



The Coalition Weekly Report

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

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Incidents

National Park System Coronavirus Response Update

Stories pertaining to the coronavirus pandemic constitute pretty much the only news coming from parks and central offices. A brief overview follows, beginning with the Washington Office.

On Tuesday, March 17th, the Washington Office posted a news release entitled “[National Park Service is Modifying Operations to Implement Latest Health Guidance](#).” Excerpts follow:

“The National Park Service is taking extraordinary steps to implement the latest guidance from the White House, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, and local and state authorities to promote social distancing. The NPS is modifying operations until further notice for facilities and programs that cannot adhere to this guidance. Where it is possible to adhere to this guidance, outdoor spaces will remain open to the public.

“The health and safety of our visitors, employees, volunteers, and partners is the priority of the National Park Service,’ Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt said. ‘Park superintendents are empowered to modify their operations, including closing facilities and cancelling programs, to address the spread of the coronavirus...’

“Updates about the NPS response to the coronavirus will be posted on www.nps.gov/coronavirus. Please check with individual parks for specific details about park operations.”

The above was followed the next day (March 18th) by a news release entitled “[National Park Service to Temporarily Suspend Park Entrance Fees](#).” Excerpts follow:

“After careful consideration, Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt directed the National Park Service (NPS) to temporarily suspend the collection of all park entrance fees until further notice.

“I’ve directed the National Park Service to waive entrance fees at parks that remain open. This small step makes it a little easier for the American public to enjoy the outdoors in our incredible National Parks,’ said Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt.

“Other states and municipalities have implemented similar policies waiving fees to parks in an effort to support social distancing.

“Our vast public lands that are overseen by the Department offer special outdoor experiences to recreate, embrace nature and implement some social distancing.’ Secretary Bernhardt continued.

“At a majority of park locations where it is currently possible to adhere to public health guidance, outdoor spaces remain open to the public, while many facilities will be closed.”

If you're interested in actions being taken by specific parks, you can dial up the site you're interested in at an NPS website entitled "[Active Alerts In Parks](#)." It lists all park alerts, including closures, and is searchable by state, park name or type of alert.

A list follows of notable articles about the closures, mostly focusing on the ambiguity of WASO directions and the propriety of keeping parks open:

- "[National Parks Are Staying Open During the Pandemic. Is That Safe?](#)," Aaron Mak, *Slate.com*.
- "[After shutting some national park sites over coronavirus, Trump administration waived entrance fees at many others](#)," Darryl Fears, *Washington Post*.
- "[The danger of self-isolating from COVID-19 on public lands](#)," Jessica Kutz, *High Country News*.
- "[National Park Concessionaires Seeking Federal Help In Dealing With Tourism Falloff](#)," Kurt Repanshek, *National Parks Traveler*.
- "[Interior pushing parks](#)," Mike Koshmrl, *Jackson Hole Daily*.
- "[National Parks See More Visitors, Worrying Health Officials and Park Staff](#)," Jordan Davidson, *EcoWatch.com*.
- "[US national parks cause public health concern as visitors flood in](#)," Annette McGivney, *The Guardian*.
- "[Jam-packed parks prompt officials to cut back on access to keep people apart](#)," Peter Fimrite, *San Francisco Chronicle*.
- "[Does Interior Secretary David Bernhardt Not Understand Coronavirus Threat?](#)," Todd Wilkinson, *Mountain Journal*.

Please see the fire section below for a couple of articles that address the potential impacts of CV on wildland firefighting.

Denali NP&P

Five Italian Hikers Rescued From Stampede Trail

Five Italian hikers were rescued last month from the Stampede Trail as they were returning from a visit to the abandoned bus made famous by the book and film [Into the Wild](#).

The International Emergency Response Coordination Center first received an alert about a medical emergency on the morning of February 22nd. Searchers from Tri-Valley Fire Department and Alaska State Troopers responded on snow machines and located the group approximately 13 miles in from the Stampede Road trailhead. One of the hikers was treated for severe frostbite to his feet.

