

YOUR AMERICAN WEST

PARKS

Nicodemus Celebrates the 146th Homecoming

Black Canyon of the Gunnison Celebrates the Stars

Artist-in-Residency Program Flourishes at Whiskeytown

EVENTS

Celebrate Christmas Past at Fort Larned National Historic Site

Experience Winter Wonder at Luminaria Nights

PRODUCTS

Holiday Gift Guide Inside!



Early morning sunrise in Keet Seel at Navajo National Monument (courtesy of NPS).

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Details

Western National Parks Association (WNPA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit partner of the National Park Service, serving more than 70 national parks in the western United States.

The Home Office and The National Parks Store are located at 12880 N Vistoso Village Drive, Tucson, AZ 85755. Learn more by contacting info@wnpa.org or visiting www.wnpa.org.



Letter from the President and Chief Executive Officer

As the glowing warmth of summer gently fades to crisp evening breezes, we welcome the wonders of the fall and winter seasons in our beautiful and uniquely inspiring Western national parks. Autumn is a time of change and preparation for the new life that springtime will bring, and I am grateful to share the news of another season of growth and collaboration for Western National Parks Association (WNPA) and our 72 partner parks. The summer brought historic events and engaging programs, as well as new challenges and opportunities for innovation and creativity. As we look forward to cooler weather, we build on these opportunities as we continue to honor the landscapes, histories, cultures, peoples, and communities of our national parks.

This issue of *Your American West* showcases the difference we make when we all work together to support our national parks. As WNPA remains committed to our mission to ensure that national parks are increasingly appreciated and experienced by all, we continue to develop new and innovative approaches to bringing people to the parks and parks to the people through education, interpretation, research, and community engagement.

As we share the stories of the recent programs and historic events of this past year, we acknowledge the vast and interconnected efforts of the many individuals and communities that made them possible. It is only through the tireless work of WNPA and NPS staff, community partners, volunteers, artists, researchers, storytellers, and advocates that we are all able to provide the vital network of support that parks need—and it is through the continued sharing of cultural and generational knowledge that we are able to better appreciate the historical and cultural significance that each park holds.

This fall, WNPA will continue the community outreach and engaging programs that inspire the connections between parks and communities, from cultural demonstrations and artist spotlights to volunteer events and children's programming. We recognize the importance of working alongside parks and people as we support parks today and help foster the next generation of park stewards. These ongoing efforts continue to promote the principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, as we work toward a more accessible and inclusive national park experience for all.

Looking toward the future, I am thrilled to announce that WNPA will host [TerraSync 2025](#), our premier training symposium for the national parks and public lands community. This dynamic professional development opportunity builds on our culture of innovation, collaboration, and community, and will bring together a diverse network of people passionate about supporting and preserving our nation's valued cultural, historical, and natural resources. Through this and other collaborative initiatives, WNPA will continue to support the relationships between the NPS and the many peoples, communities, and nations that connect deeply with the lands and stories of our national parks.

It is through the sustained and combined efforts of an entire community of national park advocates and enthusiasts that WNPA continues to build our support for our partner parks, helping to build awareness, appreciation, and respect for these landscapes, the stories of the past and present—and the promises of the future—that reverberate there. As we appreciate the changing seasons, I hope that everyone discovers even more about the experiences waiting for them in a national park and how to be a part of the national park community. As always, I welcome your thoughts and stories—ever inspired by how national parks have touched your lives—and I hope to see you in a park soon.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marie Buck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marie" and last name "Buck" clearly distinguishable.

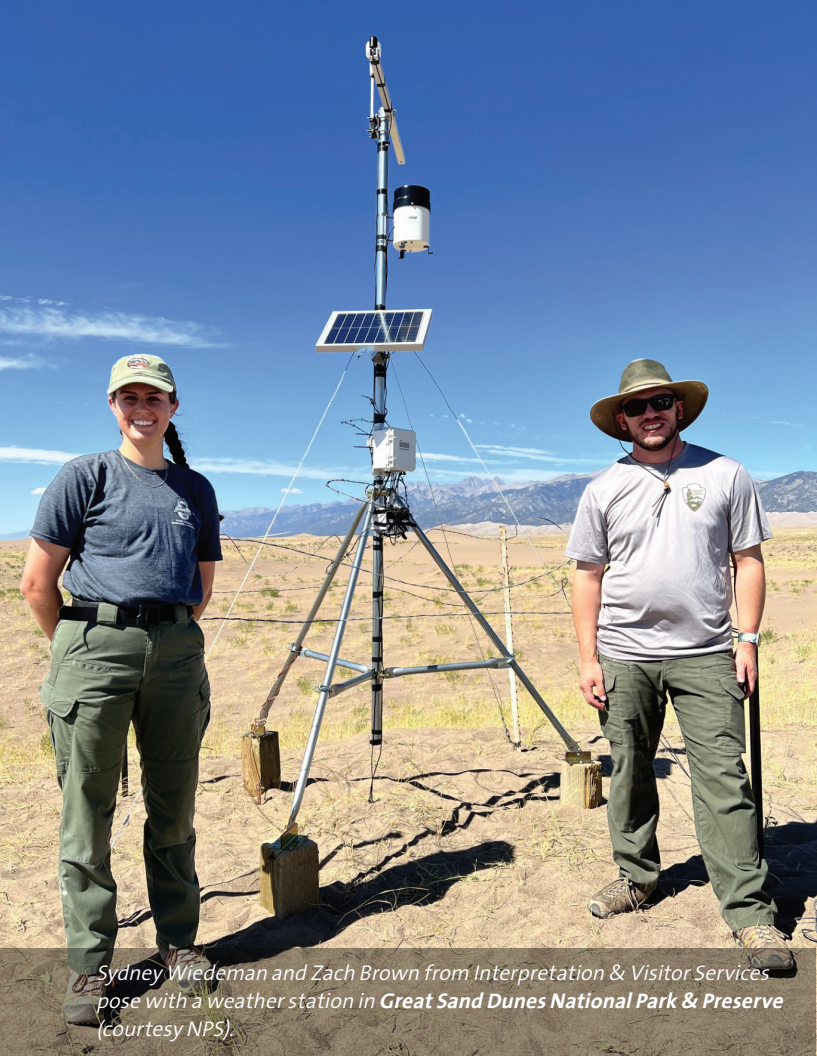
Marie Buck
President and Chief Executive Officer



