2023 Preview:
The Coalition’s 20th Anniversary and Year of the NPS Employee

2022 has been a busy, productive year for the Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks. Moreover, 2023 marks a special milestone in the history of the Coalition - our 20th anniversary. We plan to commemorate and share stories from the organization’s history in the coming months. We also plan to focus our advocacy efforts this year on improving the work conditions of the National Park Service’s most precious resources: NPS employees.

For several decades running, NPS employee morale has rated in the lowest 10% of the annual Best Places to Work in the Federal Government report. Low employee morale is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors. However, it is fitting that during our 20th anniversary year we, as an organization, re-dedicate ourselves to advocate for increased appropriations to improve staffing in support of park operations and natural and cultural resources management programs; advocate for additional and improved employee housing; encourage efforts to recruit a more diverse NPS workforce; expand NPS-affiliated youth programs; and advocate for additional funding to support increased training and development opportunities for NPS employees. While we also will continue our work on numerous other issues affecting national parks, public lands, and the programs and offices that support them, we are dedicating 2023 to being the Year of the NPS Employee!
The National Park Service’s mission to “preserve unimpaired...for this & future generations” took on new meaning for me last year. On August 25, 2022, the National Park Service celebrated its 106th birthday and, on that same day, my daughter Reese was born.

In between the newborn snuggles and over some sleepless nights, I’ve had time to reflect on the opportunities and experiences I want for Reese. I hope, like me, she’ll have many memories of visiting national parks. From walking the fields of Gettysburg to climbing the Beehive Loop in Acadia, my life has been full of unforgettable memories created in our parks and public lands. It has never felt more important to me to protect and preserve these landscapes and stories for our children and grandchildren.

The Coalition remains committed to pursuing a future where our national parks are well funded, appropriately staffed, and thoughtfully managed. If we don’t address the issues and challenges at hand, the health of our National Park System is in jeopardy.

Thank you to our members and supporters who continue to work alongside our staff and Executive Council to make an impact on behalf of our parks and public lands. Thank you to Emily Thompson, our acting executive director, who has led the Coalition during my maternity leave. Her support has made it easier to focus on my new job as mom!

I look forward to another year working with all of you to protect our country’s most sacred places for future generations.

Amy Gilbert Fehir
Executive Director
INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUES

The Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks relies on advocacy and communication to help protect our national parks and public lands. Our advocacy work is critically important and constantly evolves and grows. The issues we focus on fall under three categories:

- **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.

- **Multiple Agency Issues** – broad issues, often driven by politics, that could impact multiple federal agencies or jurisdictions, including the NPS.

- **Park Specific Issues** – typically precedent setting issues with the potential to 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.

Throughout 2022, we engaged in nearly 130 advocacy actions related to NPS budget and operations, national monument designations, serial planning processes and regulatory issues, energy development near national parks, and NPS employee-related issues, such as staffing and housing.

Thanks to our Executive Council and Issues Committee, our staff, and the numerous Coalition members who have contributed to the collective workload, our Voices of Experience have been heard. We celebrated successes, but the work continues.

Here are the highlights from our 2022 advocacy work.
In Congressional meetings and testimony, through letters and op-eds, the Coalition advocated for a restoration and increase to operational capacity that has been lost over the past decade. We supported the administration’s natural resource initiative, requested funding to complete the Cultural Resource Challenge, and advocated for additional funds for various partnership and grant programs.

The Coalition also advocated for additional funds to be directed towards NPS employee housing to help address a dire shortage in many park units. This complemented our work with the authorizing committee staff, as the Coalition helped draft legislation to provide the NPS with additional tools to build employee housing to address the shortage.

In 2022, the president signed into law the Inflation Reduction Act, a consequential commitment to address climate change, support endangered species protection, and reduce the risk of wildfires. Additionally, Congress added $500 million for the NPS to hire additional employees over the next eight years to serve in parks and along national trails, and $500 million to share with the BLM for various conservation, ecosystem, and habitat restoration projects.

