



The Coalition Report

Wednesday, October 30, 2024

Remembering our Advisor and Friend Don Hellman

We are heartbroken by the death of our friend, colleague, and long-time Executive Council member, Don Hellmann. Don led the development, coordination, and implementation of the National Park Service legislative affairs program, and retired as the Assistant Director for Legislative and Congressional Affairs. His knowledge of the history, policy, and legislation impacting the National Park System was unrivaled, including his regular contributions to this Report. Don's passion and commitment to supporting and protecting our national parks will be sorely missed. Tributes and condolences can be shared [here](#). An obituary for Don was published [here](#).

Coalition Actions

The Coalition [submitted comments](#) on the Padre Island National Seashore Draft Feral Exotic Invasive Species Management Plan and Environmental Assessment, including advocating for the inclusion of all non-native species currently compiled by the park and the consideration of a meat donation program.

We joined several other conservation groups in [submitting scoping comments](#) on the Bureau of Land Management Wyoming Office's 2025 Second Quarter Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale, including urging it to defer several parcels in the sale, particularly those in big game or greater sage-grouse habitat and corridors, and those with low oil and gas development potential.

The Coalition [submitted comments](#) on the Cumberland Island National Seashore Land Exchange proposal, urging the park to provide a complete Environmental Impact Statement with a full analysis of potential impacts due to concerns about the park's ability to adequately manage the visitor experience and park resources.

National/Regional NPS Updates

A summary of news pertaining to management and oversight of the NPS, to current trends and issues affecting the National Park System and its programs, or intersecting with the parks on a more regional basis.

- *OPM guidance to insulate against Schedule F* - On October 25, the Office of Personnel Management issued a memo offering guidance to agencies to implement new guardrails against conversions and job reclassifications that could come under an implementation of Schedule F under an administration change in 2025. Source: [Government Executive](#)
- *Clemson Institute for Parks awards* - The Clemson University Institute for Parks recently gave its 2024 George B. Hartzog Jr. Awards. The Walter T. Cox Award was given to Christopher W. Abbett, associate regional director for partnerships, lands, interpretation and planning in the South Atlantic Gulf. The Robert G. Stanton Award was given to William W. Gwaltney, who is retired after many years working for the NPS. Robert G. Stanton, former director of the National Park Service, delivered the Hartzog lecture. Source: [ClemsonNews](#)
- *Co-stewardship with Alaska Tribes* - On October 16, the Department of the Interior announced the signing of three co-stewardship agreements with Alaska Native Tribes and Corporations. Two agreements are related to efforts to safeguard salmon within the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Norton Sound regions through the Gravel to Gravel Initiative, while the third agreement “will improve management of easements that provide access to public lands and waters across privately owned Ahtna lands.” Signatories include the NPS, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Association of Village Council Presidents, Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments, Kawerak Incorporated, Nome Eskimo Community, Native Village of Eagle, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, and the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *“Is National Park Lodging Becoming Unaffordable for Average Americans?”* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) with this title, providing data that shows the price of lodging in many national park units has outpaced consumer price index increases. The article outlines the effects of increased demand, as well as the costs of operating concessions in parks. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- *Story of discontinued NPS site* - *Cowboy State Daily* published [an article](#) about Shoshone Caverns National Monument, established in 1909 and abolished by Congress in 1954. It fell into private leasing by the City of Cody, Wyoming, but eventually became cumbersome to manage. The City of Cody eventually turned it over to the Bureau of Land Management. Source: *Cowboy State Daily*

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Antietam National Battlefield* - On November 11, the park will premiere its new film,

“Remembering Antietam.” It will premiere at the Maryland Theater in Hagerstown, Maryland, that evening, and begin showing at the park’s visitor center the following day. The project was funded by park entrance and recreation fees. Source: [Antietam National Battlefield](#)