Research Matters

The groundbreaking research conducted in national parks has far-reaching implications. At [Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve](#), where the tallest dunes in North America are found, scientists have installed special weather stations to learn how water, sand, and weather patterns have shaped this otherworldly ecosystem over thousands of years. Read more about how their findings can help us learn about other dune fields across the world—and even help unlock the secrets of landscapes on other planets—in this newsletter’s research story.

Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve (courtesy of NPS)



Sydney Wiedeman and Zach Brown from Interpretation & Visitor Services pose with a weather station in **Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve** (courtesy NPS).

Weather Station Data Helps Unlock the Mysterious Winds of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

By Nikki Stavile/WNPA

Located in Colorado's San Luis Valley and nestled in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, [Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve](#) protects the tallest dunes in North America and the dramatic surrounding landscapes. Some of these massive dunes stand 750 feet tall. Scientists believe that the 30-square-mile dune field formed as early as 400 thousand years ago, although the dunes visible today are considerably younger, a mere 12 thousand years. These striking landmarks were formed by the right combination of water, wind, and sand.

Distinct wind patterns were essential to the creation of the Great Sand Dunes, and they continue to shape the park today. Scientists study the winds and weather in this national park to determine how the park's habitat may change over time and the impact of a changing climate on these dune ecosystems.

“Understanding how dune systems work helps the NPS better manage them,”

writes Andrew Valdez, park geologist and principal investigator. “And it allows us to tell a more complete story [of the park] to the public and hopefully that contributes to their appreciations of such areas.”

Scientists have observed two types of wind patterns in Great Sand Dunes—simple and complex. Simple wind patterns, where the wind blows in one direction, bring sand into the valley from the southwest. They also can cause the dunes to move over time. In contrast, complex wind patterns, where the winds come from multiple directions, are believed to cause very large dunes to form. However, despite the fact that weather stations have been in the park since 2005, researchers still have many questions about the unique wind patterns found in this Colorado valley.

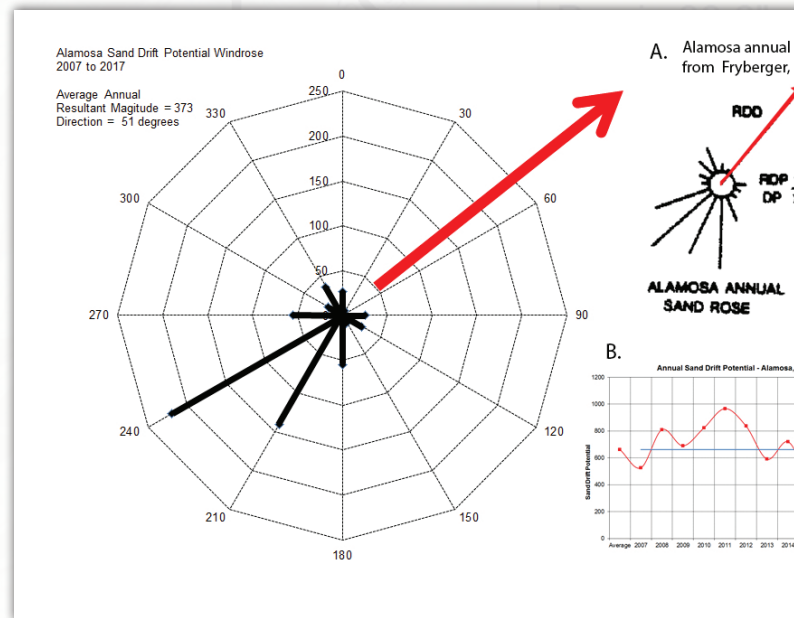
In 2023, Valdez bought two weather stations using a research grant from Western National Parks Association. He looked to answer two questions. Where do the wind patterns in the dune field change from simple to complex? And what are the wind patterns like at the most southwest portion of the park?

