



The Coalition Weekly Report

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Incidents

Point Reyes NS Couple Missing For Nine Days Found Alive

Two people who vanished on Valentine's Day from their rental cottage in the Inverness forest, an area abutted by Point Reyes NS, Tomales Bay State Park and Tomales Bay, were found alive on February 22nd. They were located in a ravine deep in the woods, where they'd survived for nine days on water from a puddle. They were in relatively good shape, given their ordeal.

The married couple – Carol Kiparsky, 77, and Ian Irwin, 72 – had been the subject of a major search involving hundreds of people from numerous agency. By Saturday, hope had been given up of finding them alive. That morning, though, two searchers spotted them about a half-mile from Pierce Point Road, deep into the vegetation, further than family and rescue crews thought was possible. The couple heard them and began screaming for help. “Groot,” a three-year-old rescue dog, got to them first, with the two searchers following right behind. They gave the couple warm clothing and water while they waited for a rescue helicopter to pick them up and take them to Marin General Hospital.

It's still unclear why the couple ended up lost in the forest, but reports were that they had just gone out for a hike on Valentine's Day unprepared for a long trek or the cold weather. They were trapped in a dense drainage ditch overgrown with foliage, where they were eventually spotted. At some point, Kiparsky attempted to go out for help, tying pieces of a scarf to vegetation as she went so she could find her way back to Irwin, but was unable to make progress.

The vegetation was so dense, one team spent nearly two hours crawling through it at one point during the search. When they were finally found, the helicopter became the only way to get the couple out.

Irwin is a Parkinson's researcher with 25 years of experience, including work identifying a toxin in heroin that re-created the signs and symptoms of the disease. Kiparsky is a prominent linguist who has published several books, including *Fact* in 1968 and *The Gooficon: A Repair Manual for English* in 1975.

The couple was last seen on a Valentine's Day trip around Point Reyes Station. They never checked out of their cottage on Saturday, leaving behind their wallets, phones, vehicle and other personal belongings.

This closing passage from the article underscores the wonder at their survival and discovery: “Speaking to reporters in front of dozens of volunteers and official searchers — and Groot — who had put in 10 to 12 hour days in the effort to find the missing couple, [a spokesman] described ‘organized chaos’ when they were finally found, with everyone scrambling to help...Superlatives like ‘ecstatic’ and

'implausible' seemed to barely capture a moment few, including experts and family members, thought would come."

Source: Bay Area News Group via [Marin Independent Journal](#).

Appalachian NST Body Of Missing Hiker Found

Eddie Noonkester, a resident of North Carolina, started hiking the Appalachian Trail on Friday, February 14th. Over the ensuing weekend, he made several 911 calls to Dawson County, reportedly sounding confused.

A search for Noonkester was immediately begun, but no sign of him was found until Monday, when staff from the Len Foote Hike Inn located some of his personal belongings near the Hike Inn trail.

Efforts to find Noonkester continued through Monday night, with six canine teams searching a large grid area around the Approach Trail in Amicalola Falls State Park. The search was suspended on Tuesday night due to weather conditions, but resumed on Wednesday with more than 130 searchers and additional assistance from north Georgia agencies. Searchers were pelted with heavy rain, wind and frigid temperatures throughout the four days.

Noonkester's body was discovered at about 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday afternoon in a rugged, inaccessible area of the state park. The cause of death has not been determined, but foul play is not suspected.

Source: Alexander Popp, [Forsyth County News](#).

Death Valley NP Searchers Rescue Injured Backpacker From Slot Canyon

On Thursday, February 6th, a backpacker on a multi-day trip fell while descending into a side canyon west of the main Cottonwood Canyon, suffering a severe lower extremity injury. Hikers in the canyon below made audible contact with the backpacker and used their satellite device to call for help.

Because the hikers were unable to ascend the difficult terrain and assist the injured hiker, they made camp and spent the night in order to help via satellite communication with rangers.

A member of Inyo County Search and Rescue was lowered into the slot canyon via helicopter at 9:30 a.m. on Friday. A California Highway Patrol helicopter then flew him out to a hospital.

According to the park's SAR coordinator, good planning by both the injured man and the party that found him helped him survive. In addition to having filled out backcountry camping permits, which provided emergency contact information and planned routes, the injured man had proper equipment to spend the night in the park. The equipment was also brightly colored, which made it much easier for search crews to see him in the narrow canyon from the helicopter.

Two-way communications, which were possible because of the satellite emergency notification device the other hikers had, proved invaluable, as cell phones don't work in most of the park.

Source: Caitlin Lilly, [KVVU News](#).

Denali NP&P Helicopter Crashes On Ruth Glacier

A helicopter transporting guests from a mountain chalet crashed on Ruth Glacier on Thursday, February 20th. Neither the two guests nor the pilot were injured in the crash. The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the incident.

Around 3 p.m. on Thursday, the Robinson R44 helicopter operated by Talkeetna Air Taxi took off from the Sheldon Chalet, a small luxury hotel located on a private inholding within the park. The helicopter crashed on the glacier, near the chalet, shortly after taking off.