In December, Congress completed work on the FY 2023 Interior Appropriations Act that provides NPS with $3.47 billion in discretionary appropriations. The NPS also will receive $1.3 billion in mandatory appropriations from GAOA to address its deferred maintenance backlog and $462 million from LWCF for various land acquisition, state grant, and related programs. There is also funding to restore lost staff capacity, support natural resource and science programs, improve employee housing, and continue grant and technical assistance programs. A separate section appropriates $1.5 billion in supplemental funding to address natural disasters at national parks across the country.
DOI AND NPS NEWS

Throughout the year, the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service announced the appointment of individuals to fill many key vacant positions. Filling these positions had been one of the key recommendations made by the Coalition at the beginning of the Biden administration. In addition, the NPS finally had a permanent director leading the agency. In 2022, Director Chuck Sams had the opportunity to work with a group of dedicated individuals and to participate more fully in a variety of park activities and programs carried out by the NPS throughout the year.

The Coalition continued to engage with the director, additional NPS leaders, and NPS employees at parks and program offices throughout the year via in-person and virtual meetings to emphasize the goals of the Coalition and to recommend actions to benefit the National Park System and its employees.

In 2022, the NPS also formally transmitted to Congress the National Park Service System Plan, which was released in 2017 but never sent to Congress. The plan identifies important natural and cultural resource and thematic gaps in the National Park System. As the NPS works to find new ways to protect resources in the future, these gaps can be addressed through a variety of means, including identifying potential new park units, expanded interpretation of missing themes within existing units, partnering with local groups to share missing stories, or using technology to highlight missing pieces.

The Coalition strongly supports the National Park Service System Plan, as it presents Congress, the NPS, and the public an opportunity to determine how best to ensure the National Park System is truly representative of this country and all Americans.
IN SUPPORT OF THE ANTIQUITIES ACT

The Antiquities Act authorizes the president of the United States to proclaim national monuments on federal lands that contain historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, or other objects of historic or scientific interest. Today, the National Park Service manages over 100 parks that got their start thanks to the Antiquities Act.

The Coalition has been a vocal advocate in support of the Antiquities Act and the designation of additional national monuments on lands at risk throughout the United States. Not only can President Biden protect public lands at risk, but he can also help move our country towards our conservation goal to conserve 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.

We have supported local campaigns to designate spaces such as Camp Hale, Avi Kwa Ame, and Castner Range as national monuments. We released a report highlighting the lasting impacts of national monuments in the National Park System. In addition, we amplified stories, authored op-eds, released statements, signed numerous letters, and held two webinars that highlighted the importance of advocacy related to national monument designation.

In the fall, the Coalition joined the local community, veterans’ groups, and conservation organizations in celebrating the creation of the Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument, which protects a World War II-era military training ground, as well as striking landscapes and wildlife habitat along the Continental Divide and the Tenmile Range in the Rocky Mountains. This was the first national monument designation by the Biden administration and was followed by President Biden’s pledge to protect Avi Kwa Ame. We hope to see a national monument designation for that site – and many others – soon. We look forward to continuing our advocacy in 2023.
A FOCUS ON NPS EMPLOYEE MORALE

The National Park Service has a morale problem, a fact that was reflected once again in the *Best Places to Work In The Federal Government* rankings from the Partnership for Public Service. Overall, the responses from NPS employees placed the agency 370th out of 432 agencies in terms of “engagement and satisfaction.”

Visitation continues to climb at national parks while NPS employees struggle with the impacts of understaffing, overcrowding, and budgets that are inadequate to cover day-to-day operations. As NPS employees continue to be asked to do more with less and absorb the duties of vacant positions, morale understandably has suffered.

The Coalition has urged our Congressional representatives – through testimony, public statements, and meetings – to increase funding for our national parks and the programs and offices that support them. We also have pushed for a recommitment from Congress to fund much-needed staff across the board in parks, program offices, and central offices of the National Park System.

In addition, the Coalition has worked with our partners and Congressional representatives to address the pressing need for adequate and affordable housing for NPS employees. Providing modernized, decent, and affordable living quarters will help parks recruit and retain qualified employees. It is our hope that addressing the housing crisis, lack of NPS staffing, and the need for additional funds will take us a few steps forward in protecting not only our national parks, but our national park workforce.

