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The Coalition Report

Wednesday, January 24, 2024

Coalition Actions

Coalition Chair Phil Francis [spoke with the Federal Times](#) on the impact of a looming government shutdown on NPS employee morale.

We provided [comments](#) on the proposed demolition of historic structures at New River Gorge National Park and Preserve.

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.

- *NPS maintenance backlog bigger than before GAOA* - The *Federal Times* published [an article](#) that shows that even with the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020, the NPS backlog has grown from \$13 million in 2020 to \$22 billion today. Source: *Federal Times*
- *GAO report on deferred maintenance project selection* - On January 10, the Government Accountability Office published a report that evaluated federal agency practices for selecting Legacy Restoration Fund projects. The report found that the agencies generally adhered to six recommended practices and also noted that the LRF program allowed more contingency funding for inflation so that projects could move forward more efficiently than through other federal funding sources. Source: [Homeland Security Today](#), [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#)

- *SEC withdraws natural asset proposed rule* - On January 17, the Securities and Exchange Commission withdrew a proposed rule change that would have allowed the listing of natural asset companies (NACs) on the New York Stock Exchange. The listing would have enrolled federal lands, including leaseable NPS lands, as "hybrid areas," allowing private interests to purchase leases on those lands to halt resource extraction. Source: [Reuters](#)
- *Mike Reynolds among "Interior's people to watch in 2024"* - *E&E News* published [an article](#) giving a brief profile of seven people who hold key positions in the Department of the Interior. Mike Reynolds, the deputy director of congressional and external relations for the National Park Service, was listed among them. Source: *E&E News*
- *"The Past, Present, and Future of the Endangered Species Act"* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) by this name, including challenges to agencies like the NPS to fully implementing the law. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- *Op-ed about proposed Bahsahwahbee national monument* - *The Nevada Independent* published [an op-ed](#) by Amos Murphy, chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation, advocating for the creation of a Bahsahwahbee National Monument in Spring Valley, Nevada, adjacent to Great Basin National Park. Source: *The Nevada Independent*

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Acadia National Park* - After a heavy storm hit the park (see "Park Incidents" below), a 1911 shipwreck was exposed at Sand Beach. The ship is the *Tay*, a two-masted lumber schooner that ran aground during a storm, killing one individual. The wreck has been uncovered a handful of times over the years, most recently in 1979. Source: [Bangor Daily News](#)
- *Acadia National Park* - Starting in March, the NPS and Federal Highway Administration will begin the rehabilitation of the historic Jordan Pond Road bridge. Detours will be instituted during the project. The park is also hoping to follow up with a rehabilitation of the Wildwood Entrance bridge, pending funding. Source: [Acadia National Park](#)
- *Acadia National Park* - The park received a \$1 million federal grant to install rooftop solar panels and 12 electric vehicle charging stations at its McFarland Hill headquarters, currently under construction to become a LEED-certified "silver" facility. Source: [Maine Public Radio](#)
- *Big Cypress National Preserve, Everglades National Park* - *The Orlando Sentinel*

- published [an article](#) about ongoing negotiations led by the Miccosukee Tribe and WildLandscapes International to purchase mineral rights in and around Big Cypress. An appraisal for the mineral rights will be complete in April. If it is within the (undisclosed) range the owners have agreed to, federal funding will be found to purchase the rights. Source: *Orlando Sentinel*
- *Blue Ridge Parkway* - The parkway opened a Request for Expressions of Interest for temporary food service at Mabry Mill during the 2024 season. Responses are due by February 23. Source: [Blue Ridge Parkway](#)
 - *Butterfield Overland National Historic Trail, Fort Davis National Historic Site* - The NPS National Trails Office is in the midst of hosting 18 public meetings from October 2023 to February 2024 to inform the trail's future comprehensive plan, to be released in 2026. The Fort Davis community and park recently participated in one of the public meetings. Fort Davis NHS is the only stagecoach stop on the trail that is currently located on public property. Source: [The Big Bend Sentinel](#)
 - *Cabrillo National Monument* - On January 13, the visitor center at the park reopened to the public after a three-month restoration project, including repairs to roofing and flooring. On January 19, the historic lighthouse restoration was also completed. Source: [Times of San Diego](#)
 - *Camp Nelson National Monument* - On December 15, a group of NPS staff and American Conservation Experience crew members finished an eight-week project to remove cattle fencing and install a split-rail fence along the western boundary of the park. Source: [Camp Nelson National Monument](#)
 - *Cape Hatteras National Seashore* - In late January, the first phase of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse restoration project will begin. The \$19.2 million project is being executed by the NPS and Stone and Lime Historic Restoration Services, Inc. The project will be under construction "for a minimum of eighteen months." Access to the Cape Hatteras Light Station will vary throughout the course of the project. Source: [Cape Hatteras National Seashore](#)
 - *Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Cape Lookout National Seashore* - The *Island Free Press* published [an article](#) about Robert Dolan, Melinda Godfrey, and Paul Godfrey, scientists who conducted research on the Outer Banks in the 1960s and 1970s, showing that the islands were not fixed in place, but constantly moving and adapting. This caused the NPS to reverse its management practices of trying to hold the islands in place. Source: *Island Free Press*
 - *Death Valley National Park* - *The New Republic* published [an article](#) about the history and future of the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, who successfully campaigned to have a parcel of their ancestral homeland in the park returned to them in 2000. They are now struggling to complete traditional summer harvesting at higher

