2020 and Beyond

When the clock strikes midnight each year, we take time to reflect on the past and consider the future. We set resolutions, establish our goals, and hope to do better. As we kickoff 2020, we’re celebrating the start of a new year and a new decade; a momentous occasion not just for individuals but for our organization as well.

Over the past ten years, the Coalition’s efforts and impacts have grown. Since 2010, we’ve gone from a few hundred members to nearly 2,000. This year, we have taken over 100 actions in support of our national parks and public lands, compared to less than twenty annual actions five years ago. In 2015, I was hired as the first employee of the Coalition. In 2020, we have two full time staff and three part time contractors.

Looking ahead, we know our public lands will continue to face threats. The steady wave of administrative actions, legal battles, and legislative challenges are sure to continue. We will have plenty of work in front of us, regardless of the results of the upcoming election. Our parks have been underfunded under Republican and Democratic administrations. The need for more funding in the face of climbing visitation is sure to continue.

The Coalition’s success is tied to the motivation and dedication of our members. Our staff and Executive Council are grateful for the role that each of you play in our work. We continue to rely on your time, energy, and generosity. Let’s keep up the momentum and ring in a decade of victories for our parks.

Amy Gilbert Fehir
Executive Director
The Work Continues

Thank you for your support of the Coalition. Your donations, the contributions of your time, and your thoughtful feedback are greatly appreciated. It is extremely rewarding to hear from you and to know that you are engaged in the issues we are tackling every year.

2019 has been a challenging year. But thanks to your support, we have been able to expand our capacity and allow our voices of experience to be heard loudly and often. We took over 100 actions in 2019, a record for our organization. Our Issues Committee has been hard at work, joining our partners to address a variety of troubling policies and practices such as energy extraction, the NPS budget, DOI reorganization, privatization of some NPS operations, the Ambler Road in Alaska, electric transmission lines in Colonial NHP, and many more. It’s already clear that 2020 will not be any quieter and our plate will be full yet again. Legal challenges are already in the works, as we may submit an amicus curiae brief for a case related to a pipeline that is scheduled to cross the Appalachian Trail and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

I want to thank our Executive Council and staff, Bill Wade, Bill Halainen, our partners, and those of you who wrote letters, submitted comments, and raised your voice on behalf of our National Park System. Collectively we made 2019 a year of progress. We will continue to meet challenges by further expanding our capacity and persisting in the fight to protect our parks and public lands. The work continues in 2020.

Phil Francis
Chair
Introductory Summary on Issues

The Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks relies on advocacy and communication to make a major impact on National Park System and Service issues. In an ever-changing political environment, these issues are constantly evolving and critically important. If we see a concern, we take action. Our issues work falls under three categories:

- Multiple Agency Issues - broad, politically driven issues that would impact multiple federal agencies or jurisdictions, including the NPS.
- NPS Service-wide Issues - broad, service-wide issues, often based on Congressional actions that could impact numerous, if not all, parks in the National Park System.
- Park Specific Issues – typically precedent setting issues with the potential to negatively impact park resources and values. Because our capacity to engage in park-specific issues is limited, the Coalition must be selective in which park-specific issues we can engage.

The Coalition took action on approximately 100 issues in 2019, a record year of productivity for the Issues Committee and the many Coalition members who contributed to this important work. Our efforts have focused mainly on “defense of public lands” work – responding to the Administration’s many harmful management proposals and proposed rule changes that would open up public lands to increased commercial exploitation of resources or dramatically weaken essential protections for national park resources and values. The Coalition has also proactively advocated for adequate funding for the NPS and for reauthorization and full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This high level of productivity has truly been a team effort, with not only Issues Committee members stepping up to handle the increased workload, but also numerous Coalition members contributing to the collective effort. Here are highlights of our collective effort in 2019:
Energy-related development near or through units of the National Park System continue to be a significant focus of the Coalition’s advocacy work. The current administration continues to ramp up oil and gas drilling and mineral extraction on public lands near numerous national parks, while weakening environmental protection regulations, shortening public comment periods, cutting protest period times, and making environmental review optional. This reckless combination of policies has limited the ability of park advocates to weigh in when parks will be negatively impacted by lease sales. As a result, these policies threaten the clean air, scenic vistas, clean water, natural quiet, and dark skies in national park areas adjacent to the increasing number of drilling sites on public lands, particularly in the American West. Similarly, proposed oil and gas pipeline construction across the Appalachian Trail and Blue Ridge Parkway; uranium mining near the Grand Canyon; and road construction through Gates of the Arctic National Preserve in Alaska to access a remote, as yet undeveloped, mining area are indicative of the Administration’s bent for catering to energy development interests at the expense of the long-term conservation of park resources and values.

