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The Coalition Report

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Coalition Actions

The Coalition issued [a press release](#) celebrating the President's action to expand the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument and the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument.

Through the National Parks Second Century Action Coalition, the Coalition signed [a letter](#) to Congress urging increased funding in Fiscal Year 2025 to address park understaffing and related operation and infrastructure needs. Among other things, the letter expresses support for the Centennial Challenge and requests at least \$17 million for the Housing Improvement Program. Furthermore, Coalition Executive Council Chair Phil Francis made [comments](#) to the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations: Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies about the Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations to the National Park Service, advocating for an increase in operational capacity, construction funding, and the National Recreation and Preservation and Historic Preservation Fund accounts.

The Coalition is working on a new advocacy effort related to conservation, national monument designations, and additional protections for public lands. If you or someone you know is both a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces and a former employee or volunteer of the National Park Service, and would be interested in engaging on these issues, we invite you to provide your contact information via [this form](#).

We joined several other organizations in [submitting comments](#) on the Bureau of Land Management's Wyoming Office Fourth Quarter Oil and Gas Lease Sale, asking it to defer

several parcels in this lease sale in order to protect public health and water resources, maintain wildlife habitat and migration routes, and factor greenhouse gas emissions into its decision making.

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.

- *DOI Diversity Awards* - On May 7, the Department of the Interior honored 43 employees with the Secretary's Diversity Award. Nichole McHenry and Daniel Calloway were the two NPS employees honored. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *2023 PWR Cultural Resource Awards* - On May 8, the Pacific West Region announced its 2023 Cultural Resource Awards. The Award for Superintendent went to Blanca Alvarez Stransky at Pinnacles National Park for her team's efforts protecting landscapes, historic buildings, and museum collections from wildland fire (see "Around the Parks" below). The Award for Facilities Maintenance Specialist went to Dave Goto at Manzanar National Historic Site for his efforts leading volunteers to conduct emergency repairs on Merritt Park after flooding covered the area in sediment and debris. The Joint Award for Cultural Resource Specialist and Partnership Excellence went to the Wahhoga Committee of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation/American Indian Council of Mariposa County and Yosemite National Park for efforts to reestablish the historic Wahhoga Village and restore the Wilson Cabin to its original location. Source: [National Park Service Pacific West Region \(Regions 8,9,10, and 12\)](#)
- *New women's virtual exhibit* - On May 8, the NPS announced the launch of [a new virtual exhibit](#) focused on women's history in the Pacific West, called "Home and Homelands." The exhibit was supported by a grant from the National Park Foundation and developed by historian Dr. Nicole Martin. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Bears Ears as a model of co-stewardship* - *High Country News* published [an article](#) about the draft management plan for Bears Ears National Monument, which was written collaboratively with five Tribes. The preferred alternative centers the traditional knowledge and priorities of the Tribes. (*Editor note: Bears Ears National Monument is managed by the Bureau of Land Management, though the article notes the increasing number of co-stewardship and co-management agreements across public land agencies, including the National Park Service.*) Source: *High Country News*
- *"Most endangered historic places"* - The National Trust for Historic Preservation published its 2024 list of [America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places](#). Minute

Man National Historical Park is listed due to a proposed "major expansion" of adjacent Hanscom Field Airport, which could greatly increase noise and traffic at the site. The footprint of the Battle of Wilderness, part of which is located in Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, is listed due to efforts to develop the remaining private segment into commercial space. This would increase visual and noise disturbances, as well as traffic. Two National Historic Landmarks (an NPS-administered program) are also listed: Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, California, and the Tangier American Legation in Tangier, Morocco. Source: National Trust for Historic Preservation

- "*The insidious plan to destroy our national monuments*" - *Outside* published [an article](#) about ongoing efforts to weaken the Antiquities Act. The Heritage Foundation has drafted a blueprint for a possible second Trump Administration and statements by Supreme Court justices appear to encourage a challenge to the Act. Source: *Outside*
- *Fossils in national parks* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) about the richness of fossils across the National Park System. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- "*Are social media videos ruining the national park experience?*" - *Sierra* published [an article](#) with this title, highlighting ways in which social media has influenced users both positively and negatively in park settings. Source: *Sierra*
- "*The Triumph of Manic Mather*" - *Psychology Today* published [an article](#) about the life and career of Stephen T. Mather, including the ways in which his bipolar disorder affected him. Stephen was the first director of the National Park Service. Source: *Psychology Today*
- *NPS LEGO vignettes* - *Jefferson Public Radio* published [an article](#) about the National Park Service LEGO Vignettes [social media account](#), which attempts to showcase different aspects of the National Park System through small LEGO scenes. Source: *Jefferson Public Radio*

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Badlands National Park* - A new genus of prehistoric deer was found in the park. Research on the fossils by scientists from the park, the American Museum of Natural History, and California State Polytechnic University was recently published in *Proceedings of the South Dakota Academy of Science*. The species, *Santuccimeryx*, lived 32 million years ago, and is described as "tiny and hornless." Its name honors Vincent L. Santucci, the senior paleontologist at the National Park Service. Vincent began his career as a paleontologist in Badlands National Park in 1985. The skull of the species was discovered by a Geoscientists-in-the-Parks intern, Tiffany Leone, in 2016. Source: [Badlands National Park](#)

