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The Coalition Report

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

Coalition Actions

The Coalition submitted detailed [comments](#) to the National Park Service on its proposal to amend the evaluation and authorization procedures for fixed anchors and fixed equipment in wilderness areas. Among other things, the letter expresses concern that the proposed change to use the minimum requirements analysis procedure for fixed anchors would be precedent-setting for other recreational activities seeking access to wilderness areas.

We submitted [comments](#) to the NPS expressing concerns over the implementation of the 2018 Livestock Plan for Big Bend National Park. The letter requests that implementation of the plan be a high priority for the park and its new superintendent. The letter describes how inconsistent implementation has increased the number of livestock accessing the park, creating safety issues for visitors and damaging the park's resources.

The Coalition joined the National Parks Conservation Association and the Sierra Club in submitting [comments](#) in support of the Environmental Protection Agency's proposal to disapprove Kansas' Regional Haze State Implementation Plan for the Second Planning Period, agreeing that Kansas failed to satisfy the requirements of the Clean Air Act and Regional Haze Rule.

We joined over 100 conservation organizations in [comments](#) to the U.S. Forest Service arguing for significantly stronger protections of old growth forests under a proposed Nationwide Forest Plan amendment.

Our 2023 Annual Report was recently mailed to all Coalition Members. You can find a digital copy [here](#). If you're not already a Coalition Member, [consider becoming one today!](#)

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.

- *Effects of drought on NPS visitation* - The National Integrated Drought Information System published [an article](#) about two of its recent studies, led by researchers at the University of California, Merced, focusing on how drought has increased Yosemite wilderness use at high-elevation sites, has shifted seasonal visitation patterns at different types of parks, and has decreased visitation at desert parks. Source: National Integrated Drought Information System
- *Wildlife incidents double* - *Thrillist* published [an article](#) showing that the number of citations issued for NPS visitors disturbing wildlife more than doubled from 2022 to 2023. In 2023, there were 835 citations issued. In 2022, there were 388, and in 2021, there were 361. Source: *Thrillist*
- *DOI commitment to Hawaiian language* - On February 1, the Department of the Interior released a new Departmental Manual Chapter about the use and preservation of the Hawaiian language ('Ōlelo Hawai'i), including place names, identifications, and references. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Analysis of recent Congressional comments on federal remote work* - *TechTarget* published [an article](#) fact-checking claims made during a recent House Committee on Natural Resources' Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing and report against remote and telework policies for federal agencies. The article argues that much of the data used was cherry-picked or inaccurate. The National Park Service is mentioned in the article. Source: *TechTarget*
- *Former park proposal for Los Alamos* - The *Los Alamos Reporter* published [an article](#) about a number of attempts between 1905 and 1930 to make the Los Alamos area into a national park due to "similar archaeological features to those at Bandelier National Monument." Instead, it later became the site of the Manhattan Project. Source: *Los Alamos Reporter*
- *Our Parks Too!* - *Afar* published [an article](#) about Our Parks Too!, an organization founded in December 2022 to foster a sense of ownership of national parks among Black Americans. Source: *Afar*
- *Op-ed on climbing anchors in wilderness* - *Climbing* published [an op-ed](#) arguing against the proposed bans by the NPS and U.S. Forest Service on fixed anchors in

designated wilderness areas. Public comment on the proposals closed recently, though there is proposed legislation in Congress that would allow fixed anchors to continue. [Editor note: See "Coalition Actions" above for information on the Coalition's stance on the proposals.] Source: *Climbing*

- "Most overlooked National Park System units" - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) by this name, based on author Kurt Repanshek's personal experience. They include Valles Caldera National Preserve, Fort Larned National Historic Site, Pecos National Historical Park, Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Homestead National Historical Park, Cape Lookout National Seashore, Jewel Cave National Monument, and Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- "The Civilian Conservation Corps Cookbook" - *National Parks Traveler* published [a review](#) of a book by this title, authored by Amy Bizzarri, whose grandfather was a member of the CCC. Source: *National Parks Traveler*