The energy-related actions we have taken this past year include:

- Filing an amicus brief with NPCA in opposition to the NPS decision to issue a right-of-way (ROW) permit under a categorical exclusion for the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) crossing of the Blue Ridge Parkway. We also sent a follow-up letter urging the NPS to prepare a proper NEPA analysis, and we continue to follow a related case involving litigation against the U.S. Forest Service and their issuance of a ROW for the pipeline to cross the Appalachian Trail.
- Encouraging DOI to postpone oil and gas lease sales until after the government shutdown in order to ensure adequate BLM staff were on duty to implement the leasing process properly.

- Opposition to the use of hydraulic fracking to extract oil and gas near the national parks and monuments in California’s Sierra Nevada Mountains and advocating concerns about the adequacy of BLM’s analysis of potential impacts of oil and gas wells proposed near Dinosaur National Monument.

- Support for H.R. 3225, the Restoring Community Input and Public Protections in Oil and Gas Leasing Act, with hundreds of Coalition members signing a letter to key Congressional officials encouraging them to support and co-sponsor the legislation.

- Submission of comment letters to both BLM and NPS regarding the proposed construction of a new mine road through Gates of the Arctic National Preserve to allow a Canadian company to access the remote, as yet undeveloped, Ambler Mine District west of the Preserve.

- Submission of an op-ed opposing the current administration’s proposal to lift the ban of uranium mining near the Grand Canyon. Resumption of such mining would pose significant threats to water quality, human health, and park resources.
Since 2017, the Coalition has been an active voice in advocating for the protection of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments in Utah, even though these particular monuments are not managed by the NPS. In our view, the Administration’s decision in 2017 to dramatically downsize Bears Ears (by 85%) and Grand Staircase-Escalante (by 50%) and thereby significantly reduce protections for both areas was an improper use of the President’s authority to designate national monuments under the Antiquities Act. Weakening that authority by such actions could have potentially significant and very harmful implications to both the integrity of the National Park System and to the conservation of our nation’s public lands. While legal challenges to the President’s questionable downsizing decisions work their way through the courts, the administration continues to push draft management plans forward that would serve to institutionalize the downsizing decisions. As a result, in 2019 the Coalition joined several partner groups in submitting formal protests of proposed monument management plans (MMPs) for both Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante. In addition, we submitted comments to BLM advocating that they go further than they had proposed in limiting opportunities for recreational target shooting at Bears Ears in order to better protect the cultural sites, natural soundscapes, and the variety of “quiet” outdoor recreation opportunities mentioned in the monument proclamation, as well as public safety for monument visitors.
The Department of Interior (DOI) is moving forward with its plan for reorganization. According to DOI, the 12 new regions are organized around ecosystems with the goal of improving interagency coordination and management. Field directors, which DOI calls Field Special Assistants (FSAs), have been appointed to each region to improve communication within regions and to the public. The Coalition has opposed this new organization, fearing that the new field offices will bypass Headquarters offices and report to political appointees at the departmental level. We believe that the new alignment is unnecessary, confusing, inefficient, and costly, which could result in the politicizing of NPS operations.

We have also opposed the reorganization and relocation of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) headquarters and some employees from Washington, D.C. to locations out west. This move to weaken BLM at a national level will be devastating to national parks, as parks depend on cooperation with neighboring agencies such as BLM to retain ecosystem and cultural integrity. The directors of federal land management agencies work together in DOI and moving BLM to the west makes it far more difficult for these agencies to collaborate and ensure the continued protection and preservation of our national parks.

The Coalition has taken numerous actions in opposition to the reorganization. We have worked closely with our colleagues at the Public Lands Foundation (PLF), an organization made up of current, former, and retired BLM employees. We have sent letters, issued statements, and signed on to a letter, written in partnership with other conservation groups and sent to Congressional leadership, expressing deep concern about the administration’s reorganization of DOI.
2019 began with the continuation of an unprecedented shutdown of the federal government. Coalition Executive Council Member Richard Ring testified before the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee in January on the negative effects of the shutdown on the national parks and National Park Service (NPS) staff.

