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The Coalition Report

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

Coalition Actions

The Coalition joined with numerous organizations in [a letter](#) to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees requesting increased funding for the Department of Interior and U.S. Forest Service. Among other things, the letter notes record high visitation while funding for operations and maintenance has been stagnant. The Coalition also joined in [a letter](#) to the Senate Committee on Appropriations requesting an increase in funding for environmental issues and opposing attempts to include provisions in the bill that would reduce environmental protections.

Coalition Executive Committee Chair Phil Francis joined a *National Parks Traveler* [podcast](#) to discuss the funding landscape for the National Park Service.

The Coalition joined with numerous organizations in [a letter](#) to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration expressing support for a phased approach for the proposed designation of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.

We issued [a press release](#) thanking Interior Secretary Deb Haaland for meeting with local leaders and visiting the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument. The press release expressed support for the designation the monument.

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 continues to wallow in best places to work rankings" - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) summarizing the findings in the "2023 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government" as defined by the Partnership for Public Service and Boston Consulting Group. It placed the NPS 385th out of 459 agencies scored. The NPS' worst scores were in pay, recognition, effective leadership, work-life balance, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and professional development. The article notes that employee attrition is up and morale continues to fall. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- *2023 Excellence in Volunteerism Regional Awards* - The NPS announced the regional recipients for these awards, including the Innovation Award, Youth and Young Adult Impact Award, Adult Impact Award, Team Impact Award, and Excellence in Volunteer Management Staff Award. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Climbing management plan public comments* - The NPS has made public comments related to the NPS' proposed guidance for climbing anchors and equipment in federal wilderness areas available online. They received over 12,000 comments and are still in the process of reviewing them and making suggested changes before final guidance will be released. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *NPS uniform policy* - On May 9, NPS Deputy Director Frank Lands issued [a memo](#) about NPS policies related to employee uniforms, particularly for attendance at events, such as Pride. The memo stated that employees were prohibited from wearing uniforms at any demonstration or event where it could be construed as agency support for an issue, position, or political party. Furthermore, employees attending events through Employee Organizations (EO) such as Employee Resource Groups are "not performing official duties while engaged in strictly EO activities," and therefore should not appear in uniform. After heavy media attention, on May 24, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland issued a directive to all Interior agencies to review the allowance of uniformed participation in "externally organized events," particularly "Special Emphasis Months," such as Pride. The NPS has stated that they are working on "implementation guidance for parks." Source: *E&E News* ([5/20](#), [5/24](#))
- "Social media influences national park visitation" - A new [study](#) by this title was published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, describing increases in visitor traffic related to high social media exposure, particularly for Alaska parks. The study looked at visitor numbers before and after social media began gaining in popularity in 2010. Source: [Alaska Public Media](#)
- *Op-ed on increasing park units and wilderness areas*- *Sierra* published [an op-ed](#) by

its editor-in-chief, Jason Mark, arguing that overcrowding at parks can be resolved, in part, by establishing more park units. The article references several proposed bills in Congress to expand or re-designate public lands. Source: *Sierra* [Editor note: A shorter version of the op-ed was also [published](#) in The Seattle Times.]

- "Seven people who influenced our national parks" - *The Washington Post* published [an article](#) with this title, highlighting the efforts of George Meléndez Wright, Mardy Murie, George Masa, Polly Dyer, Howard Zahniser, Carl Stokes, and Gerard Baker. Source: *The Washington Post*
- *AI Roker wins NPT award* - On May 16, the National Park Trust announced that they awarded *NBC Today* journalist AI Roker with the 2024 APEX Award for his efforts highlighting national parks and raising awareness about climate change through his reporting. Source: [National Park Trust](#)
- *NPS on "Jeopardy!"* - The television show "Jeopardy!" recently aired a category on national parks, which it compiled in [this short video](#) on its *YouTube* channel. Source: *Jeopardy!*

[Around the Parks](#)

