



The Coalition Weekly Report

Wednesday, September 9, 2020

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Incidents

Sequoia-Kings Canyon NPs Two Killed In Plane Crash

Two people died from a plane crash that occurred last Friday in a remote wilderness area of the park.

The single-engine aircraft had been flying near the vicinity of the Sequoia Complex Fire complex fire that's burning roughly 90 miles east of Visalia. The plane departed at 11 a.m. Friday from the Visalia Airport and was scheduled to land at 1 p.m. at Needles Airport in San Bernardino County. Radar tapes, however, showed that the plane's last location was near the Upper Horse Creek drainage in Mineral King wilderness, which is in the proximity of the 55,000-acre SQF Fire. By 8 a.m. Saturday, the parks' helitack team had located the aircraft crash site.

It was not immediately known what caused the plane to crash, though smoke from the SQF Fire might have hindered the pilot's visibility.

The plane crash caused a fire approximately a half acre in size, which ended up being contained by park personnel.

Source: Bryant-Jon Anteola, [Fresno Bee](#).

Shenandoah NP Fatal Airplane Crash

Late on the morning of September 2nd, park dispatch received a report of airplane wreckage being found roughly near the Buck Hollow Trail from Skyline Drive.

Responding rangers found that the pilot and sole occupant of the Piper PA-20 – 35-year old Nicolas Hellewell of San Luis Obispo, California – had been killed in the crash.

The Virginia State Police, the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board are assisting the park in the investigation.

Source: [WVIR News](#).

Joshua Tree NP Hiker Dies On Park Trail; Hyperthermia Likely Cause

A 20-year-old man, hiking with a friend in temperatures estimated to have reached 120 degrees Fahrenheit, died in the park on Saturday.

The young man's friend reported that he was unconscious and in need of immediate aid in the Turkey Flats area of the park on Saturday evening. Park responders located the two men near the base of Pinto Mountain at approximately 11:30 pm. Rangers administered CPR but were unable to revive the man. He was pronounced dead at 9 a.m. on Sunday the Riverside County coroner.

The hiker's body was airlifted by Riverside County Sheriff's Department. Temperatures in the area were estimated to have reached approximately 120 degrees.

Source: [National Parks Traveler](#).

Big South Fork NR&RA Mountain Biker Rescued Following Accident

Rangers and emergency responders from the Scott County Rescue Squad and Scott County Ambulance Service worked together for several hours this past Saturday to rescue a mountain biker following an accident on the Grand Gap Loop, one of the five mountain biking trails in the park that draw an "epic" rating from the International Mountain Biking Association.

Three other mountain bikers who happened to be at the trailhead at Bandy Creek were able to help locate the injured rider, who had been riding solo, and were soon joined by park responders. The rider suffered a broken ankle and was transported out of the backcountry by rescue squad and EMS personnel, then taken by ambulance to the Big South Fork Medical Center ER.

"I am thankful that my buddy's injury was not life-threatening, and I will spend a little extra time today being thankful for our local first responders," said one of the bikers. "And I will also send in a donation to our local rescue squad. The rescue took about five hours, but to the responders, it was just another day at the office."

Source: [The Independent Herald](#).

National Park System Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents

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

- *Channel Islands NP* – On September 2, 2019, a fire on the dive boat Conception killed 34 people off Santa Cruz Island. Now, a year later, the NTSB has announced it will hold a hearing in October to reveal the results of its investigation. A preliminary NTSB investigation concluded that five members of the crew were asleep in the wheelhouse and that there was no roving watch on the vessel operated by Santa Barbara-based Truth Aquatics, as required by the U.S. Coast Guard during the hours when passengers were asleep below deck. But the more extensive examination of the origins, cause and events leading up to the Conception being burned to the waterline has taken months of investigation led by NTSB board member Jennifer Homendy. The board will vote on findings, probable cause and recommendations for changes to small passenger vessels to avoid a repeat of what its chairman called a "horrible, horrible tragedy." Source: Richard Winton, [Los Angeles Times](#).