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Agate Fossil Beds National Monument, Badlands National Park* - On February 11, International Women and Girls in Science Day, the NPS will post a series of four 20-minute lectures about current research by women paleontologists from the two parks. Source: [Agate Fossil Beds National Monument](#)
- *American Battlefield Protection Program* (an NPS-administered program) - On January 26, the NPS opened applications for Battlefield Restoration Grants. They are due May 15. Funding for the program comes from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Blue Ridge Parkway* - On January 29, the parkway closed a section from Milepost 222 to Milepost 230 to repair three historic bridges at Mileposts 223.8, 224.7, and 227.5. A detour is in place. The bridge project is expected to continue through the fall. Source: [Blue Ridge Parkway](#)
- *Blue Ridge Parkway* - On February 6, the NPS opened a Request for Expressions of Interest for the preservation and re-use of several historic facilities on the Blue Ridge Parkway, including the Otter Creek Restaurant and Gift Shop (Milepost 60.8), Rocky Knob Cabins (Milepost 165), and Bluffs Lodge (Milepost 241.1). Responses are due by April 30. Source: [Blue Ridge Parkway](#)
- *Cane River Creole National Historical Park* - On February 17, a new documentary, "Tracks of Unity," will premiere at the Natchitoches Texas and Pacific Railway Depot. The film highlights the efforts to restore the depot. The film was produced by Prairie Nation Creative, LLC, in partnership with the park and Cane River National

Heritage Area. Source: [Cane River Creole National Historical Park](#)

- *Cane River Creole National Historical Park* - On February 10, the Magnolia Plantation will reopen to the public after a six-month closure to do road repair work. Source: [Cane River Creole National Historical Park](#)
- *Cape Cod National Seashore* - The *Cape Cod Times* published [an article](#) about the effects of erosion on the park's beaches. Linzy French, a visual information specialist at the park, is quoted in the article, including a guess that the shoreline has "lost anywhere from 177-295 feet in the past 59 years, give or take." Source: *Cape Cod Times*
- *Cape Lookout National Seashore* - A project to dredge the channels around Cape Lookout is slated to begin this week, pending weather impacts. The \$6.9 million project is being funded by Department of Defense Operation and Maintenance funds, the NPS, the State of North Carolina, and Carteret County. It is contracted to Next Generation Logistics.. Dredging will allow consistent access for commercial boats and deep draft vessels and allow for beach nourishment to protect the park's lighthouse and other historic structures. Source: [CoastalReview.org](#)
- *Cape Lookout National Seashore* - The park has selected Dr. Stan Rule as their 2023 Volunteer of the Year for his work researching and documenting cultural history at the Southern Outer Banks. Source: [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#)
- *Fort Smith National Historic Site* - On February 1, the park stopped charging an entrance fee to access the visitor center and museum. Source: [Northwest Arkansas Democrat Gazette](#)
- *George Washington Memorial Parkway* - On January 26, the NPS issued a Finding of No Significant Impact for the proposed improvements on the parkway's South Section and the Mount Vernon Trail, including upgraded multi-use paths, enhanced road safety, and maintenance upgrades. Source: [George Washington Memorial Parkway](#)
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area* - On March 4, the park will implement a new tiered fee system for boat passes based on vessel length. Source: [Glen Canyon National Recreation Area](#)
- *Golden Gate National Recreation Area* - On February 1, the park announced the selection of Gaetani Real Estate for a residential master lease within the park, including 39 residential units at Fort Mason, Fort Barry, and Point Bonita. Source: [Golden Gate National Recreation Area](#)
- *Grand Canyon National Park* - The NPS recently released a report, "Historical and Projected Climate Change for Grand Canyon National Park and Surrounding

Areas." The report shows increased temperatures and corresponding ecological changes from 1970-2020, as well as two climate models for the future. Source: [Fronteras](#)