The nearly 20-mile trail leading up to the abandoned Fairbanks Bus 142, known as the "Magic Bus," has become somewhat of a pilgrimage for hikers ever since Jon Krakauer's book *Into the Wild* was published in 1996. A movie based on the book was released in 2007. The nonfiction book chronicles the life of Christopher McCandless, who hitchhiked to Alaska in 1992, where a man dropped him off at the head of the Stampede Trail. A few days later, he came upon the abandoned bus and lived there for about three months before deciding to head back to civilization. As he attempted to make his way back, he arrived at a crossing of the Teklanika River. But because the river was running fast and high

from the rain and snowmelt from glaciers, he was unable to make his way across. Defeated, he turned around and headed back toward the bus, where he survived for about a month before he died in August 1992.

Hikers from around the world attempt to retrace McCandless' steps every year, but many fail and have to be rescued. Some even die. Last year, a 24-year-old woman from Belarus died while trying to reach the bus. And in 2010, a Swiss hiker drowned while trying to cross the same river McCandless failed to cross.

Source: Alicia Lee and Pierre Meilhan, [CNN Travel](#).

Dinosaur NM Snowmobiler Dies, Second Rescued From Backcountry

A missing Colorado man was found dead and a second man rescued alive in a remote area of the park last Saturday.

The snowmobilers were “inexperienced riders” who previously had been rescued from the same area by the Uintah County Search and Rescue team on February 29th. During that incident, rescuers found that the pair had been unprepared for the weather.

The pair, a 65-year-old who survived, and a 58-year-old who didn't, were reported missing on Thursday and were believed to have been snowmobiling in the Wild Mountain area near the northwest boundary of the park near the Utah and Colorado border.

Search and rescue teams found their truck on Friday and found the snowmobiles that they had been riding on Saturday morning, but saw no sign of the men. On Saturday afternoon, searchers on foot spotted the 65-year-old man waving an orange sled. He was then rescued with a helicopter and taken to a hospital. The 58-year-old man was dead when rescuers arrived.

Source: Shelly Bradbury, [Denver Post](#).

Carlsbad Cavern NP Ranger Involved In Shooting Incident

The Eddy County Sheriff's Office is investigating an “officer involved shooting” that took place last Saturday afternoon.

The incident occurred on park land, but not in the caverns. The country was asked to investigate the shooting for the NPS.

No further information has yet been released.

Source: Mike Smith, [Carlsbad Current-Argus](#)

Grand Canyon NP SAR Team Rescues Visitor Clipped Out Below Hopi Point

On the evening of February 29th, park dispatch received a report of a man who was clipped out and stranded approximately 100 feet below the rim at Hopi Point.

The man had climbed down to watch the sunset and found himself unable to make his way safely out of the canyon in the darkness.

A team assembled and conducted a nighttime technical rope rescue. The man was brought back to the rim uninjured and without incident.

Source: [Grand Canyon NP](#).

National Park System Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents

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

- *Wright Brothers NM* – Last October, somebody stole a copper bust of Orville Wright from the park and toppled its heavy granite base. A few days later, the bust was found tucked away into the sand dunes about a mile away. On March 20th, the repaired bust and base were returned to their former location on Big Kill Devil Hill. An investigation into the theft continues. Source: Christopher Collette, WVEC News.
- *Noatak NP* – An Idaho man who pleaded guilty to illegally guiding hunts in Alaska is banned from ever hunting in the state again. Paul Silvis was sentenced to six months of house arrest and 100 hours of community service and has been banned from hunting in Alaska for the rest of his life. He was also ordered to write an article for a hunting periodical detailing his crimes, and he owes \$20,000 in fines and \$2,000 in restitution to individuals who say Silvis never led them on hunts for which they paid deposits. Silvis' article will run in *The Alaska Professional Hunter Association Magazine* and contain an apology to Alaskans and those in the outfitting and guiding profession. Silvis, 52, led bear and moose hunts in Noatak in 2013 and 2014 without obtaining a license to outfit or guide in the state. Source: Nicole Blanchard, [Idaho Statesman](#).

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center Fire Activity Continues In Southern States

NIFC remains at PL 1.

Eleven new large fires were reported last week. Firefighters contained 16 large fires.

The Incident Management Situation Report no longer contains entries about assistance to Australia, which has presumably been scaled back.

Wildland Fire News – Stories pertaining to wildland fire and fire-related activities that involved the NPS and its fellow agencies around the globe.