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center Large Fires Continue To Burn In Several NPS Areas

NIFC remains at Preparedness Level 5, the highest of five levels.

One new large fire was reported on Monday and is located in California. Firefighters contained four large fires yesterday.

Two hundred thirty-three soldiers from the 14th Brigade Engineer Battalion based out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington are deployed in support of the August Complex. Three wildland fire suppression crews and three overhead personnel from Quebec, Canada, are supporting fire suppression efforts in Northern California.

Park And Park-Related Fires

- *Rocky Mountain NP* – The 96,462-acre Cameron Peak Fire, which has been burning on USFS lands to the north of the park, has now burned into the park. Three incident management teams have been committed; 829 firefighters and overhead have been assigned to it. Extreme fire behavior has been reported, including crowning, wind driven runs, and group torching. Trail Ridge Road was closed on Sunday afternoon and remained closed Monday at Rainbow Curve on the east side and Colorado River Trailhead on the west side because of critical fire weather conditions, strong winds and active fire behavior. Due to a winter storm forecast beginning late Monday and running through Wednesday afternoon, it is unknown when Trail Ridge Road will reopen. This closure includes access to vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians. Old Fall River Road will be closed until further notice. Additional trail closures implemented over the weekend include the Chapin Pass Trail off of Old Fall River Road, the North Fork Trail, the North Boundary Trail, and the Stormy Peaks Trail in the northeast area of the park and sixteen additional wilderness campsites in these areas. [Note: As we “went to press,” the National Weather Service was forecasting a major snowfall – 10” to 19” – on the park yesterday. This snowfall will come less than 48 hours after a heat wave caused record highs across the state]. For more information, go to this [InciWeb site](#) and/or the [park’s website](#).
- *Yosemite NP* – Concerns that the massive Creek Fire in the Sierra NF (135,000 acres) could eventually reach Yosemite have led the park to take several preparedness actions. The Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias has been closed so that no one will be in that region if the fire advances to it. Firefighters have also placed fire-resistant material over the Mariposa Grove Museum. For more information on the fire, go to this [InciWeb site](#).
- *Yellowstone NP* – The Lone Star Fire has burned 3,346 acres of park land three miles south of Old Faithful and 23 miles southeast of West Yellowstone. The Grand Loop Road between Old Faithful and West Thumb reopened yesterday but may be closed at any time due to smoke and low visibility. Ice and snow could also cause a temporary closure. For more information, go to this [InciWeb site](#).
- *Point Reyes NS* – The Woodward Fire has burned 4,853 acres, up from 3,269 acres at this time last week. It is 95% contained, with full containment expected by September 20th. For more information, go to this [InciWeb site](#).
- *Saguaro NP* – The Spud Rock Fire has burned 760 acres and is 85% contained.
- *Sequoia and Kings Canyon NPs* – The Moraine Fire has burned 575 acres and is now 70% contained, with full containment expected by September 30th.

Resource Commitment Trend

Category	August 25	September 1	September 8
Area Command Teams	0	1	1
NIMO Teams	3	2	3
Type 1 Teams	17	19	14
Type 2 Teams	19	13	19
Crews	501	445	449
Engines	2,297	2,033	1,424
Helicopters	223	241	217
Total FF/Overhead	27,668	26,463	22,337

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Fires/Acreage

Category	2010-2019 Ave	2020 Total	Difference
United States: YTD Fires	43,745	41,051	- 2,654
United States: YTD Acres	5,708,762	4,729,287	- 979-475

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

The Senate was not in session last week.

House Actions

The House was not in session last week.

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.