Chalet staff who saw the crash happen activated an emergency transponder and park personnel were notified of the crash around 3:20 p.m.. The request for help was canceled after chalet staff confirmed that no one on board was injured.

The damaged helicopter will be removed from the area this week if weather permits.

Source: [Anchorage Daily News](#).

National Park System Park Operating Status Summary

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

- *Theodore Roosevelt NP* – A section of road near the badlands overlook that has been closed since last May will likely remain closed until 2021. Despite securing around \$5 million in federal funding for repairs, the road has been closed ever since because the area around the slide remains unstable. In all, more than six miles of road have been closed to motorized traffic for safety precautions, resulting in an extra 45 minutes of drive time to get in and out of the park. Source: Robert Suhr, [KXnet.com](#).
- *Vicksburg NMP* – The road to the national cemetery has been closed due to a significant failure caused by slumping brought on by heavy rains. The cemetery itself is also closed while efforts are made to stabilize the slope and protect the graves within the affected area. No burial sites have been exposed. Source: John Surratt, [The Vicksburg Post](#).

National Park System Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents

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

- *Mount Rainier NP* – After more than two weeks of repairs following massive mudslides, both lanes of SR 706 are again open to drivers. That means visitors to the park can once again use the main Nisqually entrance. The road is open to Longmire, with normal winter access to Paradise, depending on conditions. The Washington State Department of Transportation closed the highway on February 6th after it was covered by two 400-foot-long mudslides following a period of heavy rain. Hundreds of tons of mud, rocks, trees and water crashed onto the highway, stranding park employees and 200 people in Nisqually Park who live near the park entrance. Good weather allowed the contractor to repair and reopen SR 706 ahead of schedule. It was estimated that the highway wouldn't be open until mid-March. Source: [KIRO News](#).
- *Appalachian NST/Harpers Ferry NHP* – The footbridge across the Potomac that was damaged two months ago when a CSX freight train derailed on the tracks next to it will remain closed indefinitely. The park is coordinating restoration efforts with CSX, which will cover the cost for the repairs. The trail closure affects thousands of visitors and hikers on the AT. The closure has created problems for hikers who have had to rely on private shuttle services to get across, a problem that will worsen as the weather warms up and the number of through hikers increases significantly. The National Park Service and CSX are planning to provide a shuttle service that would transport hikers and visitors around the footbridge closure until repairs can be completed. Source: Luz Lazo, [Washington Post](#).
- *Hawaii Volcanoes NP* – The recovery from the 2018 eruption continues, with a benchmark attained on February 21st with the reopening of the Thurston Lava Tube. One of the three biggest attractions in the park — alongside the already-reopened visitors center and the indefinitely shuttered Jaggar Museum — the lava tube, also called Nahuku, has been closed for

658 days, ever since the park shut down in 2018 during the Kilauea eruption. Repairs and upgrades required thousands of hours of labor, coordination with mainland agencies, and the expenditure of about \$170,000. Source: Michael Brestovansky, [Hawaii Tribune Herald](#).

National/International Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center Assistance To Australian Firefighters Continues

NIFC is at PL 1.

Three new large fires were reported last week, two in Texas and one in Florida. Firefighters were able to contain all three wildfires.

NIFC is continuing to dispatch firefighters and overhead to help hard-pressed firefighters in Australia. Nineteen wildland fire personnel are currently on assignment in New South Wales; another eighty are supporting operations in Victoria. Detailed information on operations in the three states where most of the fires are occurring can be found at the following websites:

- New South Wales RFS – <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/>
- Victoria – <https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/>
- South Australian Country Fire Service – <https://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/home.jsp>

You can learn more about the US deployment at https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo_australia.htm.

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

- *Wildfire and Drinking Water Contamination* – The February 11th edition of *Inside Climate News* has an article that explores the growing problems created by the byproducts of wildland fires, ranging from bacterial infiltration to debris to leaching of man-made pollutants like plastics and chemicals into water systems: “Wildfire poses layers of risk to drinking water that unspool over time and geography, with some effects emerging years later, sometimes outside the burn zone, depending on where waterways take the pollutants. Water utility managers, engineers and scientists have only recently begun to grapple with the aftereffects of fires that consume entire neighborhoods and towns—as they did in California—and that in the process, release dozens of manmade pollutants into water lines. As climate change increases the risk of wildfire and more communities encroach upon fire-prone zones, the threat to drinking water promises to grow.” Problems in Australia, many of them matched by similar issues in the US, have included “serious and extensive damage” to forest catchments that provide most city dwellers with water; major sediment runoffs clogging water purification systems; phosphorous and nitrogen in ash creating algal blooms; and byproducts of materials that have burned in residential areas – metal, vinyl siding, tires, plastics and chemicals – infiltrating and contaminating water. Source: Neela Bannerjee, [Inside Climate News](#).
- *Massive Fire Break Project Still In The Works* – You may remember that this newsletter carried a story some time ago about BLM planning to create 11,000 miles of strategic fuel breaks in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, California, Nevada and Utah in an effort to help control wildfires. That project is still alive and kicking. On February 14th, BLM released a final programmatic EIS for fuel breaks in the Great Basin. The preferred alternative analyzes a full suite of manual, chemical and mechanical treatments, including prescribed fire, seeding, and targeted grazing to construct and maintain a system of fuel breaks. These treatments would be implemented along roads and rights-of-way on BLM-administered lands to minimize new disturbance and wildlife habitat fragmentation and to maximize accessibility for wildland firefighters. An electronic copy of the EIS and associated documents is available for public review for 30 days (through March 14th) on the [BLM Land Use Planning and NEPA register](#). A record of decision will be issued after the public review concludes. Sources: [KOMO News](#) and [BLM](#).