- *Corona Virus Poses Potential Risk To Wildland Firefighting* – The March 20th *New York Times* had an article on “how the coronavirus may hinder efforts to fight wildfires.” The author begins by describing the dilemma facing firefighters: “The coronavirus pandemic is already straining resources around the country, and the federal government has limited gatherings to fewer than 10 people to slow the spread of the virus. Firefighters are finding themselves squeezed from both sides: their close living and working conditions often allow for viruses to spread, but if they are subject to a quarantine, they are not available for emergency calls.” Impacts are already being felt – fire academies and preseason planning meetings have been canceled, hazard fuel removal projects have been delayed, and staffing shortages have been projected due in part to a reliance on retirees who are more at risk of suffering serious complications from the virus. Kendra Pierre-Louis, [New York Times](#).
- *Area Command Teams Activated For Pandemic* – Three area command teams have been activated in the United States to assist in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group finalized the decision to activate all three of the teams on March 17th. The team members will all work remotely, teleworking from their home units. They will conduct business by sharing documents and talking on conference calls. Their delegation of authority directs them to coordinate with federal, state, local, and tribal officials to identify issues related to COVID-19 and wildland fire response. They will develop fire response plans for maintaining dispatching, initial attack, and extended attack capability. The

teams will also develop procedures or protocols for mitigating exposure to COVID-19 during an incident, and for responding in areas with known exposure to COVID-19. Source: Bill Gabbert, [Wildfire Today](#).

Resource Commitment Trend

Category	March 6	March 13	March 20
Area Command Teams	0	0	0
NIMO Teams	0	0	0
Type 1 Teams	0	0	0
Type 2 Teams	0	0	0
Crews	3	8	1
Engines	92	112	38
Helicopters	0	2	4
Total FF/Overhead	403	475	187

Fires/Acreage

Category	2020 Total	2010-2019 Ave	2020 Variance
United States: YTD Fires	5,205	7,955	- 35%
United States: YTD Acres	107,135	371,330	- 71%

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

March 18 – The president signed into law [H.R. 6201](#), making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020 (Public Law 116-127). See below under Senate action for a description of the provisions that affect federal employees.

Senate Actions

March 18 – The Senate passed [H.R. 6201](#), making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020, by a vote of 90 yeas to 8 nays. Among other provisions, the bill:

- Provides government employees two weeks of paid sick leave, paid at the employee's regular rate, to quarantine or seek a diagnosis or preventive care for coronavirus; or paid at two-thirds the employee's regular rate to care for a family member for such purposes or to care for a child whose school has closed, or child care provider is unavailable, due to the coronavirus. Full-time employees are entitled to two weeks (80 hours) and part-time employees are entitled to the typical number of hours that they work in a typical two-week period.
- Ensures that individuals enrolled in TRICARE, covered veterans, and federal workers have coverage for COVID-19 diagnostic testing without cost-sharing.

The House had passed H.R. 6201 on Friday, March 13; however, this was omitted from the previous coalition report. The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law.

House Actions

Nothing to report.

National Park Service

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.

- *Cumberland Island NS* – A federal judge has dismissed a complaint brought by a local environmental group against the National Park Service regarding a private dock on Cumberland Island, but the case is not closed. The Center for a Sustainable Coast brought suit against the Service in federal court because it alleged that by issuing a letter of no objection to the state Department of Natural Resources' Coastal Resources Division, the park service essentially gave the green light to Lumar LLC to construct a private dock on the island. Under the state Coastal Marshlands Protection Act, for projects like the Lumar dock, CRD has to seek the opinions of nearby property owners. The federal government, through the National Park Service, said it didn't object to the dock. The Center for a Sustainable Coast argues the park service failed to carry out its duty to object to the project under the Seashore Act. The article further describes the issue and the court's decision. The plaintiffs, however, have requested the opportunity to amend their complaint. Source: Wes Wolfe, [Brunswick News](#).
- *National Mall and Memorial Parks* – According to a report by a DC news station, more than 80 restroom repairs are needed at high-profile national landmarks in Washington, D.C., including the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial and Washington Monument. Records obtained by the investigative team via FOIA show maintenance orders for plumbing systems, sewer pumps, fixtures, HVAC systems and vents in federal landmark restrooms in D.C. The dozens of pending bathroom repairs at park sites in D.C. include hundreds of thousands of dollars of new plumbing, ceiling and sewer system upgrades at Hains Point. New pumps are also needed at the MLK Memorial Bookstore restroom. Source: Scott MacFarlane and Rick Yarborough, [WWRC News](#).

