



The Coalition Weekly Report

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Volume 4

Number 10

Incidents

National Park System Coronavirus Responses Underway Servicewide

Articles and reports on coronavirus-related actions in the parks and NPS offices are beginning to come in, although only a few sites have made public statements, usually brief. The best overview to date has been by Kurt Repanshek in the March 15th edition of his *National Parks Traveler*. Rather than cite the few similar park press releases that have appeared, this first coronavirus report consists of excerpts from that article, with a link at bottom for more information:

“Though a few more units of the National Park System were closing Sunday in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, and outwardly it was business as usual across the National Park System on Sunday, behind the scenes tensions were growing over the situation. The official list of closures Sunday included Alcatraz Island, Golden Gate Bridge Welcome Center, Lands End Lookout, the Nike Missile site, Point Bonita Lighthouse, and the Muir Woods National Monument bookstore and entrance station at Golden Gate National Recreation Area; Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument, Ford's Theatre National Historic Site, the Old Post Office Tower, and the Washington Monument. On Monday the list was to expand to include the Presidio Visitor Center, the Marin Headlands Visitor Center, and Fort Point National Historic Site, all at Golden Gate.”

“National Park Service officials in Washington, D.C., continued to point to the statement that their Office of Public Health was continuing to monitor the situation and was in contact with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as to how to move forward...

“However, park superintendents were said to be growing frustrated by the situation and lack of control they have over their operations. David Vela, the Park Service's deputy director who is its de facto director, told the superintendents that they don't have discretion to close facilities if they deem them to be a health hazard to visitors or employees. Guidelines sent out to superintendents from Washington stated that ‘all operational changes in parks (cancellations and closures) must be made through the proper NPS leadership channels.’

“Against those realities, messaging on how to deal with the public coming down from Park Service headquarters was embarrassing to some field staff. ‘There is widespread anger and frustration,’ the *Traveler* was told. ‘I’m just speculating, but I think over the next several days there’s going to be some revolts.’

“Lacking so far from the headquarters ‘is any systematic guidance. It’s totally up to how far the superintendent wants to stick his or her neck out. It’s just ridiculous. I have never been so appalled at

the lack of leadership. And I'm blaming this on the politicians' in the Interior Department who are calling the shots.”

Sources: Kurt Repanshek, [National Parks Traveler](#).

Olympic NP/Mount Rainier NP Man Sentenced To Jail Term For Thefts From Visitor Vehicles

Michael Wayne Pickering, 41, who has been convicted of breaking into at least four dozen cars at more than seven trailheads and parking lots at Mount Rainier, Olympic and elsewhere, was sentenced in U.S. District Court in Tacoma to two years in federal prison following a 25 month state prison term.

On March 28, 2019, Pickering and his girlfriend smashed windows and stole thousands of dollars of equipment from vehicles parked at the Graves Creek Trailhead and Fletcher Canyon Trailhead in Olympic National Park – the beginning of a month-long theft spree.

Pickering and his girlfriend used credit and debit cards stolen from the vehicles to make purchases at various stores – the overall financial damage was more than \$50,000. Their crime streak came to an end when Pickering was caught shortly after walking out of a store where he used victims' bank cards. He was found to have a tool used to break car windows and three credit cards in a victim's name in his possession.

When officers searched his residence, they found that he had been stockpiling much of the gear he stole or selling it online and used the stolen debit and credit cards to buy items such as flat screen TVs, gaming systems, a drone, and clothes.

Pickering reportedly has a 15-year history of property crimes in and around Olympic National Park, such as burglary, identity theft, and trespassing.

Source: [KXRO News](#).

Knife River Indian Villages NHS Chief Of Maintenance Indicted For Theft

Last month, a federal grand jury indicted a former National Park Service employee on one count of theft of government property from the park.

Charles Folk, 42, the park's chief of maintenance, allegedly stole about \$10,000 worth of property from Knife River Indian Villages over the two years that he was employed at the site.