Resource Commitment Trend

Category	January 31	February 7	February 21
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	0	0
Engines	0	21	0
Helicopters	0	0	0
Total FF/Overhead	0	78	2

Fires/Acreage

Category	2020 Total	2010-2019 Ave	2020 Variance
United States: YTD Fires	2,146	3,884	- 45%
United States: YTD Acres	38,252	77,723	- 51%

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

February 10 – The president transmitted, pursuant to law, the Budget of the United States Government for Fiscal Year 2021. Similar to last fiscal year, the president is requesting a large reduction in NPS funding. Current appropriations for the NPS in FY 2020 are \$3.37 billion and the president is requesting \$2.79 billion in FY 2021, which is a reduction of \$581 million. The budget reduction would result in 1,105 fewer staff (FTEs) in FY 2021. [The coalition issued a statement on the president's budget and its effect on the national parks and public lands.](#) The highlights of the budget for the National Park Service appear below, with the FY 2020 figures representing the amount Congress appropriated for these programs in the current fiscal year and the FY 2021 figure representing what is in the president's budget proposal (programs are in italics):

- *Operation of the National Park System* would be reduced from \$2.576 billion in FY 2020 to \$2.517 billion in FY 2021. Within this amount, cyclic maintenance would be reduced from \$135.9 million in FY 2020 to \$121 million in FY 2021. Repair/rehab funding is proposed to be increased from \$153.6 million in FY 2020 to \$188 million in FY 2021. Fixed costs of \$36.3 million are reflected in the total amount requested, with a proposed 1 percent pay increase requested this year. The budget also requests that all bureau ethics staff be consolidated within one departmental Ethics Office, which would result in the transfer of \$3.4 million for the ONPS budget of NPS to DOI and a transfer of 15 FTEs from NPS to the departmental office.
- *Centennial Challenge* would be reduced from \$15 million in FY 2020 to \$0 in FY 2021.

- *National Recreation and Preservation* (NRPA) would be reduced from \$71 million in FY 2020 to \$33.9 million in FY 2021. Within this account, national heritage area funding would be zeroed out again.
- *Construction* would be reduced from \$389.3 million in FY 2020 to \$192.6 million in FY 2021.
- *Land Acquisition* would be reduced from \$208.4 million in FY 2020 to \$17.6 million in FY 2021. There would be no request for state grant funding, with the administration saying again that states would receive funding from the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) receipts, estimated to be \$117.2 million in FY 2021. The GOMESA funding was always intended to supplement the LWCF state grant funding provided by Congress. Also, the budget makes no request for funding for federal land acquisition. Within the land acquisition budget request, funding for American Battlefield Protection Grants would be reduced from \$13 million in FY 2020 to \$0 in FY 2021.
- *Historic Preservation Fund* would be reduced from \$118.6 million in FY 2020 to \$40.6 million in FY 2021

The budget also calls for a two-year extension of the recreation fee program through the end of FY 2023, and a one- year extension of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Program through FY 2022.

February 11 – The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources approved the nominations of Katharine MacGregor, of Pennsylvania, to be Deputy Secretary, and Lanny Erdos, of Ohio, to be Director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, at the Department of the Interior.

February 13 – The Senate agreed to [S. Res. 475](#), recognizing the leading role of Utahns in the fight for women's suffrage and celebrating the sesquicentennial of the first votes by women under the equal suffrage law of Utah on February 14, 1870.

The Senate was in recess the week of February 17 – 21 for the Presidents Day holiday.

House Actions

February 10 – The president transmitted, pursuant to law, the Budget of the United States Government for Fiscal Year 2021. See summary of provisions that affect the NPS above in the Senate section.

February 10 – The House passed [H.R. 1494](#), to strengthen partnerships between historically Black colleges and universities and minority-serving institutions and the Department of Homeland Security.

February 12 – The House passed [H.R. 2546](#), to designate lands in Colorado as wilderness. As passed by the House, the bill combines six separate bills that together designate more than 1.3 million acres of wilderness across the western U.S. and protect more than 1,000 river miles under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The bill passed by a vote of 231 yeas to 183 nays. The bill, redesignated the Protecting America's Wilderness Act, includes the following that affect the National Park Service:

- Title I – Designates a small amount of wilderness in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.
- Title II – Takes the following actions affecting Redwood National Park: Section 212, authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to undertake initiatives to restore degraded redwood forest ecosystems in Redwood National and State Parks in partnership with the State of California, local agencies, and nongovernmental organizations; Section 215, authorizes the establishment of a visitor center in Del Norte County, California, to assist in fulfilling the purposes of Redwood National and State Parks and the Smith River National Recreation Area; Section 217, requires the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study to evaluate the feasibility and suitability of establishing overnight accommodations on Federal land at the southern and northern boundaries or on land within 20 miles of the southern and northern boundaries of Redwood National and State parks in consultation with interested Federal, State, Tribal, and local entities, and private and nonprofit organizations; Section 233, designates, among other

areas, approximately 31,000 acres in Redwood National Park as potential wilderness; Section 234, designates, among other river segments, three segments of rivers in Redwood National Park as part of the wild and scenic rivers system.