In September 2023, two tripod weather stations were installed. One was placed at the most southwest corner of the park. The other was placed near an important dune feature called a lunette, which is a collection of sand that forms on the downwind side of a lake. These weather stations have sensors to measure wind speed and direction, precipitation, humidity, and soil moisture and temperature. The park has not previously had a station that measures soil conditions. The weather stations are designed to collect data every five minutes, and are monitored with the help of park staff and summer interns. The data is shared with park staff during a monthly weather summary.

So far, data from the newest weather stations indicate that ground temperatures in Great Sand Dunes are often ten degrees warmer than air temperatures in the area. They have also been able to record seasonal fluctuations in humidity.

This data can help scientists understand how the Great Sand Dunes are different from other dune fields in North America, such as those in [Mojave National Preserve](#), and others across the planet. Some of these statistics could also inform us about completely different worlds.

Valdez has presented information gained from other weather stations in the park to the International Planetary Dune Workshop, which meets every two years



Sand rose calculations at Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve, from Inland Dunes of North America, edited by Nicholas Lancaster and Patrick Hesp, as quoted in the NPS final report (courtesy of NPS).

to discuss dunes on Mars, Titan, and Earth. Because scientists may not have such extensive data from dune fields on these other worlds, they often rely on information collected from similar environments on our planet in order to study and interpret dune fields elsewhere in our solar system. In the past, scientists at these conferences were impressed by the level of data and the fact that it was collected so close to the dune field. Valdez hopes to present information from the new weather stations at the next conference, as well as at events held by the Geologic Society of America. He also wishes to supply this information to the park's Interpretation Division, so they can provide visitors with the most up-to-date theories on how the dunes formed, based on the latest scientific research.

"[The park staff and I] are very pleased with the NPS/WNPA partnership, and the opportunities for these research grants," Valdez wrote in May of 2024.

"It's so nice to have data, especially when it helps finetune what is understood."



The weather station in Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve provides valuable information to researchers (courtesy of NPS).

Since 1938 WNPA has funded scientific research to help advance the management, preservation, and interpretation of our national parks. Discover more of the historical, social, and environmental research projects WNPA has funded in recent years on our [website](#).

People & Happenings

THE PORT CHICAGO 50 ARE EXONERATED AFTER NEARLY 80 YEARS

On July 20, hundreds attended [Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial](#)'s annual commemoration, which recognized and remembered the 80th anniversary of WWII's worst home-front disaster and a pivotal moment in the struggle for racial equity. Every year, this day of remembrance honors those who lost their lives on July 17, 1944, when two ships suddenly exploded as they were being loaded



Courtesy of NPS

with ammunition for the Pacific Theater. The blast instantly killed 320 people, including 202 African American sailors, and injured nearly 400 more.

Due to racial inequality and segregation, many African American men served at Port Chicago without adequate training

or safety measures. Despite the catastrophic loss of life on July 17, these men were forced to return to serve in the same dangerous conditions. However, the surviving African American sailors instead chose to protest this unjust demand. Their actions eventually led to the notable court-martial of 256 African American sailors, and the trial of 50. Click [here](#) for The Port Chicago Story.

This year's ceremony began a historic new chapter in the story of Port Chicago: exoneration. On July 17, 2024, nearly 80 years after the conviction of the Port Chicago 50, the Honorable Carlos Del Toro, United States Secretary of the Navy, exonerated all 256 African American sailors who were court-martialed and unjustly punished after refusing to return to dangerous

working conditions. These brave men live on in the hearts and minds of their families and a widespread community of advocates who worked tirelessly to bring about this historic moment of justice.

BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK HOSTS A HOMECOMING AND 70TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

In May, [Brown v. Board of Education National Historical Park](#) hosted a Homecoming Celebration in honor of the 70th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision that determined racial segregation in public schools to be unconstitutional. The park hosted a lunch for 200 attendees, including former students and educators of Topeka's four former African American elementary schools. Jeffrey Tully, NPS Park Guide, shared, "A highlight of the day was the catered lunch purchased in large part through [direct aid funding] provided by our bookstore partner, Western National Parks Association. So, many thanks, WNPA! We really appreciate your continued support of [Brown v. Board's] programming and special events."



Attendees watch a speaker at Brown v. Board of Education National Historical Park's 2024 Homecoming (courtesy of NPS).



Dineh Tah' Navajo Dancers performed at several national park sites to commemorate the Bosque Redondo treaty (courtesy of NPS).

SEVERAL NEW MEXICO PARKS COMMEMORATE THE BOSQUE REDONDO TREATY

In 1868, four years after the Diné (Navajo) were forcibly removed from their homeland and interred at Bosque Redondo, a treaty was signed between the United States government and the Navajo Nation. This treaty, hard fought for by the Diné, allowed them to return home to Dinétah (the sovereign Navajo Nation).