- *Grand Teton National Park* - On January 22, the Jackson Hole Airport Board voted 4-1 to construct a new building to house a terminal for private aviation and new airport staff offices. During the meeting, Superintendent Chip Jenkins voiced concern about the construction's effects on the park and a lack of transparency around the future of the airport. The airport is an in-holding surrounded by the park. Source: [Jackson Hole News and Guide](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park* - In mid-January, the Wyoming Legislature's Joint Appropriations Committee formally proposed a minimum \$100 million price tag for the "Kelly parcel," a tract of state land surrounded by the park that is being considered for sale. They also tabled a decision on whether to put the parcel on the open market, in favor of exploring options to trade the parcel for federal oil and gas development rights elsewhere in Wyoming. The price tag and authorization for the sale are currently listed on a larger budget bill draft that is in front of the Wyoming Legislature. Source: [WyomingTribuneEagle](#)
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - One of the park's partners has changed its name from the Great Smoky Mountains Association to Smokies Life. Source: [Citizen Times](#)
- *Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - On January 31, a project was started to repair, improve, or remove damaged buildings and infrastructure at at the summit of Kīlauea volcano. Crater Rim Drive also will be realigned to improve safety and reduce congestion at the park entrance. Area closures, entrance station delays, and reduced parking are expected at different times during the project. The project is expected to go through Fall 2025. The work is being executed by a contractor. A second phase of the project will include the rehabilitation of Kīlauea Visitor Center, which will begin "as early as Fall 2024." Source: [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#)
- *Independence National Historical Park - The Bradford Era* *RealClearPennsylvania* published [an op-ed](#) by Philadelphian Mark Nicastre that argues that the recent controversy over Welcome Park (see [1/8/24](#) and [1/24/24 Coalition Reports](#)) is an opportunity for the city to consider the ways in which urban renewal in the 1970s disrupted the sense of history and well-being of Independence Mall. The op-ed argues for a revitalization of the historic experience to honor the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Source: *The Bradford Era*
- *Katmai National Park and Preserve* - The park has opened a contest for Southwest Alaskans to submit a design for the 2024 Brooks Camp bear etiquette pin. The pins are awarded to visitors who complete mandatory bear safety training, also known

- as "bear school." The pins have been released annually since 2017. Designs are due February 19. Source: [Katmai National Park and Preserve](#)
- *Keweenaw National Historical Park* - The park, its Advisory Commission, and the Isle Royal and Keweenaw Parks Association have opened up applications for an art installation on the western side of US-41 near the Dry House Ruins. The artist will be contracted for a period of six weeks this summer. The installation is intended to "return the presence of people to these historic landscapes." Applications are due February 1. Source: [Keweenaw National Historical Park](#)
 - *Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - The park published [a press release](#) with a profile about biological science technician Clayton Merrill. Source: Lake Mead National Recreation Area
 - *Mammoth Cave National Park* - Two new species of ctenacanth shark fossils were found in the park and in northern Alabama; they were identified in collaboration with the University of Alabama Geological Sciences Department. *Troglocladodus trimblei* is named in honor of park superintendent Barclay Trimble, who found the first specimen on a paleontology survey in 2019. *Glikmanius careforum* was named in honor of the Cave Research Foundation. Source: [Mammoth Cave National Park](#)
 - *Montezuma Castle National Monument, Tuzigoot National Monument* - On March 1, both parks will transition to a fully cashless fee system. Entrance passes may also be purchased in advance on *Recreation.gov*. Source: [Tuzigoot National Monument](#)
 - *National Capital Parks - East* - On February 12, the NPS began a project to repair and upgrade 20 bridges along the Baltimore-Washington and Suitland parkways, as well as 25 other road and parking lot sites in eastern Washington, D.C., and Maryland, including Anacostia Park, Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, Oxon Hill Farm, and Piscataway Park. The \$5.6 million project is being funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. It is expected to be complete in the fall. Source: [National Capital Parks - East](#)
 - *National Capital Parks - East* - On January 30, *National Public Radio's* "All Things Considered" program published [a story](#) about efforts to eradicate invasive English ivy vines from parklands in Eastern forests. NPS staff Liz Matthews and Lindsey Donaldson are quoted in the program and several NPS sites are mentioned. Staff from Rock Creek Conservancy and Ward 8 Woods Conservancy are also quoted. Source: *National Public Radio*
 - *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* (an NPS-administered program) - On January 12, new regulations associated with NAGPRA went into effect, requiring museums and federal agencies to consult and obtain informed consent from Tribes, Native Hawaiian organizations, or other descendants before displaying or researching human remains or cultural items. The guidelines have