- Title IV - establishes as a unit of the National Park System the San Gabriel National Recreation Area in the State of California.
- Title V - adjusts the boundary of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area to include the Rim of the Valley Corridor of 191,000 acres.
- Title VI - designates certain rivers within Olympic National Park as wild and scenic rivers.

February 12 – The Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness held a hearing entitled “Land Based Ranges: Building Military Readiness While Protecting Natural and Cultural Resources”. Testimony was heard from Jordan Gillis, Principal Deputy, Assistant Secretary of the Army, Energy, Installations, and Environment; Todd C. Mellon, Principal Deputy, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Energy, Installations, and Environment; and Jennifer L. Miller, Principle Deputy, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, Energy Installations, and Environment.

February 12 – The Committee on the Budget held a hearing entitled “The President's Fiscal Year 2021 Budget”. Testimony was heard from Russell Vought, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget.

The House was in recess the week of February 17 – 21 for the Presidents Day holiday.

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.

- *Past Acting Director Smith's New Position Under Scrutiny* – Former acting Director P. Daniel Smith is now in a position in North Carolina that *E&E News* describes as a job that appears to have been created just for him. He is now the agency's national commemorations coordinator, a telework job that pays up to \$166,000 a year and is based in Cary, N.C., where Smith moved after leaving WASO in September. The following is excerpted from the article: “It's the latest twist in the strange saga of Smith, the controversial ex-acting chief who last week was accused by an anonymous group of NPS employees of missing work, skipping meetings and generating no real work while drawing more than \$50,000 in paychecks. Calling Smith a ‘high-salary ghost employee,’ the advocacy group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility wants the Interior Department's inspector general to investigate both Smith's whereabouts and whether the job posting was illegal.” Stay tuned for developments. Source: Rob Hotakainen, [E&E News](#).

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.

- *Badlands NP* – South Dakota Public Broadcasting recently posted a story on how the volunteer fire department in the tiny town of Interior (population 105) is struggling with the cost of search and rescue operations in Badlands National Park and on other federal lands. The town has gone to the state government in an effort to get some funding for its operations, but they've also tried to raise money through other means: “Sometimes, [fire department chief Cliff] McClure sends bills to people rescued by the department, hoping to get money from them or their insurance. But he said he there's no force behind his efforts, because there's no state law specifically authorizing him to collect. State Sen. Lance Russell, R-Hot Springs, wants to change that. He filed a bill authorizing state and local governments to collect up to \$1,000 from

people who benefit from search and rescue services in national parks, national forests and state parks. The bill was approved Wednesday by a legislative committee, even though the state Department of Public Safety opposes it.” Source: Seth Tupper, [South Dakota Public Broadcasting](#).

- *Harpers Ferry NHP* – Although not a part of the park (it’s an abutter), the Hilltop House has over the years become well-known to park and HFC staff and students attending classes at Mather. For some years now, reports the *Washington Post*, its proposed rehabilitation into a modern hotel has been a battleground for the town’s residents: “For the past 13 years, the town has been riven by disputes over the new hotel’s size and its design; its parking and sewage needs; and the effects of an influx of clientele for its \$500-a-night rooms, underground golf simulator and restaurant overseen by celebrity chef José Andrés. Project consultants have quit in disgust. The owners, Fred and Karen Schaufeld, who live in Northern Virginia, have left the table and come back to it, only to leave again....Along the way, Harpers Ferry residents coalesced into battle-hardened factions. On one side are those who assert the Schaufelds are trying to run roughshod over the town. Many say they want a new hotel, but that the proposed resort is too big and fancy for Harpers Ferry, whose shabby-genteel charm has changed little in the last 60 years. An opposing and equally passionate contingent sees the Schaufelds as accommodating partners whose patience has been tried with a stream of picayune objections that at times defy satire — including, most recently, the project’s impacts on roads that appear in 19th-century planning documents but were never constructed.” The article provides additional details about the fight, plus pictures of the increasingly dilapidated hotel. It’ll sound familiar to any of you who were involved in historic preservation battles during your careers. Source: Peter Jamison, [Washington Post](#).
- *Minidoka NHS* – The park’s new visitor center was opened to the public this past weekend. The building includes a theater that screens a new park film, two exhibits on the history of the Japanese American incarceration, a bookstore and much more. Over 13,000 people were incarcerated in the camp at one time or another. Source: Source: Jake Manuel Brasil, [KMVT News](#).
- *Yellowstone NP* – It may be that we’ll be seeing a spate of articles in the future on the impacts of coronavirus on park visitation, but for now this is the only one that’s come across our desk. Brian Riley, a Wyoming tourism professional who has been marketing Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Park tours to Chinese visitors for the past several years, reports that China has completely terminated tour group trips to the United States. According to Yellowstone’s most recent visitor use survey, about a quarter of all foreign visitors coming to the park are from China, which works out to between 350,000 and 400,000 people. It’s expected that the hardest-hit gateway community will be West Yellowstone. Almost half of all visitors entering Yellowstone come through the West Entrance and businesses in West Yellowstone have invested heavily in advertising to the Chinese market. Source: Mark Davis Powell, [Casper Star Tribune](#).