- elevations due to climate change and a lack of access to housing. Source: *The New Republic*
- *Dry Tortugas National Park* - Yankee Freedom, the passenger service concessioner for the park, has ordered a new 300-passenger, high-speed catamaran from Gladding-Hearn Shipbuilding. It will be named the *Yankee Freedom IV*. It is planned to be put into service in 2026, and will replace the *Yankee Freedom III*. Source: [WorkBoat](#)
 - *Glacier Bay National Park* - Holland America Line, a cruise company, has published 16 podcast episodes called the "Glacier Bay Ranger Podcast Anthology." The podcasts include audio from NPS staff, members of the Huna Tribe, and scientists. Source: [eTurboNews](#)
 - *Glacier National Park* - The nationally published comic, *Pearls Before Swine*, printed [a humorous strip](#) about the park on January 12. Source: *GoComics.com*
 - *Glacier National Park* - The Yale School of the Environment published [an article](#) about the mortality of a significant swath of whitebark pines across the western United States and the efforts and challenges to conserve and restore the population. Glacier is mentioned in the article as a location where "more than 90 percent of whitebark pine trees have died." Source: *YaleEnvironment360*
 - *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area* - Starting on January 15, the park closed the Hite developed area. Some services were suspended at Hite after a lapse in concessions operators in 2021. Due to the high cost of generating power at this remote location, all services are being suspended until future notice. The closure is expected to remain until a new takeout boat ramp is constructed for Cataract Canyon river trips and a new Hite concession contract is awarded. The access road to the Hite Ranger Station will be temporarily closed at the highway. Visitors are warned that a 126-mile stretch of highway between Hanksville and Blanding, Utah, is now without gas and water. Source: [Glen Canyon National Recreation Area](#)
 - *Grand Canyon National Park* - The *Navajo-Hopi Observer* published [an article](#) about efforts to replace a trail bridge to Ribbon Falls on a spur trail off the North Kaibab Trail. The project has been funded by a \$280,000 donation from the Grand Canyon Conservancy and matching funds through the NPS Centennial Challenge program. It is likely to go out for bid this winter with plans to begin the project this calendar year. Source: *Navajo-Hopi Observer*
 - *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal Council approved a resolution to forward an application to the federal government asking that Clingmans Dome be renamed to Kuwohi, a Cherokee word that translates to "Mulberry Place." County commissions in both Tennessee and North Carolina have voted in favor of the name change. Thomas Lanier Clingman,

the current namesake of the mountain, was a pro-slavery Confederate general.

Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)

- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - A new welcome center and retail space opened just outside the park in Townsend, Tennessee. It is operated by the Great Smoky Mountains Association and replaces the former Townsend Visitor Center building, which had been shared with Blount Partnership. A ribbon cutting ceremony and grand opening will take place in late winter or early spring. Source: [Smoky Mountain News](#)
- *Gulf Islands National Seashore* - On January 22, the park began a project to install new exhibits in the Florida District's Mine Loading Building, Battery Cooper, and Santa Rosa Life-Saving Station, and to rehabilitate exhibits from the former Naval Live Oaks Visitor Center to the Fort Pickens Visitor Center. It is expected to be completed in 2025. The project cost \$800,000, and is being funded by revenue from park recreation fees. The Fort Pickens Visitor Center will be closed to the public in 2024. Source: [Gulf Islands National Seashore](#)
- *Haleakalā National Park* - The NPS and Federal Aviation Administration completed an Air Tour Management Plan for the park, which will reduce air tours by 54%, restrict hours and days of operation, and set flight routes and minimum altitudes. Source: [Haleakalā National Park](#)
- *Homestead National Historical Park* - The park has completed a 24-minute documentary film, "Homestead Roots Deep in the South." The film follows two families from Maryland trying to piece together family clues to connect back to families who took part in the Homestead Act of 1862 in the deep South. The film will premiere at the park's education center on February 4. Source: [Homestead National Historical Park](#)
- *Ice Age National Scenic Trail* - The *Door County Pulse* published [an article](#) summarizing the 2023 accomplishments of the Ice Age Trail Alliance, including 15 new miles of trail completed by 1,990 volunteers. Source: *Door County Pulse*
- *Independence National Historical Park* - The *Philadelphia Inquirer* published [an article](#) about the 72-hour reversal of an NPS proposal to rehabilitate Welcome Park that included the removal of a statue of William Penn. The reversal came after the plan became viral via the social media platform X (formerly *Twitter*). Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*
- *Indiana Dunes National Park* - The sublease for the historic Florida Tropical House is up for sale. The house, one of five homes exhibited at the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago, is owned by the park and leased to Indiana Landmarks, a nonprofit that restores historic properties. It has been sublet to two tenants who have done a large amount of restoration on the structure. The sublease has 52 years remaining.

Source: [Chicago Tribune](#)

- *John Day Fossil Beds National Monument* - The world's first-ever fossil grasshopper eggs and egg pod were discovered in the Sheep Rock Unit of the park. Scientists from the park, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Oregon were able to use micro-CT scans to reveal the internal structure of over 50 fossilized insect eggs. The nest was found in 2016 and the research was recently published in the journal, *Parks Stewardship Forum*. The eggs were named *Cuvellipsoentomoolithus laddi*, in honor of the first superintendent at John Day Fossil Beds, Benjamin Ladd, who began the resource management and science programs at the park. Source: [John Day Fossil Beds National Monument](#)
- *Keweenaw National Historical Park* - On January 16, the Keweenaw National Historical Park Advisory Commission opened the 2024 Keweenaw Heritage Grant Program. At least \$115,000 will be available in grants between \$1,000 and \$15,000. Applications are due March 29. Source: [Keweenaw National Historical Park](#)
- *Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - The Bureau of Reclamation has released projections for Lake Mead's future lake levels, predicting that it will reach a historic low by the end of 2025. Source: [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#)
- *Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial* - The National Endowment for the Arts published [an article](#) about "facts you may not know about the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial." Source: National Endowment for the Arts
- *Morristown National Historical Park* - On January 22, the park began a project to improve accessibility and restore several structures and the cultural landscape at Washington's Headquarters and Jockey Hollow. Access may be limited at times while the project is underway. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
- *Mount Rainier National Park* - The park announced that it will implement a pilot reservation system during peak summertime hours for the Nisqually, Stevens Canyon, and Sunrise/White River entrance stations. Reservations will be available on *Recreation.gov* starting in February. Source: [The Columbian](#)
- *New River Gorge National Park and Preserve* - *The Fayette Tribune* published [an article](#) highlighting tensions around the park's plan to demolish 35 structures in the park, 21 of which are listed or eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places (public comment on the proposal recently closed; see the Coalition's comments above in "Coalition Actions"). Many of the buildings were purchased by the NPS when it became a national river in 1978 and have since deteriorated. The park has said that removing these structures will allow them resources to better restore more significant historic sites. Source: *The Fayette Tribune*

