



The Coalition Report

Wednesday, April 15, 2026

Coalition Actions

The Coalition submitted [comments](#) opposing the NPS' proposed rule to defer to Alaska state laws on hunting and trapping in national preserves under its domain. This would weaken protections for wildlife and subsistence users.

We joined 16 other conservation groups in submitting [comments](#) to the Bureau of Land Management opposing their proposal to revoke a 20-year moratorium on oil and gas leasing on federal lands around Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

The Coalition joined with other members of the National Parks Second Century Action Coalition in submitting [comments](#) to Congress urging a modest funding increase for the NPS in FY27 appropriations to support staffing and operational and infrastructure shortfalls.

We joined Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Western Watersheds Project, and Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance in submitting [comments](#) to the Bureau of Land Management arguing that its proposed lease of parcels in southeastern Utah on the Old Spanish National Historic Trail have not appropriately considered the National Environmental Policy Act and Administrative Procedure Act.

Our staff and Executive Council continue to provide statements and interviews to the media highlighting challenges to the National Park System. Recent work includes:

- [Judge halts Trump White House ballroom project, protecting historic landmark and rule of law](#), Coalition press release
- [President's budget will make crisis at our national parks far worse](#), Coalition press release
- [Victory: court ruling halts destructive data centers adjacent to Manassas National Battlefield Park](#), press release by National Parks Conservation Association

- [Interior Department planning more changes to National Park Service staffing](#), *National Parks Traveler*
- [“We’re losing that crucial point of contact”: The trouble at Yosemite National Park’s gates](#), *SFGate*
- [Concern raised over length of public comment periods](#), *National Parks Traveler*
- [Environmental, Tribal concerns persist as fireworks bring ‘rock concert in phone booth’ to Rushmore](#), *South Dakota Searchlight*

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.

- *Proposed 25% NPS budget cuts* - The Office of Management and Budget released President Donald Trump’s proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget, which allocates \$2.1 billion for park operations, a 25% cut. This includes 72% less funding for construction than the 2025 budget, and a 18% reduction in full-time staff (~2,920 positions). Source: [Deseret News](#),
- *Downsizing initiative* - On April 2, the Department of the Interior announced an effort to “optimiz[e] operations [and] streamlin[e] outdated bureaucracy” across the department, including “aligning more National Park Service positions to visitor-facing roles.” This includes another round of the Deferred Resignation Program and Voluntary Early Retirement. At the NPS, the incentivized departure programs are only being offered at regional and national offices. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *DEI snitches given whistleblower status* - On March 18, the Department of the Interior sent a memo to all employees outlining opportunities to “report suspected DEI-related discrimination, retaliation, or related violations of law” and offering them whistleblower status for doing so. Source: [SFGate](#)
- *Science series* - On March 31, the National Park Service published a series of 12 articles called “Picturing the Unseen,” featuring science across a variety of parks. Source: [National Park Service](#)
- *Clemson Hartzog Awards* - On April 2, the Clemson University Institute for Parks announced its 2026 George B. Harzog Jr. Environmental Awards. Jeffrey Marlon, who recently retired after a 39-year career at the NPS and U.S. Geological Survey, received the Benton H. Box Award. Kurt Repanshek, editor of *National Parks Traveler*, received the Walter T. Cox Award. Thomas Medema, former NPS associate director for interpretation, education and volunteers, received the William C. Everhart Award. Lisa Mendelson-Ielmini, deputy regional director of the National Capital Region, received the Fran P. Mainella Award. Source: [ClemsonNews](#)

- *Study says park crowding may be positive* - A new study published in *Tourism Management* suggests that the experience of community found in national parks with higher density visitation can sometimes feel positive, providing a sense of security and social vibrancy, particularly for community-focused cultures. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
- *Scientists catalog NPS sounds* - The University of Vermont published [an article](#) about the Listening Lab, an effort to record and analyze soundscapes in national parks across the U.S., in partnership with the NPS' Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division. Source: *University of Vermont Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources*
- *John Oliver offers park pass covers* - On March 29, John Oliver, popular comedian and host of *Last Week Tonight*, ran a piece about the America the Beautiful passes, which prominently feature President Donald Trump. In it, he announced a new website, [johnolivergivestrumpheads.com](#), in which users can download and print free designs to cover President Trump's face. Source: [Syracuse.com](#)
- *Parks ranked by affordability, crowds, convenience* - *HomeToGo*, a vacation rental platform, made a ranking of national parks (in name, not all NPS units) that takes into account affordability, crowds, and convenience for transportation and vacation rental availability. The top three parks were Death Valley, Petrified Forest, and Shenandoah, while the bottom three were Dry Tortugas, Wind Cave, and New River Gorge. Source: [HomeToGo](#)