- *Blue Ridge Parkway* - The park recently awarded a design build contract for a project to improve 24 miles of the Parkway from milepost 97 at Blackhorse Gap to milepost 121 near U.S. 220 in Roanoke. The three-year project will begin this year. Some closures will be in place during the project. It is being jointly managed by the NPS and Federal Highway Administration and is being funded with \$75 million from the Great American Outdoors Act. Source: [Blue Ridge Parkway](#)
- *Cabrillo National Monument* - On April 24, the park opened a new trail, the half-mile Oceanside Trail, which connects the Whale Watch and Kelp Forest Overlook with the Coastal Walk and tide pools. The \$400,000 project was funded by the Cabrillo National Monument Foundation and supported with trail crews from Joshua Tree National Park, the California Conservation Corps, and the San Diego Urban Corps. Source: [sdnews.com](#)
- *Canyonlands National Park* - This July, the park will begin a multi-year project to reconfigure the Grand View Point parking lot to improve safety. The project will take place on weekdays in the summer from 2024-2026. The project is being funded by fee revenue. Source: [Canyonlands National Park](#)
- *Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Kobuk Valley National Park, Noatak National Preserve* - The NPS has announced a new award, the Eileen DeVinney Award. It will be presented annually to a member of the Northwest Arctic community for the perpetuation of traditional knowledge in one (or more) of the three parks. It is named after former NPS anthropologist and resource management Eileen DeVinney, who passed away in 2017. The inaugural award was given to the Noatak Placenames 2023 field team, which revived a long-standing oral history project to establish traditional placenames and cultural practices along the Noatak River. Source: [Noatak National Preserve](#)
- *Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park* - On May 7, the park opened two new temporary exhibits showcasing artifacts from the home and dump site of Mark Thrash and his family, first recovered by archaeologists in 1975. Mark Thrash was born into slavery, gained his freedom after the Civil War, and later worked for the U.S. War Department at the military park from 1894-1922. Source: [Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park](#)
- *Colorado National Monument* - On May 29, the park will begin a project to resurface 13 miles of Rim Rock Drive. The Federal Highway Administration is managing the project. It will take two weeks to complete, and a closure will be in place. Source: [Colorado National Monument](#)
- *Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve* - The *Idaho Capital Sun* published [an article](#) about research in the park focused on climate change. Source: *Idaho Capital Sun*

- *Denver Service Center* - Ray Todd, former Denver Service Center Director, was recently honored with the Department of the Interior's Distinguished Service Award for his efforts overseeing his department in 95 Great American Outdoors Act projects, totaling nearly \$2.6 billion, from Fiscal Years 21-23. Ray retired from the NPS in March. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Everglades National Park* - On May 3, the NPS issued a Finding of No Significant Impact for the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida Osceola Camp Cure Plan. The project will help protect the camp from flooding caused by ecosystem restoration efforts from the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and Central Everglades Planning Project. Source: [Everglades National Park](#)
- *First State National Historical Park* - On May 6, the park opened its first welcome center, located at the Sheriff's House in New Castle, Delaware. The park recently completed a \$5.4 million rehabilitation of the structure, which includes exhibits, restrooms, a water bottle refilling station, and upstairs office space for park staff. The historic building was donated by the State of Delaware to the NPS in 2013. Source: [First State National Historical Park](#)
- *Gettysburg National Military Park* - Starting on May 24, two historic homes, the Michael Bushman and John Snyder houses, will be available for overnight accommodations. They are reservable on *Recreation.gov*, and reservations will include the signing of a short-term lease agreement. Source: [Gettysburg National Military Park](#)
- *Golden Gate National Recreation Area* - The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, in coordination with the National Park Service, launched [a webcam](#) focused on a nesting pair of peregrine falcons and their chicks, located on Alcatraz Island. Source: [CBS News](#)
- *Grand Portage National Monument* - On May 28, the park will begin a project to realign a portion of Mile Creek Road and construct a new bridge over Grand Portage Creek. Delays and one-lane closures are expected during the project. It is expected to be complete in Fall 2024. Source: [Grand Portage National Monument](#)
- *Hampton National Historic Site* - Starting this July, the park will begin a project to rehabilitate many of the historic structures in the park and the historic landscape. Non-historic elements will also be removed. The project also will incorporate accessibility standards and address safety issues. Construction is expected to continue through December 2025. [A storymap](#) for the project is available. The project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act. Source: [Hampton National Historic Site](#)
- *Harriet Tubman National Historical Park* - The park announced that the Thompson

- Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, the location of Harriet Tubman's 1913 funeral, will reopen to the public on June 22 after a \$5 million two-year restoration. Source: [The Citizen](#)
- *Historic Preservation Fund* (an NPS-administered program) - On May 6, the NPS announced \$62.15 million in Historic Preservation Fund grants to State Historic Preservation Offices and \$23 million to Tribal Historic Preservation Offices. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
 - *Ice Age National Scenic Trail* - On April 20, the Ice Age Trail Alliance's 18th annual conference took place in Baraboo, Wisconsin. At the conference, awards were given to over 250 volunteers who put in 100+ volunteer hours. Volunteer John Kolbe was also honored for winning the NPS Midwest Region's Impact Award for Excellence in Volunteerism. Source: [Ice Age National Scenic Trail](#)
 - *Keweenaw National Historical Park* - On May 8, the park, in collaboration with the Keweenaw NHP Advisory Commission and Isle Royale and Keweenaw Parks Association, announced that they selected the first artist to participate in the new Commissioned Artist Program, Kasey Koski. Kasey's work is expected to "capture the workers and families who once crowded the Copper Country," and will be installed near the Quincy Dry House Ruins along U.S. 41 in Hancock, MI. Source: [Keweenaw National Historical Park](#)
 - *Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - On May 4, the park reversed a February announcement, now determining that tenants may keep boats parked adjacent to their trailers at Cottonwood Cove. The reversal comes after a meeting with residents and the trailer village concessioner, Lake Mead Mohave Adventures. Many residents were upset with the proposed policy, which would have required trailer owners to relocate boats to other storage. Source: [8 News Now](#)
 - *Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - *The Nevada Independent* published [an article](#) about the issue of illegal off-road vehicle travel, particularly as the lake's water levels have dropped. When water levels were higher, there were approximately 60 access points for visitors. Currently, there are only 10 approved roads that reach the lake, five of which are in one location (Boulder Bay). The park acknowledges the lack of access, while recognizing that the ever-changing shoreline makes it difficult to establish access. This leads visitors to create their own pathways, creating resource damage and challenging rescues. The NPS has requested \$8.67 million in Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act funding to address illegal roads in the park. Source: *The Nevada Independent*
 - *Manassas National Battlefield Park* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) about the individuals involved in the ongoing fight against the establishment of a large data center adjacent to the park and in the footprint of the historic battlefield. *[Editor note: The Coalition has also [actively opposed](#) the data center project.]*

Source: *National Parks Traveler*

- *National Capital Area (Region 1)* - On April 29, the NPS signed a Finding of No Significant Impact for the demolition of Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium. The District of Columbia will execute the demolition, in accordance with its continued use of the property (owned by the NPS) and its ownership of the building itself. The stadium has not been in use since 2019 and many materials have already been removed from the site. Source: [National Capital Area \(Region 1\)](#)
- *National Capital Area (Region 1)* - On May 13, the National Low Income Housing Coalition published [a press release](#) and joined a collaborative letter to the National Park Service and the Washington, D.C., Mayor asking them to stop evictions of unhoused people in favor of implementing an existing plan to end homelessness and connect encampment residents with resources. Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition
- *National Natural Landmarks* (an NPS-administered program) - The NPS published [an article](#) outlining the 2023 highlights for the program, including the designation of new National Natural Landmarks, ongoing scientific research efforts in NNLs, and successful partnerships. Source: National Park Service Office of Communications
- *Nez Perce National Historical Park* - On May 31, the park will celebrate the grand reopening of the newly remodeled Spalding Visitor Center. The exhibit remodel is the first in 40 years. The new exhibits have improved accessibility and "not only explore Nimíipuu history from a time immemorial perspective, but also look at how that history connects to the present and informs the future for all of us." Source: [Nez Perce National Historical Park](#)
- *Olympic National Park* - On May 2, the park released a Finding of No Significant Impact for the preferred alternative identified for its Fire Management Plan. The park is now divided into two Fire Management Units: the Wilderness Unit and Non-Wilderness Unit, each managed with different objectives. Source: [Olympic National Park](#)
- *Olympic National Park, North Cascades National Park* - In 2020, the NPS, in collaboration with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Tulalip and Stillaguamish Tribes, transferred 325 non-native mountain goats from the Olympic Peninsula to its native range in the North Cascades. Of the 151 goats that were outfitted with GPS collars, only four are believed to still be alive. Experts believe the decline may come from habitat loss, increased recreation, climate change, disease, predation, and/or unfamiliarity with the new environment. Goats in other parts of the state are thriving and hunting permits are still administered. Wildlife biologists are working to draft a new recovery plan for the species in the North Cascades. Source: [Peninsula Daily News](#)