Briefly Noted

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

- *NPS Campgrounds* – *National Parks Traveler* has posted an article that provides an overview of NPS campgrounds. No big revelations, but an interesting piece with an array of facts about the system. In FY 2018, the Service had 1,421 campgrounds with 27,513 campsites. These numbers included 502 frontcountry campgrounds with 16,648 sites (another 494 campgrounds don’t have front- or backcountry designations). The ten busiest campgrounds in FY 18 were, in order, Mather (Grand Canyon), Upper Pines (Yosemite), Watchman (Zion), Moraine Park (Rocky Mountain), Assateague Island (Assateague), Fort Pickens (Gulf Islands), Pinnacles (Pinnacles), Blackwoods (Acadia), Point Reyes (Point Reyes), and Hodgdon Meadow (Yosemite). Source: Kurt Repanshek, [National Parks Traveler](#).

- *New Documentary On Threats To Public Lands* – A new documentary on threats to public lands called *Public Trust*, produced by Robert Redford and Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard and his Patagonia Films, debuted at the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival on February 17th. It focuses on three land-based conflicts – the slashing of the size of Bears Ears National Monument in Utah, the potential permanent destruction of the Boundary Waters Wilderness in Minnesota, and the de facto sale of one of the last wild places in America, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Source: Mia Galuppo, [Hollywood Reporter](#).

Commenting On NPS Projects

An alphabetical listing of National Park Service projects – physical, paper and otherwise – which have solicited public comments, plus due dates and URL's to related sites. Park/agency names for new entries are in **boldface**.

- **Bureau of Land Management** – Comments are sought on the final programmatic EIS for wildfire fuel breaks in the Great Basin. The preferred alternative analyzes a full suite of manual, chemical and mechanical treatments, including prescribed fire, seeding, and targeted grazing to construct and maintain a system of fuel breaks. These treatments would be implemented along roads and rights-of-way on BLM-administered lands to minimize new disturbance and wildlife habitat fragmentation and to maximize accessibility for wildland firefighters. Comments are due by March 14th and may be submitted to the [BLM Land Use Planning and NEPA register](#).
- **Glacier NP** – The park is developing an EA for a telecommunications plan. The plan would “correct deficiencies in NPS radio, phone, and computer/data-based telecommunications systems that are essential to the performance of park operations and maintaining employee and visitor safety; provide for basic connectivity for non-governmental use in developed areas while preserving the ability to experience park resources and values; and protect park resources through the establishment of parameters for infrastructure, equipment, and coverage.” Comments will be taken until March 9th at [the park's 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](#).
- **Grand Teton NP** – The concessions contract between the park and Grand Teton Lodge Company will expire on December 31, 2021. The NPS is currently considering what visitor services to require or authorize in the next concessions contract, which has an anticipated effective date of January 1, 2022. Comments are being accepted until March 5th at [the park's PEPC webpage](#).
- **Yellowstone NP** – The park is seeking public comment on an EA for a proposal to replace the Yellowstone River Bridge, which is located on the Northeast Entrance Road near Tower Junction. This project will maintain safe visitor access from the park's Northeast Entrance, which is part of the only road corridor in the park that is open year-round and plowed in the winter. Built in the early 1960s, the concrete deck, sidewalks, and parapets have deteriorated. Comments will be taken until March 15th at [the park's PEPC webpage](#).

The Federal Government

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

- *Fed Retirement Requests Hit Four-Year High* – “The number of new federal employee retirement claims in January marked the most in a single month under the Trump administration, according to statistics from the Office of Personnel Management released [in early February],” reports *Government Executive*. “Last month, 17,134 federal workers filed for retirement. Although January traditionally is marked by a surge of retirement claims, that figure still towers over the same month in previous years. Last year, there were 10,792 new claims; in

January 2018, 14,590 feds made retirement requests; and in 2017 there were 15,317 new requests. The avalanche of new claims meant that the backlog of pending retirement requests also spiked to 23,983. That figure has only been eclipsed once during the Trump administration: in February 2018, the backlog hit 24,225 pending claims. Despite the high backlog statistic, OPM processed more claims than in previous Januarys. Although in the last three years, the agency's best January performance was 8,638 in 2018, the agency completed 10,059 requests last month. As a result, the monthly average processing time for a retirement claim dropped a full eight days from 66 in December 2019 to 58 in January." Source: Erich Wagner, [Government Executive](#).