A trial is scheduled for April 21st.

Source: Jeremy Turley, [Dickinson Press](#).

National Park System Park Operating Status Summary

A summary of recent openings, closures and other changes in the status of parks and their facilities,

- *Acadia NP* – The 45 miles of carriage roads in the park were closed to all users on March 12th until they dry out and become firm enough to prevent damage to their gravel surfaces. Warmer weather and wet conditions have softened the carriage roads and made them susceptible to damage. Source: [National Park Service](#).
- *Joshua Tree NP* – Due to rain and flash flood activity on March 12th, the park closed Pinto Basin Road, all dirt roads, and the Joshua Tree Visitor Center. Additional roads and infrastructure in the park are subject to closure due to weather impacts. Although the visitor center has reopened, efforts are still underway to reopen park roads. Dirt roads may be closed for several days for repairs. Source: [National Park Service](#).

National Park System

Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents

Below are short follow-ups on incidents previously reported in this newsletter.

- *Blue Ridge Parkway* – Derek Pendergraft, 22, of Asheville, has been sentenced to life in prison for the murder of his co-worker, Sara Ellis. On July 24, 2018, Pendergraft, who worked at the Pisgah Inn, murdered Ellis during the perpetration of aggravated sexual abuse. Last August, he pleaded guilty to first degree murder and two counts of aggravated sexual abuse resulting in death. Source: [U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of North Carolina](#).
- *Hawaii Volcanoes NP* – The park has opened a new viewing area for the Hōlei Sea Arch, located about 1,000 feet past the gate at the end of Chain of Craters Road atop hardened pāhoehoe lava. The original sea arch viewing area has been closed since January 16th due to the discovery of cracks and instability in the coastal cliffs in the area. Source: [National Park Service](#).
- *Joshua Tree NP* – The remains of Canadian visitor Paul Miller, 51, who disappeared in July, 2018, and was the object of an extended search, have been found along with some personal items. The cause of death has not been revealed. Source: Donna Miller, [Gruntstuff.com](#).

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center

Fire Activity Increases, Mainly In The South

NIFC remains at PL 1.

Fire activity picked up in several states last week. Forty-five new large fires were reported in a dozen states, mostly in the South west to Oklahoma. Firefighters reached containment goals on 42 of them.

Sixty-four wildland fire personnel are assigned to support large fires in Victoria, Australia.

Resource Commitment Trend

Category	February 28	March 6	March 13
Area Command Teams	0	0	0
NIMO Teams	0	0	0
Type 1 Teams	0	0	0
Type 2 Teams	0	0	0
Crews	0	3	8
Engines	7	92	112
Helicopters	0	0	2
Total FF/Overhead	18	403	475

Fires/Acreage

Category	2020 Total	2010-2019 Ave	2020 Variance
United States: YTD Fires	4,637	6,777	- 31%
United States: YTD Acres	99,003	295,861	- 66%

Sources: [NICC Incident Management Situation Report](#); [National Interagency Fire Center](#); [IMSR Archives](#); [InciWeb Incident Information System](#).

Congressional Actions

Reports on legislation, upcoming hearings and new public laws of relevance to the national parks, prepared by Don Hellmann, former assistant director, legislative and Congressional affairs for the National Park Service.

New Public Laws

Nothing to report.

Senate Actions

March 10 – The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing to examine the President's proposed budget request for fiscal year 2021 for the Department of the Interior. David Bernhardt, Secretary of the Interior, was the witness for the department.

March 11 – The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs approved, among other bills, [S. 2722](#), to prohibit agencies from using Federal funds for publicity or propaganda purposes.

March 12 – The Committee on the Budget held a hearing to examine the Government Accountability Office's annual report on the nation's fiscal health, including action needed to address the Federal government's fiscal future. Testimony was heard from Gene L. Dodaro, Comptroller General of the United States, Government Accountability Office.

House Actions

March 10 – The House passed [H. Res. 756](#), implementing the recommendations adopted by the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, by a vote of 395 yeas to 13 nays.