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Acadia National Park* - *Sierra* published [an article](#) about the challenge of responding to climate change-related incidents, such as infrastructure erosion due to storms and high tides, while also providing amenities for record numbers of visitors. Source: *Sierra*
- *Amache National Historic Site* - On May 17, a dedication ceremony was held for the park. The dedication was timed to coincide with an annual pilgrimage for descendants from the former incarceration camp. Source: [9News](#)
- *American Battlefield Protection Program* (an NPS-administered program) - On May 23, the NPS awarded \$1.5 million to protect 144.36 acres across three battlefields in Mississippi and Virginia. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Blue Ridge Parkway* - The park has launched a new safety campaign, "Rule the Ridge," in order to increase motorcycle safety. The parkway has the highest number of motorcycle crash injuries and fatalities in the National Park System. In 2023, parkway law enforcement responded to 83 motor vehicle crashes that involved motorcycles. Source: [The Transylvania Times](#)
- *Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park* - The week of May 20, the park began a project to rehabilitate the left abutment of the historic Potomac Dam No. 5, located at Mile 106 of the towpath. The project is expected to continue through Fall 2025. A detour will be in place throughout the work and Dam 5 parking

lot will be closed. The \$6.7 million project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act. Source: [Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park](#)

- *Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve* - The *Idaho Statesman* published [an op-ed](#) by the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Language and Cultural Preservation Department that describes their ongoing relationship with park lands and collaborative efforts with park staff, such as broadening interpretive stories and working to eradicate invasive species. The op-ed is one of a series of six "guest columns" written to honor the park's centennial anniversary. Source: *Idaho Statesman*
- *Cuyahoga Valley National Park* - On May 22, the park reopened the Towpath Trail heading north from Station Road Bridge, after completing work on bank stabilization along that segment. The same day, the crew began working on a half-mile section of the Towpath Trail south of Station Road. The section will be closed on weekdays through August 2. No detours will be available during that time. The entire riverbank stabilization project will continue through 2025. The project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Source: [Cuyahoga Valley National Park](#)
- *Dry Tortugas National Park* - The park has reopened its campground after dredging the Fort Jefferson moat and redistributing sand. The park will next dredge the finger piers to restore access to the Garden Key waterfront, followed by dredging the moat near North Beach and the repair of the Fort Jefferson counterscarp (moat wall). The project is expected to wrap up in the fall. It is being funded by Public Law 115-123 for NPS units impacted by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. Source: [keysnews.com](#)
- *Fort Dupont Park* - On May 10, the park signed a Finding of No Significant Impact for a stream restoration plan on Fort Dupont Creek watershed. The project will be done in partnership with the District of Columbia Department of Energy and Environment. It is expected to begin this fall. Source: [Fort Dupont Park](#)
- *Fort Raleigh National Historic Site* - On June 1, National Trails Day, the park will open new educational exhibits on the Freedom Trail. These exhibits "are the first to bring personal narratives about the Freedman's Colony to Fort Raleigh." They were designed by park staff and volunteers, as well as the Pea Island Preservation Society, Outer Banks History Center, University of Notre Dame, and Sonja Griffin Evans. Funding for the exhibits came from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, the National Park Foundation, the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, and Outer Banks Forever. Source: [Fort Raleigh National Historic Site](#)
- *Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Kobuk Valley National Park* - In April, the non-profit American Rivers named the Kobuk River one of "America's Most

- Endangered Rivers" due to threats from mining, development (such as the proposed Ambler Road), and climate change. Source: [Northern Alaska Environmental Center](#)
- *George Washington Memorial Parkway* - On May 19, the NPS officially reopened Bridge 23 on the Mount Vernon Trail, located within the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. The construction project included replacing and widening the bridge, adding new pedestrian-safe handrails, and adding a bench and overlook. The project was funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and completed in collaboration with the Federal Highway Administration. Source: [George Washington Memorial Parkway](#)
 - *Great Basin National Park* - The park will reopen the Grand Palace Tour on June 9 after a project to repair portions of the path and add safety features. On May 28, the park will close Lower Lehman Creek Campground to add nine new campsites, improve accessibility, add water lines, and improve the trailhead at the campground. In July, the park will begin upgrades to the Bristlecone Trail system. Temporary closures may be in place. A pavement improvement project is ongoing on Wheeler Peak Scenic Drive and expected to be completed in the winter. Temporary traffic disruptions will occur. Source: [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#)
 - *John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site* - On June 1, the site will reopen for a full season for the first time since 2019, following an extensive renovation and accessibility improvement project. The season will run through October 30. Source: [John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site](#)
 - *Mammoth Cave National Monument* - The NPS issued a Finding of No Significant Impact for the Environmental Assessment to replace three seasonal park housing units with two new buildings, each with 12 bedrooms and baths. Source: [WNKY](#)
 - *Mount Rainier National Park* - KING5 published [an article](#) about the impacts of overcrowding in the park and the implementation of a pilot timed entry system, which started on May 24. Source: KING5
 - *National Historic Landmarks* (an NPS-administered program) - On May 19, the Waterford Foundation and Waterford Citizen's Association held a public meeting to discuss efforts to fight back against a proposal by NextEra Energy Company to open a new corridor for power lines through Waterford, a National Historic Landmark. The proposal resulted in Waterford being added to Preservation Virginia's list of most endangered historic places. The proposed route has not been finalized and still needs approval from the State Corporation Commission. Source: [LoudounNow](#)
 - *Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native Culture and Arts Development Grant Program* (an NPS-administered program) - On May 23, the NPS announced the award of