The federal government reopened on January 25th, 2019, after a 35-day shutdown. However, the administration’s use of NPS fee money to keep open certain national parks led to an oversight hearing by the House Interior appropriations subcommittee where Coalition Chair Phil Francis testified about the impact the shutdown had on the parks and NPS employees. He also released the results of a Coalition survey, detailing the impacts documented in a cross-section of national park units during the shutdown. This survey was widely covered in the media after the hearing.

The FY 2019 appropriations bill was finally signed into law in February 2019. The bill appropriated $3.22 billion for NPS in FY 2019, well above the president’s proposed $2.7 billion budget request. The administration then submitted a mirror image request of $2.75 billion for the NPS in FY 2020.

The Coalition took a strong stance against the FY 2020 budget in various statements to the press, on social media, and through letters to Congress. Coalition Executive Council Member Richard Ring testified before the House Interior appropriations subcommittee that NPS funding would need to be increased by $565 million in FY 2020 to bring the NPS back to the level of services the agency provided in FY 2009. This was followed by a statement for the record by Phil Francis to the Senate Interior appropriations subcommittee.

The Coalition continues to monitor the expenditure of NPS funds each year and calls out the administration when funds...
are spent unwisely. Nowhere was this more egregious than the president’s Salute to America on the Mall in Washington, D.C. this past July 4. The Coalition issued a number of statements to the press about the $2.5 million in national park operations funds and entrance fees that were diverted to pay for this event.

The NPS had been operating under a continuing resolution since the beginning of the fiscal year. In December, the House and Senate resolved their differences on all appropriations bills and the president signed the bill into law. Congress appropriated $3.77 billion for the NPS, which is $154.6 million above the FY 2019 funding level, and $635.6 million above the president’s budget request. The increased funding provided by Congress will help make a dent in filling a number of vacancies across the service, as well as addressing the deferred maintenance backlog and other vital needs of the NPS.
Department of the Interior Nominees

On April 11, 2019, the Senate confirmed the nomination of David Bernhardt, of Virginia, to be Secretary of the Interior, by a vote of 56 yeas to 41 nays. Bernhardt had previously been confirmed in July, 2017, as the department’s deputy secretary. A former lobbyist for the oil and gas industry, Bernhardt had been DOI solicitor as well as the head of congressional affairs for the department during the George W. Bush administration, among other positions. The Coalition sent a letter to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, published several op-eds, and issued other statements to the press and through social media expressing our deep concerns about Bernhardt’s nomination due to his past actions and conflicts of interest.

Bernhardt was nominated to replace former secretary, Ryan Zinke, who resigned at the beginning of the year under an ethical cloud. Shortly after Bernhardt’s confirmation, the Inspector General’s office at the Department of the Interior confirmed that an investigation had been opened into Bernhardt due to a number of potential conflicts of interest and other violations. Those IG investigations are continuing.

Additionally, on June 27, 2019, the Senate unanimously confirmed the nomination of Robert Wallace as the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. Wallace, a native of Wyoming, brings 45 years of experience to the position, having served as head of congressional affairs for the National Park Service, worked on Capitol Hill, and led government affairs operations in the private sector. The Coalition wrote to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee expressing its support for Wallace’s nomination.
This report would not be complete without mentioning that the National Park Service has now gone without a director for over three years – something never accomplished in the history of the Park Service. Since Jon Jarvis retired as director on January 3, 2017, NPS has been without a permanent director.

P. Daniel Smith was designated as deputy director of NPS on January 9, 2018, by former secretary Ryan Zinke. On January 28, 2018, the secretary announced that Smith would serve as acting director. When Smith exceeded the 120 days allowed by law in his acting capacity, the secretary, with an assist from the solicitor’s office, continued its norm-breaking by finding legal authority that allowed Smith to resume his position as deputy director of NPS while exercising the authority of the director. This same verbal gyration had previously been used to allow NPS career professional Mike Reynolds to act as director for over a year at the beginning of this administration.

Smith continued to exercise the authority of the director through the administration’s unsuccessful effort to have David Vela confirmed as the director of the National Park Service during the 114th Congress.