NPS/Patrick Myers

In June, to commemorate this historic event, several parks in New Mexico hosted a special presentation by Shawn Price, historian and director of the Dineh Tah' Navajo Cultural Program. The presentation, entitled "William T. Sherman: War Maker/Peacemaker," highlighted Sherman's early life, known Civil War exploits, his role with the 1867-68 Peace Commission, and the establishment of the Nation to Nation agreements. This commission established seven Tribal Accords, including the Bosque Redondo Treaty, which are legally profound to this day. As part of this event, visitors enjoyed a performance by the Dineh Tah' Navajo Dancers, an opportunity to learn about the

Diné's rich cultural heritage, bravery, and resilience. WNPA helped support events at several partner parks, including [El Malpais National Monument](#) and [Fort Union National Monument](#). The series was also showcased at [Aztec Ruins National Monument](#) and Fort Sumner Historic Site.

CROW NATION YOUTH PLACE FLAGS FOR MEMORIAL DAY

In honor of Memorial Day, youth from the Crow Nation placed approximately five thousand United States flags on the gravestones in Custer National Cemetery at [Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument](#). With WNPA support, students from the Pretty Eagle Catholic Academy joined park staff to participate in this tradition. This year, the students were able to place the flags right before stormy weather hit. Honored and memorialized at the cemetery are known and unknown veterans of our nation's wars, including women and children from isolated frontier posts, Native American scouts, and Medal of Honor recipients.



Every year, the graves at Custer National Cemetery are decorated with flags during a Memorial Day event (courtesy of NPS).

In the Parks

WANDERING IN THE CLEAR LIGHT OF NEW MEXICO: AUTHOR DISCUSSES THE WONDERS OF NEW MEXICO

On Saturday, June 8, [Petroglyph National Monument](#) hosted a WNPA-supported event with renowned author David Ryan on the park's beautiful patio. Ryan discussed his book *Wandering in the Clear Light of New Mexico*, expanding upon the profound experiences found within the state. Twenty-five years ago, after hiking the 2,180-mile Appalachian Trail, Ryan moved to New Mexico. He has since wandered and explored every corner of the state. This engaging event delighted New Mexico residents and tourists alike.

VISITORS EXPERIENCE LIVING HISTORY THROUGH HISTORICAL COOKING DEMONSTRATIONS

[Fort Larned National Historic Site](#) is famous for its incredibly illuminating and engaging living history demonstrations, which are the biggest and most extensive in western Kansas. These programs bring the 1800s fort to life. WNPA supported historical cooking demonstrations during a Memorial Day event that transported visitors to the lifeblood of the fort through a culinary perspective. Life at a fort was challenging and food preparation was just one part of that challenge. Through the park's demonstrations, which take place in the historical kitchen, visitors can gain a deeper appreciation of everyday living at a complex time and place of immense change for the nation.

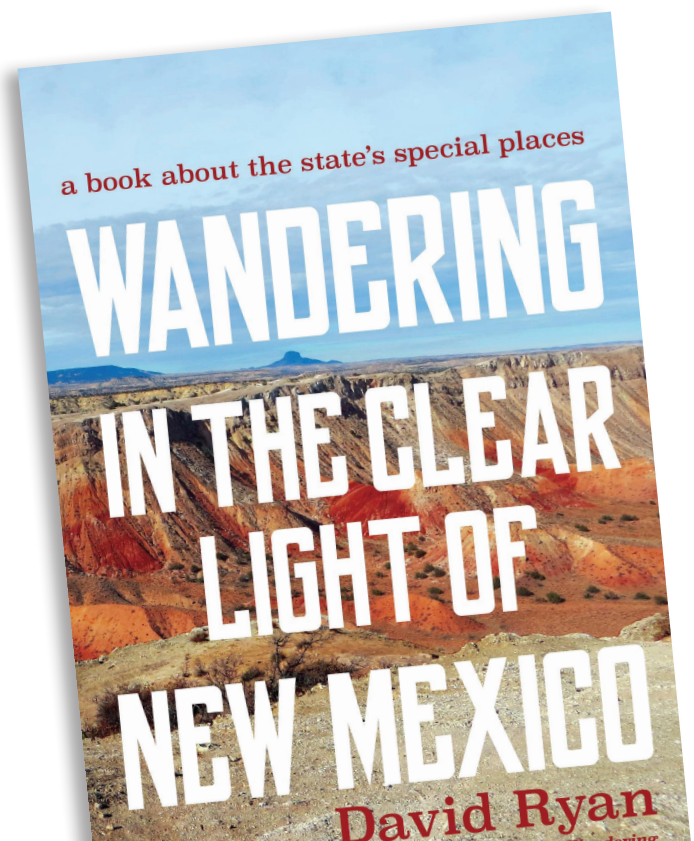
MESCALERO APACHE CROWN DANCERS PERFORM AT GILA CLIFF DWELLINGS

On April 20, [Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument](#) hosted a special cultural presentation, with the support of WNPA, featuring the Mescalero Apache Crown Dancers. The Apache Crown Dance is a ceremonial dance that celebrates ancestors, community, and traditions. The Mescalero Apache are among several peoples who hold sacred the land that the park helps preserve.