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Alaska Region* - On April 8, the U.S. Geological Survey published a new edition of *Alaska Park Science*, featuring recent collaborative research between the USGS and NPS across Alaska. Source: [U.S. Geological Survey](#)
- *Big Bend National Park* - *The New York Times* published an article about efforts to build a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico within the national park, and both conservative and liberal groups that oppose the effort. Customs and Border Protection recently changed its online map to no longer include plans for a physical barrier in the park, but officials are still debating whether the wall will be built throughout the region. Source: [The New York Times](#)
- *Big Bend National Park* - Just weeks before a long-planned construction project to tear down and rebuild the Chisos Mountain Lodge, the project was canceled due to design challenges, implementation delays, and rising construction costs. It has been modified and a contract solicitation focusing exclusively on the Chisos Basin water system rehabilitation will move forward. The lodge reconstruction may take place in the future if funding and design challenges can be resolved. Source: [Chron](#)

- *Cape Hatteras National Seashore* - On April 1, the park announced a special use permit issued to Dare County (NC) for a project to repair the southernmost groin in Buxton, North Carolina. Source: [Cape Hatteras National Seashore](#)
- *Chickasaw National Recreation Area* - On April 13, the park began a project to repair roadways at 12th Street/Bromide/Rock Creek. Delays may be in place throughout the project, which is expected to be complete on May 30. Source: [Chickasaw National Recreation Area](#)
- *Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area* - On April 6, the NPS began a rehabilitation of the Old Mine Road, between Route 560 and Route 206. Closures will be in place until the end of summer. The work is part of a \$16.9 million project being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act, which will later include rehabilitation of a six-mile section of Route 209. Source: [Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area](#)
- *Dry Tortugas National Park* - On March 31, the park announced that archaeologists have identified the original burial site of Private George Tupper, the only known service member buried at Fort Jefferson. He had been reinterred in Florida. The burial site was located during a survey of potential locations for a new radio tower at the park, and the archaeological survey turned up a variety of artifacts from the 19th century. Source: [Dry Tortugas National Park](#)
- *Fort Washington Park* - On April 13, the park began a repair project at the Historic Fort, including the drawbridge, casemates, and interior rooms. Temporary closures will be in place until the conclusion of the project on April 24. Source: [National Capital Parks - East](#)
- *George Washington Memorial Parkway* - The Department of the Interior filed a design with the Commission of Fine Arts to build a 250-foot arch on Memorial Circle adjacent to Arlington National Cemetery. The current arch design includes the words “One Nation Under God”, a winged Lady Liberty, and two 24-foot eagles. The arch has already had a lawsuit filed, with a federal judge requiring the Trump administration give the court 14 days’ notice before beginning construction, and requiring a notice of authorization on the NPS planning, environment, and public comment (PEPC) website. Source: [NBC News](#)
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area* - *GearJunkie* published [an article](#) about the decline of Lake Powell due to drought, and some advocates’ desire/prediction to see the dam removed and the Colorado River restored. Source: *GearJunkie*
- *Golden Gate National Recreation Area* - On April 8, all six board members of the Presidio Trust were fired. The Trump administration has previously called the agency an “unnecessary governmental entity.” The Presidio Trust is in charge of rehabilitating and leasing former Army base buildings in the Presidio, and is funded through its leases. Source: [The New York Times](#)
- *Golden Gate National Recreation Area* - President Trump’s proposed Fiscal Year 2027

budget includes \$152 million to reopen Alcatraz as a prison. Some estimates price the structure's rehabilitation at over \$2 billion. Source: [KQED](#)