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**.

- ***Buffalo NR*** – The park has completed the draft comprehensive plan and EA for the Boxley Area. The preferred alternative provides an overall vision for the future of the Boxley Valley area that responds to changing visitation preferences, improves the overall visitor experience, protects cultural and natural resources, and addresses visitor safety concerns. Comments can be made through March 30th at [the park's PEPC website](#).
- *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](#).
- **National Mall and Memorial Parks** – The National Desert Storm War Memorial Association, in cooperation with the NPS, proposes the establishment of a commemorative work on federal land to commemorate and honor members of the Armed Forces who served on active duty in support of Operation Desert Storm or Operation Desert Shield. Comments are being take until April 1st on an EA that will identify alternatives and assess the potential impacts of the proposal. Go to [the park's PEPC webpage](#).

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.

- *A Third Of U.S. At Risk For Spring Flooding* – NOAA released its spring flooding outlook for the United States on March 18th. Here's a summary, courtesy of the Capital Weather Gang, a group of Washington Post meteorologists: "A third of the United States is at risk of flooding this spring, including 23 states and 128 million Americans. The Northern Plains and Upper Midwest are forecast to be most at risk, but flooding concerns stretch along the entire Mississippi River. As spring rains increase and snowmelt to the north surges into river basins, a number of rivers and streams may overflow their banks and inundate nearby land. Particularly vulnerable this season is the Deep South, where many cities have already had close to 30 inches of rain since the start of the year and soils are saturated. The National Weather Service is forecasting moderate flooding over larger areas of Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. Scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration emphasized that, while an above-average spring flood season is anticipated for many this year, flooding is unlikely to be as widespread or severe as it was a year ago..." The article also includes a map showing the areas at risk. Source: [Washington Post](#).
- *Study Shows Impact Of Sea Level Rise On Migration In US* – A [new study](#) conducted by researchers at the University of Southern California employs maps to show both the impact of rising sea levels on coastal areas and the migration patterns that will likely result as people are forced to move. It shows both the obvious (and disastrous) consequences to coastal parks and less obvious population spikes in locations around more inland areas. "In the US alone, 13 million people could be forced to relocate due to rising sea levels by 2100," says USC Viterbi in

its article on the study. “As a result, cities throughout the country will grapple with new populations. Effects could include more competition for jobs, increased housing prices, and more pressure on infrastructure networks.... According to the research team, most popular relocation choices will include land-locked cities such as Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Denver and Las Vegas. The model also predicts suburban and rural areas in the Midwest will experience disproportionately large influx of people relative to their smaller local populations.” The article features a detailed map showing where coastal areas will be lost and where people will likely move. Source: Caitlin Dawson, [USC Viterbi](#).

- *Extraordinary Melting Discovered Under Antarctic Glacier* – An article appeared recently in “Changing America,” an ongoing series in *The Hill*, that details another portending polar disaster: “Researchers for the first time have discovered unusually warm water underneath Antarctica’s so-called ‘doomsday glacier,’ which could speed up the melting of the Florida-sized chunk of ice and impact sea-level rise around the world. A team of scientists earlier this month created a nearly 2,000-foot deep access hole in the ice and dropped a device to measure the temperature of the water below the Thwaites Glacier’s surface. The waters at the ground line, where the glacier meets the sea, were found to be more than 2 degrees above normal freezing temperature... The Thwaites Glacier is one of Antarctica’s fastest melting glaciers, and researchers see it as the most significant glacier in terms of global sea-level rise. If the glacier were to melt, it would drain a mass of water that is roughly the size of Great Britain, and its collapse would raise global sea levels by almost 3 feet, potentially overwhelming existing populated areas. For the past three decades the amount of ice flowing out of Thwaites and nearby glaciers has nearly doubled, and ice draining from the glaciers into the Amundsen Sea accounts for about 4 percent of global sea-level rise.” Source: Joseph Guzman, [The Hill](#).