- caused many museums to close halls and exhibits. Source: [CNN](#)
- *North Cascades National Park* - The park has changed its backcountry permit fee structure from a "per permit" fee to a "per person" fee. The changes will go into effect in March 2024. Source: [North Cascades National Park](#)
 - *North Cascades National Park* - *The Seattle Times* published [an article](#) about the effects of climate change on the North Cascades snowpack that feeds drinking water and dam-based electricity for the Seattle area. Jon Riedel, a retired geologist from the NPS, is quoted in the article. Source: *The Seattle Times*
 - *Rocky Mountain National Park* - *Denver 7 (ABC)* published [an article](#) about the history of Trail Ridge Road. It is the highest continuous paved road in the United States, topping out at 12,183 feet. It opened in 1932. Source: *Denver 7 (ABC)*
 - *Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument* - From January 29 to February 3 and February 6 to February 9, the park is conducting a Spanish Mission Climate Vulnerability Assessment of the Quarai Mission Church. The church and areas of the Convento at Quarai will be closed during the assessment. The work includes a structural assessment, high-resolution digital photography, and Lidar of the structure. Source: [Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument](#)
 - *Shenandoah National Park* - *The Daily News-Record* published [an article](#) about the park's efforts to protect eastern hemlock trees from the invasive hemlock woolly adelgid by introducing beetles that will predate the woolly adelgid. The project is a collaborative effort between the NPS and Virginia Tech with funding from the Shenandoah National Park Trust. Source: *Daily News-Record*
 - *Stonewall National Monument* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) about the park's new visitor center, which will open on June 28. It will be the park's first visitor center and is being operated by Pride Live under an agreement with the NPS. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
 - *Theodore Roosevelt National Park* - On February 1, the park opened up applications for commercial use authorizations for guided photography workshops and "step-on interpretive guide service." The application process is now online for the first time. Applications are due by March 1. Source: [Theodore Roosevelt National Park](#)
 - *Virgin Islands National Park* - On February 5, Virgin Islands Governor Albert Bryan, Jr., announced the successful closure of the St. John Land Exchange Agreement with the National Park Service. The land swap traded Whistling Cay, an uninhabited island off the coast of St. John, for Estate Catherineberg on St. John Island, where construction of a new Pre-K through 12 school will be built. The land exchange has been in the works since 2020. Source: [St. Thomas Source](#)

- *Wright Brothers National Memorial* - The National Parks Conservation Association published [an article](#) about the new Wright Flight Academy, in which a group of 23 high school students will build a two-person airplane over a two-year period in a newly-built aviation lab at the park. The academy is a collaboration between Dare County (NC) Schools and the NPS. The academy is led by a retired U.S. Navy aviator, with curriculum support from NPS staff. Source: National Parks Conservation Association
- *Wright Brothers National Memorial* - From February 5-8, contractors are conducting an assessment of the monument's condition, including water intrusion issues and general maintenance needs. The project is being carried out by Quinn Evans and Terracon. Source: [Wright Brothers National Memorial](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The *Cowboy State Daily* published [an article](#) about the effects of lower elk populations in the park on wolves, including an increase in hunting bison. Elk populations have decreased due to predation by a variety of predators, including humans, bears, mountain lions, and wolves. Elk populations are still considered "healthy." Source: *Cowboy State Daily*
- *Zion National Park* - The Trust for Public Land recently transferred ownership of a 48-acre property along the Kolob Terrace Road to the park. The purchase was funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, National Park Foundation, Eccles Foundation, and other private donations. Source: [KUER](#)

Personnel Changes

- *Department of the Interior* - Andy Lewandowski has been appointed the new chief digital experience officer at the DOI's Office of the Chief Information Officer. Andy has six years of federal service, most recently as a digital experience adviser to the federal chief information officer. Source: [ExecutiveGov](#)
- *National Park Foundation* - President and CEO Will Shafroth is transitioning from his role "to lead an initiative to help the National Park Service address future challenges to the parks including those related to climate change, housing, technology, and transportation." Source: [PR Newswire](#)
- *Wellness and Resilience Branch* - Christine Hoyer has been selected as an employee wellness program analyst. Christine most recently was the backcountry manager at Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Source: [The Mountain Press](#)

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

- Julia Rae Brandt, 71, passed away on January 23. Julia worked as a ranger at Zion National Park for a time. She is survived by her husband, Robert "Bob" Brandt, who was also a ranger at Zion for a time. Source: [Legacy/The Pantagraph](#)
- Venece E. Clark, 100, passed away on January 26. Venece worked "at the cafeteria" in Zion National Park for a time in her youth. She later married James "Ed Clark," who worked for many units of the National Park Service over his career. Source: [The Spectrum](#)
- Weino "Tug" Bereman Kangus, 84, passed away on December 21. Tug was a pilot for the National Park Service for over 40 years. Source: [Lake Powell Chronicle](#)
- Ronald "Ron" Ray Matthyssens, 60, passed away on January 23. Ron worked at Olympic National Park for a time, "doing custodial work." Source: [The Daily World](#)
- Mary Belle McKeown, 96, passed away on January 7. Mary Belle volunteered in Rocky Mountain National Park at the "Wild Basin and Longs Peak Ranger Stations." Source: [Longmont Leader](#)
- Norma Lee Caples Phelps, 85, passed away on January 23. Norma worked for the NPS at Harpers Ferry for a time. Source: [Spirit of Jefferson](#)