- *Retaliation Against DOD Whistleblowers Increases* – “The watchdog for the federal government’s largest agency [DOD] said on Tuesday that managers are increasingly retaliating against whistleblowers with impunity, while advocates for those employees told lawmakers individuals are now less likely to speak out against waste and wrongdoing due to President Trump’s reaction to his impeachment,” reported *Government Executive* on January 28th. “A recent [Government Executive survey](#) found one-in-three federal employees are now less likely to report wrongdoing to the appropriate authorities due to attacks by Trump and congressional Republicans on the whistleblower whose filing kicked off the impeachment proceedings. Another 16% said they are now more likely to blow the whistle.” Source: Eric Katz, [Government Executive](#).

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.

- *Climate Change Causes Massive Locust Invasion In East Africa* – Not surprisingly, the impacts of climate changes are now reaching literally Biblical proportions. Here’s a recent *Washington Post* headline: “Hundreds of billions of locusts — fueled by conflict and climate change — are swarming East Africa.” Unseasonable rain, linked to a climate-change-driven event in the Indian Ocean, has turned the region into what the writer describes as “a buffet for locusts” and has set it up for “a major humanitarian crisis” – the locusts will decimate cropland in an area where around 19 million people already face high levels of food insecurity. The weather anomaly is caused by an El Niño-like event in the Indian Ocean that once occurred about every 10 years but that studies show has become more frequent, as well as more intense. The events lead to heavy rainfall in East Africa — which saw eight cyclones off its coast last year — and dry conditions in Australia, exacerbating bush fires there. Rainy conditions are expected until at least June, “setting the stage for those swarms-in-waiting to devour the coming harvest.” Source: Max Bearak, [Washington Post](#).
- *Ocean Currents Speeding Up* – “All over the world, the oceans are changing in profound ways,” reports *Scientific American*. “They’re storing up more heat as the world warms. Marine ecosystems are shifting in response to climate change. Sea levels are rising as the world’s melting glaciers crumble into the ocean. And now, scientists have identified another transformation: The water itself has been moving faster over the past few decades.” The reason for the increase is a global increase in wind speeds. More climate change may mean a greater strengthening of ocean winds and potentially even faster ocean circulation...[Faster] circulation could change the way heat and nutrients are transported around the world. That could potentially alter global weather patterns and affect marine ecosystems.” Source: Chelsea Harvey, [Scientific American](#).

National Park System Issues

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

- *Colorado River Basin Parks* – A new USGS study reveals that global warming is shrinking the Rocky Mountain snowpack that feeds the Colorado River and that flows are declining at a rate of about 9.3 percent for every 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit increase in temperature. “The study links dwindling flow of water with the loss of albedo, a measure of the snowpack's reflective quality,” reports *Inside Climate News*. “Like ice in the Arctic, white snow reflects solar radiation back to space. But as the snowpack in the Colorado River declines, the ground and, crucially, the air directly above the ground, warm up. Water from the melting snow or from rain evaporates from the soil, rather than trickling into the streams that feed the Colorado River. The scientists found the link by measuring the relationship between the amount of water in the snow, the amount of the sun's incoming radiation and how much of that was reflected back by the snowpack's albedo, showing that, as the snowpack dwindled, the river's flow declined.” According to one researcher, continued warming “will lead to significant and unending reductions in river flows. Until global warming is stopped, the Colorado and other key rivers of the Southwest will continue to provide less and less water to the region.” Source: Bob Berwyn, [Inside Climate News](#).

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

- *Yosemite NP* – Those engaged in the effort to reintroduce fishers to the Sierras recently got a bit of good news – a wildlife camera photographed one in the park, indicating that fishers had extended their range further north than previously thought. Along with the images, the park found two scat samples. The images, scat, evidence from scent-detecting dogs and genetic analysis pointed to between one and six individual fishers in the area. Fishers and several other related animals were hunted nearly to extinction in the 1800s by trappers seeking to sell their pelts. Efforts have been underway for several years to bring fishers back to the area, with four kits released in Yosemite in 2015. However, as the animals are shy and elusive, sightings have been limited, which was why biologists found the images snapped on wildlife cameras this winter to be so encouraging. Source: Ed Mazza, [Huffington Post](#).

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:

- *Grand Teton NP* – The effort to remove non-native mountain goats by aerial gunning has run into a wall. Secretary Bernhardt, responding to a request from Wyoming's governor, ordered the project halted. Wyoming officials don't oppose the removal of the goats from the park, where they pose a threat of transmitting disease to native bighorn sheep and competing for forage, but simply the method. “We remain prepared to work with Grand Teton to meet their management objectives using methods that align with the value Wyoming people have for wildlife,” said the state's game and fish director. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#).