Smith finally left his position on September 30, 2019, with David Vela assuming the same deputy director position while exercising the delegated authority of the director of the National Park Service. It appears that NPS will remain without a director for the entire four years of the current administration. This inaction speaks volumes about the relative lack of importance of placed upon national parks and National Park Service employees by this administration.
The Land and Water Conservation Fund

In February 2019, the Coalition celebrated the passage of S. 47, the Natural Resources Management Act, a bipartisan package that included over 100 parks and public lands bills. A key component of S. 47 was the permanent reauthorization the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), something that the Coalition and other conservation groups have advocated in support of for many years. The House subsequently passed the same bill later in February.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was created by Congress in 1964 as a bipartisan commitment to safeguard natural areas, water resources, and our cultural heritage, and to provide recreational opportunities for all Americans. National parks and public lands have been set aside for conservation and public enjoyment thanks to LWCF funds. Local communities have benefited from LWCF through the creation of playgrounds, trails, and ball fields.

Though the permanent reauthorization of LWCF was a success, we continue to advocate for mandatory, full funding. Every year, $900 million is authorized to go into the fund. And every year, funds are redirected for other purposes.

We have issued numerous statements advocating for permanent reauthorization and full funding of this critical program. Our executive council members have met with editorial boards at newspapers from Maine to Washington, providing context and firsthand examples of the importance of LWCF in national parks. Coalition members in states across the country have submitted op-eds and letters to the editor, urging their Congressional representatives to show their support for LWCF. Our advocacy continues as we turn our attention to FY 2020.
James River Powerlines

In June 2017, the Army Corps of Engineers issued a construction permit to the Dominion Electric Company to build a section of powerline that would cut through what has been called “one of the nation’s most historically rich areas.” Seventeen towers, as tall as 295 feet, would be built across the James River, causing substantial adverse impact to the landscape and other resources of Colonial National Historical Park, Carter’s Grove National Historic Landmark, and the Captain John Smith National Historic Trail.

The Coalition joined forces with several partner groups in a lawsuit to halt the construction, submitting a detailed Amicus Curiae brief that pointed out the impacts the powerline would create. Though a U.S. District Court initially allowed construction, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia reversed that decision in March 2019. The higher court ruled that the Corps of Engineers had erred by failing to prepare a full environmental impact statement and directed the Corps to do so.

This favorable decision, which specifically cited the Coalition’s Amicus brief, set an important precedent for NEPA law. However, on remand the District Court decided not to vacate the permit for the towers, a decision that seems contrary to the guidance from the Circuit Court. An appeal has been filed contesting this decision, but the towers currently remain standing.

The EIS is now in preparation, and the comment period is expected to open in spring 2020. The Coalition plans to submit comments and will continue watching this situation closely.
The Coalition, along with Tribes and several conservation organizations, submitted comments to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in February opposing oil and gas leasing in New Mexico near Chaco Culture National Historical Park – a World Heritage Site – and Aztec Ruins National Monument. The comments expressed concerns about a number of potential adverse cultural and natural resource impacts to the Chaco Culture NHP from possible oil and gas development. In late May Interior Secretary David Bernhardt announced that BLM would change course and defer leases within 10 miles of the park over the next year while regulators prepare a new management plan for the region’s resources. A similar provision was included in the Interior appropriations bill and signed into law by President Trump in late December, confirming that there will be no more oil or gas leasing on federal lands within ten miles of the Chaco Culture NHP until appropriate cultural resource studies and consultation with tribal communities has occurred.
In 2017 then-Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke established the “Made in America” Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee in order to, in effect, give commercial interests more opportunities for input in the management of national parks and other public lands. This fall a sub-committee of the advisory group released draft recommendations that included turning over a number of NPS-managed campgrounds to commercial operators, a proposal that drew an immediate backlash on multiple fronts. The Coalition issued a strong statement pointing out the pitfalls and procedural problems with the proposal. After several weeks of widespread, negative publicity, the NPS quietly disbanded the entire advisory group and dropped any plans to move forward on commercializing park campgrounds for now.
In late September, NPS’s Acting Intermountain Regional Director issued a directive to the superintendents of Arches, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef, and Zion national parks instructing them to allow all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) to use all parks roads in accordance with the State of Utah’s “street legal ATV” regulation, effective November 1, 2019. Until this sudden and unexpected policy change, which involved no public process, ATVs and other off-highway vehicles had been prohibited in the “Mighty 5” national parks in Utah for many years. The Coalition joined other park advocacy groups in writing the Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks to voice grave concerns about the policy change. In addition, Coalition members in Utah wrote letters to their local Congressmen; and another Coalition member from Moab followed up with an op-ed in the local newspaper opposing the new policy. Importantly, key officials within the Park Service pushed back on the new policy as well and were supported by local officials in the Moab area, who were concerned about the potential impacts of ATV use in the national parks. In late October, NPS announced without elaboration that it was withdrawing its previous order that national park units in Utah allow street legal ATVs beginning November 1.
2019 Financial Summary for Membership

The Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks wrapped up 2019 in a positive financial position, due in large part to the generosity of our members, supporters, and partners. We continue to expand our capacity and build working capital to fund legislative and legal affairs, advocacy and policy, media and communications, education, and specific issue support. In 2019, the Coalition was able to dedicate 72% of total expenses toward mission related programs. We have no doubt that we will continue to grow and expand our capacity. As always, we are incredibly thankful for your support.