In the News

- Christopher Moore and Candice Kutrosky have been selected as the leaders for two new wildland fire crews under the New Mexico State Forestry Division. They first will train as Type 2 incident management crews, with the aim of eventually certifying to become interagency Hotshot crews. Christopher has worked with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Forest Service, and National Park Service. Candice is a longtime firefighter with the U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior. Source: [Santa Fe New Mexican](#)
- *Business Insider* published [an article](#) by Danielle Jackson with the title, "I'm a former park ranger. I always saw visitors make these 5 mistakes at state and national parks." Danielle previously worked for several NPS sites, including Blue Ridge Parkway. Source: *Business Insider*

Open for Comment

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

- *Dearfield Special Resource Study* - Public comment is [open through February 23](#) on a special resource study of the historic Dearfield settlement in Weld County, Colorado, to identify whether it meets criteria to be recommended as a potential

- NPS unit. Source: [Greeley Tribune](#)
- *Death Valley National Park* - Public comment is [open through February 22](#) on a proposed plan to rehabilitate water and wastewater systems in Furnace Creek and Cow Creek. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
 - *Denali National Park and Preserve* - Public comment is [open through February 18](#) on changes to the Superintendent's Compendium around food storage, commercial passenger-carrying vehicles, motor vehicle permits, and designated campgrounds for fires. Source: [Denali National Park and Preserve](#)
 - *Everglades National Park* - Public comment is [open through March 31](#) on a wilderness stewardship plan. [A storymap](#) for the plan is available. Source: [Everglades National Park](#)
 - *Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park* - Public comment is [open through February 15](#) on a proposal to replace the docks at the two forts. Source: [Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park](#)
 - *Golden Gate National Recreation Area* - The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is collecting comments on preliminary concepts for the newly-acquired Rancho Corral de Tierra addition to the park. A storymap about the unit [is available](#). Source: [CoastsideBUZZ.com](#)
 - *Home of Franklin D Roosevelt National Historic Site, Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site* - Public comment is [open through February 16](#) on a proposal to increase entrance fees for visitors over 16-years-old. Source: [Home of Franklin D Roosevelt National Historic Site](#)
 - *Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area* - Public comment is [open through February 28](#) on a plan to replace docks and fuel systems and rehabilitate parking areas at Seven Bays Marina. Source: [Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area](#)
 - *Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park* - Public comment is [open through February 29](#) on a site plan for the King Family Home on Sunset Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia. Source: [FOX5 Atlanta](#)
 - *Mojave National Preserve* - Public comment is [open through February 10](#) on a plan to rehabilitate Kelso Cima Road and South Kelbaker Road, including demolition and removal of the existing road surface, installation of a new stable road base and asphalt road surface, and fencing to facilitate safe passage for desert tortoises. Source: [Mojave National Preserve](#)
 - *Natchez Trace Parkway* - Public comment is [open through February 29](#) on a plan to construct an extension of the Chisa Foka Multi-Use Trail 2.5 miles to the Osburn

Stand parking lot at Milepost 93.5, as originally envisioned in a 1995 plan. Source:

[WJTV](#)

- *National Heritage Areas* (an NPS-administered program) - The Delta Protection Commission has opened public comment through March 6 on a Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area Management Plan. Source: [Contra Costa News](#)
- *Sagamore Hill National Historic Site* - Public comment is [open through February 16](#) on a proposed increase in fees for guided tours of the Theodore Roosevelt Home. Source: [Sagamore Hill National Historic Site](#)
- *Thomas Edison National Historical Park* - Public comment is [open through March 1](#) on a proposal to increase fees for public electric charging stations. Source: [Thomas Edison National Historical Park](#)
- *War In The Pacific National Historical Park* - Public comment is [open through February 17](#) on a management plan for the Asan and Agat Units, including moving parking areas and exhibits out of areas with frequent flooding and storm surges due to climate change. Source: [Pacific Daily News](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - On February 12, the NPS and Federal Highway Administration [will open public comment](#) on a proposal to construct a new permanent North Entrance Road, which was damaged heavily in record floods in June 2022. Source: [Yellowstone National Park](#)

