



The Coalition Report

Wednesday, January 7, 2026

The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks is proud to announce our 2025 award winners:

- **Mike Reynolds** is the recipient of the 2025 George B. Hartzog, Jr. Award. Throughout his remarkable National Park Service career, Mike demonstrated unwavering dedication to protecting national parks and supporting the National Park Service workforce. His leadership strengthened parks across multiple regions, and his steady guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic provided critical reassurance in a challenging time. Although retired, he continues to be a trusted voice and tireless advocate for national parks and the NPS employees who care for them. We are honored to recognize Mike's exceptional service, integrity, and lasting contributions with this award.
- **John Garder** is the recipient of the 2025 Bill Wade 1872 Award. John has been an strong supporter for the National Park Service throughout his tenure with the National Parks Conservation Association, dedicating countless hours to strengthening federal support for our national parks. A trusted voice on Capitol Hill and an authoritative presence in the media, he has elevated critical issues ranging from appropriations to the impacts of staffing shortages and government shutdowns. His research, insight, and partnership have been invaluable to the Coalition's advocacy efforts. We are honored to recognize John's dedication, leadership, and partnership with this award.

Coalition Actions

The Coalition joined four other conservation groups in submitting [comments](#) to the National Park Service and Federal Aviation Administration arguing that the proposed voluntary agreement for flight tours over Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Muir Woods National Monument, Point Reyes National Seashore, and San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park does not comply with the National Park Air Tours Management Act, nor previous court decisions regarding the air

tours at the four parks.

We submitted [comments](#) to the Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers in opposition to proposed changes to which bodies of water are protected under the Clean Water Act.

The Coalition joined the Southern Environmental Law Center and 44 other conservation organizations in [comments](#) opposing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's and National Marine Fisheries Service's proposed rollbacks to the Endangered Species Act. We also joined 87 other organizations in [comments](#) against the removal of specific provisions of the law.

We continue to provide statements and interviews to the media highlighting challenges to the National Park System. Of note this week:

- [5th Annual Threatened and Endangered Parks: A Rundown National Park Service](#), *National Parks Traveler*

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.

- *Law enforcement to get bigger raise* - On December 17, 2025, the Office of Personnel Management announced that law enforcement positions will receive a 3.8 percent raise, starting on January 11, in contrast to the 1 percent increase for other federal employees. The "new special rates support ongoing agency hiring efforts for mission-critical law enforcement positions essential to implementing the administration's priorities." Source: [FEDweek](#), [Office of Personnel Management](#)
- *250th anniversary commemoration* - *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) about the ways a variety of NPS sites are commemorating the United States' 250th anniversary in 2026. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- *Original WPA NPS posters wanted* - The *Smoky Mountain News* published [an article](#) about the efforts of one individual, Doug Leen, to find original copies of all 14 National Park Service posters produced by the Works Progress Administration in 1938. Doug has found 12 of the park posters, and has negatives for the others, which has resulted in him creating silkscreen prints of the original posters, and a book, *Rediscovering the WPA Poster Art of Our National Parks*. However, he has never found an original for Great Smoky Mountains National Park or Wind Cave National Park. Doug is a former seasonal ranger at Grand Teton National Park. Source: *Smoky Mountain News*
- *Park pass sticker coverings banned* - In response to President Donald Trump's face appearing on America the Beautiful passes this year, several enterprising artists devised

stickers that would cover that section of the pass. In response, the Department of the Interior updated its “Void if Altered” rules for 2026 to include stickers and other coverings.

Source: [SFGate](#)

- *Multi-strike storms create worse fires* - New research published in *Science Advances* shows that fire complexes (lightning-ignited fires with multiple nearby starts) produce conditions in the atmosphere that lead to extreme fire behavior. They also tend to deplete agency resources to manage them effectively. Between 2012 and 2023, fire complexes accounted for 31% of all burned areas in California, and 59% in Arctic-boreal regions. The study highlights the need for weather agencies to develop the capability to predict dry lightning. The KNP Complex Fire in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks is referenced in the article. Source: [UC Irvine News](#)

Around the Parks

Reports are in alphabetical order by park/program name.

