



THE COALITION TO PROTECT  
AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS  
— VOICES OF EXPERIENCE —

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

# MESSAGE FROM THE OUTGOING CHAIR



2021 has been quite a year. With a new administration in office, the Coalition broadened and changed its focus from reacting to harmful policies and issues to proactively working to undo the damage caused over the past few years.

We prepared an excellent transition paper for the Biden administration that received a positive response. Congress heard our call for more funds to support the Great America Outdoors Act and park and program operating budgets. We asked for 500 new FTEs in the National Park System each year for the next five years and it appears that it is now possible.

The Coalition's Executive Council and staff have worked tirelessly to support the National Park System and to raise awareness of the challenges facing our national parks and

program offices. They have truly made a difference. I want to recognize the great work done by the Issues Committee, which has been led by Mike Murray and supported by many members. I also want to recognize our Coalition staff, who have worked hard to build our membership, expand our budget, and advocate for the protection of our parks.

A number of Executive Council members are ending their terms of service this year and there is a new team of volunteers stepping up to lead the Coalition. It has been a pleasure to serve as Chair of the Coalition. The organization is in a good place and it's only going to get better.

Best wishes for a happy and productive New Year!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Francis Jr." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Phil Francis**  
*Outgoing Chair*

# MESSAGE FROM THE INCOMING CHAIR



Change is an inevitable occurrence in the life of an individual or an organization and it has been a common theme underlying many of our advocacy activities this year.

2021 has also been a year of significant change for the Coalition's executive council (EC), with a turnover of five EC positions at the end of the year. We extend our deepest gratitude to our outgoing members, and we welcome new EC members Linda Mazzu, Cheryl Schreier, Bill Shaddox, Terri Thomas, and Clara Wooden.

We welcomed a new administration, with high but perhaps unrealistic hopes that the incoming team could quickly correct many of the concerning actions taken by the previous administration. There have been many positive steps taken on various challenges facing the National Park System. However, numerous issues remain unresolved and require our continued advocacy. Long-lingering issues such as overcrowding of parks, compounded by inadequate operational funding and staffing, have become more urgent in light of the Covid pandemic.

I am honored to serve as the incoming chair of the EC representing all of you, our members. It truly is a wonderful group with an inspiring mission. Our effectiveness as a national park advocacy group resides in the diversity of backgrounds and experiences our members provide. After all, we (collectively) are the Voices of Experience!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael B. Murray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Mike Murray**  
*Incoming Chair*

# 2021: PUSHING FORWARD



After the last four unsettled years, we were able to take a breath in 2021. This year provided an opportunity for us to be more proactive than reactive. The issues we've worked tirelessly on haven't gone away, but we were able to stop drinking from the fire hose and think more strategically about how and when we were going to engage.

We've continued our work on issues ranging from NPS funding to oil and gas leasing. We've also started to expand our engagement on issues including climate change and diversity, equity, and inclusion, that will have tremendous impacts on the future of our public lands. Looking ahead, you can expect we will remain committed to the issues we've worked on over the past 18 years, but we are also seeking ways to increase our impact on new interest areas.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Phil Francis and Maria Burks, our Chair and Vice Chair since 2017. Much of our success and growth over these last few tumultuous years can be credited to Phil and Maria's dedication and leadership. We also extend our thanks to our other outgoing Executive Council (EC) members who have served the organization well during what has recently been a very challenging period for park advocates.

In 2022, the Coalition will welcome a new Chair, Mike Murray, and Vice Chair, Don Hellmann, as well as several new EC members. As we enter this next year, rest assured that the organization is in good hands as we continue to push forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Gilbert Fehir". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**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 issues related to the National Park System. These issues are constantly evolving and critically important. 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 2021, we took over 150 actions in support of our national parks. We remain very engaged in advocacy related to Department of the Interior accountability and leadership, energy extraction, environmental regulations, climate change, the NPS budget and operations, and the health, well-being, and morale of National Park Service employees.

Our actions have truly been a team effort, with not only Issues Committee members and staff stepping up to handle the incredible workload, but also numerous Coalition members who have contributed to the collective work of the organization. We celebrated successes and continue to tackle challenges – the work continues.

Here are highlights of our efforts in 2021.



# DOI AND NPS NEWS



UNITED STATES CAPITOL BUILDING – DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The leadership of the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the National Park Service (NPS) transitioned in 2021. The Coalition sent letters of support, composed op-eds, and provided Senate committee staff with potential questions for the confirmation hearings for Secretary of the Interior

Deb Haaland, and Director Charles Sams, III. Members of the Executive Council also had a virtual meeting with Director Sams prior to his confirmation hearing. Throughout the discussion on a range of issues critical to the National Park System, we were impressed with Director Sams' credentials, knowledge, and support of the mission of the National Park Service. Mr. Sams was confirmed by the Senate on November 18, 2021.