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

- *Appalachian NST* – This past Monday, the Supreme Court heard arguments in two interrelated cases – the Forest Service v. Cowpasture River Preservation Association and Atlantic Coast Pipeline LLC v. Cowpasture River Preservation Association. These consolidated cases pit a pipeline developer and the Forest Service against environmental groups that want to halt the pipeline's construction and protect the Appalachian Trail. The proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) would carry natural gas 604 miles from West Virginia to North Carolina and would tunnel below the trail. “At issue is whether jurisdiction over the affected land belongs to the Forest Service or the National Park Service,” writes Noah Sachs in SCOTUS Blog. “The case presents the justices with a complex tangle of federal laws that will determine if the land is open to energy development or must be preserved for recreational use under the park service's mandate.” Questions centered on whether or not the trail included the land underneath it, who

has jurisdiction over the trail, and whether or not a ruling blocking construction of the pipeline would in effect make the AT a barrier to all future pipelines or similar projects that involved crossing the trail. This case has potentially significant impact on land management for the NPS, so we'll offer more than one source on this debate. For a good summary of the issues, see the aforementioned [SCOTUS Blog](#) for the article by Noah Sachs; for an article on the hearing itself written this past Monday, see the article by Rebecca Beitsch and John Kruzel in [The Hill](#); for an opinion piece by Ephrat Livni on the novel USFS argument that the trail really isn't land, see his piece in [Quartz](#); for the transcript of an NPR radio show program on potential impacts of the SCOTUS decision on trail management, listen to Becky Sullivan's report (or read the transcript) on the [National Public Radio webpage](#).

- *Arches NP* – A proposal for potential oil and gas development in the popular Slickrock Trail recreation area in Grand County is being opposed by local elected leaders and outdoor recreation companies who say it's an inappropriate move by the federal government. The two parcels are within a mile of Arches National Park and span more than 60% of the Slickrock Trail in the Sand Flat Recreation Area, which is jointly managed by the county and the BLM. Should the project move forward, Grand County and Moab officials fear that it will have impacts on the area's outdoor recreation economy and will put local drinking water supplies in jeopardy. Source: Amy Joi O'Donoghue, [Deseret News](#).

The Coalition

Summary of recent developments within the Coalition, including some of the actions that CNPCA took on your behalf.

- *President's Proposed Budget* – CPANP issued a statement denouncing President Trump's proposed budget, calling it "ill-informed, irresponsible, and exactly what we've come to expect from this administration." It was picked up by various media outlets, including the Weather Channel and USA Today network (which are linked in the post). [CPANP statement](#).
- *Proposed Sale Of Federal Lands* – President Trump's latest nominee to the Federal Reserve Board, Judy Shelton, has expressed the view that the U.S. government should sell-off its "numerous federal land holdings" in order to "expedite the achievement of a balanced budget." Coalition Chair Phil Francis said that this idea, which has been introduced before, "was a bad idea then and is a bad idea now. To sell lands for short term gain at the expense of long-term benefits makes no sense at all." [Phil's statement](#).
- *NPS Understaffing* – Coalition Chair Phil Francis, also a former Smokies superintendent, commented on the rising visitation and declining staff at parks across the country in a story about visitation at Great Smoky Mountains NP in a recent newspaper article. Francis said the cuts [proposed in President Trump's budget] would put extra strain on the already over-worked park staff. [Newspaper article](#).
- *Planned Change In Ranger Series* – The Coalition strongly opposes the initiative to convert all National Park Service protection rangers from the current park ranger (0025) series to the inspection, enforcement, and compliance (1801) series. A letter has been sent to Acting Director Vela, expressing our concerns. [Coalition letter](#).
- *Lack Of NPS Director* – An op-ed piece about the lack of a permanent director, written by chairman Phil Francis and Theresa Pierno, president and CEO of NPCA, appeared in the February 17th edition of The Hill. [Op-ed piece](#).
- *NEPA Changes* – Executive committee member Sarah Bransom testified at a public hearing in Denver, expressing the Coalition's concerns over the proposed changes to NEPA. [Sarah's testimony](#).

- *Border Wall Construction Damage To Organ Pipe Cactus* – In a recent op-ed for *National Parks Traveler*, member Rick Smith writes: "The damage being done to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument by the construction of this border wall will last for centuries; in fact, it may very well be irreversible." [Rick's op-ed](#).

Source: Emily Thompson, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator.

Park People

NPS Alumni Passing Of Rick Wagner

Rick Wagner, 74, who was the NPS lands chief in Seattle for many years, passed away on February 18th with his family at his side. He is survived by wife, Donna Wagner, daughter Kari Brown, son-in-law Daryl Brown, son Darren Wagner, five granddaughters and one great granddaughter.

Rick worked in many parks in the West and Alaska and made many park staffs lives much easier with his knowledge of land issues. He worked closely with various DOI solicitors to resolve many legal problems in favor of the parks.

At this time, the family is grieving and has asked that friends not the house. Donna is overwhelmed and not answering the phone at this time.

A service for Rick will be held on February 28th at 1 p.m. at the Sunset Hills Memorial Park & Funeral Home (1215 145th Place SE, Bellevue, WA). The service is open to everyone who would like to attend and express their condolences to the Wagner's family.

You may also send condolences and flowers to Mrs. Donna Wagner, 10615 NE 123rd Street, Kirkland, WA 98034. Memorials may be made to Kirkland Church or Christ at 10421 NE 140th Street, Kirkland, WA 98034, or to the National Park Foundation online at <https://nationalparks.org>. You can also leave a message on [his page at the funeral home's website](#).

Sources: Barbara Holyoke, Stuart Snider and Mark Forbes.

Yellowstone NP Death Of Ranger Donna Youker

Ranger Donna Marie Youker died on Tuesday, February 4th, at her home in Yellowstone National Park. She was 37. The cause of death has not been given.