- *Pacific West Region* - The *Simi Valley Acorn* published [a profile](#) of David Szymanski, the new regional director for the region. David is a 25-year employee of the NPS, most recently as the superintendent of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Source: *Simi Valley Acorn*
- *Piscataway Park* - The NPS has extended negotiations for the long-term lease of Fort Washington Marina by 60 days (through March 9). This will allow the NPS and the potential operator time to work through the details of the final lease agreement, including improvements to the property, as well as opening the restaurant and boat repair shop. The park hopes to have a lease in place by the spring. Source: [Piscataway Park](#)
- *Point Reyes National Seashore* - The *Marin Independent Journal* published [an article](#) about the deterioration of an abandoned fishing boat near Inverness in Tomales Bay that has been a "landmark" for many years. The boat sustained significant damage in a 2016 fire and recent storms have created additional damage. The NPS is "evaluating options to remove it safely." Source: *Marin Independent Journal*
- *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, Yosemite National Park* - The *Los Angeles Times* published [an op-ed](#) by John D. Wehausen, president of the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Foundation, arguing that some mountain lions need to be killed in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in order to allow the endangered Sierra bighorn sheep to survive. A California Department of Fish and Wildlife policy has required that mountain lions are relocated rather than killed, allowing them to continue to hunt bighorn sheep for many months before being moved. Source: *Los Angeles Times*
- *Shenandoah National Park* - On January 18, the park announced that it will implement a permanent day-use ticketing system for Old Rag Mountain from March through November each year. The decision comes after a multi-year pilot program, public engagement, and visitor use data analysis. Day-use tickets for 2024 will be available on *Recreation.gov* starting on February 17. Source: [Shenandoah National Park](#)
- *Shenandoah National Park* - The Conservation Fund has donated 27 acres to the park. A significant donation from Frances Kennedy, wife of the 14th Director of the NPS, Roger Kennedy, as well as support from the Shenandoah National Park Trust, allowed for the land transfer. The Conservation Fund purchased the property in 2022. Source: [Blue Ridge Outdoors](#)
- *Theodore Roosevelt National Park* - The *North Dakota News Cooperative* published an article about the potential economic effects to gateway communities if wild horses are culled from the park (as proposed in a yet-to-be-determined Livestock Plan for the park). Source: [Inforum](#)

- *Virgin Islands National Park* - On January 17, the District Court of St. Thomas held a hearing between the Department of the Interior and EHI Acquisitions, LLC, regarding the 40-year retained use estate agreement established in 1983 for the Caneel Bay Resort. The issue at question is whether the NPS owns the resort free and clear or if it owes EHI \$70 million for improvements made on the property. On January 19, the judge issued an order asking for clarification of the terms found in the agreement, including, "offer," "acceptance," and "offer to convey and transfer." Both legal teams have until February 8 to submit written arguments. Source: [St. Thomas Source](#)
- *Weir Farm National Historical Park* - The park published a "[2023 Year in Review](#)" page to its website, including efforts to preserve several historic structures and successful programs with the local community. Source: Weir Farm National Historical Park
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The *Missoulian* published [an article](#) about research conducted by a University of Washington professor, John Marzluff, about ravens in the park. John has affixed tracking devices to ravens to learn about their behaviors. Source: *Missoulian*
- *Yosemite National Park* - The Sierra Nevada Conservancy published [an article](#) about the acquisition and restoration of Ackerson Meadow, which was transferred to the park in 2016. The restoration, which began in Spring 2023, is the park's largest-ever wetland restoration project. The restoration has been done collaboratively through the NPS, American Rivers, Stanislaus National Forest, and Yosemite Conservancy. Source: Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Personnel Changes

- *Fire and Aviation Management* - Rebecca "Becky" LaTour was selected as a management and program analyst. She has 23 years of federal experience, most recently in a long-term detail as the executive assistant for the state director of the Bureau of Land Management Idaho Office. She began her new role in mid-January. Source: [National Park Service Fire and Aviation Management](#)
- *Great Basin National Park* - Ashley Adams was selected as the new superintendent. Ashley has many years of NPS experience, most recently as deputy superintendent at Nez Perce National Historical Park, Whitman Mission National Historic Site, and Big Hole National Battlefield. Source: [National Park Service Pacific West Region \(Regions 8, 9, 10, and 12\)](#)
- *Wildland Fire Program*:
 - Gillian "Gill" Fay was selected as the new wildland fire budget officer and program lead. Gill has many years of federal fire service, most recently as the national fire budget officer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service branch of fire

- management. Source: [National Park Service Wildland Fire Program](#)
- Erin Horsburgh was selected as the new deputy branch chief. Erin has over 30 years of experience within the Department of the Interior, most recently as the deputy director at the Office of Wildland Fire for the DOI. In 2014, she received the NPS Outstanding Service Award for creating a new governance structure for aviation in the DOI to facilitate interagency leadership. She will begin her new role this month. Source: [National Park Service Wildland Fire Program](#)