- *Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial* - American University Radio published [an article](#) about Stephen Hammond, an NPS volunteer who leads tours of the site. Stephen is a descendant of the Syphax family, who were enslaved at the former plantation. Source: *WAMU*
- *Assateague Island National Seashore* - Starting next year, the park will begin a project to move a public beach access on the south end of Chincoteague to a location 2.5 miles to the north due to the effects of storm damage and erosion. The southern end of the park is “migrating west 10 to 13 feet per year.” The project will include new trails, an access road, and parking lots. Construction is expected to begin in March 2025 and last through April 2026. Source: [WBOC](#)
- *Big Bend National Park* - On May 1, 2025, the park will begin a project to improve the Chisos Basin area of the park, including demolishing and building a new Chisos Basin Lodge, fixing utilities throughout the area, upgrading the visitor center, rerouting pathways, and installing electric vehicle charging stations. The project is expected to last two years, and the area will be closed throughout the project. Source: [Big Bend National Park](#)
- *Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park* - A new book, *The Valley of the Blackstone: Its People and Their Mill Villages*, by Albert “Al” T. Klyberg, was recently published by the Rhode Island Publication Society and the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council. Al Klyberg, who passed away in 2017, was instrumental in getting the park designated in 2014. Source: [The Valley Breeze](#)
- *Channel Islands National Park* - On October 11, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration published the final rule, final management plan, and record of decision establishing Chumash National Marine Sanctuary, located adjacent to Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary and the park. The new sanctuary was established with a co-stewardship agreement with Chumash people. Source: [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#)
- *Colonial National Historical Park* - On October 24, the park held a celebration for the completion of a major shoreline restoration project along the York River. The project reinforced infrastructure on the scenic road, increased the height of the embankment, installed new rock sills and breakwaters, and enhanced and added wetland and marsh habitat. The project was funded with \$12 million in Great American Outdoors Act funding and \$12 million in Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act funding. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Congaree National Park* - On October 29, the park announced the award of a contract for

the replacement of the Boardwalk Loop Trail in sections B, D, and F. The project will replace and upgrade about 3,800 linear feet of boardwalk and add new overlooks on the eastern end of Weston Lake. The project is expected to begin “prior to the 2024 holiday season,” and to be complete by Summer 2026. Source: [Congaree National Park](#)

- *Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve* - The park, in collaboration with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, recently installed nine new interpretive waysides on the Devils Orchard Nature Trail. Content features “aspects of Indigenous history, perspective, culture, and language while challenging visitors to consider the difficulties of protecting this fragile environment.” Source: [Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve](#)
- *Dinosaur National Monument* - *TownLift* published [an article](#) with the title, “The fossil find that saved Dinosaur National Monument from oblivion.” The article outlines the early history of the park, including the discovery of fossils and its establishment under the Antiquities Act. Source: *TownLift*
- *Effigy Mounds National Monument* - *The Gazette/ Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* published [an article](#) about a proposed Army Corps of Engineers project to stabilize the banks of the Mississippi River to protect burial mounds in the Sny Magill Unit of the park. Source: *The Gazette*
- *George Washington Birthplace National Monument* - The Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the Council of Virginia Archaeologists has featured Building X at the park as “one of the most notable sites in the state for Virginia Archaeology Month.” The park will host several days of special activities and a new podcast episode featuring the building. Source: [George Washington Birthplace National Monument](#)
- *George Washington Memorial Parkway* - On October 16, the park announced that it has halted tree removal work associated with vista improvements along the north parkway due to “concerns from the community.” The NPS will now initiate a full review through the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act and an Environmental Assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act, and allow for more public engagement, transparency, and community involvement. Source: [George Washington Memorial Parkway](#)
- *Gettysburg National Military Park* - On October 16, the park asked the Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) to delay its review of the Gettysburg Station project so that the park can review potential impacts to “nationally significant views from iconic locations.” The project includes three buildings, one of which is seven stories high, and is located across from the Gettysburg Train Station, as well as within the Borough of Gettysburg Historic District and the Gettysburg Battlefield Historic District. The HARB agreed to delay the review until November. Source: [Gettysburg Times](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park, Yellowstone National Park* - The superintendents at both parks, Chip Jenkins and Cam Sholly, sat on a panel at the Mountain Towns 2030 Climate

Solutions Summit in Jackson, Wyoming, discussing the environmental impact of tourism on parks. Source: [Buffalo Bulletin](#)