She was raised in Randolph, New Jersey, graduated from Randolph High School, and earned her bachelor's of science in biology at Montclair State University. Donna moved out west over ten years ago and worked in several national parks. She enjoyed traversing through the backcountry and all the enjoyment the mountains and the snow offer. She also enjoyed time visiting her friends, family, and her nieces and nephews, whom she loved dearly. Just recently Donna landed her dream job as a Yellowstone protection ranger.

She is survived by siblings Donald, Danielle, David and Darren Youker; her nieces and nephews Elizabeth, Makenzie, Jacob, and Mason; her dog, Rex; and countless friends and work-family members. She is predeceased by her parents: Donald and Marilyn; and her grandmother, Elizabeth.

Services were held in Rockaway, New Jersey, on February 12th. Interment followed at Marcella Union Cemetery, also in Rockaway. You can log into her guest book at [Whitham-Kanapaux Funeral Home](#).

Source: Cecilia Levine, [Morris Daily Voice](#).

NPS Alumni Correction To Obituary For Dee Molinar

The obituary in the last issue for Dee Molenaar, 101, a past NPS climbing ranger and legendary mountaineer, contained an error, one that appeared in the original newspaper article:

"I would like to draw attention to a mistake in the Seattle article," writes member Ed Clark. "It said that Molenaar was on the first team of Americans to attempt the summit of K2 in 1953. This is incorrect, the first American expedition to attempt K2 was in 1938 as a reconnaissance effort by Fritz Wiessner. He returned in 1939 leading an American expedition which made it to within 800' of the summit but ended in tragedy."

Source: Ed Clark.

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:

- *Pullman NM* – A profile of Teri Gage, the park's new superintendent, appears in a current edition of *Patch*, a Chicago-based publication. Gage has been with the NPS for 32 years, serving as a budget technician and administrative manager in national parks in the Midwest. Before taking on her current role managing operations at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, she worked in Arkansas at the Buffalo National River Gage and was acting superintendent at the President William Jefferson Clinton Birthplace Home National Historic Site. Source: Mark Konkol, [Patch](#).
- *Wildland Fire Program* – Jennifer Rabuck, a Forest Service zone fire management officer on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in Hayward, Wisconsin, has been named as the wildland fire safety specialist for the Branch of Wildland Fire. Jennifer fills the vacant position left when Chad Fisher became the wildland fire operations program leader in 2017. 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.

- *Yosemite NP* – On the afternoon of December 29th, a Dodge mini van collided with a park snow plow on the Badger Pass Road. All eight passengers in the van, an extended family from California and Connecticut, suffered varying degrees of injury and required medical treatment. Two were flown from the scene by helicopter to a hospital in Modesto; one of them, a 70-year-old male, had suffered massive chest trauma and was pronounced dead upon arrival. Six ambulances, two helicopters, and two structural engines and their crews were required to manage the patient extrication and transport. Over 40 park personnel were involved. The roads were covered with packed snow at the time of the accident, but the weather was clear and both vehicles were equipped with tire chains. The accident occurred shortly before the lifts closed at the Badger Pass ski area and completely blocked access to the area. Over 900 cars were trapped at Badger Pass for several hours. Investigation into the cause of the accident continues. Submitted by Brian Smith.
- *Bryce Canyon NP* – At 3:30 a.m. on February 18th, a park visitor reported finding what appeared to be a strange motor vehicle accident - the car's top damaged, but nothing else wrong - along a remote stretch of the park's Rainbow Rim Drive. Rangers found Aaron Wilson, 18, of Bakersfield, California, sitting in the driver's seat, fatally injured from an explosive device. The windows of Wilson's 1977 Lincoln Continental were blown out, and the doors and roof were expanded outwards by several inches. Several unexploded devices were found in the

car's interior along with a detonation controller and cans of black power. The area was evacuated and the south end of the park was closed. An ordnance disposal unit from Tooele Army Base was dispatched to the scene; they employed a remote control tracked robot to remove the explosive devices and Wilson's body from the vehicle. The area was reopened late the same day. There were no indications of criminal activity. It's believed that Wilson either committed suicide or was infatuated with explosive devices and was killed in an accidental detonation. Submitted by Chief Ranger Charlie Peterson.

- *Yosemite NP* – Around 4:30 a.m. on New Year's Day morning, rangers Tom Wilson and Cameron Sholly found an unconscious and unresponsive man face down in the snow near one of the concession employee dorms. The man, who had a very strong odor of an alcoholic beverage about him, could not be awakened, and was taken by ambulance to the park's clinic. He was found to have a core body temperature of 90 degrees and a blood alcohol level of .35 percent. He was rewarmed and eventually regained consciousness. After release from the clinic, he was placed under arrest for public intoxication and booked into the Yosemite jail. This was his fourth arrest for public intoxication in the park. Submitted by Brian Smith.

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- Production: Steve Pittleman
- Regular Correspondents: Don Hellmann, Dennis Burnett, Rick Smith, and Duncan Morrow
- Issue Contributors: Ann Rasor, Mark Forbes, Cathy Halainen, Bill Walters, Ed Clark, Steve Hastings

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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