- \$750,000 to the Alaska Native Heritage Center and \$749,282 to the Sealaska Heritage Institute to each provide programming focused on traditional Alaska Native arts. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Olympic National Park* - On May 22, the park launched a new aquatic invasive species program, including free cleaning stations at Lake Ozette and the Fairholme, Storm King, and Log Cabin Resort boat launch stations on Lake Crescent. Source: [Olympic National Park](#)
 - *Salem Maritime National Historic Site* - On May 28, the park will begin a project to stabilize and repair the Derby and Central Wharves. The project is expected to be completed by Winter 2024. Source: [Salem Maritime National Historic Site](#)
 - *Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* - *The Fresno Bee* published [an article](#) about the efforts needed to conduct a "health inspection" of the General Sherman giant sequoia, which is considered the largest known living tree on the planet. The article outlines the use of drones, satellite mapping, and rope ascension. The effort was coordinated by the Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition, a collaborative that includes the NPS, Sequoia Parks Conservancy, Ancient Forest Society, and others. Source: *The Fresno Bee*
 - *Shenandoah National Park* - *Virginia's Public Radio* published [an article](#) about the parks efforts to eradicate spongy moths by spraying pesticides from helicopters. The pesticide is called "BT" and is used in certified organic agriculture. It degrades quickly in the environment. Source: *WVTF*
 - *Submerged Resources Center* (an NPS program) - *National Parks Traveler* published [an interview](#) with Brett Seymour, the deputy chief and audiovisual production specialist at the SRC. The interview talks about the scope of the program's work and shares stories from a number of park units. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
 - *Valles Caldera National Preserve* - *The Albuquerque Journal* published [an article](#) about the park's ongoing efforts to restore the ecological landscape and improve the visitor experience. Source: *Albuquerque Journal*
 - *Vicksburg National Military Park* - Last month, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History Board of Trustees approved a design contract with Perkins & Will to design a new visitor center for the park. The State of Mississippi is collaborating on funding the project with the Friends of Vicksburg National Military Park and Campaign and the Foundation for Mississippi History. It is expected to cost \$80-120 million. Both the design and construction phases are each expected to take about two years to complete, with a tentative opening slated for Summer 2028. Source: [WLBT](#)
 - *Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve* - The park has implemented an email

application process for off-road vehicle use permits (recreational and subsistence categories). They may also be obtained in-person at the Slana Ranger Station or main visitor center in Copper Center, but will no longer be available at the Nugget Creek trailhead. Permits are free. Source: [Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve](#)

- *Yosemite National Park* - The park recently signed a five-year sister park agreement with Wild Nephin National Park in Mayo, Ireland. The parks are expected to share knowledge around conservation and biodiversity efforts, the visitor experience, and wildfire management. Source: [RTE](#)

