

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



2020 was a remarkable year for the Coalition and the National Park Service (NPS). Our action count reached an all-time high, our membership hit nearly 1,900, and grants and contributions have grown. Thanks to the support of

our membership, sponsors, partner organizations, members of the Executive Council, and dedicated staff, our voice was heard across the country.

Now, we look to the future. There are serious issues on the horizon as the Biden administration begins their time in office. But the Coalition produced an excellent transition document that was delivered to the Biden Transition Team and we had an opportunity to meet virtually to discuss our concerns and our priorities with the new administration. We have high hopes for the next four years.

This year we will focus on mitigating the adverse actions taken in the past four years and supporting positive change as we move forward. We will continue to push for adequate funding for the NPS and work to restore integrity and public confidence in our beloved agency. In other words, 2021 will be another very busy year!

I want to thank all of you who have played a role in making this year successful and hope you will continue to help us support the NPS and its employees as they do the work necessary to protect and preserve park resources and programs, provide effective visitor services, and improve employee morale.

Chilip A. Francis Ja

Phil Francis Chair

## 2020: WHAT A YEAR



Last year was truly a year unlike any other. We pushed back and spoke out on issues ranging from the impacts of COVID-19 to National Park Service (NPS) funding. We can count as successes events that *did* happen,

like the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act and actions that *didn't* happen, such as lease sales and bad policy proposals. Thank you for your confidence in us.

Groups like the Coalition are so important in these unsettled times because we are driven by a common purpose; to support the NPS mission, "to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations." Thank you for your dedication to this important work.

We are thankful that we have been able to secure grants and donations throughout the year. Many other non-profits have not been able to maintain the same level of operations—but we have grown. We made the Associate Director job a full-time position and we now have a part-time Business Manager and Staff Assistant. We also have hourly contractors supporting our operation. The expansion of our staff can be linked to our increased output. This year, we have surpassed 250 actions. Thank you for your support as we continue to grow.

We are grateful for our engaged membership. Thank you for your trust, dedication, and generosity. Here's to a healthy and productive 2021!

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Amy Gilbert Fehir Executive Director



## 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 our current 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.

In 2019 we took 100 public actions. That was an incredible growth from the 17 actions we took in 2015. This year, we have surpassed 250 actions, a record year of productivity. We were heavily engaged in advocacy related to the COVID-19 pandemic, urging the administration to prioritize the health and safety of NPS employees. We endeavored to hold the Department of the Interior accountable for their bad policies and proposals, and pushed back against the politicization of our national parks. We fought against environmental rollbacks, oil and gas lease sales on the doorsteps of our parks, and questionable hunting practices in Alaska. We advocated for adequate funding for the NPS and strongly supported the Great American Outdoors Act. Our efforts have 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 2020:

#### THE PANDEMIC & OUR PARKS

The impact of COVID-19 in the United States during 2020 was staggering, with over 19 million cases and over 330,000 deaths occurring by the end of December. Just as the federal government was slow to react to the pandemic, the response from DOI agencies was equally problematic, given the concerns of the Centers for Disease Control about transmission of the disease among travelers.

In the spring, many parks remained open to the public with no prudent public health precautions in effect, despite the accelerating number of cases. The Coalition was a strong and visible presence, advocating that parks be closed to the public to protect NPS employees, volunteers, and gateway community residents until appropriate safety measures could be implemented. Yet hundreds of parks remained open last spring and those that had temporarily closed were reopened before the peak summer season got underway.

In the fall, a number of parks reported record monthly visitation as the predicted surge in COVID-19 cases was underway. The Coalition sought information about the numbers and locations of COVID-19 cases in parks since March by submitting monthly FOIA requests. While we knew that hundreds of NPS employees did test positive for COVID-19, NPS leadership continued to withhold such information from the public, despite other federal agencies being more transparent about its COVID-affected employees.

We are hopeful that new leadership at DOI will understand the importance of prioritizing the health and safety of our NPS employees and others in our national parks, and will demonstrate that they are fully capable of dealing effectively with this public health crisis in the context of America's parks and public lands.





#### DOI ACCOUNTABILITY

The NPS remained without a Senate-confirmed director for the entire term of the Trump administration – an unprecedented occurrence. Secretary Bernhardt continued to designate individuals to perform the duties of the director while maintaining tight control over decisions affecting NPS. After David Vela abruptly retired in early August, Margaret Everson was named as acting director. The Coalition denounced her naivety about national parks when she stated that a lack of employees should not be a reason to limit access to the parks during the pandemic.