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

- Robert "Bob" L. Brown, 83, passed away on January 1. During his retirement, Bob "worked for the National Park Service at Catoctin, Yellowstone, and the Grand Tetons." Source: [Legacy/Black's Funeral Home](#)

In the News

- Velma Landley was inducted into the Centenarians of Oklahoma Hall of Fame. Velma spent two summers working in Yellowstone National Park. Source: [The Claremore Daily Progress](#)

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](#)
- *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](#)

- *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](#)
- *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 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](#)
- *Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area* - Public comment is [open from January 29 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](#)
- *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](#)

Other Department of the Interior News

- "*BLM's top stories of 2023*" - The Bureau of Land Management published its top highlights from 2023, including the draft Public Lands Rule that would allow for

conservation easements, proposed protections in the Arctic, and the designation of two new national monuments. Source: [Bureau of Land Management](#)

- *Roads disrupt caribou* - A new study by scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Land Management demonstrated that traffic volumes of just five vehicles per hour deter caribou from roads, particularly during high insect activity and post-calving. This runs counter to management techniques intended to protect caribou, such as low speed limits and authorized vehicle restrictions, as well as a standard of 15 vehicles per hour. NPS biologist Kyle Joly is quoted in an *Alaska Beacon* [article](#) about the study. The proposed Ambler Access Road is also mentioned, which would affect Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. Source: *Alaska Beacon*
- *Updated roadmap for solar* - On January 17, the Department of the Interior announced an updated plan for solar energy development across the West on Bureau of Land Management lands: the draft analysis of the Utility-Scale Solar Energy Programmatic Environmental Statement (also known as the updated Western Solar Plan). The BLM also announced progress updates on seven solar projects in three states. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *\$80 million for orphaned wells* - On January 12, the Department of the Interior announced it will award \$80 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding to plug and reclaim orphaned wells in Texas. 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.

New Public Laws

December 22, 2023 – The president signed into law H.R. 2670, to authorize appropriations for Fiscal Year 2024 for military activities of the Department of Defense and for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year (P.L. 118-31). (See "Senate Actions" in [12/13/23 Coalition Report](#), for provisions of the law that affect the National Park Service.)

Senate Actions

January 3, 2024 – The Senate was not in session and stood adjourned until 12:00 p.m. on Wednesday, January 3, 2024, to convene the Second Session of the One Hundred and Eighteenth Congress.

The 3rd day of January being the day prescribed by the Constitution of the United States for the annual meeting of the Congress, the 2nd session of the 118th Congress convened at 12 p.m., and was called to order by the Honorable Charles E. Schumer, a Senator from the state of New York. Thereupon, the Senate adjourned until Friday, January 5, 2024, at 10 a.m.

January 18 – The Senate passed H.R. 2872, to amend the Permanent Electronic Duck Stamp Act of 2013 to allow the Secretary of the Interior to issue electronic stamps under such Act, by the order of the Senate of Wednesday, January 17, 2024, 60 Senators having voted in the affirmative. This bill was used by the Senate as the vehicle for the Further Additional Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, which provides continuing appropriations for all federal agencies for the current fiscal year, including the National Park Service. Appropriations are provided for the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service through March 8, 2024. The bill passed by a vote of 77 yeas to 18 nays. It now goes to the House for further action on the Senate-passed amendment.

House Actions

January 3, 2024 – The House met at 11 a.m. and, at 11:55 a.m., the Chair declared the First Session of the One Hundred Eighteenth Congress adjourned sine die, pursuant to the 20th amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

This being the day fixed pursuant to the 20th Amendment to the Constitution for the meeting of the Second Session of the 118th Congress, the House met at noon and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore. Thereupon, under its previous order, the House adjourned until Friday, January 5, 2024, at 10 a.m.

January 10 – The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Federal Lands; and Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a joint hearing entitled "National Park Service's Deferred Maintenance Backlog: Perspectives from the Government Accountability Office and the Inspector General." Testimony was heard from Cardell Johnson, Director, Natural Resources and Environment, Government Accountability Office; and Mark Greenblatt, Inspector General, Department of the Interior.