- *Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve* - On May 9, the National Parks Conservation Association hosted a webinar about the Oregon Caves Chateau, which has been closed since 2018 due to "significant seismic and structural stabilization needs." The NPCA states that the building is currently at-risk and must be stabilized soon to avoid additional damage. Source: [National Parks Conservation Association](#)
- *Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail* - Cherokee County (SC) received a Federal Lands Access Program grant that will allow it to plan and design 26 miles of trail associated with the Overmountain Victory NHP corridor and the Carolina Thread Trail. Partners on the project include the NPS, Carolina Thread Trail, Gaffney Board of Public Works, Cherokee County Recreation District, City of Gaffney, and Town of Blacksburg. Source: [Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail](#)
- *Pinnacles National Park* - The NPS published an article about efforts to protect the park's natural and cultural resources from wildfires. Superintendent Blanca Alvarez Stransky was recently bestowed with a Regional Cultural Resource Award for these efforts (see "National/Regional News" above). Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Rocky Mountain National Park* - In honor of Amphibian Week, the U.S. Geological Survey's Fort Collins Science Center published [an article](#) highlighting "four athletic amphibians" from the park, including the western tiger salamander, wood frog, boreal chorus frog, and boreal toad. Source: U.S. Geological Survey
- *Sagamore Hill National Historic Site* - The park, in partnership with Casey Trees, and the Theodore Roosevelt Legacy Partnership, recently participated in the replanting of six Kwanzan cherry trees in an area adjacent to the parking lot. The new trees replace ones gifted to Sagamore Hill by Japan for President Roosevelt's work brokering peace during the Russo-Japanese War. Additional tree plantings are also underway to replace other historic trees on the property. Source: [Sagamore Hill National Historic Site](#)
- *Saratoga National Historical Park* - On May 29, the park will host a celebration for the completion of the \$6 million Battlefield Tour Road Improvement Project. The project made improvements to parking areas, trailheads, walkways, seating, signage, exhibits, and viewing areas along the road. It was funded by the Great American Outdoors Act. Source: [Saratoga National Historical Park](#)
- *Shenandoah National Park* - The park recently celebrated the completion of a \$15 million 18-month project to repair and restore 56 miles of Skyline Drive and 19 overlooks. They are also midway through a \$1.2 million project to remove obsolete structures and restore native conditions in the Big Meadows Area and at Loft Mountain Campground. Both projects were funded by the Great American Outdoors Act. Source: [Shenandoah National Park](#)

- *Shenandoah National Park* - The park was selected as a 2024 "Spotlight Site" by the Leave No Trace (LNT) organization. From June 14-16, the park and LNT will host programs and activities focused on stewardship, including a volunteer service project to rehabilitate backcountry campsites. Source: [Shenandoah National Park](#)
- *Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore* - *Interlochen Public Radio* published [an article](#) about an effort to halt construction on a section of the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail because of its impact on the dune environment and the cost of the segment. The trail route was approved 15 years ago, and eight of the nine sections of trail are complete. The project is currently in the design phase. Source: *Interlochen Public Radio*
- *Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore* - *Northern Express* published [an article](#) about the Sleeping Bear Inn, which will open to guests for the first time in 50 years, starting this summer. A nonprofit, Balancing Environment and Rehabilitation (BEAR), has spent \$2 million renovating the inn. They currently hold a 40-year NPS lease for the property. Source: *Northern Express*
- *Theodore Roosevelt Island* - *The Washington Post* published [an article](#) about efforts to sight and track migratory birds at the park. Source: *The Washington Post*
- *Tribal Historic Preservation Program* (an NPS-administered program) - In April, the NPS signed a new Tribal Historic Preservation agreement with the Tule River Indian Tribe in California, marking its 10th such agreement in the last year. There are currently 222 Tribes with signed Tribal Historic Preservation Office agreements. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Valles Caldera National Preserve* - The park is seeking local food vendors to apply for a Commercial Use Authorization to provide "New Mexican cuisines" in the park from May through November. Source: [Valles Caldera National Preserve](#)
- *Zion National Park* - On May 14, the park announced they selected Destination Zion Lodge, LLC, a subsidiary of POWDR Corp, as the new concessioner to operate the lodging, food and beverage, and retail services. The 10-year contract begins on January 1, 2025. POWDR Corp is a "long-time ski resort operator." Xanterra Parks and Resorts, Inc., has held the concession since 1972 and will continue to operate until January. Source: [Zion National Park](#)

Personnel Changes

- *Big Bend National Park* - Anjna O'Connor was selected as the new superintendent. Anjna comes to the NPS after many years of work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, including the management of many campgrounds and day use areas in central Texas. Source: [Big Bend National Park](#)

- *Denver Service Center* - Bethany Barron was selected as the new director. Bethany brings many years of experience with the NPS, U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Reclamation. Most recently, she served as the deputy associate director of the Park Planning, Facilities and Lands Directorate for the NPS. She received a Departmental Superior Service Award this year in recognition of her leadership in major construction across the National Park System. She will begin her new role on June 3. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Dinosaur National Monument* - Phil Akers was selected as the new superintendent. Phil has over 25 years of experience with the NPS, most recently as chief ranger at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Phil begins his new role on June 16. Source: [Dinosaur National Monument](#)
- *Fire and Aviation Management* - Hannah Jones was selected as a budget analyst. Hannah has worked for the federal government since 2016, including time with the Department of Defense and Bureau of Land Management. Source: [NPS Division of Fire and Aviation Management](#)

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

- Duane A. Potila, 80, passed away on April 6. Duane was a carpenter at Isle Royale National Park from 1975 until his retirement in 2006. Source: [Upper Michigan's Source/TV6](#)

Retired

- On April 30, Pat Kenney retired. Pat worked for the NPS for 34 years, including as a natural resource manager at Big Cypress National Preserve, planning branch chief at the Denver Service Center, superintendent at Cape Lookout National Seashore, deputy superintendent at Yellowstone National Park, and, lastly, as superintendent of Shenandoah National Park and Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park. Source: [Shenandoah National Park](#)