- *Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - On October 21, the park began a project to remove and replace the wooden boardwalk at Ha'akulamano, also known as Sulphur Banks. The area will be closed for the duration of the project, which is expected to be complete by December 12. Two trail crew workers from Yellowstone National Park are assisting Hawai'i Volcanoes staff. Source: [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#)
- *Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park* - The park's visual information specialist, Michael Newman, was honored with the NPS' "Excellence in Interpretation Award" for his efforts elevating 'ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language) and Hawaiian place names across a variety of digital products. Source: [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#)
- *Independence National Historical Park* - The park recently completed a project to restore the southeast guardhouse in Washington Square, including a new roof, exterior wood repairs, and exterior paint. The project was funded by the Independence Historical Trust, and the Washington Square Committee of the Society Hill Preservation Foundation. Source: [Independence National Historical Park](#)
- *Lowell National Historical Park* - *Invest*, a media outlet of Capital Analytics Associates, published [an interview](#) with the park's superintendent, Julie Galonska, about the park and its efforts to preserve stories of industrial innovation and to play a role in community initiatives. Source: Capital Analytics Associates
- *Mojave National Preserve* - On October 27, the park reopened Cima Road after a major roadway rehabilitation and safety improvement project. The effort was part of a \$24 million project funded by the Federal Highway Administration that included improvements to several paved roads in the park. A ribbon cutting ceremony will be held on November 6. Source: [Mojave National Preserve](#)
- *Mojave National Preserve* - The park recently completed a project to install two-foot-high fencing to prevent desert tortoises from entering onto Cima Road. The park will continue to install fencing along other roads in the park that intersect key tortoise habitat. The park is also removing utility poles that allow raven populations to nest and proliferate, which are a threat to the tortoises. Source: [Mojave National Preserve](#)
- *National Historic Landmarks Program* (an NPS-administered program) - On October 25, the NPS announced the completion of a historic context study on an eleven-mile stretch of the Great River Road on the Mississippi River in St. John the Baptist Parish, Louisiana. The study found that the area is a "good candidate for consideration" for nomination as a National Historic Landmark due to its integrity and significance. Source: [Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve](#)
- *National Mall and Memorial Parks* - On October 18, the NPS published a Finding of No

Significant Impact for a proposed 0.15-acre Peace Corps Commemorative Park, to be established at the intersection of Louisiana Avenue, C Street, and 1st Street NW in Washington, DC. Source: [National Mall and Memorial Parks](#)

- *National Underground Railroad to Freedom Program* (an NPS-administered program) - On October 25, the NPS announced the addition of 14 new listings in 11 states to the program. Source: [National Underground Railroad to Freedom Program](#)
- *New River Gorge National Park and Preserve* - On October 14, the park celebrated the opening of a new parking lot at the Nuttall Trailhead of the Endless Wall Trail. The project has been in the works for several years. It adds 70 parking spaces for the popular trail. Source: [West Virginia Watch](#)
- *Olympic National Park* - On October 23, the park removed a temporary bridge on the North Shore Quinault Road. This splits the Quinault Loop Drive into two out-and-back roads for the time being. The temporary bridge was installed in Summer 2023 to reduce stress on a failing culvert north of the intersection of North Shore and South Shore Road. Crews decided the temporary bridge was unlikely to withstand winter weather. A permanent repair is expected in the spring. Source: [Olympic National Park](#)
- *Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park* - On October 21, the Paterson (NJ) City Council approved a \$1.14 million contract to replace the iconic footbridge at Great Falls. It was awarded to Colonnelli Brothers, Inc., of Hackensack, New Jersey. Source: [northjersey.com](#)
- *Reconstruction Era National Historical Park* - On September 9, the NPS signed a Finding of No Significant Impact for a General Management Plan. Source: [Reconstruction Era National Historical Park](#)
- *San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park* - On November 4, the park will begin a temporary suspension of entrance fees to Hyde Street Pier due to the relocation of the fleet to Mare Island for a restoration of the pier. November 3 is the last day for public visitation to the *Balclutha* tall ship. Source: [San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park](#)
- *Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site* - On September 20 and 21, members of the United Methodist Church met with representatives of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes to “continue on a path of healing,” including acknowledging the church’s role in the Sand Creek massacre and “develop a coordinated response and commit denominational resources to enact it.” Source: [UM News](#)
- *Saratoga National Historical Park* - The American Battlefield Trust donated 25.6 acres of land to the park. It is located south of Fish Creek. Source: [Times Union](#)
- *Shenandoah National Park* - The park premiered a new film, called “Shenandoah.” It is now showing at Byrd Visitor Center and will be shown at the Dickey Ridge Visitor Center

starting in Spring 2025. It is also available [online](#). The film was made in collaboration between the park and Orange Frame Productions. It was funded by recreational fees.