Support for NPS employees will be a large focus of our work in 2023 and will continue to drive our advocacy efforts. We look forward to continuing the conversation.
The dramatic and ongoing effects of climate change on our national parks have been front-page news for much of 2022.

Unprecedented floods have erased longstanding roads in Yellowstone National Park and buried parking lots in Death Valley National Park. Meanwhile, water levels at Lake Mead and Glen Canyon National Recreation Areas have become so chronically low due to ongoing drought that many of the parks’ boat launches and marinas are literally “high and dry” and no longer usable by the public. On the East Coast, shoreline homes regularly are collapsing into the surf at Cape Hatteras National Seashore due to sea level rise and more frequent and intense tropical storms.

Climate change also is impacting the famed giant sequoia trees in Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks, which have thrived on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada for thousands of years. The trees are succumbing in unprecedented numbers due to more frequent and intense wildfires exacerbated by prolonged drought and warming temperatures. At Denali National Park, located in Alaska, the nation’s fastest-warming state, landslides exacerbated by melting permafrost have closed the park’s primary visitor access road since August 2021. While limited portions of the road were open in 2022, it is not expected to fully reopen until 2024.

It is clear that our national parks are on the frontlines of the battle against climate change. The Coalition continues to amplify messaging related to the threat of climate change and the escalating consequences. In particular, the impacts of a warming climate have elevated the issue of energy development in or near national parks to be one of the focal points of advocacy work in recent years - and 2022 was no different.
THE IMPACT OF ENERGY DEVELOPMENT ON OUR NATIONAL PARKS

Much of our advocacy work in 2022 has focused on advocating for reforms of federal oil and gas leasing practices on America’s public lands. The Department of the Interior announced that it would institute new reforms for its onshore oil and gas leasing program, and the Coalition supported these reforms. We pushed for the Bureau of Land Management to address the longstanding problem of tens of thousands unplugged, unclaimed “orphaned wells,” requested that BLM conduct supplemental NEPA analyses for its proposed first quarter onshore lease sales, and submitted formal administrative protests of proposed BLM oil and gas lease sales in Colorado, Montana, and the Dakotas. We also joined comments regarding the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management’s 2023-2028 proposed offshore oil and gas leasing program for the Outer Continental Shelf.

We collaborated with Archeology Southwest to issue a report that examines the threats that energy development poses to ancestral homelands and sacred sites of Tribes within and adjacent to national parks in the United States. The report considers such impacts at parks such as Chaco Culture National Historical Park and Mesa Verde National Park and explores how oil and gas activities on surrounding lands have harmed these special landscapes over the years. It also identifies specific steps, such as leasing reforms, that the Biden administration and Congress could take to protect parks and public lands across the country. Following the release of the report, we published an op-ed with Archaeology Southwest advocating for federal oil and gas leasing reforms that would provide cultural landscapes across the country with more effective and lasting protection.
Two serial planning processes that began in 2021 continued to account for a significant portion of the Coalition’s advocacy workload in 2022.

**Air Tour Management Plans (ATMPs)**
The National Park Service and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued numerous proposed air tour management plans (ATMPs) in 2021 but failed to consider a range of alternatives or provide any analysis of air tour impacts for the public to comment on, as required by the NEPA. The Coalition has submitted formal comments on all issued ATMPs, identifying the fundamental flaws in the agencies’ NEPA planning process. The agencies also issued planning newsletters for four additional park ATMPs in 2022 that will involve preparation of an environmental assessment and provide further opportunities for public comment.

**Periodic Updates of State Regional Haze Implementation Plans**
2021 marked the first comprehensive review period for the state implementation plans required under the Clean Air Act. As of early 2022, 39 states had failed to submit to the EPA the regional haze implementation plan revision. The Coalition joined other conservation groups in filing a Notice of Intent to sue the EPA for its failure to issue required “completeness determinations” and “findings of failure” to submit regional haze state implementation plans for the many overdue plans. Throughout the remainder of 2022, we have commented on an additional 11 overdue plans. At this point, it remains to be seen how the shortcomings in the proposed or overdue updated plans will be resolved, and the Coalition will continue to collaborate with other conservation groups on this important issue.
A THREAT TO PARK RESOURCES: LARGE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Several large projects proposed near national parks pose significant risks to historic and cultural resources.