- *Anacostia Park, National Mall and Memorial Parks, Rock Creek Park* - On December 31, the Department of the Interior terminated the National Links Trust’s (NLT) 50-year lease agreement to operate the East Potomac Golf Course, Langston Golf Course, and the Rock Creek Golf Course (all are NPS sites). They stated that the nonprofit had not implemented required capital improvements and had failed to meet other, unspecified terms of the lease. The NLT stated that \$8.5 million had gone toward capital improvements at the courses, and that both rounds played and revenue had more than doubled during their tenure. They also had secured pro bono design work from three prominent golf course designers. The Department of the Interior also stated that they owed \$8.8 million in rent, which the NLT stated were rent offsets approved by the National Park Service. Source: *Orlando Sentinel*, [Golf](#)
- *Biscayne National Park* - The *Defense Visual Information Distribution Service* published [an article](#) about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ efforts to restore the Biscayne Bay coastal wetlands. They recently installed three pump stations to better distribute water and support critical habitat. Source: *Defense Visual Information Distribution Service*
- *Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area* - On December 7, the park began a major trail project at Island Ford. The effort will rehabilitate the area’s trails and add 2.2 miles of new trail, in alignment with the park’s 2022 comprehensive trails management plan. The project is being funded and co-managed by the Chattahoochee National Park Conservancy. Source: [Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area](#)
- *Denali National Park and Preserve* - A new book, *Safeguarding Mountain Social-Ecological Systems*, has a chapter dedicated to the impacts of permafrost thaw on the park. Source: [ScienceDirect](#)
- *Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Alaska Region* - *National Parks Traveler*

published [an article](#) summing up the current status of the long-litigated, proposed Ambler Road, which would cross Gates of the Arctic and have ecological impacts on other public lands in the region. Per an October 6 Executive Order by President Donald Trump, Alaska Regional Director Donald Striker granted right-of-way grants to the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority for the road and “permanent related infrastructure appurtenant within the road embankment”, stating “we are excited to work with you to accomplish President Trump’s energy orders.” Two lawsuits by environmental and Native Alaskan groups are currently active. Source: *National Parks Traveler*

- *George Washington Memorial Parkway* - The ongoing rehabilitation of the parkway has been somewhat delayed, and will continue into the new year. The project has been underway since Spring 2023, with lane closures in place since then. Most of the work is complete, with work still ongoing on several bridges south of the Route 123 interchange. Source: [WJLA](#)
- *George Washington Memorial Parkway* - On January 5, the NPS held a ribbon cutting at Theodore Roosevelt Island to celebrate the installation of 14 new freeze-resistant drinking fountains and bottle-filling stations along the Mount Vernon Trail. Source: [George Washington Memorial Parkway](#)
- *Glacier National Park* - On January 5, the NPS announced that Belton Chalets, Inc., has been selected for a 10-year concession contract providing backcountry lodging, food and beverage, and other services. They have held the concession since 2015. Source: [Glacier National Park](#)
- *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - Due to drought, both Lake Powell and Lake Mead are less than two-thirds full, creating challenges for both parks. *National Parks Traveler* published [an article](#) about the efforts each park has taken to maintain recreation access. Source: *National Parks Traveler*
- *Grand Canyon National Park* - New research published by the U.S. Geological Survey shows that wastewater-related contaminants were detected in springs along the South Rim of the Grand Canyon in samples taken in 2021 due to treated effluent from the South Rim Wastewater Treatment Plant. Though none of the contaminants exceeded drinking water standard or human health benchmarks, most of the compounds detected were pharmaceuticals that have no regulatory standards. Source: [U.S. Geological Survey](#)
- *Indiana Dunes National Park* - Save the Dunes, the park’s philanthropic partner, gave out its 2025 environmental stewardship awards. The Paul H. Douglas Memorial Award was given to Christopher Pergiel, honoring his 45-year career with the NPS, including many years at Indiana Dunes. The Dorothy Buell Youth Environmental Award was given to the Notre Dame Student Policy Network for their efforts producing white papers about a variety of important environmental issues. Source: [Save the Dunes](#)
- *Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park* - On January 6, the park will begin a safety

improvement project on Mountain Road. The project is expected to continue through the spring, and will require intermittent road closures. Source: [Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park](#)