- *Great Sand Dunes National Park* - On April 13, the park began a employee housing rehabilitation project in the park, including expanding the number of units to 18, accessibility improvements, and upgrades to utilities and fire suppression systems. The \$14 million project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act, and executed by HMP Contracting of Lakewood, Colorado. Source: [Alamosa Citizen](#)
- *Honouliuli National Historic Site* - The park has announced the park will open for limited public tours once per month, starting this summer. Though the park has been an NPS site since 2015, it has remained closed and inaccessible to the public due to access issues. Source: [SFGate](#)
- *Independence National Historical Park* - On April 9, a federal appeals court upheld a lower court's order that an exhibit about people enslaved by George Washington should not be replaced until court proceedings determine the authority of the Trump administration to remove the original exhibit. Both courts have stopped short of ordering that the original exhibit be reinstated. Images of proposed exhibits to replace the former exhibit have been released [online](#). Source: [E&E News](#)
- *Indiana Dunes National Park* - The University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability published [a profile](#) on alumnus Jason Taylor, superintendent at Indiana Dunes. Source: *University of Michigan News*
- *Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area* - On March 30, the park closed the Fort Spokane Museum and Visitor Center for repairs, including the porch, roof, windows, exterior brick, and interior plaster. The project is being funded by the Great American Outdoors Act, and is expected to be complete in July. Source: [Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area](#)
- *Natchez Trace Parkway* - On April 15, the parkway will begin construction of a permanent pedestrian safety barrier on Double Arch Bridge near Nashville, Tennessee. The bridge will be closed and a detour will be in place throughout construction, which is expected to be complete in Spring 2027. Preventative maintenance, including repainting the bridge, will also be done during this time. Source: [Natchez Trace Parkway](#)
- *Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument* - SFGate published [an article](#) chronicling plans to build a second border wall through the park, including Quitabaquito Springs, home of two endangered species and an important site for Tohono O'odham people. Source: *SFGate*
- *Point Reyes National Seashore* - A biologist at the park recently observed California giant salamanders in Olema Creek for the first time. The salamander is a species of special concern in California. Source: [SFGate](#)
- *Point Reyes National Seashore* - On April 8, 12 ranches at the park closed their doors

permanently, as part of a settlement with the NPS and Nature Conservancy last year (documented heavily in past *Coalition Reports*). *SFGate* published [an article](#) reviewing what will become of the ranchers and their employees, as well as of the lands they vacated. Source: *SFGate*

- *Rocky Mountain National Park* - A new study published in *Wilderness and Environmental Medicine* found that among over 600 park visitors surveyed, “a minority of participants met our definition of wilderness prepared, about half were altitude prepared, and approximately a quarter did not tell anyone where they were going or when they expected to return.” Source: [National Parks Traveler](#)
- *Saratoga National Historical Park* - On April 26, the park will debut a new exhibit, a 266-year-old French cannon named “La Poesie” (Poetry). The cannon was part of a secret arms shipment that came to New Hampshire in 1777 and “played an important role in setting the stage for the Battles of Saratoga.” The cannon will be on display for two years, in honor of the 250th anniversary of the United States in 2026 and the 250th anniversary of the Battles of Saratoga in 2027. Source: [Saratoga National Historical Park](#)
- *Stonewall National Monument* - On April 13, the Department of the Interior and NPS “confirmed their intention to maintain a Pride flag at Stonewall” via court proceedings, stating it will only be removed for “maintenance or other practical purposes.” This is a reversal of a decision to remove the Pride flags in February after a memo guiding parks around non-US flags. Source: [The Guardian](#)
- *The White House and President’s Park* - On March 31, a federal judge halted the continuation of work on the proposed White House East Wing ballroom project, citing the lack of authorization from Congress to complete the project. On April 11, a federal appeals court ruled 2-1 for the temporary continuation of construction on the project through April 17, asking the lower court to clarify a series of national security-related questions. Source: [CNN](#), [The Washington Post](#)

Personnel Changes

- *Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area* - On March 31, the NPS announced that Eamon Leighty has been selected as the new superintendent. He has been the deputy superintendent at the park since 2021 and the acting superintendent since March 2025. He has also worked at Independence National Historical Park. Source: [Pocono Record](#)

Park People

Deceased

- Douglas DeNio passed away on March 23. He worked for the NPS at the Denver Service

Center as an engineer for a time, as well as at the U.S. Forest Service. Source: [The Wright County Monitor](#)