March 10 – The Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies held a hearing entitled "Member Day", in which members of the House could present their priorities for funding in FY 2021. Testimony was heard from sixteen members of the House.

March 11 – The Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies held a budget hearing on the Department of the Interior. Testimony was heard from David Bernhardt, Secretary, Department of the Interior.

March 11 – The Committee on the Budget held a hearing entitled "Protecting Congress' Power of the Purse and the Rule of Law". Testimony was heard from Thomas H. Armstrong, General Counsel, Government Accountability Office; and public witnesses.

March 11 – The Committee on Natural Resources approved the following bills, among others:

- [H.R. 139](#), to establish the Springfield Race Riot National Historic Monument in the State of Illinois.

- [H.R. 3094](#), to designate the National Pulse Memorial located at 1912 South Orange Avenue, Orlando, Florida, 32806.
- [H.R. 3250](#), to require the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the sites associated with the life and legacy of the noted American philanthropist and business executive Julius Rosenwald, with a special focus on the Rosenwald Schools.
- [H.R. 3349](#), to authorize the Daughters of the Republic of Texas to establish the Republic of Texas Legation Memorial as a commemorative work in the District of Columbia.
- [H.R. 5068](#), to authorize the Women Who Worked on the Home Front Foundation to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs.
- [H.R. 5126](#), to require individuals fishing for Gulf reef fish to use certain descending devices.

National Park Service

National Park System

A summary of articles pertaining to management and oversight of the NPS, to current trends and issues affecting the National Park System, or to either all or parts of the entire system.

Around The Parks

Park reports are in alphabetical order. Included are proposals in the works for new areas or changes in designation for current NPS units.

- *Eisenhower NHS* – A WWII hand grenade that’s been on display for the past two years as part of an exhibit on General Eisenhower was recently found to be live. It was removed and destroyed. The discovery that it was live came after a recent directive requiring park curators to survey their collections and identify any potentially live ordnance. Source: [WGAL News](#).
- *Indiana Dunes NP* – Erosion along the Lake Michigan shoreline has prompted residents in a waterfront town to file a federal lawsuit. Residents of Ogden Dunes claim that the town’s infrastructure is in danger of “total destruction.” According to the lawsuit, residents argue protections previously installed are exposed to Lake Michigan and at least one section of a steel wall is failing. The lawsuit accuses the NPS and the Army Corps of Engineers with interfering with permits for protection plans. Source: Bob Johnson, [Michigan Live](#).
- *Pea Ridge NMP* – A coalition of conservation groups has purchased the 140-acre Williams Hollow Farm on the northern side of the park and plans to donate the site to the NPS. The trust and the Conservation Fund, a national environmental and historical preservation group, along with other donors, bought the site. The farm, which recently went up for sale, borders the park on three sides. The coalition will protect the site and take care of the grounds for as long as needed until the Park Service can fit such care into its budget. Source: Doug Thompson, [Arkansas Democrat Gazette](#).

Commenting On NPS Projects

A listing of National Park Service projects – physical, paper and otherwise – which are currently open to public comment, plus due dates and URL’s to related sites. Park/agency names for new entries are in **boldface**.