Secretary Bernhardt's hold over NPS decision-making was also apparent when he refused to allow the agency to release the number of employees infected by COVID-19 or their park locations. Further, Bernhardt supported White House efforts to allow the use of NPS sites for partisan purposes to further the president's reelection efforts. The Secretary's influence over NPS decisions was again

evident when he undermined the intent of the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act by releasing his proposed list for full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) where he counted \$120 million for nonfederal Forest Legacy land acquisition projects as being included among the projects funded on the federal side of LWCF. This was overturned by Congress in December. The revised list provided \$43.3 million for NPS land acquisition projects within park boundaries and an additional \$36 million to acquire inholdings, and to deal with hardships and recreational access. The vast majority of the remaining LWCF appropriation for NPS of \$380 million went for state grants and non-federal battlefield acquisition. The NPS federal land acquisition appropriation was disappointing as the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service had greater federal land acquisition funding than NPS, even with its federal land acquisition backlog of over \$2 billion.

#### **POLITICS AND PARKS**



During the 2020 Presidential campaign, the Coalition engaged in several issues where President Trump's campaign team attempted to leverage our national parks for partisan political purposes. Several parks were directly affected – Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, National Mall and Memorial Parks, and Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine. These national park units were used as the scene of political activities inappropriately authorized by the National Park Service (NPS) at the direction of the Interior Department. These events put NPS employees in the position of violating the Hatch Act and government ethics rules while adversely impacting park resources in some cases, such as at Fort McHenry. The Coalition was able to bring national attention to the misuse of federal lands for political purposes by filing numerous Freedom of Information Act requests, releasing statements, sending letters, and speaking out in the media about these improper uses.





#### TRANSITION PLANNING



US CAPITOL BUILDING, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The Coalition worked in the second half of the year to support efforts to provide the incoming Biden administration with a roadmap for a number of National Park Service issues that needed to be addressed due to

disastrous decisions made affecting our national parks during the past administration. The Coalition supported the work of other national conservation organizations by advising them on some of the problem areas from the previous four years.

Separately, the Coalition put together a series of recommendations for the Biden administration to address the NPS problem areas. The recommendations were focused on four primary areas involving NPS Leadership and Organization, Resource Stewardship, Visitor Experience, and Employee Support. Zoom meetings were held with the Biden transition staff to discuss the recommendations, to respond to questions about pending issues, and to determine areas where additional information would be needed. The Coalition's recommendations were well-received and appreciated due to the experience with national parks that Coalition members have.

#### **ENERGY EXTRACTION**

In 2020, BLM continued to aggressively push oil and gas exploration and development on America's public lands, despite the significant drop in market demand for fossil fuel consumption during the pandemic. These "energy dominance" policies have resulted in a significant workload for the Issues Committee the past few years, as we have advocated against the accelerated pace of lease sales, simplified environmental reviews, and significantly reduced or in some cases eliminated opportunities for public comment on proposed lease sales.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Coalition pushed for DOI and BLM to suspend new leasing proposals. We joined other groups in commenting on major BLM lease sale proposals in southern Utah and a major re-write of a long-term oil and gas development plan for the Greater Chaco Area in northwestern New Mexico. We voiced our opposition to DOI's proposals to open the Arctic National

Wildlife Refuge to leasing and to reduce royalties for federal oil and gas lessees during the pandemic. And we actively supported multiple legislative proposals that would reform BLM oil and gas leasing practices, restore public involvement and comment opportunities, end the practice of noncompetitive leasing on BLM lands, and ensure a fair return based on market rates from companies leasing federal lands for oil and gas development. To help broaden our advocacy efforts, we also presented a webinar focused on oil and gas leasing and how our members can advocate for prudent management of this highly impactful use of public lands.

While the change in administration gives us optimism that we will see a balance between conservation and consumptive use in managing oil and gas leasing on public lands, we expect this issue to remain at the forefront of our advocacy efforts until there is true and lasting reform of BLM's policies.





#### **ENVIRONMENTAL ROLLBACKS & CLIMATE CHANGE**

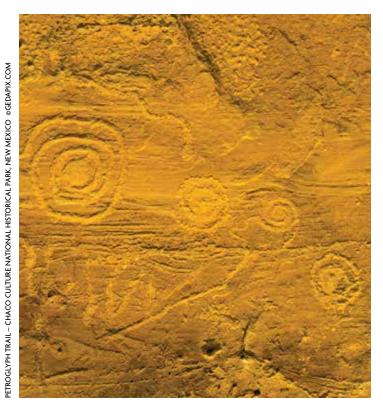


WILFIRE IN HILLS - VENTURA, CALIFORNIA

2020 has seen a record number of named tropical storms devastating the southern United States along the gulf and southeastern coasts. Over 58,000 wildfires have scorched 10.3 million acres across the United States. Scientists continue to forecast and document the impacts of climate change on human health and the environment, in general; and, specifically, within units of the National Park System. Yet in recent years the U.S. Environmental Protection