In the News

- On May 11, Betty Reid Soskin was honored with an Honorary Doctorate of Human Letters by California State University, East Bay. Betty retired as the oldest NPS ranger at age 100 in 2022. Source: [NBC Bay Area](#)
- William "Bill" Joseph Wright was recently inducted into the Chickasaw Nation Hall of Fame for his efforts protecting Chickasaw National Recreation Area and other

public lands. William worked for the NPS for 40 years, starting his career as a fee collector at Chickasaw NRA, then working at eight other parks before returning to Chickasaw as its superintendent. He retired from the NPS in 2022. According to the announcement, he is the only person to serve as Chief Ranger at three major national parks (Everglades National Park, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and Grand Canyon National Park). Source: [Indian Gaming](#).

Open for Comment

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

- *Acadia National Park* - Public comment is [open through June 5](#) on a proposal to enter into agreements with the five federally recognized Tribes of Maine for the gathering of sweetgrass within the park. Source: [Acadia National Park](#)
- *Badlands National Park* - Public comment is [open through May 15](#) on a Draft Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [Badlands National Park](#)
- *Cape Hatteras National Seashore* - The park is currently accepting public comments to inform a future draft management plan for the herd of wild horses on Ocracoke Island. A public meeting is scheduled for May 21 and other public comments may be submitted via email. A more formal public comment process will take place after a draft plan is released "in the coming months." Source: [CoastalReview.org](#)
- *Crater Lake National Park* - Public comment is [open through June 14](#) on a Draft Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [Crater Lake National Park](#)
- *Dinosaur National Monument* - Public comment is [open through June 1](#) on a proposal to increase camping fees. Source: [KSL](#)
- *Dinosaur National Monument* - Public comment is [open through May 27](#) on a Fire Management Plan. Source: [Dinosaur National Monument](#)
- *Everglades National Park* - Public comment is [open through June 9](#) on a plan to rehabilitate the bulkheads, walkway, and aging amenities at the Flamingo marina. Source: [Everglades National Park](#)
- *Harry S Truman National Historic Site* - Public comment is [open through May 27](#) on a Draft Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [Harry S Truman National Historic Site](#)
- *Guadalupe Mountains National Park* - Public comment is [open through June 7](#) on a Frontcountry Management Plan. Source: [Guadalupe Mountains National Park](#)
- *Point Reyes National Seashore* - Public comment is [open through June 5](#) on a

proposed Tomales Point Area Plan. The new plan would replace the 1998 Tule Elk Management Plan and revise the 1980 General Management Plan for Tomales Point. Source: [Point Reyes National Seashore](#)

- *Rocky Mountain National Park* - Public comment is [open through May 23](#) on a proposal to increase camping fees at four reservation campgrounds inside the park. Source: [Longmont Leader](#)
- *Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore* - Public comment is [open through May 18](#) on a plan to repair and replace docks at North and South Manitou Islands. Source: [Yahoo!](#)
- *Voyageurs National Park* - Public comment will be [open from May 28 through June 28](#) on a proposed Frozen Lake Use Plan. Source: [Voyageurs National Park](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The Environmental Protection Agency has [opened public comment through May 16](#) on a Clean Water Act Section 401 water quality certification for Yellowstone National Park authorize the emergency stabilization of the Soda Butte Creek footbridge. Source: Environmental Protection Agency

Other Department of the Interior News

- "Owl vs. Owl" - *Sierra* published [an article](#) outlining the controversial proposed U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plan to kill "up to 470,000 barred owls" over the next 30 years in order to protect the northern spotted owl, a threatened species in significant decline. Source: *Sierra*
- *\$147 million for drought resiliency* - On May 6, the Department of the Interior announced \$147.6 million in funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and annual appropriations to support water supply reliability projects to mitigate the impacts of drought. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *\$87 million for migratory birds* - On May 8, the Department of the Interior announced \$87 million in approved funding by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission to enhance wetlands and "associated upland habitat." Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *\$71 million for electricity on Tribal lands* - On May 1, the Department of the Interior announced \$71 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding for the second round of the Tribal Electrification Program. The program supports bringing electricity to unelectrified Tribal homes through zero-emissions energy systems. 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

May 1 – The Senate agreed to S. Res. 668, honoring the life of Daniel Robert "Bob" Graham, former Senator for the state of Florida. Senator Graham recently passed away and was known for being one of the leading proponents of creating and supporting the national parks of Florida, including the restoration of the waters that flow into Everglades National Park.

May 1 – The Committee on the Budget concluded a hearing to examine the oil industry's evolving efforts to avoid accountability for climate change, after receiving testimony from Representative Raskin; Michael Ratner, Specialist in Energy Policy, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress; Sharon Y. Eubanks, former Director, Tobacco Litigation Team, Department of Justice; Geoffrey Supran, University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric, and Earth Science, Miami, Florida; and Ariel Cohen, International Tax and Investment Center, Washington, D.C.