- *Lake Mead National Recreation Area* - On January 5, the park began a rehabilitation of Willow Beach Road, from the entrance station to the nonmotorized boat launch area. It is expected to be complete in mid-March. The project is being executed by CORE Contracting Group. The \$2 million project is being funded by park entrance fees. Source: [Lake Mead National Recreation Area](#)
- *National Capital Region* - The NPS will fix fountains and water features at seven locations in Washington, DC, over the next couple of months. The \$54.2 million project is “part of a broader effort to restore aging infrastructure while improving the appearance of some of the city’s most prominent civic landscapes ahead of the nation’s 250th anniversary in 2026.” Locations include Meridian Hill Park, Rawlins Park, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, the World War II Memorial, Freedom Plaza, Columbus Circle, and John Marshall Park. Source: [The Washington Post](#)
- *National Mall and Memorial Parks* - On January 6, the NPS announced that City Sightseeing Washington DC, Inc., doing business as Big Bus Tours, has been selected for a ten-year concession contract providing interpretive transportation services. The new contract started on January 1. Source: [National Mall and Memorial Parks](#)
- *Yosemite National Park* - Recently retired interpretive ranger Yenyen Chan was honored with the National Parks Conservation Association’s 2025 Stephen T. Mather Award in recognition of her 25-year career with the NPS and contributions to park stewardship, cultural understanding, and resource protection. In particular, Yenyen daylighted the story of how Chinese Americans helped build critical park infrastructure and supported early tourism. Source: [National Parks Conservation Association](#)

Personnel Changes

- Cinda Merrill Waldbuesser was selected to be the president and CEO of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Cinda was formerly the deputy regional director of the NPS’ Northeast Region, and also has many years of nonprofit experience. She began her role on November 17, 2025. Source: [Appalachian Trail Conservancy](#)

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

- John Anton Hanuska, Jr., 101, passed away on November 17, 2025. John worked for “many summers” in Yosemite National Park, “in the Park Superintendents HQ [sic].” Source: [Legacy/Press Democrat](#)
- Robert “Bob” Heib, 79, passed away on December 27. Bob worked for the NPS for many years, as a facility operations specialist at Gateway National Recreation Area. Source: [Morning Times](#)
- Evelyn V. Klein, 83, passed away on January 1. Evelyn worked for the NPS for 30 years, including as one of the first employees at Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park as interpretation staff, and later as a law enforcement ranger. Source: [Schaetter Funeral Home](#)
- Renold “Ren” Paul Landon, 93, passed away on December 28. Ren worked for the NPS for many years, including Sequoia National Park. Source: [The Tribune](#)
- Edward “Ed” Joseph McCarthy, 80, passed away on December 13, 2025. Ed and his partner Diana volunteered for the NPS at Yellowstone National Park for three summers in their retirement. Source: [Legacy/Lewis Funeral Homes and Crematory - Milton Chapel](#)
- Vince Pasquale Pareago passed away on December 16. Vince worked for the NPS for 32 years. Source: [Legacy/Cremation Services Direct](#)

Retired

- Sandi Marra retired after six years as the director of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. *Backpacker* published [a profile](#) of her career and an interview about her time at the helm of the ATC. Source: *Backpacker*

In the News

- The *Cowboy State Daily* published [an article](#) about Jack Brush, a law enforcement ranger who was famous for his work on the Los Angeles Riots in the 1960s and in the arrest of Charles Manson. Jack worked as a law enforcement ranger in Yellowstone National Park for many summers during the 1970s through 1982, and the article features stories from his time there. He also worked for a time as a law enforcement ranger at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Source: *Cowboy State Daily*

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.