Agency (EPA) has weakened or eliminated a variety of air pollution and motor vehicle fuel efficiency standards that otherwise would reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and slow the pace of climate change. The Coalition has been a strong voice regarding the deleterious impacts of climate change on parks across the System. This year we have joined other groups in commenting on EPA's proposed rule to weaken secondary national ambient air quality standards for particulate matter. And we have collaborated with NPCA in summarizing scientifically documented climate change impacts to parks in amicus briefs filed at the U.S. circuit court of appeals level in support of lawsuits challenging the EPA's rollback of the Clean Power Plan and FPA's withdrawal of California's waiver to set its own, more stringent fuel efficiency standards. We have also prepared a third brief to be filed in early 2021 challenging EPA's final rule rescinding the scheduled phase-in of higher fuel efficiency standards nationwide.

#### PROTECTING NEPA



The Coalition submitted extensive comments on the Council on Environmental Quality's proposed rollback of its National Environmental Policy (NEPA) regulations. We testified at hearings in Denver, Colorado, and Washington, D.C., commenting on the new regulations' minimization of public participation, the dangers of limiting the scope of a NEPA analysis, and our concerns over the dismissal of consideration of cumulative impacts when federal agencies are engaged in the NEPA planning process for plans, projects and regulations. The Coalition also has submitted comments, penned numerous opeds, and talked with the media about our concerns over these rollbacks. While the proposed regulations became final on September 14, 2020, numerous groups are in the process of litigation, urging injunctions against the new regulations and a revision of the CEQ regulations that are more aligned with the intent of NEPA. The Coalition remains actively involved in the protection of this bedrock environmental law.





## SSUES

## QUESTIONABLE HUNTING & TRAPPING IN ALASKA



BLACK BEAR CUBS - ALASKA

In what can only be seen as an irresponsible and politically motivated decision, the NPS issued a final rule in 2020 that overturned a 2015 NPS regulation prohibiting a number of questionable, State-approved recreational hunting methods from being adopted in NPS-managed national preserves in Alaska. The previously prohibited practices that have reinstated by the 2020 rule include the following: using artificial lights to kill black bear mothers with cubs in

their dens; "harvesting" grizzly bears over bait of human food; "taking" female wolves and coyotes and their pups during the denning season; and shooting swimming caribou from moving motorboats. These methods have long been considered by NPS to be in conflict with NPS wildlife management policies under the NPS Organic Act, which are intended to preserve the natural abundance and diversity of native species even where hunting is mandated, such as in Alaska's national preserves. During both the 2015 and 2020 rulemaking, the Coalition has been a strong advocate for the application of "fair chase" hunting practices on preserve lands in Alaska that are more in keeping with the NPS conservation mandate. In response to the 2020 rule change, the Coalition has joined a coalition of wildlife advocates, capably represented by the Trustees for Alaska, in filing a legal challenge to the Park Service's 2020 rule in the U.S. District Court of Alaska. The case will play out in court during 2021.

OPPOSITE PAGE: TIMBER WOLVES – ALASKA 2020 ANNUAL REPORT 19

#### THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT



VIRGIN RIVER - ZION NATIONAL PARK, UTAH @GEDAPIX.COM

The Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA)— a landmark piece of legislation that has become one of the greatest conservation efforts in a generation — was signed into law in 2020. This new law fully and permanently funded the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a program that

invests in national parks, public lands, and communities across the country by expanding trails and services, and creating new parks and outdoor greenspaces at no cost to U.S. taxpayers. GAOA also provided billions of dollars to help address the crippling backlog of deferred maintenance in America's national parks and public lands. Conservation groups, including the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, have been longstanding and vocal advocates for both components of this new law. We were a visible and strong advocate for the need to permanently reauthorize and fully fund LWCF, and we pushed hard for funding to address the maintenance backlog that has crippled our parks. Our countless op-eds, statements to the media, letters to Congress, and overall advocacy efforts resulted in victory. Passage of GAOA is a momentous triumph for all those who treasure our national parks and public lands. Thank you for all your hard work and contributions. After decades of advocacy, we have achieved an incredible win.