NICODEMUS CELEBRATES THE 146TH HOMECOMING CELEBRATION

Since 1878, [Nicodemus National Historic Site](#) has worked with the town of Nicodemus and the Nicodemus Homecoming Emancipation Celebration Group to celebrate emancipation, the hard-fought-for freedom from enslavement, during the annual [Homecoming Celebration](#). As the oldest and only remaining all-Black settlement west of the Mississippi, Nicodemus is a living and thriving community and is still considered home to those whose ancestors left the town generations ago. Homecoming is when descendants from all over the country return to Nicodemus to celebrate. With the energy of a family reunion mixed with a county fair, it is three days of fun, games, music, events, food, and other activities, with festivities starting in the mornings and going late into the night.

In 2024, Homecoming took place July 26–28 and was a tremendous success. With the support of many organizations including WNPA, attendees enjoyed refreshments, activities for all, and the strength of community that continues to resonate through the city.





Park rangers point green lasers at the sky. These are used for constellation tours (courtesy of C. Roundtree/NPS).

BLACK CANYON OF THE GUNNISON CELEBRATES THE STARS

On September 5–7, [Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park](#) held the annual astronomy festival known as AstroFest, which aims to help visitors develop and strengthen their knowledge and appreciation of the skies. This WNPA-supported event is packed with fun and engaging programming, including telescoping viewing and evening ranger programs. AstroFest is an astronomical experience held at an International Dark Sky Park known for its excellent protection of night skies from the harms of light pollution.

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCY PROGRAM FLOURISHES AT WHISKEYTOWN

Artists have had a long-standing impact on the formation, expansion, and direction of America's National Park System. From painters to writers,

photographers to composers, [Whiskeytown National Recreation Area](#) has had an Artist-in-Residence program since the early 2000s. The program inspires both visitors



Lynn Cunningham, former Whiskeytown Artist-in-Residence, paints in the serene landscape (courtesy of NPS).

and artists with a deeper appreciation and understanding of the park. Artists may apply for a two-to-three week residency during which they can camp and explore the beautiful natural history and cultural heritage of the park. Artists receive funding from WNPA. Spring residency applications are due in December and artists can learn more here: <https://www.nps.gov/whis/getinvolved/artist-in-residence.htm>.

Paintings by Whiskeytown Artists-in-Residence: "Whiskeytown Winter Morning," by Jennifer Gibson; "Crystal Creek Falls," by Joellyn Duesberry; "Kate Camden," by Kathryn Law (courtesy of NPS).



GOLDEN SPIKE COMMEMORATES THE 155TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LAST SPIKE CEREMONY

On May 10 and 11, [Golden Spike National Historical Park](#) hosted the commemoration of the 155th Anniversary of the Completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. Attendees had the opportunity to hear the incredible stories of those who came before and reflect on how an event over 150 years ago still holds lessons for us today. The complex story of the railroad has involved diverse communities, often with harmful impacts. Representatives from the Northwestern Band of Shoshone and the Chinese Railroad Workers participated in the commemoration, bringing awareness to important and often underrepresented perspectives.

BIGHORN CANYON BRINGS ENGAGING SUMMER PROGRAMS

Throughout August, [Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area](#) hosted a robust program of cultural, educational, and interactive events, bringing visitors from all walks of life together to experience the natural beauty, cultural heritage, and joyful recreation to be found there. With WNPA support, visitors were able to attend and enjoy ranger-guided programs, art-in-the-park events, geology talks, and so much more.



Many gathered at Golden Spike National Historical Park for an annual historical reenactment of the joining of the Transcontinental Railroad (courtesy of NPS).

Focus On

HUBBELL TRADING POST GOES ON THE ROAD

[Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site](#) is the oldest, continuously operating trading post on the Navajo Nation. The post supports the Ganado community and local artists and brings the vibrant Diné (Navajo) culture into other parks and communities. Last spring, the WNPA team from Hubbell Trading Post hit the road and traveled to parks like [Bandelier National Monument](#) and [Petroglyph National Monument](#) in New Mexico, as well as [The National Parks Store](#) in Arizona bringing with them a wide selection of authentic Native American weavings and jewelry for visitors and shoppers to browse, appreciate, and purchase. With rug talks from Diné Trader Wallace James Jr and weaving demonstrations from Diné weaver Tonita Yazzie, audiences learned about the beauty and significance of the sacred art of weaving.



Diné Trader Wallace James Jr gives a rug talk at The National Parks Store in Tucson, Arizona (WNPA).

WNPA DONATES FIXTURES TO LOCAL BUSINESS

WNPA recently remodeled the [Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument](#) park store. The resourceful park staff saw an opportunity to support Relmagine, a local Ajo, Arizona, business dedicated to sustainability through repurposing, recycling, and upcycling. Maria Singleton, park store manager, connected with Relmagine staff. They were overjoyed to repurpose the old shelving and racks from the park store, which were still in good working condition, and even came out to the park and helped take down the shelves. The park store held its grand reopening in August, and Relmagine was able to make excellent use of the old fixtures. This is just one example of how every small action can contribute to a healthier planet and stronger community.