Other Department of the Interior News

- *Okefenokee permit applicant fined* - Twin Pines Minerals, a company that has applied for a mineral extraction permit adjacent to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, has been fined \$20,000 by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division for not having a professional geologist or engineer supervise while collecting soil samples for its permit application and for failing to provide a required letter of credit or a performance bond that covers drill violations. NPS hydrologists from the South Florida Natural Resources Center previously found "critical shortcomings" in the scientific modeling of the company's proposal (see [4/5/23 Coalition Report](#)), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has written that the proposed mine could post "substantial risks" to the Okefenokee. Source: [WABE](#)
- *Piping plover comeback* - The piping plover, a federally threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, was documented to have 1,145 nesting pairs on Cape Cod (MA), a 500% increase since its listing in 1986. The recovery has been an interagency effort among the Massachusetts Audubon Coastal Waterbird Program, the National Park Service, state and local government agencies, beach managers, landowners, and conservation organizations. Source: [Cape Cod Times](#)

- *Montana to sue USFWS* - On January 26, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks sent a 60-day notice of intent to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for its November 2023 decision to list wolverines as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has undergone six rounds of litigation over three decades by conservation groups, which led to the recent listing. Source: [Bozeman Daily Chronicle](#)
- *Pygmy rabbit undergoing review ESA protection* - On January 24, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that the pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) may warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act, following a petition from several conservation groups asking the agency to review the species. The USFWS will now evaluate whether or not the species is determined to need protections. Source: [Buckrail](#)
- *Gray wolf relisting denied* - On February 2, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined it would not relist gray wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains under the Endangered Species Act. They are still listed in 45 states, but have been under state jurisdiction in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and parts of Oregon and Washington since 2011. The USFWS analysis found that wolves are not at risk of extinction in the western United States. The new analysis was in response to a 2021 petition by several conservation groups to relist the species in those five states. The Western Environmental Law Center stated their intent to sue over the decision and the Center for Biological Diversity stated a new lawsuit "is likely." Source: [Bozeman Daily Chronicle](#)

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

Nothing to report due to pro forma sessions and the Senate taking no actions of interest to the National Park Service/System.

House Actions

January 30 - The House reported and placed on the Union Calendar (# 297) H.R. 1727 (as amended in Committee), a bill to amend the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Development Act to extend the The Chesapeake and Ohio National Historical Park Commission to 2031.

Incidents

Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.

Assateague Island National Seashore

Beached whale

On January 31, a subadult humpback whale was found deceased on the north end of the seashore. NPS staff moved it out of the tidal zone and a necropsy was conducted on February 2 by staff and volunteers from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Stranding Response Program and the National Aquarium. The cause of death was unable to be determined during the examination and samples have been submitted for further diagnostic analysis. It is the second beached whale carcass found in the area within three weeks. Source: [CBS Baltimore](#)

Cape Hatteras National Seashore

Cold-stunned turtles

The week of January 21, NPS staff and volunteers rescued over 100 cold-stunned sea turtles between Bodie Island and Ocracoke. Many of them were transported to the STAR center at the North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island for rehabilitation. Source: [Spectrum News 1](#)

Golden Gate National Recreation Area

Sewer "outfalls"

The week of January 21, due to heavy rainfall, a series of combined sewer overflows caused pipes to back up at overflow outfall points, bringing trash and partially-treated sewage onto Ocean Beach and Fort Funston. The NPS has asked that volunteers do not pick up trash because of the toxic nature of sewage. As of January 23, the maintenance team was "determining next steps." Source: [SFist](#), [SFGATE](#)

Grand Teton National Park

Avalanche rescue

On February 4, a 29-year-old was backcountry skiing with a group of four others near the top of Banana Couloir on Prospectors Mountain when they triggered an avalanche. Three of the individuals were able to self-arrest. One skier was carried 500 feet and the 29-year-old was carried 1,500 vertical feet. Neither skier was fully buried by the slide. The 29-year-old sustained serious injuries. The park requested helicopter assistance from Teton County Search and Rescue. They were able to short-haul the injured skier off the mountain to an NPS ambulance at Windy Point Turnout. The other four skiers were able to ski out on their own. Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#)