Membership

Coalition membership continued to increase throughout 2019 with an annual growth of approximately 6%. Membership increased from 1,662 members on January 1, 2019, to 1,773 members on December 31, 2019.
2019 Issues Contributors

We extend a special THANK YOU to the following Coalition members and supporters who helped with this important work:

Rob Arnberger  Leon Folsom  Steve Martin  Richard Ring
Brenda Barrett  Stan Fowler  Allyson Mathis  Tom Ross
Marcia Blaszak  Phil Francis  Scot McElveen  Laura Rotegard
Sarah Bransom  Russ Galipeau  Abby Miller  Jeanne Schaaf
Kathyrn Brett  Denis Galvin  Dave Mills  Dan Sealy
Phil Brueck  Laura Gates  Doug Morris  Rick Smith
Maria Burks  Amy Gilbert  Laurel Munson Boyers  Tom Smith
Mark Butler  Charles Gilbert  Mike Murray  Mike Soukup
Judy Caminer  Bill Halainen  Don Neubacher  Bob Stanton
Richard Curry  Scott Hall  Jim Northup  Sheridan Steele
Rolf Diamont  Rebecca Harriett  Alan O’Neill  Kate Stevenson
Gary Davis  Don Hellmann  Cassie Pais  Dan Taylor
Dominic Dottavio  Cyndy Holda  Jim Pepper  Emily Thompson
Fred Fagergren  Jon Jarvis  Michael Piraino  John Thompson
Bill Fink  Patricia J. Kelly  Steve Pittleman  Bill Wade
Maureen Finnerty  Bob Mackreth  Sandy Rabinowitch  Bonnie Winslow
Mary Foley  Mary Martin  John Reynolds

If we inadvertently left you off this list – we apologize but remain grateful for your support!
Awards

Hartzog Award
The George Hartzog Award is given to an individual who demonstrates outstanding support for the mission of the National Park Service or National Park System. This year, the Coalition has selected two winners.

Kate Cannon
In her long career with the NPS, Kate distinguished herself by her leadership and skillful collaboration with neighboring agencies and local communities on a variety of challenging initiatives and issues. In her last, but perhaps most compelling action as Southeast Utah Group Superintendent, Kate publicly voiced and defended her legitimate concerns regarding an NPS directive permitting ATV use in all Utah national parks. She was successful in getting the ill-conceived directive overturned. For nearly 40 years, Kate has demonstrated outstanding leadership and support for the mission of the National Park Service and ensuring the integrity of the units of the National Park System. For these reasons, the Coalition is proud to award Kate with the 2019 George Hartzog Award.

Roxanne Quimby
Roxanne has been a passionate and active supporter of our national parks for decades. She was a leading advocate for the creation of Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, purchasing and donating over 85,000 acres of land to the new park. Roxanne demonstrated great leadership and perseverance despite high profile opposition. In addition, Roxanne subsequently purchased and donated another 17 critical parcels of land for other national parks across the
country, including Acadia, Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Saguaro, Colorado NM and Gettysburg. Roxanne has gone to great lengths to ensure the continued protection and preservation of our national parks, reflecting her great love and respect for America’s outstanding National Park System. For these extraordinary efforts, the Coalition is proud to award Roxanne with the 2019 George Hartzog Award.

1872 Award
The 1872 award is given to an individual for outstanding service and support for the mission of the Coalition. This year, the Coalition has selected Rick Smith as the winner. Though Rick retired from a long and distinguished career of service as a National Park Service ranger, trainer, and manager, he has never stopped working for our national parks. Rick was an early leader of the Coalition and served as Chair of the Executive Council. He has also managed the Park Lands Watch Google Group website for over a decade, providing a variety of media reports about NPS actions and issues for several hundred individuals every day. We are proud to recognize Rick with the 1872 Award in honor of his continued advocacy for our National Park System and his commitment to ensuring that other NPS people, partners, and advocates are informed and updated on park news.