- Robert “Bob” Edwin Gowdy Jr., 75, passed away on March 13. Bob worked at Rocky Mountain National Park in college. Source: [The Denver Post](#)
- Michael Eugene Johnson, 73, passed away on March 26. Michael did “concession work on Isle Royale National Park” for a time. Source: [Upper Michigan Source/TV6](#)
- Cory Gene Osieczonek, 54, passed away on February 8. He worked at Isle Royale for a time. Source: [The Daily Mining Gazette](#)
- John Edward Salisbury, 81, passed away on December 19, 2025. John helped get the McLoughlin House added to Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, where he later worked. He also worked for the NPS at Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area. Source: [The Independent](#)

Open for Comment

Items will stay on this list until public comment has closed. Listed alphabetically, except for items affecting the entire NPS, which are listed on top.

- *Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail* - Public comment is [open through May 15](#) on a management plan for Kauleoī, a 95-acre shoreline parcel on the South Kona coast. Source: [Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail](#)
- *Death Valley National Park* - Public comment is [open through April 16](#) on an Accessibility Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan. Source: [Pahrump Valley Times](#)
- *Denali National Park and Preserve* - The Environmental Protection Agency has opened public comment on a water quality certification for the Toklat Gravel Extraction Project in the park. Comments can be made via email. Source: [Environmental Protection Agency](#)
- *Flight 93 National Memorial, Fort Necessity National Battlefield, Friendship Hill National Historic Site* - Public comment is [open through May 1](#) on a white-tailed deer management plan for the three parks. Source: [Flight 93 National Memorial](#)
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - Public comment is [open through April 22](#) on proposed improvements to the Oconaluftee River Trail. Source: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#)
- *Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument* - Public comment is [open through May 6](#) on a General Management Plan for the park. Source: [Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument](#)

- *Los Angeles Coastal Area Special Resource Study* - Public comment is [has been extended through May 23](#) on a Special Resource Study of the Los Angeles coast for possible inclusion in the National Park System. Source: [National Parks Traveler](#), [Los Angeles Daily News](#)
- *Natchez Trace Parkway* - Public comment is open through May 3 on engineering evaluations and cost analyses for cleanup of the [former Ridgeland Firing Range](#) and the [former Port Gibson Firing Range](#). Source: *Natchez Trace Parkway* ([Ridgeland](#), [Port Gibson](#))
- *Petroglyph National Monument* - The NPS, City of Albuquerque, and Tribal partners have opened [public comment through April 30](#) on visitor services and facility enhancements for Boca Negra Canyon and the Lava Shadows area. Source: [Petroglyph National Monument](#)

Congressional Actions

Reports on legislation, 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.

With Congress in recess the past two weeks, there is nothing to report this period.

Other Relevant Department of the Interior and U.S. Forest Service (Dept. of Agriculture) News

- *USFS moves* - On March 31, the U.S. Forest Service announced it will move its headquarters to Salt Lake City, Utah, “to move leadership closer to the forests and communities it serves.” They are also moving away from a regional model to a more state-focused approach, similar to the Bureau of Land Management. Some regional office function will move “to a network of operational service centers.” Multiple research stations will be brought under a single research organization based in Fort Collins, Colorado. Employees in closed offices will be offered reassignment in new offices. Source: [Department of Agriculture](#), [Government Executive](#)
- *BOEM & BSEE merger* - On April 3, the Department of the Interior announced the merger of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement into the Marine Minerals Administration. The move is “intended to improve coordination and increase efficiencies across offshore leasing, permitting, inspections and environmental oversight.” Source: [Department of the Interior](#)
- *Record offshore oil production* - On April 1, the Department of the Interior announced a record level of offshore oil production in 2025, 714 million barrels. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

Incidents

Listed alphabetically by park/program.

Catoctin Mountain Park Chronic Wasting Disease

On April 9, the NPS announced that two deer tested positive for Chronic Wasting Disease at the park. They are the first CWD detections at the park. Source: [Catoctin Mountain Park](#)

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Sewer break analysis

The Washington Post published [an article](#) chronicling the construction delays that led to the rupture of a major sewer line in the park in January, one of the largest spills of untreated wastewater in U.S. history. D.C. Water had flagged corrosion and detached rebar on the pipe and requested fast-tracked repairs from the NPS as far back as 2018. Repairs on the line were delayed for a variety of reasons, including concerns about other environmental impacts, and scope and design changes that required restarting environmental assessments several times. Source: *The Washington Post*

Great Smoky Mountains National Park Wave of rescues

In March, the park responded to 18 backcountry search and rescue incidents, including two helicopter hoist extractions and four incidents involving technical rope rescue. Five other backcountry calls were able to be resolved through phone contact. They also encountered 15 frontcountry emergency calls, with four patients transported by life flight. Several of those were featured more prominently in the media (and two others were reported in the [4/1/26 Coalition Report](#)):

On March 28, a 65-year-old fell off a 60-foot cliff on the Alum Cave Trail. NPS personnel responded to the scene, but resuscitation efforts were unsuccessful.