Park People

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

Deceased

- James "Jim" A. Burnett, 92, passed away on April 26. He worked for the NPS from 1958 to 1983. Source: [South Florida SunSentinel](#)
- Ferdinand "Butch" Hagel, 92, passed away on May 20. Ferdinand and his spouse Doris served as campground hosts in Yellowstone for one summer in their retirement. Source: [Legacy/The Bismarck Tribune](#)
- Brandy Sue Hickman, 47, passed away on May 10. Brandy worked at Yellowstone National Park "in guest relations" for a time. Source: [Torrington Telegram](#)
- Robert "Bob" Augustus Malone Jr., 92, passed away on May 16. Bob worked in Glacier National Park in 1955. He met his wife, Catherine Ann Sorenson while working there. Source: [Dignity Memorial](#)
- Elmer "Marty" Carlyle Martinson, 90, passed away on June 7. Marty was a landscape architect for the NPS, "stationed in Colorado for most of his career." Source: [The Denver Post](#)
- Paul R. Philbrook, 92, passed away on March 3. In his retirement, Paul and his wife Sarah volunteered for the National Park Service in the winters. Source: [Seven Days](#)
- Carolyn Burner Rothgem, 81, passed away on May 24. She worked for the NPS at Shenandoah National Park for a time. Source: [Legacy](#)
- Alfred "Fred" M. Suarez, 80, passed away on April 22. Fred worked for NPS in the Midwest Region in the land acquisition office for 30 years. He was also a board member for the Lewis and Clark Trail Center Foundation in Nebraska City, Nebraska. Source: [Heafey, Hoffman, Dworak, & Cutler Mortuaries and Crematory](#),

Bill Schenk

- David Harold Wallace, 97, passed away on May 5. He worked for the NPS for many years, including at Independence National Historical Park (1957-1968), and at the Harpers Ferry Interpretive Design Center. Source: [Legacy/The Frederick News-Post](#)

In the News

- *Nevada Public Radio* published a "Desert Companion" [feature story](#) on Alan O'Neill. Alan worked for the NPS for many years, including as the superintendent at Lake Mead National Recreation area from 1987 through 2000. He later founded and directed the Outside Las Vegas Foundation, now rebranded as Get Outdoors Nevada. He is currently a board member for Friends of Sloan Canyon and Friends of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, and is actively involved in proposals to designate other national monuments in Nevada. Source: *KNPR*

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](#)
- *Bandelier National Monument* - Public comment is [open through June 3](#) on a Fire Management Plan. Source: [Bandelier National Monument](#)
- *Canaveral National Seashore* - On May 1, the park raised fees for campsites and the turtle watch after-hours program. Reservations are available at Recreation.gov. Source: [Canaveral National Seashore](#)
- *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 took place on 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](#)
- *Death Valley National Park* - The NPS and Federal Highway Administration have opened public comment [through June 23](#) on a proposal to replace the boardwalk, road, vault toilet, and parking lot at Salt Creek. The boardwalk and vault toilet were destroyed in a flashflood in August 2022, then the parking lot and road were damaged by Hurricane Hilary in 2023. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)

- *Dinosaur National Monument* - Public comment is [open through June 1](#) on a proposal to increase camping fees. Source: [KSL](#)
- *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](#)
- *Guadalupe Mountains National Park* - Public comment is [open through June 7](#) on a Frontcountry Management Plan. Source: [Guadalupe Mountains National Park](#)
- *Haleakalā National Park* - Public comment is [open through June 22](#) on a proposed increase on frontcountry and backcountry campgrounds. Source: [Haleakalā 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](#)
- *Shiloh National Military Park* - Public comment is [open through July 4](#) on a Development Concept Plan for the management of new lands added to the park since 2000. Source: [Shiloh National Military Park](#)
- *Voyageurs National Park* - Public comment is [open through June 28](#) on a proposed Frozen Lake Use Plan. Source: [Voyageurs National Park](#)

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.

Editor note: This week, there are no New Public Laws or House Actions to report.

Senate Actions

May 14: The Senate agreed to [S. Res. 686](#), designating May 18, 2024, as "Kids to Parks Day," the goals of which are to "(1) promote healthy outdoor recreation and responsible environmental stewardship; (2) empower young people; and (3) encourage families to get outdoors and visit the parks and public land of the United States...and recognizes...the importance of outdoor recreation and the preservation of open spaces in promoting the health and education of the young people of the United States; and encourages the people of the United States to observe Kids to Parks Day with safe family trips to parks."

May 15: The Senate agreed to [S. Res. 693](#), recognizing the significance of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (May 2024) as an important time to celebrate significant contributions to the history of the United States.