James River Transmission Line
The Coalition continues to advocate for the protection of historic resources and values at both Colonial National Historical Park and the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, which are being impacted significantly by a towering transmission line constructed by Dominion Energy across the James River. Pending release of the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in late 2022, we and other conservation groups have actively encouraged the NPS and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, who are cooperating agencies on the project, to formally request a “referral” to the Council on Environmental Quality. Meanwhile, the completion date for the Army Corps’ final EIS has continued to slip.

Proposed Lava Ridge Wind Farm near Minidoka National Historic Site
BLM has proposed the construction of an industrial-scale wind farm on public land immediately adjacent to the historic Minidoka National Historic Site, a Japanese incarceration camp in southern Idaho. The number and size of the giant turbines would overwhelm the stark landscape adjacent to the camp and irreparably change the isolated setting that is integral to conveying the experience of those incarcerated at the camp. We are coordinating our advocacy efforts with Japanese American groups that include individuals with personal connections to the camp, such as the Friends of Minidoka, and are closely monitoring the project’s progress. A draft environmental impact statement is expected in early 2023.
Proposed Digital Gateway poses significant threat to Manassas National Battlefield Park

Prince William County approved a major zoning change to its comprehensive plan that would enable the construction of a massive data center, known as the Prince William Digital Gateway, on a 2,100-acre tract currently zoned “rural” and located adjacent to Manassas National Battlefield Park (Battlefield) and Conway Robinson State Forest. The project poses a grave threat to irreplaceable historic and environmental resources, including impacts to the regional water supply of the Occoquan Reservoir, a national park, a state forest, and our global climate health. As with many historic sites and cultural resources, preservation of the landscapes in and around the protected area is fundamental to preserving the site itself. The Coalition has joined local groups in opposing the rezoning proposal and will continue to advocate for protection of this important Civil War battlefield.
Congress had the most significant impact on the NPS in the final week of 117th Congress in December. After three decades of advocacy, Congress established in law the National Heritage Area (NHA) System consisting of already established heritage areas, as well as those to come. At the recommendation of the Coalition, Congress redrafted the committee-reported bill so that the law was placed in Title 54, the National Park Service part of the U.S. Code, ratifying the NPS’ role in coordinating the NHA program and in providing technical and financial assistance to heritage areas.

As part of the Interior Appropriations Act for FY 2023, Congress added 53 sections of park and public lands authorizing bills, of which 42 concerned the NPS. The Act established the New Philadelphia NHS and renamed the Pullman NHP, authorized a park land exchange, designated two wild and scenic river system additions of 71 miles, created the Chilkoot NHT in Alaska, allowed for additions to
seven park units, authorized eight studies of potential new park units, wild and scenic rivers, and trails, and authorized eight potential new memorials in the Washington, D.C., area. Additionally, the Act authorized the U.S. African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program and the Japanese American World War II History Network and Education Grants Programs, all within the NPS. Separate from this bill, Congress established the Butterfield Overland NHT.

Earlier in 2022, Congress established the Amache NHS in Colorado and the Blackwell School NHS in Texas upon acquisition of sufficient lands at both sites. Congress also renamed and expanded the Brown v. Board of Education NHP to include sites in South Carolina and Kansas, as well as affiliated areas in Virginia, Delaware, and Washington, D.C. The Coalition had supported and advocated for many of these new designations during the 117th Congress in an effort to ensure the National Park System includes sites that reflect the diversity of this nation and our citizens.
The Coalition and other conservation groups sued the National Park Service in 2020 challenging an NPS regulation that opened up Alaska’s national preserves to the State of Alaska’s so-called “liberalized” predator hunting practices. Among other things, those practices allow sport hunters to shoot brown bears over bait, kill sow bears and their cubs in their dens, and kill she-wolves and their pups during the denning season. In late September 2022, the U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska ruled that the NPS regulation is poorly reasoned and arbitrary and ordered the rule to be remanded back to the agency for revision. In early January 2023, the NPS issued a proposed revision of the national preserve hunting rule, which will be open for public comment for 60 days.
A controversial plan to extract billions of gallons of groundwater from beneath the Mojave Desert in California was blocked by a federal judge, who ruled the review of the project by the BLM under the Trump administration “was a decision not to engage in review.”