On April 1, an individual was on Kuwohi Road near Diloons Gap when they experienced cardiac arrest. A Tennessee National Guard Blackhawk helicopter responded and flew the patient to the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville. The patient's condition was not reported.

Source: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#), [FOX5](#), [The Charlotte Observer](#)

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Mountain lion cub rescue

NPS biologists were monitoring a mountain lion with a GPS collar when they observed a change in her movements, indicating she may have abandoned a cub. It is suspected that the cub, which was missing toes on one of its hind feet, may have lost them due to umbilical cord strangulation.

The missing toes may have triggered an instinct in the mother to relocate the other kittens to a new den site in order to conserve resources. Staff from the NPS and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife determined the 3-week-old kitten was unlikely to survive on its own and decided to remove him from the wild. He has been named Crimson and has been brought to the Oakland Zoo, where he will soon be introduced to Clover, a female mountain lion cub rescued in El Dorado County, California, in early March. Source: [Los Angeles Times](#)

Yellowstone National Park

Sentence for thermal trespass

On March 31, a 50-year-old was sentenced to five days of incarceration for walking off the designated boardwalk at Mammoth Hot Springs at Canary Spring, Mound Terrace, Palette Hot Spring, and Jupiter Terrace. The action left footprints behind, damaged natural resources, and put the individual at risk of death. Source: [United States Attorney's Office: District of Wyoming](#)

Wildfires

- *Big Cypress National Preserve* - On April 3, the Hilux Fire was reported, located north of I-75 and east of State Road 29, near Bear Island Campground. Local closures are in place, including Bear Island, Gator Head, and Pink Jeep Campgrounds. As of April 12, the Hilux Fire was 420 acres and 35% contained, with 99 personnel assigned. Source: [Big Cypress National Preserve](#), [Western Fire Chiefs](#)
- *Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area* - On March 21, the Kane Fire was reported, burning 1 mile northwest of Highway 14A and Road 20, east of Lovell. As of April 1, the Kane Fire was 100% contained. Temporary closures will reopen after hazardous trees have been removed. Source: [The Ledger](#), *Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area* ([3/27](#), [4/1](#))
- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - On March 25, the park received report of a fire in the Twentymile Area. As of April 2, the Fox Gap Fire was 100% contained. All area closures have reopened. Source: *Great Smoky Mountains* ([3/26](#), [3/28](#), [3/30](#), [4/2](#)).

Follow-ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park* - On March 23, a 36-year-old was found guilty of assaulting an individual who was jogging on the Canal Towpath Trail near Point of Rocks in Frederick, Maryland in March 2026 (see [3/20/24 Coalition Report](#)). The individual was convicted of attempted third-degree sex offense, attempted fourth-degree sex offense, second-degree assault, and false imprisonment. Source: [Maryland State Attorney's Office](#)
- *Grand Canyon National Park* - Due to a break in the Transcanyon Waterline (see [4/1/26 Coalition Report](#)), on April 11 the park enacted additional water conservation measures at the South Rim, including reduced hotel occupancy, dry camping only at campgrounds, and fire restrictions. Source: [Grand Canyon National Park](#)

- *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* - On March 31, a federal judge granted the Department of the Interior's request to dismiss a lawsuit brought by victims of the 2016 Chimney Tops 2 Fire that destroyed much of Gatlinburg, Tennessee. In the ruling, they found that the NPS performed the required assessments and issued warnings as mandated by the park's Fire Management Plan, and though they made errors in assessing the fire, their judgment was protected under the "discretionary function exception." The plaintiffs may appeal the ruling or seek legislative action. Source: [Knox News](#)

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If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to:
report@protectnps.org.

The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks 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.

