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The Coalition Report

Wednesday, January 10, 2024

Coalition Actions

The Coalition is pleased to announce it has presented the 2023 George Hartzog Award to Dr. Patrick Gonzalez and the 1872 Award to Mike Murray. Patrick is honored for his research and writing focused on climate change, including serving as the principal climate change scientist for the NPS for a time. Mike is honored for his tireless efforts over ten years on the Executive Council at the Coalition, including two years as Chair. We recognize both in appreciation of their efforts in protecting America's national parks. [More info on both awards](#)

Coalition Chair (former) Mike Murray joined the *National Parks Traveler* podcast to discuss the top 2023 stories from the National Park Service in a two-part series ([part 1](#), [part 2](#)).

We joined with five organizations in [comments](#) to the Bureau of Land Management New Mexico Office about the 2024 Second Quarter Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale Draft Environmental Assessment and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact. Among other things, the comments recommend the BLM consistently track expressions of interest and acreage pursuant to IM 2023-006; remove all parcels that do not comport with IM 2023-07; properly analyze reasonably foreseeable greenhouse gas emissions; and consider impacts to groundwater from well construction and hydraulic fracturing.

The Coalition joined with four organizations in submitting detailed scoping [comments](#) to the Bureau of Land Management Nevada Office on parcels for the 2024 Second Quarter Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale. Among other things, the letter expresses support for the Fluid Mineral Leases and and Leasing Process Rule and urges its finalization before

proceeding with additional leases.

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.

- *\$138 million for wildfire resilience* - On January 9, the Department of the Interior announced \$138 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding for wildland firefighter training, rehabilitating burned areas, advancing fire science, and reducing the risks of extreme fires. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *"Should international tourists be charged more to visit?"* - A new study by a research fellow at the Property and Environmental Research Center suggests that charging international visitors a \$25 surcharge could result in \$330 million in additional annual revenue for the NPS. Source: [Bozeman Daily Chronicle](#)

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *American World War II Heritage Cities Program* (an NPS-administered program) - On December 28, the NPS announced the designation of 11 new communities to the program. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Assateague Island National Seashore* - The park presented its 2023 Superintendent's Award to Lauren Kramer for her work supporting information technology across the park during a staff vacancy, and the 2023 Assateague Island Safety Award to Merrit Kramer for her efforts making sure the resource management division has the equipment and training they need to work safely in the field and the aquatics lab. Source: [Assateague Island National Seashore](#)
- *Blue Ridge Parkway* - On December 5 and 6, over 130 individuals from North Carolina and Virginia attended the Blue Ridge Rising Two-State Summit, aimed at the "betterment of the region." The event was hosted by the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and included a range of speakers and panelists from non-profit partners, businesses, and state agencies. Source: [The Carroll News](#)
- *Cabrillo National Monument* - On January 8, the park began an interior restoration project on the Old Point Loma Lighthouse, including painting and other minor repairs. The lighthouse will be closed through January 18. Source: [Fox 5 San Diego](#)
- *Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area* - The Cumberland Community Improvement District (GA) voted unanimously at its December meeting to allocate \$3.3 million to revamp the Paces Mill Unit of the park. Another \$2 million is

"expected to come from congressional appropriations." The first phase of renovations will begin in September, including the parking lot, meadow area, and installation of two river overlooks. It is expected to be complete in May 2025. The CID is in the process of raising money for phase two, which will include restrooms and further improvements. Source: [Marrieta Daily Journal](#)

- *Fort Pulaski National Monument* - On January 8, the park opened a temporary exhibit at Savannah City Hall highlighting recent archaeological discoveries at the Workers Village on Cockspur Island. The exhibit will remain open through January 20. Source: [Fort Pulaski National Monument](#)
- *Fort Scott National Historic Site* - The park has started a year-long fire suppression system replacement in nine buildings. The first phase includes the Post Hospital, necessitating a temporary move of the information desk to the West Infantry Barracks next door. The park's bookstore will be closed during this time. The first phase is expected to be complete at the end of February. Source: [Fort Scott National Historic Site](#)
- *Independence National Historical Park* - On January 8, the park announced that it had withdrawn the recently-released proposal to rehabilitate Welcome Park and closed the open public comment period. The preliminary proposal "was released prematurely and had not been subject to a complete internal agency review." After completing internal reviews, the park will put forth a new proposal for public comment. The redacted proposal had included the removal of a statue of William Penn, which received a lot of media attention. Source: [Independence National Historical Park](#)
- *John Muir National Historic Site* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) about the challenges to protecting a giant sequoia at the park, planted by John Muir about 140 years ago. The tree has a "debilitating fungus." The article also touches on the management of cultural landscapes and efforts to train new arborists in the NPS. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- *New Philadelphia National Historic Site* - The *Herald-Whig* published [an article](#) about the one-year anniversary of the site becoming a unit of the NPS, including an update on the legal process of transferring the land and an uptick in local tourism. Source: *Herald-Whig*
- *Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site, Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural National Historic Site* - *Sedona Red Rock News* published [an article](#) about actor Joe Wiegand, who has portrayed Theodore Roosevelt for over 20 years. The three national park units are mentioned in the article as locations where Joe annually performs. Source: *Sedona Red Rock News*