For years, the Cadiz Water Project has petitioned the BLM for approvals and grants of rights-of-way necessary to withdraw as much as 16 billion gallons of water per year and pump it to distant Southern California cities. According to the ruling, the BLM during the closing days of the Trump administration approved the project without conducting the necessary environmental reviews.

The lawsuit challenging project approvals was brought by the Native American Land Conservancy and the NPCA. These organizations were represented by the University of California, Irvine Environmental Law Clinic. A related case was filed by the Center for Biological Diversity. The Coalition has consistently supported the litigation brought by these organizations against Cadiz and the effort to preserve and protect the interests of local tribal nations, nearby communities, Mojave Trails National Monument, and Mojave National Preserve.
The Coalition remains in a secure financial position to begin 2023. In 2022, the funding landscape began to shift as funders navigated economic unknowns. We are paying close attention to trends and are keeping in close contact with our funders to remain “top of mind” as they plan and prioritize. The Coalition resumed travel for in-person meetings and events. While we continue to conduct much of our business remotely, we greatly value the opportunity to meet in-person and expect that our travel expenses will return to pre-pandemic levels. Our members continue to be incredibly generous, and we are grateful for their support.

Membership
In 2022, the Coalition continued its steady growth. We added 235 members, bringing our total membership to 2,334. This amounts to roughly an 11% increase. Our utilization of targeted outreach through social media continues to be our most successful recruitment tool.
2022 ISSUES CONTRIBUTORS

THANK YOU to Coalition Members, Partners, and Supporters!

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Emily Thompson, Katie Wallace, and Chelsea Wells
IN MEMORIAM

Don Baur, a longtime advisor, supporter, and friend of the Coalition, passed away in December 2022. Don was a partner in the Washington, D.C., office of Perkins Coie, where he practiced environmental, natural resources, and Native American law.

Don served as pro bono legal counsel to the Coalition for fifteen years. During that time, the Coalition participated in thirteen lawsuits – and we can say with humility that our participation has made a difference.

Don advised the Coalition in cases such as the *Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence v. Salazar*, which challenged NPS and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service regulations that would allow visitors to carry loaded and concealed firearms in parks and wildlife refuges; *Sierra Club v. United States Department of Interior*, which involved a lower court decision regarding the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline; and *Alaska Wildlife Alliance, et al., v. Bernhardt, et al.*, which challenged a 2020 NPS regulation regarding hunting practices allowed in Alaska's national preserves that are managed by the NPS.

In total, Don donated thousands of hours of significant and critical legal counsel to the Coalition. He has been honored with the Coalition’s 1872 Award and was named an Honorary Member. Don was a passionate advocate for our national parks and a strong supporter of a new generation of conservation leaders. We will be forever grateful to Don for his wise counsel, friendship, and support. He will be missed.
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 Dr. Michael “Mike” Soukup as the recipient of this award. Mike served as the NPS Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science. He has been a constant advocate for enhanced resource protection funding and support. Among his many achievements, Mike was responsible for the creation and implementation of the Natural Resource Challenge, a $100 million funding initiative that highlighted the protection of natural resources and professionalized the natural resource workforce. Mike continues to promote advanced natural resource learning for NPS employees, and we are proud to recognize his work with this 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 Maria Burks as the recipient. Maria served as vice chair of the Executive Council, where she pulled from her deep knowledge of National Park Service operations to serve as the point of contact for several priority issues. Her dedicated, long-time participation in the every-day work of the Executive Council has assured its success over the years and has guaranteed that the Coalition remains respected as the Voice of Experience. Even after her time on the Executive Council, Maria has continued to help and support the staff and Executive Council members as a strong and vocal advocate. We are proud to recognize Maria with the 1872 award in honor of her service.