- *Cabrillo NM* – The park is planning to renovate the Ballast View Rest Area. This project is needed in order to improve visitor access for the mobility impaired, correct unsafe conditions, and provide interpretive programs and demonstrations to more visitors in a safe, accessible environment while maintaining the Mission 66 characteristics of the property. Comments are being taken until March 21st at [the park's PEPC website](#).
- *Everglades NP/Big Cypress NP* – The NPS has prepared an EA to evaluate the impacts of demolishing three hurricane-damaged houses at Everglades National Park and constructing one new four-plex housing unit within Big Cypress National Preserve. Comments can be submitted until April 7th at [the Everglades' PEPC webpage](#).
- *Glacier Bay NP&P* – The park's 1989 wilderness visitor use management plan will be updated this year. Comments will be taken until April 21st at [the park's PEPC webpage](#).
- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – The park is evaluating ways to improve visitor safety and experience during vehicle-free days on the Cades Cove Loop Road. Due to growing use and congestion, the park is proposing to implement a pilot study for the 2020 season to evaluate changing this vehicle-free period to a weekly, full day closure on Wednesdays from May through September. The comment period is open until March 27th. See [the park's PEPC webpage](#).
- *Mount Rushmore NM* – The park is preparing an EA to evaluate a proposal by the state of South Dakota to host a fireworks display at Mount Rushmore on July 3rd. Under the proposed action, the NPS would permit the state's Independence Day celebration, including a fireworks display and other entertainment. Similar events could be permitted in future years if conditions remain the same and impacts are as described in the document. The EA is available for public comment through March 30th at [the park's PEPC webpage](#).

Briefly Noted

Other matters of interest pertaining to the parks and their people.

The Federal Government

News from around the federal government – including DOI, kindred agencies and the courts – of consequence to the NPS.

- *Endangered Federal Agency Mascots* – You may recall that we ran an article a few issues back on some of the strange and often hilariously named mascots that federal and state land management agencies have created over the years. If legislation introduced by Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA) is enacted, their contemporary successors will be terminated – except for Smokey the Bear and Woodsy Owl. Here's a summary of S. 2722, the SWAG Act, as it appears on Govtrack.us: "The Department of Agriculture has 'Sammy Soil.' The Department of Housing and Urban Development has 'Franklin the Fair Housing Fox.' The Department of Energy has 'the Green Reaper.' The U.S. Navy has 'Brite the Light Bulb.' The National Park Service the talking cactus 'Sunny Saguaro.' All of these talking mascots might seem fun and harmless, but have been created on the taxpayers' dime — money that could have gone elsewhere. The Stop Wasteful Advertising by the Government (SWAG) Act would prevent federal agencies from using money for 'self-aggrandizement,' including mascots or characters, but also items ranging from coloring books to stickers to fidget spinners. The bill would make an exception for mascots or characters explicitly authorized in preexisting laws, including the U.S. Forest Service's 'Smokey the Bear' and 'Woodsy Owl.'" Nice to see the senator putting some time and attention into

important legislation rather than dealing with climate change or other mundane international crises. Source: [Govtrack.us](https://govtrack.us).

Climate and Conservation

This section covers the myriad interconnected, conservation-related threats that are transforming the national parks, their ecosystems, and the world ecosphere, often simultaneously.

National and Worldwide Issues

Reports on the national and international climate and conservation crisis.

National Park System Issues

Climate Change – News concerning the impacts of climate change on park lands, waters, species and other assets.

Native Flora and Fauna – Recent news pertaining to the protection, propagation and advancement of species now or formerly native to the national parks:

Invasive and Exotic Species – News on exotic or invasive species that have appeared or may soon appear in NPS areas and efforts to counter them:

Ecosystems and Habitat – News about actions that affect park and adjoining ecosystems and habitat:

Park Carrying Capacity – Management challenges pertaining to the balance between park protection and use.

External Issues – Management issues related to usage or development in culturally or naturally sensitive areas abutting or passing through parks.

Systemic Pollution – Issues pertaining to air, light, sound, water and other forms of pollution associated with industrial development, population growth and other sources.

- *Systemwide* – GAO just issued a report that says that there are some 140,000 abandoned hardrock mines on federal land, including NPS sites, of which “about 67,000 pose or may pose physical safety hazards—danger of injury or death—and about 22,500 pose or may pose environmental hazards—risks to human health or wildlife from long-term exposure to harmful substances. Agency officials also estimated there could be more than 390,000 abandoned hardrock mine features on federal land they have not captured in their databases.” Risks include unsecured entrances, vertical shafts and tunnels, abandoned mills and other structures, potentially lethal gases, and piles of waste containing hazards such as arsenic, lead and mercury. The Forest Service, BLM, NPS, EPA, and Interior’s Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement together spent \$2.9 billion over the ten years through 2017 on remediation, nine-tenths of that for environmental hazards, and were reimbursed only about \$1 billion of that from former owners and other responsible parties. Source: [FEDweek](https://www.fedweek.com).