National Park System Issues

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

- *Yellowstone NP* – In late January, *Mountain Journal* ran a piece on a study just released on the future of the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem. Excerpts follow: “[Confronting] an unprecedented invasion of people, an expanding footprint of human development replacing a once-defining pastoral community character, and signs of climate change already foreshadowing future challenges with forest health, wildfire and water, the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem—a national natural treasure—finds itself at a crossroads.” That’s the finding of a 171-page report authored by a noted public policy scholar and law professor, Robert B. Keiter, the Wallace Stegner Professor of Law at the University of Utah Law School and director of the Wallace Stegner Center for Land, Resources and the Environment. His report, entitled “[The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Revisited: Law, Science, and the Pursuit of Ecosystem Management In An Iconic Landscape](#),” appears in the first 2020 issue of the *University of Colorado Law Review*. “Looking ahead, as we enter the Age of the Anthropocene, an ecological approach to resource management in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is more important than ever... Visitation and recreation pressures continue unabated across Greater Yellowstone’s public lands, private land development and subdivision activities are escalating, and potentially devastating climate change and wildlife disease impacts now hang over the area... These serious new threats portend adverse ecological impacts at least tantamount to those confronting the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem thirty years ago... To address these new challenges and solidify existing achievements, current Greater Yellowstone conservation efforts must be expanded in scale to embrace a larger landscape—one that connects Greater Yellowstone to more distant ecosystems stretching across the central Idaho wilderness complex to the Crown of the Continent region and into southern Wyoming.” Source: [Mountain Journal](#).

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

- *Zion NP* – Utah’s Congressional delegation is not happy about the possibility of the park instituting a reservation system to handle overcrowding. The park has been studying ways to handle exploding visitation – the park had 4.3 million visitors in 2018, up 62% from 2010. “We

strongly urge the department to find solutions that will preserve access to [the park] while enhancing the visitor experience,” says the letter, signed by all six members of the delegation – Republican Sens. Mitt Romney and Mike Lee as well as GOP Reps. Rob Bishop, Chris Stewart and John Curtis along with Democrat Ben McAdams. Zion visitation has been increasing for decades, which has resulted in long lines to enter the park and board shuttles. Parking lots routinely are full by 9:30 a.m., which creates congestion in the nearby town of Springdale. Source: Kathy Stephenson, [Salt Lake Tribune](#).

- Rocky Mountain NP – The park again had record-setting visitation last year – the continuation of a trend going back to 2014 (excluding 2017). Visitation is up 44% since 2012, which has caused long lines at the entrance stations. More than 4.67 million people visited Rocky in 2019, a 1.7% increase over 2018. Park managers are working to address the impact of record visitation on safety, natural resources and visitor experience. That includes restricting vehicle access in the Bear Lake Road corridor, the Wild Basin area and the Alpine Visitor Center when parking areas fill and heavy congestion warrants. Ideas for addressing challenges are being considered and will be made public later this year for a stakeholder-engaged planning process. Source: Rebecca Powell, [The Coloradoan](#).

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

- *Petrified Forest NP* – “Facing a lawsuit, federal officials have agreed to conduct environmental studies before deciding whether to lease more than 4,000 acres of land near the Petrified Forest National Park for oil and gas exploration,” reports the *Arizona Daily Star*. “The decision by the Bureau of Land Management ends, at least for the time being, the possibility of fracking operations that...could have threatened a significant aquifer as well as endangered species and public health in general. But the agreement does not guarantee there never will be drilling in the area. Instead, the federal agency has promised to update the environmental analysis ‘prior to issuing a new decision on the leases.’” Source: Howard Fischer, [Arizona Daily Star](#).

Park People

NPS Alumni

Passing Of Bob Hoyle

Robert “Bob” C. Hoyle, of Moose and Fairview, North Carolina, died of cancer on March 2ne. He was 75.

Hoyle worked for 47 seasons as a ranger at Grand Teton National Park, where he developed the park’s astronomy interpretative program.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to support the planetarium building project and astronomy interpretative education activities in the park. Checks can be made to Grand Teton National Park, P.O. Drawer 170, Moose, WY 83012, noting the donation account name, “Robert C. Hoyle Astronomy Fund.”

A full obituary can be found at the link below.

Source: [Jackson Hole News & Guide](#).