- *Bryce Canyon NP* – Scenic Byway 12, the road to Bryce Canyon National Park, is about to get a major renovation. Construction by the Utah Department of Transportation began on Monday, August 31st. A mile and a quarter of the renovation will be to the section within the park. This work follows a February 2017 landslide on the road, and UDOT hopes this will bring further stability to the area. Both UDOT and the National Park Service cooperated to assess the best way to ensure the longevity of the road into the future. Development of intersections, tunnels, pavement, striping, signs, shoulder and guardrail are all included in the renovation. A westbound climbing lane will also be added to help reduce speed conflicts and provide passing opportunities on a steep curvy grade where driver visibility is limited. Work will continue until next July. Source: K. Sophie Will, [St. George Spectrum & Daily News](#).
- *Capitol Reef NP* – Work is to begin this month to rehabilitate the park's visitor center, with completion expected late next spring. The visitor center will undergo building rehabilitation followed by the fabrication and installation of new interpretive and informational exhibits. The newly rehabilitated visitor center restrooms opened to the public on September 2nd and will remain open during building rehabilitation. A temporary visitor center and park store building will be installed adjacent to the current visitor center parking lot. While operations will continue mostly as normal, there will be occasional delays and temporary closures of parking lots and buildings to accommodate construction. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#).

- *Curecanti NRA* – Deferred maintenance on the park's 55-year-old visitor center is scheduled to begin in the near future. The Cecil Doty-designed building has undergone some changes since it was built as part of the original recreational infrastructure that came along with the construction of the Blue Mesa Dam, but now, after 15 years of planning, the funding is at last available to make major updates. Workers will modernize the building by adding an elevator to increase accessibility, add new heating and air systems, remodel office space, and build all-new restrooms. Source: Katharhynn Heidelberg, [Montrose Press](#).
- *Everglades NP* – A contract has been awarded for the second and final phase of the Tamiami Trail Next Steps Project. The Florida Department of Transportation, in coordination with Everglades National Park, will oversee this critical project to improve water flow to one of the most over-drained wetlands within the Greater Everglades watershed. This phase of the project will focus on raising and reconstructing the remaining 6.7 miles of the eastern Tamiami Trail, with features that will further improve water conveyance, roadway safety, and storm water treatment. Construction on Phase 2 is scheduled to begin in November. Source: [National Park Service](#).
- *Grand Canyon NP* – The Silver Bridge, which crosses the Colorado River along the Bright Angel Trail near Phantom Ranch, has been closed due to structural safety concerns. During the closure, hikers will need to cross the river via Black Bridge. Hikers on the Bright Angel Trail should anticipate being redirected to the River Trail and the Black Bridge, which will add approximately 1.5 miles to their trips. There is no estimated time of repair for Silver Bridge; it will remain closed until further notice. Phantom Ranch on the North Kaibab Trail will remain open and accessible, as will Bright Angel Campground and the South Kaibab, and Bright Angel Trails. Source: Tracy Smith, [KTVX News](#).
- *Yellowstone NP* – Giantess Geyser erupted for the first time in more than six years on August 25th. At one time, the geyser was known to erupt two to six times a year. When the geyser erupts, it typically shoots a plume that is from 100 to 200 feet high. You can see a video of a recent eruption at the following site. Source: [KECI News](#).
- *Yellowstone NP* – In order to remind visitors of the dangers of getting too close to elk – particularly males during mating season – the park has posted a video of two mature elk battling each other that shows their power (not to mention formidable racks). It comes with this message: "The elk rut has begun in Yellowstone National Park. Bull elk can be extremely dangerous during this time. You are responsible for your own safety." You can see it at the following website. Source: [Cowboy State Daily](#).

The Coalition

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

- *Oil And Gas Lease Sales Near Carlsbad Caverns* – The Coalition [commented on a recent oil and gas lease sale](#) that included land in New Mexico. Coalition Chair Phil Francis contended the sale could threaten sensitive areas such as Carlsbad Caverns, saying that it "jeopardizes not only animal migration and critical species habitat, it puts the irreplaceable natural and cultural resources at Carlsbad Caverns itself at risk."
- *COVID-19 FOIA Request* – CPANP submitted yet another [FOIA request](#) for COVID-19 infection numbers in the NPS:
- *Vice-Presidential Speech At Fort McHenry FOIA Request* – The Coalition submitted a second [FOIA request](#) last week, this one for information related to the Vice President's recent speech at Fort McHenry National Monument.