May 15: The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources: Subcommittee on National Parks concluded a hearing to examine the President's proposed budget request for Fiscal Year 2025 for the National Park Service, including:

- [S. 2620](#), to establish the Chesapeake National Recreation Area as a unit of the National Park System;
- [S. 2742](#), to establish the Fort Ontario National Monument in the state of New York as a unit of the National Park System;
- [S. 2743](#), to amend the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act to designate as a component of the National Heritage Area System the Finger Lakes National Heritage Area in the state of New York
- [S. 2784](#), to amend the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992 to adjust the boundary of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park;
- [S. 3195](#), to designate the General George C. Marshall House, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, as an affiliated area of the National Park System;
- [S. 3241](#), to establish the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians and Jefferson College as affiliated areas of the Natchez National Historical Park;
- [S. 3251](#), to modify the boundary of the Lincoln Home National Historic Site in the state of Illinois;
- [S. 3474](#), to re-designate the Hulls Cove Visitor Center at Acadia National Park as the "George J. Mitchell, Jr., Visitor Center";
- [S. 3534](#), to authorize the Pines Foundation to establish the Fire Island AIDS Memorial;
- [S. 3542](#), to amend the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area Act to modify the boundary of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area;
- [S. 3543](#), to establish the Historic Greenwood District-Black Wall Street National Monument in the State of Oklahoma;
- [S. 3568/H.R. 3448](#), bills to amend chapter 3081 of title 54, United States Code, to enhance the protection and preservation of America's battlefields;
- [S. 4129](#), to contribute funds and artifacts to the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library in Medora, North Dakota;
- [S. 4209](#), to provide greater regional access to the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument in the state of Maine;
- [S. 4216](#), to establish the Ocmulgee Mounds National Park and Preserve in the state of Georgia;
- [S. 4218](#), to designate the visitor center for the First State National Historical Park to be located at the Sheriff's House in New Castle, Delaware, as the "Thomas R. Carper Visitor Center";
- [S. 4222](#), to adjust the boundary of the Mojave National Preserve in the state of California to include the land within the Castle Mountains National Monument;

- [S. 4227](#), to amend the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 to expand the boundary of Joshua Tree National Park;
- [S. 4228](#), to re-designate the Cottonwood Visitor Center at Joshua Tree National Park as the "Senator Dianne Feinstein Visitor Center";
- [S. 4259](#), to require the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study to assess the suitability and feasibility of designating certain land as the Lahaina National Heritage Area;
- [H.R. 359](#), to establish Fort San Geronimo del Boquerón in Puerto Rico as an affiliated area of the National Park System;
- [H.R. 2717](#), to authorize the National Medal of Honor Museum Foundation to establish a commemorative work on the National Mall to honor the extraordinary acts of valor, selfless service, and sacrifice displayed by Medal of Honor recipients;
- and [H.R. 4984](#), to amend the District of Columbia Stadium Act of 1957 to provide for the transfer of administrative jurisdiction over the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus to the Administrator of General Services and the leasing of the Campus to the District of Columbia for purposes which include commercial and residential development, after receiving testimony from Senators Van Hollen, Lankford, and Ossoff; and Michael A. Caldwell, Associate Director, Park Planning, Facilities and Lands, National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

May 23: Senate agreed to [S. Res. 708](#), commemorating the 100th anniversary of the designation of the Gila Wilderness. The resolution states in part that on June 3, 1924, the Forest Service set aside 755,000 acres as the Gila Wilderness, the first designated wilderness in the United States and the world, marking the beginning of a national system of wilderness areas that helped inspire the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Incidents

Incidents are listed in alphabetical order by park.

Buffalo National River

Drowning

On May 19, a 69-year-old was kayaking in the upper district of the river near Carver when they struck a tree and overturned the watercraft. After turning over in the water, the individual was pulled under a submerged tree. Other members of their party tried to extract them but were unsuccessful. The individual was not wearing a personal flotation device at the time. Personnel from the NPS, Newton County (AR) Sheriff's Office, and Hasty Volunteer Fire Department responded to the incident. Source: [Buffalo National River](#)

Canyonlands National Park

Archaeological theft/trespassing

On March 23, two individuals entered a marked closed area at Cave Spring Cowboy Camp in the Needles District, removed artifacts from a cabinet, and "handled historic

harnesses in a manner that had potential to damage them." The incident was caught on video. The park is looking for any information the public can provide to identify the suspects. Source: [Canyonlands National Park](#)