- *San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park* - The move of four historic ships from the park's fleet to a leased space at Mare Island (CA) has been delayed. The ships are now set to be moved between March and June and are expected to stay through mid-2026 while Hyde Street Pier is replaced. Source: [Times-Herald](#)
- *San Juan National Historic Site* - The NPS released a Finding of No Significant Impact Statement for the Free Ranging Cat Management Plan, which will remove cats from the park in a phased approach, in coordination with a local animal welfare organization. Source: [San Juan National Historic Site](#)
- *Scotts Bluff National Monument* - The park opened a new temporary exhibit at the visitor center that highlights the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps' Company 762, which worked at the park in the 1930s. Source: [Scotts Bluff National Monument](#)
- *Selma To Montgomery National Historic Trail* - On January 6, the trail's interpretive center in Selma closed for a project to make major site improvements, including expansion into adjacent buildings, improved accessibility, and new exhibits. The project is heavily informed by outreach in the local community. It is expected to be completed by Fall 2025. Source: [Selma To Montgomery National Historic Trail](#)
- *World Heritage Program (an NPS-administered program)* - The Department of the Interior has authorized the NPS to prepare a possible nomination of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge to the UNESCO World Heritage List. It is one of the world's largest naturally driven freshwater ecosystems. The DOI will collaborate with partners and consult with the Federal Interagency Panel for World Heritage before making a final decision about whether to nominate the site. The NPS implements the World Heritage Convention on behalf of the United States in cooperation with the Department of State. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The *Billings Gazette* published [an article](#) about the challenges to providing a wastewater system in the park in the wake of the 500-year flood that washed out a major sewer line in June 2022. The park immediately repurposed an old sewage treatment system last used in the 1960s and has put in a large effort to install a \$30 million temporary treatment system until a longer term solution can be put into place. Source: *Billings Gazette*
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The Yellowstone Volcano Observatory found that earthquakes and geyser activity in the park slowed during 2023, falling on the low end of the park's "normal" range. Source: [Idaho Capital Sun](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The *Cowboy State Daily* published [an article](#) about the Uncle Tom's Trail, which became permanently closed to the public in 2019. The trail closed due to concerns about the structural safety of its iconic 328-step staircase, persistent maintenance issues, visitor safety incidents, and prohibitively expensive

costs to rehabilitate it. Source: *Cowboy State Daily*

Personnel Changes

- *Devils Tower National Monument* - John Hinrichs was selected as the new facility manager. John has nine years of NPS experience, most recently as a maintenance mechanic (climbing) at high-elevation camps at Mount Rainier National Park. Source: [Devils Tower National Monument](#)

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

- James "Jim" Russell Casey, 70, passed away on January 3. Jim's "first job was at the Old Faithful Inn at Yellowstone National Park as a dinner chef, then to Flamingo Point in Everglades National Park." Source: [Fillmore County Journal](#)
- Greg Dannels, 75, passed away on December 24. Greg worked for the National Park Service for 29 years, providing road maintenance and masonry at Rocky Mountain National Park. Source: [Estes Park News](#)
- Richard "Dick" Stephen Hammerschlag, 82, passed away on December 28. Dick was the chief for the Center for Urban Ecology for the NPS from 1974 to 1995 and transferred to the U.S. Geological Survey when many NPS science functions moved there. Source: [Sol Levinson](#), David Manski
- Richard "Dick" Raymond Reiss, Jr., 84, passed away on December 23. Dick worked for the National Park Service in the 1960s and 70s, including stints at Great Smoky Mountains National Park (through "Job Corp"), Glacier National Park, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Colonial National Historical Park, and Yellowstone National Park. Source: [Legacy/Helena Independent Record](#)

Retiring

- Frank Dean will retire as the president and CEO of the Yosemite Conservancy this year. Frank worked for the National Park Service for most of his career, including as the superintendent of Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Source: [San Francisco Chronicle](#)

In the News

- *NWI.com* published [an article](#) about the career of Paul Labovitz, who worked for the NPS for 35 years, including as superintendent at Indiana Dunes National Park and Pullman National Historical Park. Source: *nwi.com*