Source: Emily Thompson, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator.

Park People

NPS Alumni

Address Correction For Condolences To Phil Ward's Family

As noted in last week's edition, career ranger and former regional chief ranger for Western Region Phil Ward died while in hospice care in Tucson on August 28th.

The address that appeared in that edition for sending his wife, Jo, condolence notes listed a street number, but we've learned that mail to her now goes to a box number: Jo Ward, P.O. Box 17064, Tucson, AZ 85731.

Source: Dwayne Collier.

NPS Alumni

Passing of Mick Hall

Former NPS ranger Michael "Mick" Hall, 71, died on August 10th in Ivins, Utah.

Following graduation from high school, he joined the Marines and was wounded in Vietnam. Mick then joined the National Park Service, where he worked for numerous national parks over the course of his career.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made in Mick's memory to the First Recon Battalion Association, 43761 Churchill Glen Dr., Chantilly, VA 20152.

Source: *Middletown Journal News*.

NPS Alumni

Passing Of Jim Schultz

Jim Schultz, 80, who served as concessions management specialist at Olympic from 1984 until his retirement in 2004, died on August 27th in Port Angeles.

Jim graduated from Purdue University in 1963 with a degree in agriculture and Texas A&M University with a master's degree in forestry in 1979. He served as an officer in the Third Marine Division in Vietnam, then worked for several companies before joining the NPS.

Jim is survived by Sandy, his wife for 53 years, and numerous children and grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Jim's memory can be made to: Colton's Army Guild (supporting Seattle Children's Hospital – grandson is honoree, Colton) and First Presbyterian Church of Port Angeles.

Source: [Legacy.com](https://www.legacy.com).

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:

- *Washington Office* – Joy Beasley has been selected as the permanent associate director of cultural resources, partnerships and science. Beasley, who has served as the acting associate director since 2017, assumed the permanent role on August 31st. Source: [National Park Service](#).

- *Washington Office* – Jenny Anzelmo-Sarles has been selected as the chief of public affairs and chief spokesperson for the National Park Service. She will move into the position on September 14th. Anzelmo-Sarles returns to the NPS from strategic communications firm RUBENSTEIN, where she was a vice president. Previously, she served for ten years as a spokesperson for the NPS in Washington, D.C., the San Francisco Bay Area and at Grand Teton National Park. Before joining the NPS, she held various roles at NBC News and on Capitol Hill. Source: [National Park Service](#).

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.

- *Western Region* – On August 1st, Richard Skalski of Redwood City, California, and Thomas Kral, of Tucson, Arizona, pled guilty to felony violations of the Endangered Species Act before a federal district court judge. Skalski was sentenced to five months in a work-furlough facility, five months in a halfway house, and two years' probation. Kral, considered less culpable, was given three years' probation. Both were also fined \$3,000 and their collections were confiscated. A third man, Marc Grinnell of Santa Rosa, California, pled guilty to similar charges at an earlier date and was sentenced to three years' probation. The charges against the three men stemmed from nine years of poaching rare butterflies from federal lands, including Golden Gate, Grand Canyon, Point Reyes, Death Valley, Yosemite, and other areas. The conspiracy was uncovered when a Stanford University biologist contacted the Fish and Wildlife Service and advised agents that an employee had been poaching rare butterflies from the Grand Canyon. A search of Skalski's house revealed more butterflies, as well as correspondence linking the three men and other collectors around the country. FWS special agent John Mendoza was the case agent, and was assisted by numerous NPS criminal investigators and rangers. The investigation spanned a four-year period. While Kral conceded to the judge that there was no excuse for such illegal activity, he said that the Endangered Species Act was sometimes ambiguous. The judge agreed and directed Kral to help dispel the confusion by teaching other collectors about the law. Submitted by Criminal Investigator Rod Suarez.
- *Western Region* – During a seven-month period in 1993, Michael Esakov and Jennifer Sweat-Esakov, his now ex-wife, stole money from donation pipe safes at NPS, USFS and BLM sites, passed fraudulent checks to agencies and businesses, and employed stolen credit cards and checks taken from cars and tents in campgrounds throughout the West. Among the areas the couple hit were Yellowstone, Wind Cave, Bryce Canyon, Zion, Grand Teton and Grand Canyon. The Esakovs were arrested separately in Akron, Ohio, and Seneca, South Carolina, last September. They both admitted guilt during subsequent interviews and revealed many more violations, including theft of firearms, stolen money, pawning of stolen items, and a previously unknown and similar crime spree in 1992 which added many more parks to the list of areas which they'd struck, including sites in Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, California, Oregon, Colorado, Nevada and Mexico. They subsequently pled guilty to charges of conspiracy and theft of government money. Under a plea agreement, Esakov was sentenced earlier this summer to six months in federal prison and three years' supervised probation; ordered to pay \$7,500 in restitution to the NPS and a \$1,000 fine; and required to undergo drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Sweat-Esakov is expected to receive similar sentencing. Submitted by Special Agent Erny Kunch.
- *Great Smoky Mountains NP* – On August 28th, Travis Williams, 37, and Charles Norvell, 35, both of Fort Pierce, Florida, who previously pled guilty to possession and use of a silenced weapon to poach deer in the park, were each sentenced to 18 months' incarceration in a federal prison and 24 months' supervised probation. The charges were filed by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Williams and Norvell were arrested by rangers in 1991 for poaching in the Cades Cove district, were found guilty on those charges later that year, and have already