Source: [Shenandoah National Park](#)

- *The White House and President's Park* - On October 20, the White House introduced a revamped public tour program, the first change to the program in “decades.” It will include an added stop in the Diplomatic Reception Room, allow visitors to “go further inside each room,” and include amenities to make the tour more interactive and educational. The new tour was supported by First Lady Jill Biden. Source: [UPI](#)
- *Valles Caldera National Preserve* - On October 18, the Department of the Interior and Jemez Pueblo finalized a settlement allowing the Tribe to occupy and use Banco Bonito for traditional cultural and religious purposes. The agreement comes after “years of litigation” and a recent court ruling in favor of the Tribe. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
- *Virgin Islands National Park* - On October 22, the park released a Request for Qualifications for the Caneel Bay Lodging Zone leasing opportunity. They are due by December 27. Source: [Virgin Islands National Park](#)
- *Virgin Islands National Park* - The park, with support from the NPS’ Historic Preservation Training Center, is currently engaging in a project to stabilize the Cinnamon Bay Danish Warehouse ruins, which sustained significant damage during Hurricane Irma in 2017. The project is expected to be complete in November. It is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act. Source: [Virgin Islands National Park](#)
- *Voyageurs National Park* - *The Timberjay* published [an article](#) about the October 13 memorial service for ranger Kevin Grossheim, who died in the line of duty while rescuing a group in the park (see [10/16/24 Coalition Report](#)). Source: *The Timberjay*
- *Waco Mammoth National Monument* - On October 21, Baylor University finalized an agreement with the park to transfer “thousands of fossils and original photographs” from excavations to the NPS. Baylor and the Mayborn Museum Complex will stay in possession of the materials as officially-designated park partners, but the items are now federally-owned. Source: [KCEN](#)

Personnel Changes

- *National Capital Region* - Jennifer “Jen” Takouhi Nersesian was selected as the new regional director. Jen has 22 years of NPS experience, most recently as superintendent of Gateway National Recreation Area. She begins her new role on December 1. Source: [National Park Service Office of Communications](#)
- *Rock Creek Park* - Brian Joyner was selected as the new superintendent. Brian has over 20 years of NPS experience, most recently as the deputy superintendent at Rock Creek

Park. Source: [Rock Creek Park](#)

Park People

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

Deceased

- Robert “Lex” Barnett, 91, passed away on October 18. Lex worked at Yellowstone National Park for a time. Source: [Jacksonville.com](#)
- Andrew Galewsky, 69, passed away on October 15. Andrew worked for the NPS for several years, including at Guadalupe Mountains National Park, Carlsbad Caverns National Park, and Big Thicket National Preserve. Source: [Legacy/ Fredericksburg Standard Radio-Post](#)
- Gary Kent McCurdy, Sr., 89, passed away on October 12. Gary volunteered for a time at Yellowstone National Park in his younger years. Source: [Legacy](#)
- Einar Offerdahl, Jr., 77, passed away on October 9. Einar worked “in various capacities for the Department of the Interior,” including a stint as the procurement officer for Glacier National Park. Source: [Legacy/ Daily Inter Lake](#)
- Edwin Andrew Page, 88, passed away on October 18. Edwin was an 18th century reenactor and portrayed “John Quincy Adams for the National Park Service, as well as driving the NPS trolley in Quincy.” Source: [Dignity Memorial](#)
- Pamela “Pam” Steffen-Skeels, 56, passed away on October 22. Pam worked for several years at Zion National Park after graduation from college. Source: [FDL Reporter](#)
- Thelma Mothershed Wair, 83, passed away on October 19. Thelma was one of the “Little Rock Nine,” a group of Black students who desegregated Little Rock Central High School in 1957. Thelma received many honors for both her civil rights work and career in education. The story of the Little Rock Nine and its place in U.S. history is honored today by Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site. Source: [Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site](#)