Cape Hatteras National Seashore

Exposed hazards on beach

On May 16, the park announced that it is advising visitors to avoid the beach adjacent to Ocean Drive in Rodanthe, North Carolina. Recent wave action has exposed wires, pipes, and septic system on the beach. The park is working with Dare County and the Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative to mitigate the hazards. Source: [Cape Hatteras National Seashore](#)

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park

Bridge damage

On May 24, the park closed the Polly Pond Bridge (mile 134.3) after engineers found damage to the foundation, piers, and structure due to erosion. A detour is currently in place. No reopening date has been announced. Source: [Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park](#)

Death Valley National Park

Medical fatality

On May 19, a 70-year-old was driving along Artists Drive when they went unconscious. Their spouse, a passenger in the car, was able to stop the vehicle safely and move the individual to the back seat. The spouse drove to Furnace Creek and called 9-1-1 as soon as they had service. NPS staff did CPR. An automated external defibrillator (AED) was attached but did not advise shocking. After consulting with University Medical Center, the individual was pronounced deceased. Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)

Death Valley National Park

Missing person rescued

On May 9, a 31-year-old went missing from a day-tour group at Artists Palette. The tour guide searched for the individual, then drove to Furnace Creek to report them missing. Personnel from the NPS, Inyo County (CA) Sheriff's Office, and California Highway Patrol attempted a search. The individual had tipped their guide at the start of the tour and had told other people in the tour group that they were coming to Death Valley for "spiritual reasons." The following morning, a ranger spotted the individual on a steep, unstable ridge north of Artists Palette. Responders were able to communicate with the individual but were not able to find a safe route to access them. A California Highway Patrol helicopter hoisted the individual from the ridge. They later told park staff that they had intended to climb up the slope, wander into the desert, and not return. They "appeared to be experiencing an emotional crisis." Source: [Death Valley National Park](#)

Denali National Park and Preserve

Mountaineering fatality

On May 16, an individual in their "mid-40s" was climbing solo on the West Buttress Route when they took a fall on the Denali Pass traverse. On May 19, a concerned family member contacted the park to let them know they had not heard from the climber for several days. They previously had been regularly checking in by a satellite device. Mountaineering rangers located the climber's empty tent at the top of the 16,200-foot-ridge. They also interviewed other climbing parties, who had witnessed the individual traversing from "the 17,200 feet plateau" to Denali Pass on May 15. Other park staff were able to collect location data from the individual's satellite data, which showed that their location at 17,000 feet had not changed since May 16. On May 20, as weather cleared, NPS staff located the individual while using a spotting scope to search the area of the probable fall location. They then traveled to the site, where they confirmed that the individual was deceased. They secured the individual in-place and returned to High Camp. Later that day, a helicopter was able to recover the individual's body by utilizing a long line short-haul on a helicopter. The individual's body was transferred to the State Medical Examiner. Source: [Denali National Park and Preserve \(5/20, 5/21\)](#)

Denali National Park and Preserve

Climber rescue

On May 20, a three-member rope team took a fall just below the feature known as Zebra Rocks, located at about 18,600 feet on the West Buttress. One of the team members incurred a lower leg injury. Park staff were notified, and the injured individual was short-hauled in a rescue basket on a helicopter to the 7,200-foot basecamp. The individual was eventually transferred to Talkeetna, then to a ground ambulance. Source: [Denali National Park and Preserve](#)

Denali National Park and Preserve

False viral story

A report that the park superintendent banned the flying of the American flag by contractors at a construction site within the park went viral the week of May 19. On May 24, Alaska Senator Dan Sullivan sent a letter to NPS Director Chuck Sams, demanding an investigation. On May 26, the park made an official statement that they "at no time" sought to ban the American flag from the project site or associated vehicles, and that the reports are false. The press release stated that the NPS is not administering the contract, nor do they have the authority to enforce terms or policies related to the contract or contractors performing the work. It also stated that the American flag is flown in many places in the park, including park facilities, on public and private vehicles, and at employee residences. Source: [CBS News](#), [Denali National Park and Preserve](#)