served time in prison, performed extensive community service, paid fines and restitution charges, and forfeited weapons and the Ford Bronco used in the incident. The two men, both firefighters from St. Lucie, Florida, had driven to the area and taken a room in a local motel. Each night, one of them would drop the other off at the Cades Cove loop road before it closed, survey the area, then kill a trophy buck with a silenced weapon. When summoned by CB radio, the partner would then return for the pickup. Before heading off on their trip, however, Norvell and Williams made the mistake of telling their co-workers about their plan to come to the park to shoot trophy bucks. One of them called the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency's toll-free number for reporting poachers, and TWRA in turn notified the park. Rangers confirmed their registration at the motel, staked out the area, and caught them on their way out of the park with a deer - the second they'd taken. District Ranger Jack Piepenbring led the investigation. Submitted by Chief Ranger Jason Houck.

A Closing Observation

"An urgent need of the Park Service [in its early years] was to develop a capable and professional ranger force. At his first national parks conference, Mather had been disappointed with the caliber of the superintendents, many of whom were politically appointed lightweights, unmoved by his idealism. Rangers and superintendents were not under civil service, and predictably the parks were crippled by vigorous application of the spoils system. When a new administration took office in Washington, the faces of new superintendents appeared in the parks, for appointments to many jobs were prerogatives of local congressmen. A story is told, which has the ring of truth, that one such ranger appointee in Glacier National Park had to be assigned patrol duty along the railroad tracks so that he wouldn't get lost in the woods. Postponing entry into civil service, the Park Service thoroughly cleaned house. It unloaded misfits and shifted jobs around and was highly successful in finding good men, many of whom were attracted from other agencies. Fortunately, from its beginnings, the Park Service has been able to attract a different type of individual. A group of men from unlikely backgrounds have somehow been assembled who combine a cultivated disregard for standard operating procedures with an unorthodox ability to get the job done. For the special flavor that such men have imparted to the agency, the Park Service has been grateful - generally."

William C. Everhart, *The National Park Service*, 1972

Acknowledgements

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- Production: Steve Pittleman
- Regular Correspondents: Don Hellmann, Emily Thompson, Dennis Burnett, Rick Smith, Duncan Morrow and Mark Forbes
- Issue Contributors: Dwayne Collier, Larry Frederick,

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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salaried employee (GS, wage grade, seasonal, temporary, or SES) of the National Park Service can join the Coalition ([click on this link](#)). Coalition supporters can also join and receive the newsletter ([click on this link](#)). If you need to contact the Coalition office on other matters, including changes of address, [click on this link](#).

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