January 18 – The House concurred in the Senate amendment to H.R. 2872, to amend the Permanent Electronic Duck Stamp Act of 2013 to allow the Secretary of the Interior to issue electronic stamps under such Act, by a 2/3 vote of 314 yeas to 108 nays. This bill was used by the Senate as the vehicle for the Further Additional Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, which provides continuing appropriations for all federal agencies for the current fiscal year, including the National Park Service. Appropriations are provided for the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service through March 8, 2024. It now goes to the President to be signed into law.

January 18 – Read a letter from the Speaker wherein he designated the period from Thursday, January 18, 2024, through Sunday, January 28, 2024, as a "district work

period" under section 3(z) of House Resolution 5. The House will meet in pro forma sessions during this period.

January 18 – The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing entitled "Reporting for Duty: Examining the Impacts of the Department of the Interior's Remote and Telework Policies." Testimony was heard from Mark Green, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Human Capital and Diversity and Chief Human Capital Officer, Department of the Interior; and Dawn G. Locke, Director, Strategic Issues, Government Accountability Office.

January 18 – The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held a hearing on several bills, including H.R. 5441, the "Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Reauthorization Act of 2023," and H.R. 6235, the "Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Amendments Act of 2023."

Testimony was heard from Representatives Jerry Carl and Nick LaLota; Paul M. Scholz, Deputy Assistant Administrator, National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce; and public witnesses.

Incidents

Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.

Acadia National Park

Storm damage

On January 10, a storm hit the park, creating "significant damage" to facilities in the park, including roads and trails. The Schoodic Loop Road and Ocean Drive were closed for a time, and have since reopened. Source: [WGME](#), [Acadia National Park](#)

Death Valley National Park

Truck catches fire

On January 10, a semi-truck descending Towne Pass on CA-190 caught on fire, probably due to overheating brakes. Responders from the NPS, Beatty Volunteer Fire Department, California Highway Patrol, and Caltrans assisted in the incident. The truck was carrying bottled water, which helped slow the fire's advance, "but not enough to save it." Source: [Sierra Wave Media](#)

Fire Island National Seashore

Flooding

On January 10 and 11, high winds and flooding created a great deal of damage to Fire Island. All freight and passenger service on ferries was put on hold, and NPS staff are still in the process of assessing damage and making repairs. The boardwalks at Sunken Forest, Watch Hill, and Carrington are currently closed. Source: [Patch](#), [Fire Island National](#)

[Seashore](#)

Gateway National Recreation Area

Extreme weather forces relocation of migrants

On January 9, 1,900 individuals staying at Floyd Bennett Field at a camp for asylum seekers were relocated temporarily to James Madison High School in Midwood (part of Brooklyn, NY) due to predicted storms and wind speeds over 70 miles per hour. Source:

[NY Daily News](#)

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

Hikers rescued

On January 14, two hikers called 911, saying they were out of food and water and their phones were running out of power. They were located around 11,000 feet on the slopes of Mauna Loa. The mountain was closed at the time above 10,000 feet due to severe winter weather and high winds. The individuals had not checked in and picked up their permit, so they did not know about the closure. A helicopter was deployed and was able to locate and land near the two hikers. Both individuals were uninjured. An NPS staff member gave the individuals food, water, and a satellite communication device, as well as directions to the nearest shelter. The elevation and gusty winds made transportation of the two individuals too risky. That evening, the hikers sent a message saying they had lost the trail in bad weather near 10,300 feet. The following morning, the hikers were extracted by helicopter, one-by-one. The hikers, along with two others they had hiked with (who self-extricated safely after separating), were cited for entering the area without a permit.

Source: [Spectrum News](#)

Mesa Verde National Park

Missing person

A 73-year-old went missing after being last seen hiking on the Petroglyph Point Trail on January 15. On January 16, the individual's cellphone was turned into the park's museum. The individual has "cognitive impairment" and may be without necessary medication. Responders from the NPS, local law enforcement, and search and rescue teams, have been conducting a search. As of January 23, the individual had not been found. Source:

[KJCT8, Idaho Statesman](#)

Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park

Hazardous substances

On November 30, the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund and Emergency Management Division issued a letter to the mayor of Paterson, New Jersey, saying that the newly expanded portion of the park should not be opened to the public until asbestos and other hazardous substances in the industrial ruins have been mitigated. The Quarry Lawn and Riverwalk is currently undergoing a \$7.9 million revitalization and is scheduled

to open to the public in June. It is owned by the city of Paterson and is within the boundaries of the park and a national historic landmark district. It may take up to two years to demolish the buildings and clean up the contamination from the site. The mayor's office has said that it is trying to set up a meeting with the EPA's regional administrator to discuss potential actions. Source: northjersey.com