In other virtual meetings with DOI and NPS leadership staff and with Congressional offices, the Coalition focused its advocacy efforts on addressing the state of the National Park System. Our discussions included concerns over overcrowding, insufficient staff, and lack of adequate funding to truly support national parks and program offices. We look forward to continued dialogue with Director Sams and other members of DOI and NPS.









# STATE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

As had become the norm over the previous four years, the full year's appropriation for FY 2021 was not finalized until the very end of December 2020. For FY 21, the National Park Service received \$3.123 billion, which was \$330 million above the previous president's budget request. Further, FY 21 was the first full year the NPS received mandatory funding from the Great American Outdoors Act. As a result of this act, the NPS has an additional \$1.3 billion to help address deferred maintenance in our national parks, as well as \$473.8 million for federal land acquisition and related grant programs from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

While this funding is a positive step forward, there is still a great need. NPS staffing has suffered greatly over the past decade with many parks and programs having fewer staff than they did a decade ago. The Coalition sent to Congress and the Biden administration its recommendations for the FY 22 budget with an emphasis on restoring the lost staff

capacity, appropriating additional funding to address climate change and natural resource protection priorities, as well as providing funding for completing the cultural resource challenge.

Congress took steps toward implementing some of these recommendations when the House passed the FY 22 Interior appropriations act, which increased funding for the NPS over FY 21. However, the Senate had not acted on the bill by the end of the calendar year, so the NPS is funded as of press time via a continuing resolution.

Along with this funding, the president signed into law the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act as well as a five-year reauthorization for federal highway programs. The Coalition signed several letters, issued press statements, and advised members of Congress of the importance of this funding to our National Park System.

# DIVERSITY IN OUR NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

To support a greater diversity of sites and stories in our National Park System, the Coalition endorsed the proposed addition of several new parks and related areas.

We submitted letters and comments in support of legislation to establish the Amache National Historic Site as a unit of the National Park System. Amache was one of ten federally operated internment camps where collectively over 110,000 Japanese Americans were unjustly incarcerated during World War II. The new unit would complement several other sites in the System that tell the story of racial prejudice, the violation of civil liberties, and the failure of our democratic institutions during a momentous time in our past.

The Coalition also strongly supports the creation of the Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park, a site which would tell the story of a renowned

philanthropist and his involvement in the successful creation of more than 5,000 schools and related buildings for the education of African American children in the South.

The Coalition expressed its support for local proponents' vision for the establishment of Alabama Black Belt National Heritage Area. While some at NPS recommended the NHA limit its focus to the Civil Rights movement, the local vision embraces the Black Belt's multiple historical and cultural periods, ranging from pre-colonial indigenous cultures to the cotton boom enabled by slavery, the Civil War, Jim Crow, and the area's emergence as the epicenter for the Civil Rights activities of the 1960's.

The Coalition will continue to use its voice to champion the inclusion of more diverse sites in the National Park System and build upon efforts to increase the diversity of park visitors, park employees, and our own membership.







# AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

In Spring 2021, the Biden Administration outlined its America the Beautiful initiative. A report from the administration encouraged support for locally led and voluntary efforts to conserve and restore America's lands, waters, and wildlife. This nationwide effort will also tackle the climate crisis, address access to the great outdoors, and set our first-ever national conservation goal – to conserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030 (the 30 x 30 initiative).

The Coalition firmly believes that our national parks and the NPS programs that support them are vital to the health of our country. National parks drive tourism, make communities more desirable places to live, boost physical activity, and create jobs. They provide us with places to seek adventure or peace. We must ensure that our national parks are not only protected and preserved for future generations, but accessible to all Americans today. And President Biden's

America the Beautiful plan is an important step forward to achieving these goals.

The Coalition has taken numerous actions in support of this initiative. Coalition members in Montana, Colorado, Arizona, Oregon, and other states across the country have authored op-eds about the significance of the 30 x 30 initiative. The Executive Council sent letters and spoke with the media about the importance of conservation, restoration, and increased access to parks and public lands. And Coalition members met with leadership from the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, in addition to representatives from numerous congressional offices, to express our support for the goals of the America the Beautiful initiative.

We look forward to continuing the support in 2022.

# ENERGY DEVELOPMENT NEAR NATIONAL PARKS

The Coalition has long been concerned about BLM-managed oil and gas leasing near national park boundaries. In addition to the global impacts of climate change, our concerns have included the localized impacts of drilling operations on park air quality, water quality, viewsheds, night skies, and wilderness characteristics.

The Coalition submitted extensive recommendations to the Department of the Interior for leasing reforms based on our many years of commenting on federal leasing proposals. We followed up on this detailed submission with letters to Departmental officials and Congressional committee leadership, as well as with numerous Coalition member op-eds, in support of a variety of proposed leasing reforms.

