



THE COALITION TO PROTECT AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS

VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

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Membership Update

The Coalition's membership currently stands at 1,811 members.

Website Links

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The Coalition's Reponse to COVID-19

We hope this monthly brief finds you staying healthy and safe. These are incredibly difficult times and we continue to advocate for the safety and well-being of our NPS employees, visitors, and our national parks. We have issued statements on the need for parks to **enact closures** and the Interior Secretary's decision to **waive entrance fees** at national parks. And our members have been very active in the media, pushing hard for greater protection for NPS staff. You can read more about it in the box below.

National Parks During the Pandemic

NPS Employee Safety Concerns

While it is considered unsafe to gather in public places such as movie theaters, restaurants, museums, and libraries, people are still being encouraged to visit national parks, putting NPS employees and visitors at risk. We received a letter from an NPS employee, who writes, "what is especially damaging and demoralizing is that the employees of the Park Service are not considered to be strong enough justification to shut down, despite what they are repeatedly saying to their leadership. The call to close parks is not being addressed quickly enough - which is why we need to advocate for ourselves and our families." We passed this letter on to the *Washington Post*, who wrote [this piece](#). The full text of the letter is linked below.

Open Letter to the NPS

Halt and Delay Requests

COVID-19 also has the potential to impact our parks and public lands in **other ways** with long-lasting consequences. The Coalition joined over 90 other organizations in a **sign-on letter** requesting that DOI suspend ongoing comment periods, halt oil and gas lease sales, and delay new policy proposals. In our press release issued in support of this letter, Chair Phil Francis said, "there are huge implications and consequences surrounding proposed policy changes and lease sales. These actions should be given full and deliberate consideration, not rushed through at a time when we should be focused on the health and safety of the American people."

Statement of Support for Delays and Suspensions

The Work Continues

Although our focus right now is strongly on ensuring the health and safety of our NPS employees and visitors, we continue to work as advocates for our national parks and public lands. Here are some of the actions we were pursuing prior to the pandemic, and some action items that have come up in the past few weeks.

LWCF Inholding Report

The Land Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) plays a vital role in ensuring the continued protection of irreplaceable natural and cultural resources. LWCF funds allow parks to purchase inholdings, or privately owned land that is located within the boundaries of our national parks. In a recent report, we highlighted a small subsection of the many opportunities to purchase private lands from willing sellers to complete our national parks.

LWCF Inholding Report

Great American Outdoors Act

The Great American Outdoors Act would provide permanent and full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, in addition to addressing the deferred maintenance backlog at our national parks. We strongly support this Act and hope we will soon have the opportunity to advocate again for its passage.

Support of Great American Outdoors Act

Protecting NEPA

We submitted extensive **comments** on the proposed changes to NEPA regulations, and strongly encouraged CEQ to look beyond the perceived financial benefits that the proposed "streamlining" of the NEPA process would provide to industries that build major infrastructure projects. We urged them to give serious consideration to the many substantive concerns expressed by agencies, Tribes, organizations, and the general public. In addition, the Coalition joined 328 other organizations in submitting collective comments on the proposed changes.

NEPA Letter

Changes to MBTA

The Coalition joined our partners in opposition to the Fish and Wildlife Service's proposed change to its Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) regulations. Though the rule itself is only 2 sentences long, it would dramatically limit the scope of the MBTA "only to actions directed at migratory birds, their nests, or their eggs. Injury to or mortality of migratory birds that results from, but is not the purpose of, an action (i.e., incidental taking or killing) is not prohibited by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act." The Southern Environmental Law Center took the lead on [this letter](#) and the Coalition also sign-on to [this letter](#) from the Audubon Society.

Protecting our Planet

Coalition Chair Phil Francis **spoke** with *Backpacker Magazine* about the public lands platforms of the U.S. presidential candidates. "Whoever is elected president has to be committed to making sure the places where we live on this planet are improving and well taken care of."

Along these same lines, we joined over 140 other organizations and signed a letter of support of S. Res. 372 and H. Res. 835, "Thirty by Thirty Resolution to Save Nature."

These resolutions call on the federal government to establish a national goal of conserving at least 30 percent of the land and 30 percent of the ocean of the United States by 2030.

30 x 30 Letter

Budget Needs

Even prior to the decision of the Secretary of the Interior to waive entrance fees at national parks during the pandemic, parks were already dealing with **high visitation**. And these higher levels of visitation necessitate **higher budget numbers** for the NPS. Our written testimony to House and Senate appropriators conveyed this message. Click below to read it in full.

Testimony

What We're Reading & Tracking This Month

In our Focus on Friends series, we highlight **the work** of the National Park Trust, an organization that preserves parks today and creates park stewards for tomorrow.

Although it's hard to focus on anything other than the fallout from COVID-19, **this** is an excellent editorial in the *Seattle Times*, urging Congress to support parks and public lands amid the coronavirus response. In addition, Coalition member Cordell Roy penned **this piece** in the *Salt Lake Tribune* about the need for vigilance and continued opposition to oil and gas lease sales in Utah.

While it is best not to visit national parks right now, there's no reason you can't enjoy a quick **virtual visit**. Google will allow you to explore national parks through a 360-degree virtual tour. Check out *The Hidden Worlds of the National Parks*, a Google Arts & Culture exhibit and interactive documentary.

And if you need to escape into the beauty of the natural world without leaving your home, you could also check out the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, which now offers more than 150,000 vivid illustrations related to botany, wildlife, and biodiversity.

Thank you to all of our members for supporting our actions and offering feedback and support. Stay safe and healthy - and let us know how we can help.