Open for Comment

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

- *National Park System* - Public comment is [open through January 16](#) on a draft Wilderness Stewardship Reference Manual governing the management of climbing activities in wilderness areas in the National Park System. The U.S. Forest Service also simultaneously [opened public comment through January 16](#) on its own climbing management directives. Source: [Missoulian](#), [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Acadia National Park* - Public comment is [open through January 17](#) on preliminary planning concepts for a plan to allow traditional sweetgrass gathering by enrolled members of the five federally recognized Tribes in Maine. Source: [Acadia National Park](#)
- *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](#)
- *Glacier National Park, Olympic National Park* - The U.S. Forest Service has [opened public comment through late January](#) on the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan, a proposed nonmotorized trail from the Continental Divide to the Pacific Ocean, starting in Glacier and ending in Olympic. Source: [Montana Outdoor Radio Show](#)
- *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](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park* - Public comment is [open through January 11](#) on a master plan for the management and use of Colter Bay. Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#)
- *Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - Public comment is [open through January 11](#) on a Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan for accessibility. Source: [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#)
- *Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - The NPS and Hawai'i Electric Light Company

have [opened public comment through January 18](#) on a proposal to relocate and upgrade an electrical transmission line within the park. Source: [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#)

- *Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area* - Public comment is [open through January 31](#) on a plan to replace and improve houseboat docks at Keller Ferry Marina. Most of the marina was destroyed in a storm in 2017. Source: [Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area](#)
- *Mojave National Preserve* - Public comment is [open January 11 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](#)
- *New River Gorge National Park and Preserve* - Public comment is [open through January 15](#) on a proposal to demolish and remove 35 structures from the park, including 21 that are considered historic. Source: [New River Gorge National Park and Preserve](#)

Other Department of the Interior News

- *Retrospective on Endangered Species Act* - December 28, 2023, was the 50-year anniversary of the signing of the Endangered Species Act. The *Associated Press* ran an article that reflected on the Act's origins, successes, and challenges over its history. Source: [WIVB/Associated Press](#)
- *New DOI appointees* - On January 5, the Department of the Interior announced three new appointees: Steve Feldgus, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management; Sharon Buccino, Principal Deputy Director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement; and Hadeel Shadid, Special Assistant to the Senior Counselor. 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

Nothing to report due to pro forma sessions and the Senate holiday recess.

House Actions

Nothing to report due to pro forma sessions and the House holiday recess.

Summary of National Park and Related Laws Enacted in the 118th Congress (January 3 - December 19, 2023)

Note: The first session of the 118th Congress (calendar year 2023) resulted in only 34 new public laws being enacted, which has been characterized as the most unproductive Congress in almost 100 years. Thus, the list of accomplishments affecting the National Park Service, below, is very small compared to many recent previous Congresses.

• **New Park Units**

- Proclamation 10602, Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument, IL and MS. Proclamation issued by the president on July 25, 2023.
- North Country National Scenic Trail. Administratively re-designated by Director Chuck Sams III on November 16, 2023.
- New England National Scenic Trail, MA to CT. Administratively re-designated by Director Chuck Sams III on November 16, 2023.
- Ice Age National Scenic Trail, WI. Administratively re-designated by Director Chuck Sams III on November 16, 2023.

• **Lands Authorities**

P.L. 118-31, to authorize the Secretary of the Navy to acquire, by purchase or lease from the Commonwealth of Virginia, a real property interest in approximately 225 square feet of land, including ingress and egress, at Westmoreland State Park, Virginia, for the purpose of installing, operating, maintaining, and protecting equipment to support research and development activities by the Department of the Navy for national security purposes, without regard to the applicability of the Land and Water Conservation Act. The real property interest acquired by the Secretary shall terminate, and be released without cost to the Commonwealth, when the Secretary determines the real property interest is no longer required for national security purposes (included as section 2864 of the FY 2024 Defense Authorization Act). Signed on December 22, 2023.

• **Miscellaneous Authorities**

P.L. 118-9, to require each federal agency to include a link to a 100-word plain language summary of any proposed rule. Signed on July 25, 2023.

P.L. 118-31, to authorize the Secretary of Defense, acting through the Director of the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation, to make a grant (including a supplemental grant) or enter into a cooperative agreement to assist the State of Arkansas to provide security services and fire protection services for approximately twenty-one acres located at Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, which comprise facilities previously occupied by the Army and Navy General Hospital conveyed by quitclaim deed to the State of Arkansas pursuant to the Act of September 21, 1959 (included as section 2852 of the FY 2024 Defense Authorization Act). Signed on December 22, 2023.