Gateway National Recreation Area

Erosion creates hazardous conditions

On May 24, the park closed the area of Bay 1 through Bay 5 of Jacob Riis Park due to significant erosion along the eastern shoreline of the beach. The erosion has exposed "deteriorating wooden groins, rockwork, and other structures" and also has significantly reduced the beach area. A multi-agency project provided 360,000 cubic yards of sand at the park in 2023. That sand was expected to last 4-6 years, but much of it has already washed away due to storms and high tides over the winter and spring. The closure is likely to remain in place through the 2024 summer season. Source: [Gateway National Recreation Area](#)

Golden Gate National Recreation Area

Labor strike

On May 25, about 100 Alcatraz City Cruises employees went on strike to push for higher wages and benefits and more dependable schedules. Negotiations have been underway for 18 months. According to employees, the strike will continue "until management decides to negotiate in good faith." The employees are unionized under the Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific. Alcatraz City Cruises is contracted by the NPS to transport visitors by ferry to and from Alcatraz Island. The company has said they will make sure the strike doesn't disrupt operations. Source: [The San Francisco Standard](#)

Grand Canyon National Park

Structure fire

On May 18 around midnight, a fire started within a concessionaire housing unit on Bourbon Street. An employee used a fire extinguisher to put out most of the fire, "potentially saving the lives of other residents and several cabins surrounding the structure fire." The park's South Rim structure fire team responded and was able to extinguish the fire completely. A 21-year-old employee was arrested in conjunction with the incident, facing charges for driving under the influence, arson, property damage, and trespassing. The suspect's vehicle was found severely damaged. The investigation is being conducted by the NPS' Investigative Services Branch, Grand Canyon law enforcement staff, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Source: [Grand Canyon National Park](#)

Grand Teton National Park

Grizzly injures visitor

On May 19, while on a hiking and photography outing around the Signal Mountain Summit Road, a 35-year-old suddenly saw a grizzly bear cub running up a hill, about 70 yards away. The individual immediately took out their bear repellent and then saw an adult grizzly charging. They attempted to yell and deploy the spray but were attacked before being able to use it. While the bear attacked, the individual pretended to be dead, lying prone, and covered their neck with their hands, still holding onto the bear spray. The bear

bit and scratched them several times, then bit into the can of bear repellent and was "hit with a burst of it," causing it to flee. The individual utilized their gear to improvise tourniquets to slow bleeding on their legs and called 911 to request help. Personnel from the NPS and Teton County Search and Rescue responded to the scene and the individual was airlifted by helicopter, transferred to an ambulance, and transported to St. John's Hospital. The patient was said to be in stable condition and "expected to fully recover." Park officials stated that they will not capture or kill the grizzly because it was protecting a cub, not engaging in habituated behaviors. The Signal Mountain Summit Road and Signal Mountain Trail were temporarily closed to the public and have since reopened. Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#), [CBS News](#), [NBC News](#)

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Missing person found

On May 12, a 62-year-old went missing. Their vehicle was found by park staff at the Chimney Tops Overlook parking area on May 14. A search was conducted and the individual was located May 17. They were reported as "safe," but no other details were given. Source: Great Smoky Mountains National Park ([5/16](#), [5/17](#))

Kenai Fjords National Park

Warm temperatures

On May 17, due to warm temperatures and snowmelt, the park closed the Exit Glacier Developed Area to all snowmachine use. The park will reopen it when snow depth, snow density, and frozen soil conditions are adequate. Source: [Kenai Fjords National Park](#)

Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site

Wildfire

On May 17, a lightning strike caused a fire near the Two Rivers Trail. An NPS employee reported it to the Mercer County (ND) Sheriff's Office. Personnel from the NPS and Stanton Volunteer Fire Department contained the fire at 7.4 acres. Source: [Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site](#)

Lake Mead National Recreation Area

Overtaken jet ski

Over the weekend of May 18-19, two individuals overturned their jet ski in high winds and were observed to be struggling in the water. The incident was reported to rangers nearby, who responded and found the pair wearing "poorly fitted" life jackets that were slipping over their heads. The rangers were able to use a throw ring to bring both individuals to safety. Source: [KTNV](#)