May 2 – The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources concluded a hearing to examine the President Joe Biden's proposed budget request for Fiscal Year 2025 for the Department of the Interior, after receiving testimony from Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior.

May 8 – The Senate passed S. 3791, to reauthorize the America's Conservation Enhancement Act. Sec. 108 of the bill reauthorizes funding for the Chesapeake Bay Initiative Act through 2030. That act includes the authority for the Chesapeake Bay Gateway Watertrails Network, which is managed by the National Park Service.

May 8 – The Committee on Appropriations: Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies concluded a hearing to examine proposed budget estimates and justification for Fiscal Year 2025 for the Department of the Interior, after receiving testimony from Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior.

May 9 – The nomination of Shannon A. Estenoz, of Florida, to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior was transmitted to the Senate. Shannon currently serves as the Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

House Actions

April 29 – The House agreed to H. Res. 1172, expressing the profound sorrow of the House of Representatives on the death of the Honorable Donald M. Payne, Jr., a member of the House from New Jersey.

April 30 – The House passed the following bills:

- H.R. 615, to prohibit the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture from prohibiting the use of lead ammunition or tackle on certain federal land or water under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, by a ye-and-nay vote of 214 yeas to 201 nays.
- H.R. 764, to require the Secretary of the Interior to reissue regulations removing the gray wolf from the list of endangered and threatened wildlife under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, by a recorded vote of 209 yeas to 205 noes.
- H.R. 3195, to rescind Public Land Order 7917, to reinstate mineral leases and permits in the Superior National Forest, to ensure timely review of Mine Plans of Operations, by a ye-and-nay vote of 212 yeas to 203 nays. This bill would allow copper sulfide ore mining to proceed in the forest surrounding Voyageurs National Park, with the potential to affect the quality of the waters of the forest and the park.

April 30 – The Committee on Natural Resources: Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing entitled "Examining the Influence of Extreme Environmental Activist Groups in the Department of the Interior." Testimony was heard from public witnesses.

May 1 – The Committee on Natural Resources held a hearing entitled "Examining the President's FY25 Budget Request for the Department of the Interior." Testimony was heard from Deb Haaland, Secretary, Department of the Interior.

May 6 – The House passed the following:

- H.R. 7219, amended, to ensure that federal agencies rely on the best reasonably available scientific, technical, demographic, economic, and statistical information, and evidence to develop, issue, or inform the public of the nature and bases of federal agency rules and guidance, by a 2/3 ye-and-nay vote of 377 yeas to 4 nays.
- H.R. 7528, amended, to amend section 206 of the E-Government Act of 2002 to improve the integrity and management of mass comments and computer-generated comments in the regulatory review process.
- S. 2073, amended, to amend Title 31 of United States Code, to require agencies to include a list of outdated or duplicative reporting requirements in annual budget justifications.

May 7 – The Committee on Natural Resources held a markup on several bills, including H.R. 6852, the "Holcombe Rucker Park Landmark Act," which establishes the Holcombe Rucker Park National Commemorative Site in Harlem, NY. The bill includes a provision that affirms the site is not a unit of the National Park System.

May 8 – The House passed H.R. 2925, to amend the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 to provide for security of tenure for use of mining claims for ancillary activities, by a ye-and-nay vote of 216 yeas to 195 nays. This bill sets forth a process to allow mine operations to use, occupy, and conduct operations (e.g., construction of roads and other mining infrastructure activity) on public land regardless of whether a mineral deposit has

been discovered on the land.

Incidents

Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park

Storm

On May 8, the park closed due to incoming storms and severe weather. As of May 10, the park had reopened most areas, with the Loop C trail at the Birthplace Picnic Area closed due to standing water. By May 13, all areas of the park were open. Source: Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park ([press release](#), [current conditions](#))

Acadia National Park

Wildfire

On May 11, two fires started along the St. Sauveur Trail. Personnel responded from Southwest Harbor, Mount Desert, Tremont, and the Maine State Forest Service helicopter. One was contained at 0.1 acres, while the other was contained at 0.25 acres. Both fires were extinguished within three hours. The incident is currently under investigation by the NPS. No cause was listed, though the park reminded the public that charcoal and wood fires are only allowed in campgrounds and designated picnic areas. Source: [Acadia National Park](#)

Appalachian National Scenic Trail

Fish hook-stuffed dog treats

Over the weekend of May 4-5, a hiker on the Appalachian Trail discovered dog treats stuffed with fish hooks scattered along the path near the George W. Outerbridge shelter in Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Game Commission is investigating and has asked the public for any additional information about the incident or further incidences. Source: [News Nation](#)

Bandelier National Monument

Power outage

On May 10, the park announced that the Tsankawi Unit will remain closed due to power loss at the site. The unit has been closed since April 2023 as part of an interagency project to improve traffic flow and safety at a nearby traffic junction. During the road project, the Tsankawi Loop Trail was re-routed in accordance with a 2014 management plan and the wishes of the Pueblo of San Ildefonso. The park is working to restore power. No projected reopening date has been announced. Source: [Bandelier National Monument](#)