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

Dog rescued

On the evening of January 10, a dog got off leash and fell off a cliff near Miners Castle onto a ledge 60 feet below. The dog's owners searched the area and were unable to locate the dog, convinced it had not survived the fall. The following morning, NPS staff and Superior High Angle Rescue Professionals located the dog and extracted it from the ledge. The dog was cold, but alive, and "excited to see rescuers." It was reunited with its owners. Source: [Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore](#)

Saguaro National Park

Possible rabies outbreak

On January 23, the park published a press release saying they have found several deceased foxes in the park, have received several reports of abnormal behavior in foxes and raccoons, and had one reported incident of a bobcat biting a visitor. No carcasses have yet been recovered for testing to determine the cause of illness. Rabies is a possible cause, and visitors are encouraged to maintain distance from all wildlife. Source: [Saguaro National Park](#)

Severe weather

Many NPS units have closed recently due to severe winter weather, including:

- **Crater Lake National Park** - On January 12, the park closed all facilities and the road from park headquarters to Rim Village. Source: [Crater Lake National Park](#)
- **George Washington Memorial Parkway**: On January 15, the parkway closed from 495 to Spout Run. It again closed and reopened on January 19. Source: [George Washington Memorial Parkway \(1/19 - first, 1/19 - second\)](#)
- **Great Smoky Mountains National Park**: On January 15, all park roads and all park facilities closed, with the exception of the Spur, and the Newfound Gap Road from Cherokee to Towstring, and from Gatlinburg to Sugarlands. The park reopened the Sugarlands and Oconaluftee visitor centers on January 17. Source: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park, WATE](#)
- **Haleakalā National Park**: On January 12, the Summit District and Hosmer Grove Campground closed. They reopened late in the day. Source: [National Parks Traveler, Haleakalā National Park](#)
- **Natchez Trace Parkway**: On the evening of January 14, the Natchez Parkway was closed between mileposts 429 and 442. The parkway visitor center closed at noon

- on January 15. It has since reopened. Source: [Natchez Trace Parkway](#)
- **Shenandoah National Park** - On January 15, Skyline Drive closed to all vehicles. Source: [CBS 19 News](#)
- **Stones River National Battlefield**: On January 16, all areas of the park closed. The park reopened on January 23, though water service was not functioning. The visitor center and museum were expected to reopen on January 24 or later, pending temporary restroom availability. Source: [Stones River National Battlefield \(1/16, 1/23\)](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Death Valley National Park* - Keane Wonder Mine Road reopened on January 22 and the Big Pine - Death Valley Road reopened on January 18. Both have been closed since the record floods from Hurricane Hilary in August 2023. Source: [Sierra Wave Media](#)
- *Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area* - On January 9, the Pocono Chamber of Commerce (Monroe County, PA) announced that it has sought the assistance of U.S. Representatives Matt Cartwright and Susan Wild to expedite the NPS permitting to reopen a section of Route 611 between Cherry Valley Road/Oak Street and Slateford Road. It has been closed since December 6, 2022, due to a rockslide. An NPS special use permit is required before PennDOT can reopen the road. On January 10, State Senator Rosemary M. Brown sent a letter to NPS Director Chuck Sams calling for prioritizing the permit. The NPS is scheduled to have an internal meeting about the project in "mid-January," followed by a meeting between the NPS, PennDOT, and the Federal Highway Administration. Source: [Pocono Record](#)
- *Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park* - The park installed a security fence around the Birth Home on Auburn Avenue (Atlanta, GA) in response to the recent arson attempt (see [12/13/23 Coalition Report](#)). Source: [WRDW](#)
- *Olympic National Park* - On January 19, the NPS released [its report](#) of the investigation of the origin and cause of the Hurricane Ridge Day Lodge fire on May 7, 2023. The fire likely originated in the northeast portion of the building, but a specific source could not be determined. The building was a "total loss." Source: [Olympic National Park](#)

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- Editor: Katie Wallace
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- Regular Correspondent: Don Hellmann, Chris Soller
- Issue Contributors: 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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