#### END TO THE ATLANTIC COAST PIPELINE

At the beginning of 2020, the Coalition joined our colleagues at National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) and several other advocacy groups in filing a joint amicus brief with the United States Supreme Court supporting conservation respondents in U.S. Forest Service, et al. v. Cowpasture River Preservation Association, et al. In the brief, we argued that the Mineral Leasing Act (MLA) did not give the U.S. Forest Service the authority to grant a permit for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) to cross underneath the Appalachian Trail on Forest Service lands because the Trail is a unit of the National Park System and administered by the National Park Service (NPS). Under the MLA, only Congress can approve natural gas pipelines through park system units. In issuing its decision, the Supreme Court ruled that the Forest Service does, in fact, have the authority to issue permits on lands it manages, including the portions of the Trail on national forest lands. Although the ruling was a setback for Trail advocates,

other lawsuits remained including a legal challenge to the NPS right-of-way permit issued to allow the ACP to cross underneath the Blue Ridge Parkway, one of the most visited parks in the National Park System. Overcoming this particular challenge to the ACP would be much more difficult for project proponents Dominion Energy and Duke Energy to achieve. Under the Parkway's enabling legislation, the NPS cannot issue such a permit unless the proposed activity is found to be "consistent with park purposes." Shortly after the Supreme Court ruling, the two energy companies announced that they were canceling the ACP project altogether, citing increased development costs related to the ongoing litigation. Park advocates, environmental groups, and partners can be credited with effectively challenging key federal permits necessary for the project to move forward. Thanks to our persistence in addressing this issue, our collective voices helped to bring about the cancellation of this project!

# PROTECTING THE GROUNDWATER UNDER GREAT BASIN NATIONAL PARK



There was good news to celebrate in a long struggle against the Southern Nevada Water Authority's (SNWA) proposed groundwater pumping and pipeline project in Eastern Nevada, which would have caused significant impact to Great Basin National Park. Following a 30-year battle, the SNWA decided not to appeal the March 2020 decision by Nevada District Court Judge Robert Estes to deny a significant portion of the water rights SNWA sought for the project, which he said could result in "water mining." The Coalition to Protect America's Parks, along with the Great Basin Water Network, the Great Basin National Park Foundation, and the National Parks Conservation Association, long opposed the project that put the continued protection of Great Basin National Park at risk. The Coalition sent letters to Congress and the Secretary of the Interior, testified at hearings, and met with elected officials in our efforts to protect Great Basin.

OPPOSITE PAGE: TERESA LAKE – GREAT BASIN NATIONAL PARK, NEVADA

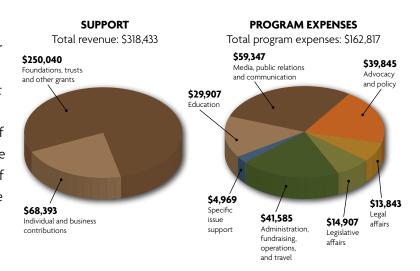


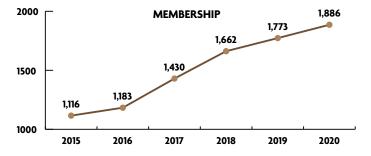
#### 2020 FINANCIAL SUMMARY FOR MEMBERSHIP

We wrapped up 2020 in a strong financial position after a record-setting fundraising year. We continue to expand our capacity – this year we were able to increase our Associate Director's hours to full-time, hire a part-time Staff Assistant and Business Manager, and continue contracts to manage our grants, website, and social media. We dedicated 80% of total expenses toward mission related programs, an increase of 8% over 2019. This increase may be due to a reduction of other expenses because of the pandemic. We will continue to dedicate most of our resources to program expenses, even as life returns to normal. As always, we are incredibly thankful for your support.

#### Membership

Coalition membership continued to follow an annual growth rate of approximately 6%. Membership increased from 1,773 members on January 1, 2020, to 1,886 members on December 31, 2020. Our goal is to surpass 2,000 in 2021.





#### 2020 ISSUES CONTRIBUTORS

#### **THANK YOU** Coalition Members and Supporters:

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Additionally, thank you to the Coalition staff and support team:

Brian Carandang, Teresa Ford, Amy Gilbert Fehir, Greg Hughes, Steve Pittleman, Emily Thompson, and Chelsea Wells.



#### **AWARDS**



#### **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 Doug Morris as the winner. Though Doug retired from

a long and distinguished career of service with the National Park Service, he never stopped working for our national parks. Doug's strong leadership on the Coalition's Executive Council for 13 years contributed to the organization's growing reputation as a professional, non-partisan advocate for the proper management of the National Park System. We are proud to recognize Doug with the 1872 Award in honor of his continued advocacy for our National Park System and his important role in evolving the Coalition from a small group of NPS retirees into a well-established and highly regarded national park advocacy organization.



#### Hartzog Award

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

as the winner of this award. Dan's conservation leadership has generated invaluable solutions to land protection and policy issues at parks such as Acadia National Park and Natchez National Historical Park (NHP) to Martin Luther King Jr. NHP and Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument. Dan's tireless work to protect our irreplaceable natural and cultural resources, his focus on telling untold and under-told stories, and his exceptional creativity and humility have made him a conservation hero. For these extraordinary efforts, the Coalition is proud to award Dan with the 2020 George Hartzog Award.