Death Valley National Park

Hazmat truck fire

On April 26, a semi-truck carrying hazardous waste had its engine and brakes catch on fire while descending Towne Pass on CA-190, near milepost 83 between Emigrant Junction and Stovepipe Wells. A park staff member reported the burning truck to dispatch by radio. Park staff responded with a fire engine and prevented the fire from spreading from the cab to the cargo compartment, preventing the hazardous substances from igniting. Caltrans supported the incident with traffic control. The driver, a 48-year-old, sustained "non-life-threatening injuries," and was transported by ambulance to Desert View Hospital in Pahrump, Nevada. It is the third truck fire on Towne Pass in the last year (see [1/24/24](#) and [8/23/23 Coalition Reports](#)). Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)

Death Valley National Park

National Register historic resource damaged

Some time between April 1 and 24, an individual used a winch to extract their vehicle out of deep mud, anchoring it to the historic 113-year-old salt tram tower in Saline Valley. In the process, the tower was toppled and its concrete footings came out of the ground. The Saline Valley Salt Tram is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Funding had been lined up for stabilization of the salt tram in its previous condition, and it is unclear whether or not it will be able to be re-anchored. The NPS is looking for any information the public can provide about the incident. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)

Mount Rushmore National Memorial

PFAS in drinking water

A 2023 test of the park's drinking water showed a Perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) concentration of 9.8 parts per trillion, more than two times higher than the recently-finalized Environmental Protection Agency limit of 4 parts per trillion. (PFOS is a member of the synthetic chemical group known collectively as perfluorinated alkylated substances, or PFAS.) That 2023 test is considered preliminary and does not "count" toward the new limits until 2027. The EPA will use annual running averages to determine compliance. Mount Rushmore is the only site in South Dakota to test above the new EPA limits. The park has stated that they are monitoring results and considering mitigation. Source: [South Dakota Searchlight](#)

Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation (an NPS-administered program)

Federal theft at CCC

On May 6, a 48-year-old who formerly served as the chief operating officer of the Citizens Conservation Corp (CCC) pleaded guilty to theft from federal programs. In 2018, the CCC received \$111,221 from the NPS through a cooperative agreement to recruit, hire, and pay two interns to do work at the Olmsted Center for 13 months. The individual directed an accountant to draw down \$108,753 of the obligated funds and fraudulently misapply them for other operating expenses at the CCC. At the time, the organization had recently lost its

20-year multimillion-dollar contract with the State of West Virginia and was "extremely financially unstable." The individual stated that they misapplied the funds at the direction of the Chief Executive Officer. The CEO, a 67-year-old, pleaded guilty to related charges on January 12. Both individuals await sentencing for their crimes. The cases were investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Office of Inspector General.

Source: [U.S. Attorney's Office: Southern District of West Virginia](#)

Point Reyes National Seashore

Surfer found deceased

On May 1, a surfboard washed ashore at Drakes Beach. Observers called authorities after they were unable to locate an individual in the water. Responding agencies included Marin County (CA) Sheriff's Office and Search and Rescue, the NPS, the U.S. Coast Guard, Marin County Fire Department, and the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office helicopter. A deceased person was found later that day about 2.5 miles northwest of the Drakes Beach parking area. The individual's body was recovered by a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter. After recovery, the individual was identified as a 55-year-old. The individual had been arrested the day before on suspicion of lewd and lascivious acts with a child and sexual abuse. It is unclear if this was related to the individual's death. The cause of death is under investigation by the NPS and Marin County Sheriff's Office Coroner Division.

Source: [CBS News](#)

Rocky Mountain National Park

Missing hiker

On May 12 at about 1pm, a 23-year-old texted their friend, indicating they were on the summit of Longs Peak. "Significant" storms moved through the area that afternoon. The individual was reported missing late that night. The following morning, rangers confirmed their vehicle was still parked at the trailhead and a search was started, including staff from the NPS and air resources from Flight for Life Air Ambulance and the State of Colorado Department of Fire Prevention and Control. As of May 14, the individual had not yet been found. The park is looking for any information the public might have.

Source: [Rocky Mountain National Park](#)

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

Backcountry fatalities

On May 7, two individuals were reported overdue on Mt. Whitney. They had intended to go to "the Notch," then ski and snowboard back to their camp at Upper Boy Scout Lake. Inyo County Search and Rescue initiated a search, with support from the NPS, Tulare County Sheriff's Office and Coroner, and California Highway Patrol Air Operations. The individuals were found deceased within the Tulare County side of the mountain (the north face of Mt. Whitney, which is within the park).

Source: [Inyo County Sheriff's Office](#)

[Facebook page](#)

White Sands National Park

Air Force jet crash

On April 30, a U.S. Air Force F-16 jet crashed "in the area" of the park. The pilot successfully ejected from the jet and was taken to a hospital for medical care. They are said to be in "good condition" and were released from the hospital the same day. They were the only person in the plane. The park has been closed to the public past mile marker 3 since the incident. The investigation is ongoing, and no reopening date has been announced. Source: [El Paso Times](#)

Yosemite National Park

Concession actions led to injury

SFGate recently obtained the 2023 annual report about Yosemite Hospitality, a subsidiary of Aramark Corporation that holds the main concession contract in the park. The report showed that the concession's "satisfactory" rating was later changed to "marginal" due to failures that injured a visitor and a staff member: a fall due to a poorly maintained balcony railing and the partial collapse of a dining room ceiling during meal service. It is the concessioner's second "marginal" rating in a row, which can be grounds for contract termination with the National Park Service. The report said that the NPS would work with the concessioner on "next steps in meeting outstanding contractual requirements."