- *Bandelier National Monument* - Public comment is [open through February 1](#) on a fire management plan for the park. Source: [KRQE](#)

- *George Washington Memorial Parkway* - Public comment will be [open from January 12 to February 12](#) on a proposed plan for improvements near the Old Town North neighborhood of Alexandria, Virginia, including new trail connections to the Mount Vernon Trail, more access to the Potomac River, more public space, and transportation upgrades. Source: [George Washington Memorial Parkway](#)
- *National Capital Parks - East* - The NPS and Washington, DC's Department of Energy and Environment have opened [public comment through January 23](#) on an ecological restoration of Kingman Lake. Source: [National Capital Parks - East](#)
- *Olympic National Park* - Public comment is [open through January 21](#) on an initial design plan for the Hurricane Ridge Day Lodge, which burned down in May 2023. Source: [Olympic National Park](#)
- *Rocky Mountain National Park* - Public comment is [open through January 8](#) on a plan to improve wetland habitats and stabilize moose populations in the park. Source: [Rocky Mountain National Park](#)
- *Yellowstone National Park* - The NPS and the Federal Highway Administration have opened [public comment through February 4](#) on a proposal to reconstruct a new permanent North Entrance Road to recover from the 500-year flood event in June 2022. A temporary road has been in place since October 2022, and a more permanent solution is needed. Source: [Yellowstone National Park](#)

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.

New Public Laws

Nothing to report.

Senate Actions

Nothing to report, as the Senate was on recess for the holidays.

House of Representatives Actions

December 18 - The House passed H.R. 4776, the Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development Act (SPEED Act), to amend the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 to clarify ambiguous provisions and facilitate a more efficient, effective, and timely review process, by a year-and-nay vote of 221 yeas to 196 nays.

For the rest of the period, there is nothing to report, as the House was on recess for the Holidays.

Editor note: Our Congressional Action reporting is often a couple days delayed due to the timing of official notices and internal editing. That said, on January 5, the House Appropriations Committee passed an appropriations bill that would grant \$3.27 billion for the remainder of the fiscal year, about \$1.15 billion higher than President Trump proposed in budget requests last year. It will go next to the House for a vote. We will have more of a breakdown on that budget and updates to its trajectory through Congress in the next Coalition Report. Source: [Deseret News](#)

Other Relevant Department of the Interior News

- *Fire truck adaptation grants* - On January 6, the Department of the Interior announced the award of \$5.08 million to 97 local emergency response agencies through the Slip-on Tanker Pilot Program, which allows trucks or other vehicles to be operated as wildland fire engines. Source: [Department of the Interior](#)

Incidents

Listed alphabetically by park/program.

Big Bend National Park

Water pumps break

On December 23, the water pumps at Oak Spring broke. The back-up water pump was already out of the park for repair and is not available. The park enacted Stage 2 water restrictions at Chisos Basin to conserve the water currently stored in its tanks. Repairs to the pumps are expected to take at least several weeks, with no official estimate available. The Chisos Basin area remains open, but may need to close if the water levels drop to the minimum needed for firefighting. Source: [Big Bend National Park](#)

Congaree National Park

“Person in distress”

On December 30, a call was made to law enforcement for a welfare check on a person in the park. A several hour search was enacted, with personnel from the NPS, Richland County (SC) Sheriff’s Department, and State Law Enforcement Division. Dogs, helicopters, and heat-sensing equipment were utilized. The search was called off that evening, with law enforcement stating, “No one matching the description provided to law enforcement, or any signs of distress, were located.” Source: [The Post and Courier](#)

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Deer poaching

On December 22, a deer was illegally shot with an arrow in a field off Sparks Lane on the Cades Cove Loop Road. The park is looking for any information the public might be able to provide

regarding the incident. Source: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#)

Point Reyes National Seashore

Cliff rescue

On January 4, two hikers became stuck on a cliffside just south of Pelican Lake. A California Highway Patrol helicopter was able to perform a “skid landing” to rescue the two individuals. They were treated by an awaiting ambulance upon landing. Source: [ABC7](#)

Follow-Ups on Previously Reported Incidents

- *Olympic National Park* - The Upper Hoh Road opened the first week in January for the first time since a major storm flooded the road on December 10. It has taken several weeks for crews to make repairs and clear debris. Source: [Seattle Times](#)

Acknowledgements

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- Editor: Katie Wallace
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- Regular Correspondent: Chris Soller
- Issue Contributors: Steve Hastings, Mike Murray, Bill Walters

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.