The Coalition

Summary of recent developments within the Coalition, including some of the actions that CPANP took on your behalf. Hyperlinks to specified documents are embedded in each entry.

- *NEPA Statement* – The Coalition issued [a statement](#) strongly condemning proposed changes in NEPA.
- *NEPA Testimony* – Amy Fehir, CPANP’s executive director, [testified](#) on the proposed NEPA changes.
- *NEPA Comments to CEQ* – The Coalition submitted extensive [comments](#) on the proposed changes to NEPA, stating that "we strongly encourage CEQ to look beyond the perceived financial benefits that the proposed ‘streamlining’ of the NEPA process would provide to industries that build major infrastructure projects and give serious consideration to the many substantive concerns expressed by agencies, tribes, organizations, and the general public."
- *NEPA Comments to CEQ with Other Organizations* – The Coalition also joined 328 other organizations in submitting [collective comments](#) on the proposed changes to NEPA regulations.
- *Public Lands Royalties* – The Coalition [signed onto a joint letter and issued a statement of support](#) for the Fair Return for Public Lands Act, which updates the nation’s antiquated public lands royalty system and will ensure that taxpayers get fair returns on leases of public lands for oil and gas production.
- *NPS Appropriations* – CPANP submitted [testimony](#) to both the House and Senate appropriations committees on the FY 2021 NPS budget.
- *LWCF and Deferred Maintenance Funding* – The Coalition issued [a statement](#) on the combined bill that would give permanent, full funding to LWCF and address the deferred maintenance backlog in our national parks.
- *LWCF and Land Acquisition* – CPANP released [a twelve-page report](#) highlighting the importance of LWCF funds in the purchase of national park inholdings.
- *Magazine Interview* – Chair Phil Francis was [interviewed by Backpacker Magazine](#) about the public lands platforms of the presidential candidates. Phil is quoted as saying that “whoever is elected president has to be committed to making sure the places where we live on this planet are improving and well taken care of.”

Source: Emily Thompson, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator.

Park People

NPS Alumni

Recent NPS Management Changes

Here's a listing of recent personnel changes in the NPS. Click on the links following the brief summaries for additional details:

- *Fire and Aviation Management* – Roberta Gorman has been selected as the new structural fire prevention program manager for the National Park Service. She has more than 19 years of experience as a federal employee and nearly eight years as a federal contractor. Since 2012, Roberta has worked as a contractor involved in most aspects of the structural fire program in Boise. She has managed the structural fire protection internship program, completed A123 audits, created policy, collaborated with external programs, and coordinated suppression training. Source: [National Park Service](#).
- *Yellowstone NP* – Nancy Finley, a 30-year veteran of the NPS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has been named as the new chief of the Yellowstone Center for Resources in Yellowstone National Park. She will arrive in the park and assume her new duties in May. Source: [National Park Service](#).
- *Southeast Utah Group* – Kayci Cook Collins has been selected as the interim acting superintendent for the group. She has more than 36 years of experience in the National Park Service, over 20 of them as a superintendent or deputy superintendent. Source: [The Times-Independent](#).

From The Archives

This section contains incidents taken from *Morning Report* issues published during the corresponding week (approximately) 25 years ago in 1995. All entries appear in the original verb tense; “submitters” are those people who originally submitted the incident report.

Editor's note: All three of this week's entries stem from the same massive storm that struck the West Coast in March, 1995.