In the News

- *Thrillist* published [an article](#) about Gabriel Mapel, “one of Death Valley [National Park]’s rangers and park medics.” It chronicles his journey to working in parks, as well as giving a sense of his work and life in Death Valley. Source: *Thrillist*
- *Business Insider* published [an article](#) about Megan Wright, who has been a concession

employee at several parks for about eight years. It chronicles her line of work and lifestyle working in parks. Source: *Business Insider*

Retired

- Phil Bradshaw is retiring after 28 years as president of the New Philadelphia Association. Phil oversaw the transition to the establishment of New Philadelphia National Historic Site in 2022. Gerald McWorter, who has served as the organization's vice president for "about a decade," has been selected as the new president. Source: [WLDS](#)
- Deb Yandala, president and CEO of the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park, will retire in Spring 2025. She has served in the role since 2002. Source: [Morningstar/PR Newswire](#)

Open for Comment

Items will stay on this list until public comment has closed.

- *Arches National Park* - Public comment is [open through November 23](#) on a Visitor Access and Experience Plan, including a timed entry reservation system, which the park has piloted for three years. Source: [Arches National Park](#)
- *Fort Pulaski National Monument* - Public comment is [open through November 9](#) on a development concept plan for facilities and infrastructure at the park, particularly deficiencies related to recent storms and continued sea level rise. Source: [Fort Pulaski National Monument](#)
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area* - Public comment is [open through November 15](#) on a proposal to change regulations about Off Road Vehicle use on shoreline access areas and unpaved roads in the Orange Cliffs Special Management Unit. Source: [Glen Canyon National Recreation Area](#)
- *Grand Teton National Park* - Public comment is [open through November 21](#) on design concepts for the Taggart Lake Trailhead. Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#)
- *Lava Beds National Monument* - Public comment is [open through November 24](#) on a Petroglyph Point site management plan. Source: [Lava Beds National Monument](#)
- *Mammoth Cave National Park* - Public comment is [open through November 15](#) on a land and river trail management plan for the park. There is [a storymap](#) and [informational video](#) about the project. Source: [Mammoth Cave National Park](#)
- *Natchez National Historical Park* - Public comment is [open through November 30](#) on a concept plan for the Forks of the Road Slave Market site in Natchez, Mississippi. Source: [The Natchez Democrat](#)

- *National Heritage Areas* (an NPS-administered program) - Public comment is [open through November 25](#) on a feasibility study for the designation of Ka'ena Point as a National Heritage Area. Source: [Maui News](#)
- *National Mall and Memorial Parks* - Public comment is [open through October 30](#) on a design concept for the proposed Fallen Journalists Memorial. Source: [National Mall and Memorial Parks](#)
- *New River Gorge National Park and Preserve* - Public comment is [open through November 8](#) on a proposal to demolish “up to 19 historic structures and one modern addition to a historic structure.” This project will allow for upgrades to infrastructure at the park. There is [a storymap](#) available for the project. Source: Steve Hastings
- *Padre Island National Seashore* - Public comment is [open through November 15](#) on a draft Feral Exotic Invasive Species Management Plan, including the removal of feral swine and antelope (nilgai) to protect federally threatened and endangered species. Source: [Padre Island National Seashore](#)
- *Rock Creek Park* - The District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority and NPS have [opened public comment through December 6](#) on a proposal to construct the Piney Branch Tunnel Project within Rock Creek Park, part of the larger DC Clean Rivers Project to better control stormwater and sewage overflow. Source: [Washington Citypaper](#)
- *Valles Caldera National Preserve* - Public comment is [open through November 3](#) on a fire management plan. Source: [Valles Caldera National Preserve](#)