Independence National Historical Park

Presidential pardon for marijuana

On January 23, a 48-year-old marijuana decriminalization activist received a pardon from President Joe Biden for October 2012 charges of possession of marijuana during a series of "Smoke Down" protests on Independence Mall. The protests led to a 2014 Philadelphia (PA) city ordinance that decriminalized possession of up to 30 grams of marijuana. The individual's presidential pardon was part of two rounds of pardons granted for simple marijuana possession on federal lands. Source: [The Philadelphia Inquirer](#)

Isle Royale National Park

Unseasonably warm temperatures

Due to high temperatures the last week in January, scientists were unable to land planes on weak ice at the park, disrupting the long-standing study of moose and wolves on the island. Temperatures have been running about 20 degrees above normal. Scientists were able to collect about two weeks of moose survey data before temperatures turned.

Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)

Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River

Car in river

On December 19, an individual drove a car onto the Fish and Boat Commission access ramp on the Pennsylvania side of the river. They lost control of the vehicle, ending up in high water. The individual was able to escape, but the vehicle washed down river. A nearby bystander called 911, resulting in a response of NPS staff, state police, and nearby fire departments from Pennsylvania and New York. On December 22, the car was located just south of the river access at Tammany Flats. The NPS is working with landowners and the Environmental Protection Agency to extract the vehicle, pending lower river levels.

Source: [Tri-County Independent](#)

Zion National Park

Hiker fatality

On January 26, a 63-year-old became unresponsive on the West Rim Trail near Scout Lookout. Other hikers performed CPR on the individual until NPS staff arrived on scene with an AED (automated external defibrillator) and heart monitor. After 90 minutes of unsuccessful resuscitation and checking the individual's condition, park staff consulted with a doctor at medical control and the patient was pronounced deceased. Over 20 search and rescue team members and a park ambulance responded to the incident. Though the official cause of death has not been determined, officials said the symptoms are "consistent with a cardiac event." The trail was closed during the emergency response. Source: [Zion National Park](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area* - On February 3, two U.S. Senators and two U.S. Representatives from Pennsylvania sent a letter to NPS Director Chuck Sams and Pennsylvania Secretary of Transportation Mike Carroll asking for the two agencies to craft a compromise that allows Route 611 to reopen. It has been closed since December 2022 due to a rockslide (see several *Coalition Reports*; most recently [1/24/24](#)). Source: [The Valley Ledger](#)
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - On January 31, a federal court heard arguments from a group of insurance companies arguing that the NPS is liable for property damage from the 2016 Chimney Tops 2 Fire because they failed to adhere to mandated safety protocols and are therefore liable under the Federal Tort Claims Act. The U.S. Department of Justice argued that there were no concrete directives for fire suppression. No timetable has been set for the court's decision. Source: [Courthouse News Service](#)
- *Joshua Tree National Park* - A group of park researchers found an unattended backpack off a trail in the Black Rock area, later confirmed as belonging to a 25-year-old hiker who went missing in May 2023 (see [5/10/23](#) and [6/7/23 Coalition Reports](#)). On January 25, park staff found human skeletal remains in the area. The Riverside County Sheriff's Office and Coroner's Bureau was called to the scene and is handling the investigation. The official identity of the deceased individual and the cause of death have not yet been determined. Source: [Joshua Tree National Park](#)
- *Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park* - The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection released a statement the last week of January, saying that it is "aware of concerns regarding the structural integrity of buildings and soil contamination at the Allied Textile Printing site" and they are supportive of the Environmental Protection Agency's efforts to address the issues for the protection of public health (see [1/24/24 Coalition Report](#)). The EPA and the Paterson (NJ) mayor met recently and had a "constructive dialogue." A plan of action for the site is ongoing, and the NPS has stated it will work with both entities towards a "safe, positive resolution." Source: [northjersey.com](#)
- *Tuzigoot National Monument* - On February 5, the park reopened Tavasci Marsh to the public for the first time since a wildfire in April 2023 (see [4/5/23](#) and [4/26/23 Coalition Reports](#)). A portion of trail on the southeast side of the marsh remains closed due to repairs needed to the overlook. Source: [Tuzigoot National Monument](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - On January 4, the celebrity actor that was charged with two citations for entering a closed thermal area at Mammoth Terraces (see [1/10/24 Coalition Report](#)) pleaded not guilty. A status conference will take place on February 20. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)

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

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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