National Park Service

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:

- *Acadia NP* – Thérèse Picard, deputy chief ranger at Acadia for the past three years and acting chief ranger since late September, has been named chief ranger. She succeeds Stuart West, who left Acadia in late September to become superintendent of three small National Park Service units in the Southwest. Source: Dick Broom, [Mount Desert Islander](#).

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.

- *Canyonlands NP* – On the morning of March 17th, park visitor Chris Miller reported that his girlfriend, 25-year-old Shana Gage of Flagstaff, had walked away from their illegal campsite in Devils Canyon the previous evening and had not returned. Thorough interviews were conducted with Miller and his five companions, one of whom had a fractured ankle resulting from a short fall from a rock. One of the members of the group said that he'd seen Gage take three hits of LSD and some Valium on the day she disappeared; rangers had already noted that Miller appeared to be under the influence of some drug at the time he reported Gage's absence. Reports indicated that Gage was dressed in a bikini and hiking boots. During the night, the area received hard rain for several hours, but temperatures remained mild. Hasty teams were immediately dispatched to the point last seen, and an aircraft was brought in to search roads and trails in the area. Three search dog teams, additional rangers and a helicopter joined the search effort the following day. Around 4 p.m. that afternoon, Gage walked into the Needles visitor center, where she'd been dropped off by someone who'd picked her up. She did not understand that she'd been missing for 48 hours, and rambled about being confronted by armed men and Indians who were "shooting rocks" at her. Except for a few scratches and contusions on her legs and feet, she was in good condition. County officers searched Gage's vehicle and found marijuana in Miller's pack. He was charged with possession by the county; federal charges are pending. Submitted by Chief Ranger Larry Van Slyke.
- *Gulf Islands NS* – Early on the morning of Wednesday, March 8th, the tugboat Mary Sue lost control of four coal barges in the Intercoastal Waterway about a mile north of Horn Island. Strong winds and heavy seas caused the tow cables to break; the crew attempted to regain control of the barges, but was not successful. The pilot decided to beach the barges on the north shore of the island, a designated wilderness area. Two of the barges grounded on relatively flat areas of sand and seagrass, while the other two grounded where a deep hole and sandbar meet. The bow portion of one barge and the stern of the other settled into the deep water, causing them to partially submerge and flooding the cargo boxes. After grounding the barges, the tugboat took shelter in a port about eight miles away. Due to harsh weather, salvage operations did not begin until Thursday evening, when empty barges and a large crane could be brought to the scene. The park imposed stringent salvage conditions in order to minimize damage to the seagrass beds and bottom contours and to reduce coal dust sedimentation of the waters. Park staff have begun an environmental assessment, but continued bad weather has prevented underwater inspections of the area. It is feared that impacts to the area may be severe. The company which owns the tug, Henry Marine of Gulfshores, Alabama, was also involved in a major coal barge accident in the park just under a year ago. In that incident, some 4,000 tons of coals was spilled when two barges sank in Pensacola Pass. Coal dust and lumps of coal were cleaned from park beaches for several weeks after that incident, and coal continues to wash up on park shores. Submitted by Chief Ranger Gene Phillips.
- *Badlands NP* – On November 19, 1993, a federal grand jury in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, returned a 39-count indictment against a commercial fossil dealer and eight other individuals for illegal taking and sale of fossils from private and public property, including NPS, BLM, Forest Service, Indian and state school lands. The indictment charged Black Hills Institute of Geological Research (BHI) with illegally collecting and selling fossils to museums and private corporations. Among them were the fossilized remains of triceratops, mosasaur, whales,

edmontosaurus, theropods, crinoids, ammonites, acanthoceras, catfish, turtle and fishhead. The eight individuals were indicted on a variety of related charges, including conspiracy, theft of government property, interstate transportation of stolen goods, making false statements, money laundering, wire fraud, and obstruction of justice. On March 14th, a federal jury handed down eight felony convictions, including one against BHI for theft of the catfish from the park - the only count stemming from a violation on NPS lands. Peter Larson, president of BHI, was convicted on two felony counts for money violations and two misdemeanor counts for theft from public lands. Neal Larson, vice president of BHI, was convicted of misdemeanor theft from public lands. Bob Farrer, secretary of BHI, was convicted on two felony charges of making false statements to Customs officials. The jury was hung on 22 other indictments. The sentencing date has not yet been set. Submitted by Chief Ranger John Donaldson.

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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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