Other Department of the Interior and U.S. Forest Service News

- *Proposal to expand Okefenokee* - On October 18, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a proposal to add 22,000 acres to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, including the area proposed by Twin Pines Minerals to extract titanium sands from 600 acres on Trail Ridge. The Twin Pines project has been controversial (and opposed by the USFWS) and the permits are still awaiting approval by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division. The USFWS proposal would not block the mine project, but would “open the door for the agency to work with willing landowners nearby to acquire their properties or explore other conservation solutions to protect the refuge.” Comments on the proposed expansion may be submitted through November 18 at okefenokee@fws.gov. Source: [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)
- *USFS freezes hiring of seasonals* - The U.S. Forest Service reported that it will not hire seasonal workers next summer, with the exception of fire staff, due to budgetary issues. Going forward, the agency reports that it will prioritize workers already on staff and only consider internal candidates for filling positions “in most cases.” They also intend to hire

fire-related positions at lower general service levels (pay grade) when possible. Source: [Oregon Public Broadcasting](#)

- *Downlisting of endangered woodpecker* - On October 24, the Department of the Interior announced the downlisting of the red-cockaded woodpecker from endangered to threatened status. The species was listed as an endangered species in 1973, when populations were listed at 1,470 clusters. They were recently estimated at 7,800 clusters across 11 states. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *BLM committee for Public Lands Rule* - On October 18, the Bureau of Land Management announced that it will establish a national advisory committee for the implementation of the Public Lands Rule. Comments about its establishment are due by November 4. Nominations for membership on the committee are due by November 18.
- *Geothermal development* - On October 17, the Bureau of Land Management proposed a new categorical exclusion that would apply to geothermal resource projects of up to 20 acres. The permitting proposal would “help accelerate the discovery of new geothermal resources throughout the West.” They also announced the approval of the Fervo Cape Geothermal Power Project in Beaver County, Utah. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *\$375 million from SNPLMA* - On October 29, the Department of the Interior announced the award of \$375 million in Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act funds for 36 projects in Nevada and the California side of Lake Tahoe. The projects are related to recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, reducing hazard fuels, and preventing wildfires. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Salton Sea rehabilitation* - On October 15, the Bureau of Reclamation, California Natural Resource Agency, and other stakeholders broke ground on “the latest phase” of the Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat Project. The \$250 million five-year project is an effort to enable water conservation while suppressing dust and restoring aquatic habitat. It is being funded by the Inflation Reduction Act. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Provo River Delta restoration* - On October 26, a project to restore the delta between the Lower Provo River and Utah Lake was completed and reopened to the public. The project will aid in the recovery of the threatened June sucker, and included improved visitor amenities, such as trails, parking restrooms, nonmotorized boat launches, fishing platforms, interpretive features, and a wildlife-viewing tower. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *KS drought mitigation* - On October 22, the Department of the Interior announced the award of \$9 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding for the Kansas Equus Beds Aquifer Recharge, Storage and Recovery Project near Wichita and the Kansas Water Transition Assistance Program. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *NV lithium mine approved* - On October 24, the Bureau of Land Management announced

the approval of the Rhyolite Ridge Lithium-Boron mining project in Nevada's Silver Peak Range. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

- *Atlantic wind lease sale* - On October 29, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management completed the first commercial sale for floating offshore wind on the Atlantic Coast. Four areas in the Gulf of Maine were leased to two provisional winners for just under \$11 million. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

Congressional Actions

Reports on legislation, upcoming hearings, and new public laws of relevance to the national parks, prepared by Chris Soller, former superintendent of Fire Island National Seashore and legislative specialist for the National Park Service.

New Public Laws

Nothing to report.

Senate Actions

As the Senate was either in Pro Forma Session or on recess during the last two weeks, there is nothing to report.

House of Representatives Actions

As the House was either in Pro Forma Session or on recess during the last two weeks, there is little to report. However, that said, on October 22, a report was filed for H.R. 1314, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to enter into partnerships to develop housing, and for other purposes.

Incidents

Listed alphabetically by park.