TOHONO O'ODHAM HARVEST IS HONORED AND SHARED AT SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK

August is a special time in the Sonoran Desert and for the Tohono O'odham, who have lived in this desert homeland for generations. During the hottest time of the year, the saguaro fruit ripens and people prepare for the saguaro fruit harvest. At [Saguaro National Park](#), Maria Francisco and Tanisha Tucker Lohse carry on the work of the late Stella Tucker, a beloved family member, sharing their knowledge and friendship with park staff and special groups. Every year, they uphold this sacred practice during the annual Tucker family harvest camp. Maria and Tanisha demonstrate the steps of the harvest, share how the fruit has been and continues to be traditionally used, and teach participants about the cultural significance of the saguaro.

Maria Francisco and Tanisha Tucker Lohse carry on the work of the late Stella Tucker as they harvest the fruit of the saguaro at Saguaro National Park (courtesy of NPS).

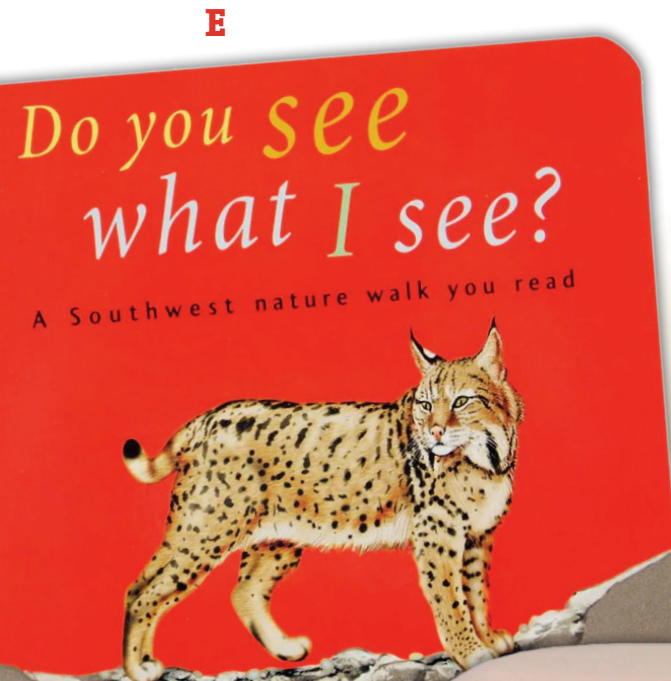
Holiday Gift Guide

Check out these ideas to get your holiday shopping started.

Shop any time at store.wnpa.org.

Under \$10

- A. [Prickly Pear Gummi Bears](#)
- B. [Prickly Pear Hand Cream](#)
- C. [Smokey Bear Paisley Bandana](#)
- D. [Smokey Bear Carabiner Clip Keychain](#)
- E. [Do You See What I See?](#)



Holiday Gift Guide

Check out these ideas to help you get started on holiday shopping.

Shop any time at store.wnpa.org.

Under \$30

- F. [Bison Miniblocks](#)
- G. [Passport™ to Your National Parks](#)
- H. [Passport to Your National Parks Junior Ranger Edition](#)
- I. [National Parks Mini Circle Sticker Set](#)
- J. [Eugy Wolf 3D Puzzle](#)
- K. [Channel Island Fox Plush Toy](#)
- L. [Junior Ranger Beanie](#)
- M. [Junior Ranger Vest](#)
- N. [Smokey Bear Comic Art T-Shirt](#)
- O. [Smokey Bear Knit Beanie](#)
- P. [Park Protector Membership](#)
- Q. [Ranger Rubber Duck](#)
- R. [Passport to Your National Parks Book—Collector's Edition](#)
- S. [Smokey Bear Bobblehead Figurine](#)
- T. [Yahtzee - National Parks Edition](#)



Holiday Gift Guide

Check out these ideas to help you get started on holiday shopping.

Shop any time at store.wnps.org.

\$30 and Up

U. [50 States Bucket List Bottle](#)

V. [Peanuts Nature Chick Ladies'](#)

W. [Saguaro National Park Collegiate Fleece Hoodie](#)

X. [Saguaro National Park Cycling Jersey](#)

Y. [Atlas of the Indian Nations](#)

Z. [Smokey Bear Fleece Hoodie](#)



Featured Events & Activities

Celebrate Christmas Past at Fort Larned National Historic Site

Come ring in the holidays frontier-style at one of the best preserved forts from the 1800s. This free event at [Fort Larned National Historic Site](#), located on the historic Santa Fe Trail, features historical reenactments, horse-drawn carriage rides with Santa, metalworking demonstrations, and much more! You can also enjoy hot apple cider and popcorn, and there are plenty of games and activities for the kids. Come join in on the fun on Saturday, December 14 from 11 AM to 3:30 PM.

Poetry and Picnicking in Saguaro National Park

Bring a picnic lunch and write your own poem at this special event at 1:30 PM on December 3 at the Mica View Picnic Area at [Saguaro National Park](#)! Join park staff and partners for the unveiling of a special picnic table featuring a nature-themed poem chosen by US Poet Laureate Ada Limón. Parking is limited, so be sure to arrive early.