- *Yosemite NP* – Over eight-and-a-half inches of rain fell on the park during a 48-hour period that began on Thursday, March 9th. Highways 41 and 140, the park's two primary access roads, were heavily damaged by rock slides, mud slides and undermining of the roadway in numerous areas. The main park sewer line was threatened as a portion of Highway 140 above the line slid into the Merced River. The Badger Pass ski area and park communities of Wawona, El Portal and Yosemite West were cut off by blockages of access roads. Power was lost in some areas for an extended period and the water storage for Wawona was damaged, leaving that community with only minimal drinking water and inadequate water for structural fire protection. Preliminary estimates place the damage to roads, utilities and some buildings in excess of \$1 million. At present, Yosemite Valley can only be reached by Highway 120. Minimum estimates for the length of time it will take before Highways 41 and 140 can be reopened are, respectively, five days and over two weeks. Damaged areas of these roads will require extensive engineering and repairs. All estimates, however, are predicated on no further rains or other damage. About 300 park, concession and other employees will have significant problems getting to either their homes or work places over the next few weeks. The park completed a comprehensive ICS plan for potential spring flooding from heavy rains and snow runoff just prior to the storm's arrival; on March 10th, non-essential park employees were released from duty early in the day and the ICS plan was put into effect. As of yesterday, about 150 park employees were involved with the incident. The park has received mutual aid assistance from the Forest Service. Submitted by Brian Smith.
- *Olympic NP* – Heavy rains and extremely high winds that struck the area on the afternoon of March 9th caused power outages, building damage and road blockages throughout the park. Winds blew steadily at about 60 mph, with gusts in excess of 80 mph on the Olympic Peninsula. Some areas of the park had received over seven inches of rain in the 48 hours prior

to this storm's arrival, which exacerbated run-off and slide problems. There were many downed trees and rock falls; almost all districts had roads blocked by fallen trees. Several visitor centers and visitor use areas were evacuated when trees began falling around them. The Staircase ranger station received a direct hit from a large tree that caused significant damage to the roof and to a nearby patrol vehicle. The Mora ranger station and a patrol vehicle were also hit by a tree, but only suffered minor damage. Some district areas which have low visitor use during the winter remain closed due to trees across roadways. All ranger stations were accessible and open at the time of the report, but visitor delays were expected as crews were still clearing trees. A damage assessment of front country areas is underway; assessments of backcountry areas will not take place until staff are available and snow melt makes it possible to hike into backcountry areas. Submitted by Larry Nickey.

- *Pinnacles NP* – The park will remain closed until a full assessment of storm damage is completed. It's possible that part of the area will be opened this weekend. Overflowing streams and rock slides have closed portions of monument roads in both the east and west districts. Employees placed sandbags around the Bear Gulch visitor center to divert fast-flowing water away from it. Many large trees have toppled, road and trail bridges are damaged, and large sections of the park's trail system have been swept away. The bridge crossing Chalone Creek sustained a hole around the abutment about nine feet deep and eight feet across. Federal highway engineers are in the park to assess possible structural damage to the bridge. A rock slide in the administrative area buried a residential cabin to the window level. On the west side, Juniper Canyon creek overflowed its banks, established a new channel, and flooded Chaparral campground. At least five of the 18 campsites have been lost, and a portion of the parking lot was undermined. Park personnel placed sandbags to protect their residences from rising water from the west fork of Chalone creek. Numerous sewer and utility lines are exposed on both sides of the park. Submitted by Carl Christensen, Western Regional Office.

Acknowledgements

This newsletter comes to you through the efforts of a number of people:

- Production: Steve Pittleman
- Regular Correspondents: Don Hellmann, Dennis Burnett, Rick Smith, Emily Thompson, and Duncan Morrow
- Issue Contributors: Bob Martin,

If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to Bill Halainen at the Weekly National Park System Report: BHalainen@gmail.com. Please don't submit them via his personal email address or Facebook page.

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The *Weekly National Park System Report* is a publication of The Coalition To Protect America's National Parks. It is prepared by Coalition member Bill Halainen, former editor of the *NPS Morning Report*, and produced and disseminated by Coalition member Steve Pittleman.

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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