Source: [SFGate](#)

Zion National Park

Bicycle-deer incident

On April 28, two people riding a tandem bicycle collided with a deer near the South Entrance. Personnel from the NPS, Hurricane Valley Fire and Rescue, and the Springdale Police Department responded. The two riders were transported to St. George Regional Hospital. Source: [KSL](#)

Zion National Park

Hiker fatality

On May 6, an individual went unresponsive while hiking at Scout Lookout. Rangers on scene immediately responded and performed CPR, while other rangers hiked in with additional medical equipment. After 90 minutes of unsuccessful resuscitation efforts, medical control gave the order to terminate further efforts and the individual was pronounced dead at the scene. The response included over 33 staff from the NPS and Intermountain Life Flight. The Washington County Sheriff's Office, Utah Office of the Medical Examiner, and the NPS are still investigating the cause of death. Source: [Zion National Park](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Cape Hatteras National Seashore* - On May 3, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Savannah District awarded a \$525,000 contract to do soil sampling and testing on leaking petroleum contaminants near Buxton Beach Access on Hatteras Island. This is a shift from its prior stance of taking no action at the site. The contractor was expected to begin work on May 14 and wrap up on May 24. The beach has been closed since September 1 (see [9/6/23](#), [3/6/24](#), and [4/3/24 Coalition Reports](#)). Source: [The Paradise](#)
- *Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area* - The Georgia Environmental Protection Division fined Fulton County \$90,524 for 25 permit violations and the closing of Chattahoochee River NRA for 20 days in June 2023. The county's Big Creek sewage plant released "tens of millions of gallons" of partially treated sewage into the river system, resulting in dangerously high levels of *E. coli* bacteria in the waterway. The NPS is assessing damages to the park and "will seek compensation." Source: [RoughDraft Atlanta](#)
- *Chickasaw National Recreation Area* - On May 7, the park reopened the Platt Historic District east of U.S. 177 and the Guy Sandy area for the first time since a tornado hit the area on April 27 (see [5/1/24 Coalition Report](#)). On May 9, the park reopened The Point area of the park. On May 13, the park reopened several campgrounds and the Buckhorn area of the park. The park and the local community of Sulphur, OK, received "significant damage" and several areas of the park remain closed (as of May 13). Many iconic trees in the park, some planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, were damaged. A popular local tree known as the "Monkey Tree" sustained damage, but is "likely to survive." Source: Chickasaw National Recreation Area ([5/6](#), [5/7](#), [5/9](#), [5/12](#), [current conditions](#))
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Grand Canyon National Park* - On May 10, a deceased individual was found near mile 6 on the Colorado River. It is believed to be the 58-year-old who went missing in late April, who was thought to have attempted to run the river on a homemade wooden raft with a dog (see [5/1/24 Coalition Report](#)). The Coconino County (AZ) Medical Examiner's Office will confirm positive identification and work with the NPS on an investigation of the incident. Source: [Grand Canyon National Park](#)
- *Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - On May 4, the park reopened the areas of the park that were closed due to increased seismicity in the area (see [5/1/24 Coalition Report](#)). Seismic activity has returned to normal levels. Source: [Honolulu Star Advertiser](#)
- *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* - On May 13, the park announced the reopening of the Generals Highway between Ash Mountain and Giant Forest, 10 days ahead of schedule. Repairs and traffic delays are expected through the end of June. The park will also begin repairs on the Mineral King Road this week, which are expected to last eight weeks. The damage was incurred by winter storms in

2023. Source: [Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks](#)

- *Virgin Islands National Park* - On May 3, EHI Acquisitions filed a motion asking the court to alter or amend its summary judgment orders to remove the reference transferring the title of Caneel Bay Resort and its improvements to the National Park Service. On April 22, the court determined that the federal government owns the resort, based on its 1983 Retained Use Estate (RUE) agreement (see [5/1/24 Coalition Report](#)). EHI's motion argues that the RUE did not end, as scheduled, on September 30, 2023, because their mortgage states that they may not terminate the RUE without the prior written consent of the lender. EHI also argues that due process was not honored because the issue raised in the courts was only the title to the land, not ownership of the Retained Used Estate or ownership of the improvements. The federal government argues that EHI signed documents agreeing to the expiration of the lease under the RUE and operated under them for over 15 years. (Editor Note: *Caneel Bay Acquisitions, LLC (known as "CBI"), is an affiliate/"sister company" of EHI Acquisitions. Both have been involved in the financial interests, and EHI and CBI have been used interchangeably in the Coalition Report throughout the legal process.*) Source: [St. Thomas Source](#)

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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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