Experience Winter Wonder at Luminaria Nights

Participate in a Southwestern tradition and see the national parks in a whole new way this holiday season by attending a luminaria night. Spanish for “illumination,” these tiny lanterns are part of cultural celebrations such as Las Posadas and traditional dances, or as year-end holiday decorations. You can see your favorite trails and cultural sites lit up at several of WNPA’s partner parks, including [Tonto National Monument](#), [Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site](#), [Tumacácori National Historical Park](#), and others. Some festivities may require advance registration—be sure to reach out to the park for details.

WNPA Hosts a Premiere Training Symposium in 2025

WNPA is proud to host the TerraSync training symposium from June 24–26, 2025, at The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa in Tucson, Arizona. This three-day event, presented in partnership with the National Park Service, includes practical skill workshops, talks by industry experts, and networking opportunities. This collaborative symposium is designed to provide attendees with the skills that they need to help preserve, protect, and enhance our national parks and public lands. If you’re a member of the public lands community, visit our website to learn more about registration, speaking, and sponsorship opportunities at terrasync.org.

Free Entrance Days in National Parks

Monday, November 11 is a day of free admission to our national parks in honor of Veterans Day. This will be the last fee-free day of 2024.

January 20 – Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.

April TBD – First Day of National Park Week

June 19 – Juneteenth

August 4 – Great American Outdoors Day

September 27 – National Public Lands Day

November 11 – Veterans Day

The entrance fee waiver doesn’t cover amenity or user fees for activities such as camping, boat launches, transportation, or special tours.

For the most current event information at WNPA-affiliated sites near you, check out their websites on nps.gov. For events at The National Parks Store in Tucson, Arizona, visit wnpa.org/events.

Visit the Parks

Make it a National Park Winter

By Julie Thompson/WNPA

Whether there's snow three feet deep or a beautiful frost that glimmers and melts with the rising sun, you'll find plenty of adventures in these and many other national parks beyond the sunny trails of summer and the golden hues of fall.

Experience the serenity of [Bandelier National Monument](#) during the winter months, where snow blankets the towering cliffs, canyons, and ancestral Puebloan architecture carved directly into the landscape. The crisp air will wake you up as you travel snow-dusted trails, enjoy cross-country skiing, or camp surrounded by the cultures of complex civilizations. Snow-capped landscapes frame Frijoles Canyon, creating a picturesque backdrop for your journey as iconic as the Grand Canyon. The quieter atmosphere allows for a more intimate connection with nature and history.

Slightly further north in Colorado, winter recreation awaits you at [Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve](#), where the combination of snowy peaks and vast, golden dunes creates a stunning landscape. Traverse the pristine, snow-covered dunes, offering a unique blend of desert and winter magic. The park's iconic peaks, softened by snow, provide a breathtaking backdrop for exploration. Sled down the frosted dunes—the largest dunes in North America. Snowshoeing, backcountry skiing, nature photography, and more await you.

Or, if you're not a fan of snow, you can escape to the warmth of [Saguaro National Park](#) during the winter months, where the majestic saguaro cacti, sacred to the Tohono O'odham, stand tall against clear blue skies. You'll find milder temperatures, perfect for hiking in the vast desert landscape. Winter unveils a serene beauty as sunlight bathes the rugged terrain, casting long shadows across the unique flora. Hike the scenic trails, marvel at the panoramic vistas, and

witness the vibrant sunsets that paint the saguaros in warm hues. With fewer crowds and comfortable weather, winter becomes the perfect season to discover or return to Saguaro National Park and its iconic desert scenery.

If you're looking for a different park experience in Arizona with opportunities for wildlife observation, camping, hiking, and impressive night skies, check out [Chiricahua National Monument](#). This geological wonderland has a rich heritage dating back thousands of years, telling the cultural, historical, and geological stories of the region. As a certified International Dark Sky Park, Chiricahua's starry nights are not only beautiful to observe—they also preserve important ecosystems. This is the perfect park for campers, hikers, amateur astronomers, nature enthusiasts, and anyone who appreciates the road less traveled. It's right outside of Willcox, Arizona, famous for its vineyards and wine-tasting rooms!

If you prefer a trip underground, a visit to [Carlsbad Caverns National Park](#) in the winter is like visiting another world. While it might be chilly outside, the well-lit cave remains a balmy 56 degrees Fahrenheit. Descend into the vast chambers, with stunning stalactites and stalagmites. Winter brings unique tranquility to the park, allowing visitors to marvel at the intricate underground landscapes without the crowds. Delve into the mysteries of this millennia-old landscape during this season. While you're there, swing by [Guadalupe Mountains National Park](#) in Texas—it's only about an hour's drive away!

Check the NPS website for alerts and closures as you plan your trip. While we often think of this season as perfect for staying cozy indoors, during the winter months, you can discover and experience a different side of your favorite national park. What once was running is now still. What once was rustling is now frosted over. What once was flowing is now calm. The sun shines differently through the trees. Cactus spines are luminescent as the sunrise turns midnight ice into shining beads. Landscapes take on a new life as you don skis and snowshoes or finally decide to hike that desert trail. Smaller crowds make the park feel bigger and more serene. You take a breath and inhale the crisp, fresh air, and you can feel grateful for a perfect park moment.