Missouri National Recreational River

Missing person

On May 24, a 23-year-old was reported missing. The individual had last been seen swimming alone in the Missouri River under the Meridian Bridge. Their personal belongings were found on the riverbank. The NPS and Cedar County (NE) Sheriff's Office are investigating. Source: [KTIV](#)

National Mall and Memorial Parks

Removal of unhoused encampments

On May 16, the NPS and "D.C. agencies" removed six encampments of unhoused individuals due to safety concerns, such as fires, traffic collisions, assaults, and rodents. Three of the locations were NPS parks: San Martin Memorial Park, Rawlings/Wittman Parks, and 16th and L Streets NW. About 70 people were displaced. Volunteers with Miriam's Kitchen and the National Homelessness Law Center helped support the displaced individuals. Source: [NBC Washington](#)

Petersburg National Battlefield

NPS reverses decision after lawsuit

On May 23, the Knights of Columbus Petersburg Council 694 dropped its lawsuit against the National Park Service when the agency reversed its decision to deny giving a permit for a Memorial Day Mass the organization has been holding "every year for decades." The NPS had cited a policy that says religious services are prohibited demonstrations. The permit was given and the service took place on May 27. Source: [WWBT](#)

Yellowstone National Park

Late blizzards

On May 23, the park received a late-season snowstorm, resulting in the temporary closure of many roads due to dangerous driving conditions. The roads have since reopened. Source: [Yellowstone National Park](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Chickasaw National Recreation Area* - On May 19, the park reopened Flower Park for the first time since an April 27 tornado (see [5/1/24](#) and [5/15/24 Coalition Reports](#)). On May 23, the park reopened much of the rest of the park, with approximately 5% still closed for recovery. Crews will continue to do repairs in both closed and open areas over the coming weeks. Source: Chickasaw National Recreation Area ([5/18](#), [5/23](#))
- *Death Valley National Park* - On May 16, the park announced that an individual involved in the toppling of a historic salt tram tower in Saline Valley (see [5/15/24 Coalition Report](#)) called the park's tip line and turned themselves in. The individual acknowledged it was an accident stemming from their attempt to winch their vehicle out of deep mud and they had no intention of harming the tower. The park

did not announce the identity of the individual, nor whether any punitive actions will occur. Source: [NBC News](#)

- *Isle Royale National Park* - On May 15, the U.S. Attorney's Office: Western District of Michigan announced that they had filed charges against three individuals, aged 28, 29, and 30, with one count of lighting, tending, or using a fire causing damage to real property; and one count of violating conditions established by the superintendent of the park. The charges are linked to a wildfire that ignited in August 2022. The individuals are alleged to have camped illegally in an area too close to the Mount Franklin and Tobin Harbor Trails and had a fire outside of an official fire ring or grill. The fire burned "park property" and created threats to public safety. Source: [Isle Royale National Park](#)
- *President's Park (White House)* - On May 13, a 20-year-old pleaded guilty to one count of willful injury or depredation of property of the United States for an attempted attack on the White House in a rented U-Haul truck in May 2023 (see [5/24/23](#) and [6/7/23 Coalition Reports](#)). The crash caused \$4,322 in damage to the National Park Service and over \$50,000 in damage to U-Haul International. No one was hurt in the incident. The individual stated that they had hoped to have President Joe Biden killed and replaced with a dictatorship based on the ideology of Nazi Germany. The individual will be sentenced on August 23. Source: [CNN](#)
- *Rocky Mountain National Park* - On May 16, the 23-year-old who went missing after summiting Longs Peak (see [5/15/24 Coalition Report](#)) was found deceased on Mills Glacier, near the base of Lamb's Slide. Initial investigations indicate a significant fall. After park staff completed their investigation, the individual's body was flown to a landing zone in the park and transferred to the Boulder County (CO) Coroner's Office. Personnel involved in the search and recovery included the NPS, Flight for Life Air Ambulance, State of Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control, Colorado Army National Guard, Colorado Search and Rescue Association, Search and Rescue Dogs of the United States, Larimer County SAR Dog Team, Boulder County Sheriff Dog Team, Park County SAR Dog Team, and El Paso County SAR Dog Team. The Boulder County Coroner's office will release the official cause of death. Source: [Rocky Mountain National Park](#)

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- Regular Correspondent: Don Hellmann, Chris Soller
- Issue Contributors: Bill Schenk, 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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