and ankles. Source: [KRON4](#)

Gulf Islands National Seashore

Weather closure

On April 9, the park closed the Fort Pickens Area and its campground in preparation for incoming weather, which was expected to have high winds and 10-foot surf. It reopened on April 12. Source: [Gulf Islands National Seashore](#)

Glacier National Park

Political candidate states false report of shooting

In December, a current candidate for the U.S. Senate in Montana claimed that a bullet in their arm was from a Navy SEAL deployment in Afghanistan, rather than an accidental discharge in Glacier National Park. In October 2015, an NPS investigation report showed that the individual stated they accidentally shot themselves in the arm while loading a vehicle in the park. The individual now claims that they actually hurt themselves that day on a hike in the park, which required a trip to the emergency room. They told the medical staff that they had a bullet in their arm, triggering the interview with the ranger and a \$525 fine for illegally discharging a weapon in a national park. The individual is now claiming the story

told to the ranger was fabricated to protect themselves and other platoonmates from an investigation into a 2012 shooting in Afghanistan, which may have come from friendly fire.

Source: [The Washington Post](#)

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Missing person found

On April 8, the vehicle of a 35-year-old was found in the park. They had last been seen the day before in Maynardville, Tennessee. On April 9, the park began a search with support from several organizations. On April 10, the individual was found "in the vicinity of Tremont." A park visitor "recognized that [they] were in need of care and the visitor took them to the Incident Command Post near the Townsend Wye. The individual had minor injuries and exposure to weather. They were evaluated on site and taken to a local hospital. Source: Great Smoky Mountains National Park ([4/9](#), [4/10](#))

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

Possible hate crime

On March 31, Easter Sunday, communion wafers were left around the parking lot and on the road leading into the lot at the historic Chapel of St. Peter, an NPS property that is "under the care" of St. James the Greater Catholic Church. The wafers were placed "mostly around the vehicles' driver's side doors" so that people would have to step on them to enter their vehicles. In the Catholic Church, communion wafers are considered "consecrated hosts," so stepping on them would be tantamount to sin. Church officials buried the wafers, following Catholic practices, even though they suspected that the wafers were not consecrated. Church officials expressed concern that it might be a hate crime meant to instill fear. The NPS is investigating the incident. Source: [CatholicVote](#)

Lake Mead National Recreation Area

Vandalism

On April 7, two adults were recorded on video toppling natural rock formations from the top of a cliff in the area of the Redstone Dunes Trail. This incident is considered vandalism of the landscape. The NPS is looking for any information the public can provide. Source: [Lake Mead National Recreation Area](#)

Petroglyph National Monument

Increase in vandalism

On April 15, the park issued a partial closure for the uppermost segment of the Mesa Point Trail and the mesa top area within Boca Negra Canyon due to "countless incidents of damage and vandalism," including the moving of rocks into stacked cairns, as well as scratched graffiti. Source: [Petroglyph National Monument](#)

Saguaro National Park

Rabid fox attacks

On April 3 and 4, three hikers were attacked by a rabid gray fox on the Hugh Norris Trail. Two of them were able to fend off the fox with trekking poles, while the other was "potentially scratched" by the animal. All three hikers were treated for rabies. The trail was closed. On April 5, a ranger spotted the animal. It was euthanized and later tested positive for rabies. This is a continuation of rabies in bobcats and foxes in the park and in the surrounding Tucson, AZ, area (see [1/24/24 Coalition Report](#)). Source: [The Sacramento Bee](#)

Yosemite National Park

Rockfall

On April 7, a rockfall happened on the section of Big Oak Flat Road between Foresta Junction and El Portal Road. The road was closed until the following afternoon, and then reopened. Source: [The Union Democrat](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park* - The *Dayton Daily News* published [an article](#) about the status of an NPS purchase of the Wright brothers' airplane factory buildings in the aftermath of the March 2023 fires that destroyed much of the structures (see [4/5/23 Coalition Report](#)). Superintendent Kendell Thompson was quoted in the article, stating that the NPS is waiting on the structural analysis of the structures, which is being contracted by the city of Dayton, which currently owns the property. Congressional members from Ohio have asked the NPS to "fulfill its statutory requirement" to purchase the hangar buildings. The loss of structural integrity may impede the NPS' ability and desire to purchase the buildings. Source: *Dayton Daily News*
- *Rocky Mountain National Park* - On April 30, 2023, an individual "willingly walked away" from their family at the Wild Basin Entrance Station. They were seen by staff and visitors later that day and the following day in the Wild Basin area, but a multi-day search was unsuccessful (see [5/10/23 Coalition Report](#)). On April 2, 2024, the individual was arrested and booked into Teller County Jail for charges of felony theft, felony charitable fraud, and two counts of official misconduct in their role as a former El Paso County (CO) Sheriff's Deputy. Court documents show that the suspect's then-spouse discovered that the suspect was married to another person shortly before they disappeared in 2023. Source: [KOAA](#)
- *Virgin Islands National Park* - On April 11, a 43-year-old former deputy superintendent at the park was sentenced to nine months of home detention and four years of probation for converting property of another. They also were ordered to pay \$29,502 in restitution, as well as a \$6,000 fine. The individual was found to have occupied two housing units owned by the NPS without paying rent, claimed

false relocation expense reimbursements, and submitted overlapping travel vouchers on four occasions (see [5/24/23 Coalition Report](#)). Source: [The Virgin Islands Consortium](#)

Acknowledgments

This newsletter is supported through Coalition staff and invaluable volunteers:

- Editor: Katie Wallace
- Tech and Production Support: Theresa Manthripragada, Steve Pittleman, Emily Thompson
- Regular Correspondent: Don Hellmann, Chris Soller
- Issue Contributors: Gary Davis, Bill Walters

If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to report@protectnps.org.

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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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