- **Appropriations for the National Park Service**

P.L. 118-5, to provide for a responsible increase to the debt ceiling. As a trade-off for suspending the federal debt limit, Congress also placed limits on federal spending for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025. Signed on June 3, 2023.

P.L. 118-15, making continuing appropriations for Fiscal Year 2024. The law provided continued funding for all federal agencies, including the National Park Service, through November 17, 2023. Signed on September 30, 2023.

P.L. 118-22, making further continuing appropriations for Fiscal Year 2024. The law extends funding for some federal agencies through January 19, 2024, and others through February 2, 2024. Funding for the National Park Service is extended through February 2. Signed on November 16, 2023.

Incidents

Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park

"Credible threat"

On December 26, the park's Birthplace Unit closed due to a "credible threat." Law enforcement made an investigation and determined that the threat was no longer credible. The park reopened after that determination. Source: [The News-Enterprise](#)

Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Cumberland Island National Seashore, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, Wright Brothers National Memorial

Storm closures

The above parks closed on January 8 due to anticipated impacts from a storm predicted to bring a cold front, strong winds, coastal flooding, and ocean overwash January 9 and 10. Source: [Cape Hatteras National Seashore](#), [Cumberland Island National Seashore](#)

Death Valley National Park

Power outage

On December 23, the power went out at the park. At least eight electric vehicles had to be towed, and water was trucked into the park during the outage. It was restored on December 26 after a 64-hour outage. The cause of the outage has not be disclosed. Source: [8 News Now](#)

Death Valley National Park

Illegal off-road drivers get stuck

On December 22, two individuals drove a rented SUV off a road toward the salt flat two miles south of Badwater Basin. The vehicle became stuck in mud about 200 yards from the road. The individuals were advised that NPS staff would need to monitor the extraction, as it can cause significant additional damage to resources. The individuals hired a person with a pickup truck to attempt to remove the SUV without NPS staff present. The pickup truck also got stuck in mud. A few days later, a tow truck winched the pickup truck out of the mud. The SUV required the digging of holes and laying down traction and was then driven out of the mud.

On December 27, an individual drove an SUV over a parking lot curb and about a half-mile across the Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes before getting stuck in sand. The vehicle was towed out the following night. Park staff are concerned that vehicle tracks often inspire others to follow. New carsonite sign posts were installed to deter future vehicle trespass.

Individuals were cited for their actions. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)

Death Valley National Park

Habituated coyote hit

On December 25, a coyote was struck by a vehicle and killed. The coyote had been begging for food along Badwater Road near Golden Canyon for several months. NPS staff had attempted to haze it away from the road with a paintball gun and pepper spray, but the efforts were unsuccessful at changing the animal's behavior. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)

Grand Canyon National Park

Bobcat dies from rodenticide

A bobcat was found deceased recently in Grand Canyon Village. An autopsy found that the individual died from high levels of rodenticide. Rodenticides are banned at the Grand Canyon "except in specific situations when officials deem it necessary to mitigate disease transmission." The park offers kits and guidance for removal of rodents without using poison. Source: [KTAR](#)

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

Rockfall

Rockfall took place on Chestnut Hill Road between the bridges near Harpers Ferry on park land. Rockfalls have taken place recently along the road, requiring a three-month detour for mitigation. The rocks have been removed from the road and the detour and mitigation work is ongoing. Source: [The Panhandle News Network](#)

Lake Mead National Recreation Area

1976 human remains identified

On November 23, 1976, hikers discovered human remains in a shallow grave about six miles east of Katherine's Landing. Investigators determined the individual was shot in the head at close range. Though fingerprints were gathered and a composite of the victim's face was developed, no leads were ever found about the individual's identity. In October 2023, Mohave County Sheriff's Office's Special Investigations Unit began a review of the case and compared them against national fingerprint records, a resource that did not exist in the 1970s. The victim was identified, and detectives learned that the individual was living or working in the Las Vegas area around their time of death. Officials have not yet been able to locate any relatives of the individual. Source: [St. George News](#)

Yellowstone National Park Celebrity in closed area

On November 1, a 70-year-old who is well-known publicly as a celebrity actor, was observed in a closed thermal area at Mammoth Terraces. Two citations for petty offenses were issued. The individual was on personal time, not for film work. The individual is scheduled to appear in U.S. District Court on January 23. Source: [WSAZ](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - On December 28, the park reopened the Maunaiki Trail from the trailhead to the Ka'ū Desert Trail intersection. It has been closed since October 2023 due to increased seismicity in the Southwest Rift Zone of Kīlauea volcano. Seismic activity has since lessened. Source: [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#)

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- Regular Correspondent: Don Hellmann, Chris Soller
- Issue Contributors: David Manski

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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