Progress was made in the protection of several areas that were threatened by oil and gas leasing. In June the administration announced that it is suspending all oil and

gas leasing in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, an area managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. And in November, DOI announced that BLM will initiate consideration of a 20-year withdrawal of federal lands from new oil and gas leasing within a 10-mile radius around Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

DOI also finally published its promised report on proposed oil and gas leasing reforms. The Coalition issued a statement of support for the recommended measures and urged the Department to pursue additional reforms.

The year began with high hopes for major federal oil and gas leasing reforms within DOI. It ended with some tangible improvements, but uncertainty, about what the reforms will actually include. Federal oil and gas leasing programs will continue to be a significant issue of concern for the Coalition in 2022.







# SERIAL PLANNING PROCESSES

Two serial planning processes accounted for a significant portion of the Coalition's advocacy workload in 2021:

## **Air Tour Management Plans (ATMPs):**

The National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000 required the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and NPS to jointly prepare ATMPs, along with NEPA analysis, to manage and limit the adverse impacts of commercial air tours over national parks. Twenty years later, the agencies had not completed any ATMPs, were successfully sued, and given two years by the court to complete ATMPs for 23 parks by late 2022. The plans proposed by NPS to date have failed to consider alternatives to, or evaluate impacts of, the existing levels of air tours in the affected parks. The Coalition has submitted comments, critical of the process, on each ATMP issued thus far, and will continue to do so until the process is complete.

## **Regional Haze Rule Updates:**

The Clean Air Act designated “national parks” and designated wilderness areas as Class 1 clean air sites, the highest level of air quality protection afforded under the Act. The Regional Haze Rule requires states to develop and implement air quality protection plans to reduce the pollution that causes haze. 2021 marks the first comprehensive update of the many plans originally developed in 2007. Given the large volume of plan revisions this year, we are collaborating with and signing on to comment letters developed by other conservation organizations. Protecting air quality and limiting haze in parks has long been a priority of the Coalition's advocacy work. The current updates are an opportunity to ensure that visibility in parks remains unimpaired in the decade ahead.



# MAJOR PROJECT PROPOSALS AFFECTING PARKS

Two major projects located adjacent to national parks were the subject of multiple Coalition actions in 2021:

## **James River Transmission Line:**

The Coalition continued to advocate for the protection of resources and values at Colonial NHP and the Captain John Smith Chesapeake NHT which are being significantly impacted by a towering transmission line constructed across the James River under a flawed 2017 environmental assessment (EA). The EA was overturned by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. In 2021 we commented critically on the Army Corps' draft, court-ordered EIS, which endorses the transmission line as constructed. Pending release of the final EIS in 2022, we are encouraging the NPS and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, to formally request a "referral" to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) based on unresolved agency concerns about the impacts of the project.

## **Spaceport Camden:**

Spaceport Camden is a proposed commercially operated, low-orbit, satellite launching facility that would be located on the Georgia coastline adjacent to and only two miles from Cumberland Island National Seashore. The Coalition has collaborated with a coalition of conservation groups and state agencies in commenting our collective opposition to the project. Our concerns have generally reflected those of the NPS, which include adverse impacts during launch events to park soundscapes, night skies, wilderness characteristics, and visitor access and public safety. For example, during launches there could be "temporary controls on public access" to Cumberland Island, which is accessible only by water, and there is potential for significant visitor safety concerns on the island in the event of launch failures, which occur as often as 20% of the time.









# NATIONAL MONUMENT RESTORATION



HOUSES ON FIRE – BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT, UTAH

Under the previous administration, we witnessed a relentless attack on our country's national parks and monuments, including rollbacks of protections for national monuments that put irreplaceable natural and cultural resources at risk. Indigenous groups, tribal leaders, and environmental organizations, including the Coalition, pushed hard to reestablish national monument boundaries that were in

place prior to the rollback. The Coalition joined sign-on letters, met with Congressional representatives, authored op-eds, and issued statements about the cultural, historical, and environmental importance of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments in Utah. Protecting these spaces was vital not just to the environment but our collective history. Thanks to our collective advocacy and hard work, President Biden restored the boundaries of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments, and restored management conditions to the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument in the northwest Atlantic Ocean. These actions help to ensure the safety of our resources and offer a better experience for those who visit. But this is just the beginning, as there are lands and waterways across the U.S. that need protection. We will continue to advocate for the protection of parks and more public lands to help meet the goals of the America the Beautiful initiative.