Kids in Parks

Another Successful Year for Camp Owa Chita

During this extraordinary summer camp at [Washita Battlefield National Historic Site](#), kids between first and fourth grade participated in engaging activities and enriching experiences, including creative and culturally relevant art projects and fun outdoor recreation. Black Kettle National Grassland led educational and interactive sessions and the kids learned about animals and the environment. This camp, supported by WNP, is free to attend and connects kids to a significant historical, cultural, and natural landscape.

Junior Rangers Have a Blast at Canyon de Chelly

[Canyon de Chelly National Monument](#) had a full house for their annual Junior Ranger Camp, sponsored by WNP and Capacity Builders Inc. Participants learned about traditional arts and stories through hands-on activities, including weaving, pottery making, silversmithing, and painting. The camp ended with a nature walk and a swearing-in ceremony as the group became official National Park Service Junior Rangers!

Fourth Graders Take a Field Trip to Channel Islands

In April, more than two hundred fourth graders traveled to Scorpion Island for a field trip to California's [Channel Islands National Park](#). This park preserves and protects the cultural and natural landscapes of five beautiful islands off the coast of southern California. WNP funded the boat transportation costs, supporting what the kids would call "The Best Field Trip Ever!" They observed the beautiful marine mammals on the boat ride to the island, the plentiful birds, and of course the famous, once-critically endangered island fox. It was a learning experience filled with outdoor recreation, environmental education, and lessons about sustainability.



For the most current event information at WNPA-affiliated sites near you, check out the NPS app or find the park at nps.gov.

Arizona

[Canyon de Chelly National Monument](#)
[Casa Grande Ruins National Monument](#)
[Chiricahua National Monument](#)
[Coronado National Memorial](#)
[Fort Bowie National Historic Site](#)
[Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site](#)
[Lake Mead National Recreation Area](#)
[Montezuma Castle National Monument](#)
[Navajo National Monument](#)
[Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument](#)
[Saguaro National Park](#)
[Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument](#)
[The National Parks Store](#)
[Tonto National Monument](#)
[Tumacácori National Historical Park](#)
[Tuzigoot National Monument](#)
[Walnut Canyon National Monument](#)
[Wupatki National Monument](#)

California

[Channel Islands National Park](#)
[Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site](#)
[John Muir National Historic Site](#)
[Mojave National Preserve](#)
[Pinnacles National Park](#)
[Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial](#)
[San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park](#)
[Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area](#)
[Whiskeytown National Recreation Area](#)

Colorado

[Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site](#)
[Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park](#)
[Curecanti National Recreation Area](#)
[Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve](#)
[Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site](#)

Kansas

[Brown v. Board of Education National Historical Park](#)
[Fort Larned National Historic Site](#)
[Fort Scott National Historic Site](#)
[Nicodemus National Historic Site](#)

Montana & Wyoming

[Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area](#)
[Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument](#)

Nevada

[Great Basin National Park](#)
[Lake Mead National Recreation Area](#)
[Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument](#)

New Mexico

[Aztec Ruins National Monument](#)
[Bandelier National Monument](#)
[Capulin Volcano National Monument](#)
[Carlsbad Caverns National Park](#)
[Chaco Culture National Historical Park](#)
[El Malpais National Monument](#)
[El Morro National Monument](#)
[Fort Union National Monument](#)
[Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument](#)
[Pecos National Historical Park](#)
[Petroglyph National Monument](#)
[Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument](#)
[White Sands National Park](#)

Oklahoma

[Chickasaw National Recreation Area](#)
[Washita Battlefield National Historic Site](#)

Texas

[Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument](#)
[Big Thicket National Preserve](#)
[Chamizal National Memorial](#)
[Fort Davis National Historic Site](#)
[Guadalupe Mountains National Park](#)
[Lake Meredith National Recreation Area](#)
[Lyndon B Johnson National Historical Park](#)
[Padre Island National Seashore](#)
[Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park](#)
[San Antonio Missions National Historical Park](#)

Utah

[Golden Spike National Historical Park](#)
[Timpanogos Cave National Monument](#)

Trails

[Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail](#)
[Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail](#)
[Santa Fe National Historic Trail](#)
[Trail of Tears National Historic Trail](#)



As a nonprofit education partner of the NPS, WNPA raises funds for our national park partners. But we can't do it without you. Your contributions to our fundraising efforts improve visitor experiences, aid operations, and expand educational opportunities.

Your generosity supports more than 70 park sites across 12 states and countless visitors and park staff.

From serene shorelines to mountain ranges against dark skies, from historic forts and trails to inspiring cultural sites echoing with stories from past and present, our Western parks make up our shared heritage.

Your gifts, along with sales from our national park stores, ensure these places are protected for generations to come.

Your donation:

- Empowers the next generation through Junior Ranger programs
- Funds critical scientific research and discovery
- Tells the stories of our parks through ranger-approved interpretative programs, events, videos, books, and more

Together we can make a difference. Your investment of \$75 or more ensures that this critical work can continue. If you have already donated, thank you for your support.

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