Big Bend National Park

Hiker fatality

On October 27, park staff noted that a vehicle had been parked for multiple days at the trailhead for the Marufo Vega/Strawhouse/Ore Terminal Trail. They reviewed records and found there were no overnight backpackers listed for that area for those nights. They launched a quick search by the park pilot that evening. The following day, they began a more extensive search with both air assets and ground teams on the three different trails, with personnel from the NPS, U.S. Border Patrol, Texas Department of Public Safety, and U.S. Customs Air and Marine Operations. A deceased individual, 24-years-old, was found on the Marufo Vega Trail. A Department of Public Safety helicopter was able to recover the individual's body. Source: [Big Bend National Park](#)

Big Cypress National Preserve

Fire

On October 14, a fire began on the Kirby Storter Boardwalk at mile marker 62 of the Tamiami Trail. The Greater Naples (FL) Fire Department responded and was able to suppress the fire. However, most of the walkway was burned in the incident. The boardwalk and adjacent parking area currently are closed to the public. The cause of the fire is under investigation by the NPS.

Source: [Big Cypress National Preserve](#)

Blue Ridge Parkway

Illegal egress

The parkway has seen an increase in visitors “entering closed areas and vandalizing safety barriers” along the parkway, which has many closures in place due to damage sustained in Hurricane Helene. Unauthorized use is dangerous for visitors and slows recovery operations. The parkway has announced that it will begin enforcing closure violations with citations as necessary.

Source: [Fox Carolina](#)

Grand Teton National Park

Speed record attempt cited

On September 2, a 32-year-old professional “mountain runner” attempted to set a speed record for the ascent and descent of the Grand Teton. In doing so, the individual cut a switchback, a park violation. The individual’s route choice was published on their *Strava* account, as well as in their narrative description of the event. The individual was charged for their behavior. A park spokesperson stated, “It was a very public violation of NPS regulations, shared in such a public way by this influencer and sponsored athlete in association with [their] effort to achieve the fastest known time goal.” The individual faces a court appearance for the misdemeanor on November 19, with the possibility of a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or six months in jail. The site *FastestKnownTime.com*, which serves as “arbiter” of speed records, is not recognizing the record because of the violation of park rules. Furthermore, The North Face, a sponsor of the athlete, took down its post and narrative about the event after receiving backlash from the public.

Source: [Jackson Hole News and Guide](#)

Grand Teton National Park, Yellowstone National Park

Grizzly killed by vehicle

On October 22, the grizzly known as #399 was struck and killed by a vehicle on Highway 26/89 in Snake River Canyon, south of Jackson, Wyoming, outside of park boundaries. The grizzly was well-known due to her status as the oldest known grizzly bear to be still producing offspring, at 28-years-old. She was known to be with a yearling cub at the time of the accident. The status of the cub is unknown. Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#)

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Commercial trucks in restricted areas

The park has experienced an increase in large commercial trucks illegally driving on US 441/Newfound Gap Road, resulting in several incidents. On October 3, in two separate incidents,

a commercial car-hauler crashed into a wall and down an embankment, while another semi-truck had its brakes catch on fire. While responding to the incidents, eight other semi-trucks were observed illegally driving by. On October 5, a commercial truck crossed over the center dividing line and struck a pedestrian vehicle. The driver was cited. On October 13, a semi-truck became stuck overnight, requiring a tow out “backwards” the following day. The driver was cited. The NPS, in collaboration with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Government and Sevier County (TN), is staffing checkpoints on either end of the road to turn away commercial vehicles. Source: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#)

Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area

Lawsuit by NPS against power company

On October 17, the NPS filed a civil claim in federal court against Avista Utilities for “unauthorized activities to stabilize and replace an unpermitted power pole.” The permit for the pole expired in 1999. The company “and/or its contractor” is accused of driving off-road in an area not designated for off-road travel, cutting down trees, mechanically damaging trees, displacing native vegetation, and disturbing numerous archaeological features and artifacts in an adjacent site. They did not contact the park until after the work was complete. In a separate filing, the federal government offered to resolve the claims if the court orders Avista to pay \$900,000. Source: [KXLY](#)

Point Reyes National Seashore

Court filing by ranch residents

On October 11, a group of people living at agricultural operations in the park filed motions in federal court seeking to be involved with the ongoing mediation between environmental groups and the park regarding the continuation of agricultural activities in the park. The park’s approved 2021 General Management Plan amendment permitted the extension of five-year leases to 20-year terms. That amendment is under a lawsuit by the Resource Renewal Institute, Center for Biological Diversity, and Western Watersheds, which seek to end all agricultural activities in the park. A stay order is in place to allow for mediation, and all agricultural leases are currently set to expire on November 22. The new filing by ranch residents seeks to give them standing in the discussion. Source: [Marin Independent Journal](#)

Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield

Fire

On October 19, a grass fire ignited just past Stop 1 on the Tour Road, between the Ray Cornfield and the Gibson Mill Trail. Park staff and local fire departments responded and were able to contain the fire completely within a couple hours. About four acres of fields burned. No injuries were reported in the incident. The cause of the fire is under investigation. Source: [Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield](#)

Yosemite National Park

Tree fall fatality

On October 8, a 22-year-old and another individual were hit by a falling tree near Union Point on the Four Mile Trail. The trail was closed temporarily, and about “30 emergency personnel” responded to the scene. The 22-year-old was killed in the incident, while the other individual was flown by helicopter “for treatment at a hospital.” There were “wind gusts” that day that contributed to the tree toppling. Source: [The Union Democrat](#)

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Blue Ridge Parkway* - On October 23, the parkway reopened from Bamboo Gap (milepost 285.5) to Beacon Heights (milepost 305). This is the first section of roadway to open in North Carolina since Hurricane Helene. Many sites remain closed within that corridor, and visitors should follow directions on local signage. NPS staff from 64 parks and offices continue to work to assess and repair damage along the parkway. Source: [Blue Ridge Parkway](#)
- *Cowpens National Battlefield* - The visitor center, Loop Road, and a portion of the Battlefield Trail and picnic area have reopened since Hurricane Helene. The Nature Trail and a section of the Battlefield Trail remain closed, and some of the picnic pads are closed. Source: [Ninety Six National Historic Site](#)
- *Cumberland Gap National Historical Park* - A 12-person sawyer task force with staff from seven park units across the country has cleared over 500 trees from 10 miles of trail, allowing several trails to reopen. Some trails remain closed due to damage from Hurricane Helene. Source: [Cumberland Gap National Historical Park](#)
- *Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area* - On November 4, Route 611 south of Delaware Water Gap will reopen as a single-lane road. It has been closed since a rock slide in December 2022 (see [1/24/24](#), [2/7/24](#), [6/12/24](#), and *Coalition Reports*). The road will not be fully open with two lanes and no traffic signals until a more permanent solution is determined. There is no timeline for that goal yet. Source: [Pocono Record](#)
- *Kings Mountain National Military Park* - The visitor center and roads have reopened since Hurricane Helene. Trails remained closed. Source: [Ninety Six National Historic Site](#)
- *Ninety Six National Historic Site* - The visitor center and a portion of the Battlefield Trail have reopened. All other trails are closed until further notice. Utility crews are working to restore internet and phone service. Source: [Ninety Six National Historic Site](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The family of the 22-year-old who went missing while hiking Eagle Peak (see [10/2/24](#) and [10/16/24](#) *Coalition Reports*) has continued an unofficial search for the individual. Though the park has allowed the family to continue its ground searches in the aftermath of the park’s discontinuation of an active search, it has denied a request for a contractor to fly ground searchers in via helicopter. In its denial, the park cited the inability to verify the pilot’s experience and the park’s currently limited resources

for a rescue on the mountain if anything went wrong. The U.S. Forest Service also denied a request for a volunteer helicopter flight. Source: [WyoFile](#)

Acknowledgments

This newsletter is supported through Coalition staff and invaluable volunteers:

- Editor: Katie Wallace
- Tech and Production Support: Amy Gilbert Fehir, Steve Pittleman, Emily Thompson
- Regular Correspondent: Chris Soller
- Issue Contributors: Bill Walters

If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to:

report@protectnps.org.

* * * * *

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."

To receive a copy of this free publication, [join or support the Coalition](#). Any current, retired, or former-salaried (GS, Wage System, Seasonal, Temporary, or SES) National Park Service employee or volunteer who served under a signed volunteer agreement can join the Coalition. Coalition supporters who do not qualify under those criteria [may also join](#) and receive the newsletter.

--- ### ---