# THE TRANSITION



OLD POINT COMFORT LIGHTHOUSE – FORT MONROE NATIONAL MONUMENT, VIRGINIA

As part of our preparations for a new administration in 2021, the Coalition joined other environmental organizations in compiling recommendations for actions the administration

should take to address the most pressing issues affecting our national parks and public lands, as well as our air, water, and other resources. Separately, the Coalition prepared our own report, *This Land Is Our Land*, which was sent to the Biden administration early in 2021. This report identified five specific areas with recommended changes in direction for our national parks and programs to help restore the agency's mission and ensure that NPS employees are supported with strong leadership and sufficient resources to do their jobs.

The Biden administration has moved to implement numerous recommendations found in *This Land is Our Land*. Some of these include filling senior level vacancies, taking steps to reestablish the NPS as a leader in the fight against climate change, and investing in cultural resources. The Coalition provides periodic updates to the report and the full list of successes can be found on our website at [protectnps.org](https://protectnps.org).



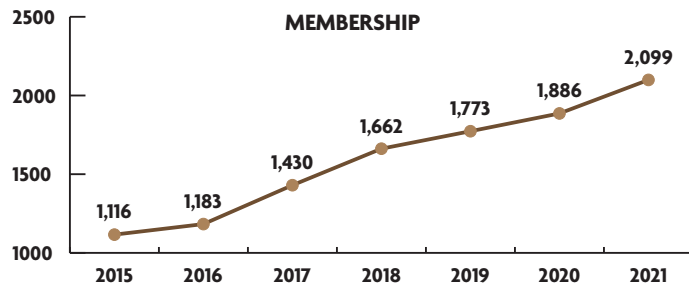
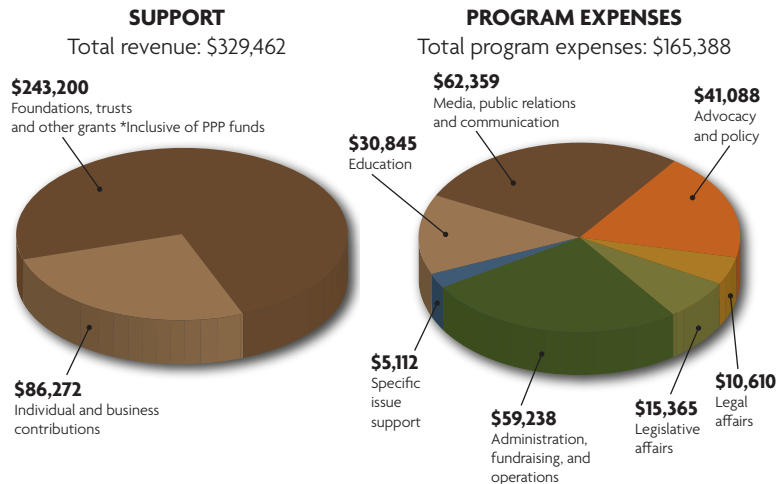


# 2021 FINANCIAL SUMMARY FOR MEMBERSHIP

The Coalition remains in a strong financial position. In 2021, as we navigated the unknowns of the pandemic, we saved money related to travel and meetings by conducting most of our business remotely. The bulk of our expenses are tied to mission related programs, which we expect to continue given our growing workload and engagement. The Coalition qualified for the Payment Protection Program, which provided us with funds to pay up to 8 weeks of payroll costs. Once these funds were expended, we applied for loan forgiveness which was granted. As we begin another busy year, we remain grateful for your continued support.

## Membership

In 2021, the Coalition surpassed the 2,000-member mark. We saw an impressive annual growth rate in membership, amounting to roughly an 11% increase. This can be attributed to an online recruitment strategy utilizing targeted Facebook outreach.



# 2021 ISSUES CONTRIBUTORS

THANK YOU to Coalition Members, Partners, and Supporters!

Michael Allen  
Sarah Allen  
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Tom Vaughan  
Bill Wade  
Clara Wooden

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

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



Harpers Ferry  
National Historical  
Park  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
VISITOR CENTER PARKING  
AHEAD 0.5 MILE



# 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 Phil Francis as the recipient. Phil served two terms as

the Chair of the Coalition's Executive Council. Phil led the organization through a particularly tumultuous period for our National Park System. His role as the public face of the Coalition required handling high-pressure, time sensitive NPS issues, fielding requests from media for comment on those issues, and coordinating work on a variety of organizational concerns. Despite the challenges, the Coalition experienced remarkable growth under his leadership. Phil's steady hand guided the organization during this most unusual period and we are proud to recognize Phil with the 1872 award in honor of his service.



## 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. David

Graber as the recipient of this award. David retired as Chief Scientist, NPS Pacific West Region. During his career he was instrumental in providing oversight and guidance on some of the most controversial science issues facing the agency. David embodied the importance of scientists and managers working together to protect resources. He was an advocate for science-based decisions, emphasizing its importance to all levels of park management. Although he has been retired for 7 years, his work continues to have a profound impact on science throughout the NPS. The Coalition is proud to award David with the 2021 Hartzog Award.



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