



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

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



The Year in Review

The Coalition marked several milestones in 2023. We celebrated our 20th anniversary by focusing our advocacy efforts on issues impacting NPS employees, while continuing to serve as advocates

on many other issues affecting the National Park System. This year was also my 10th and final year of actively serving on the Coalition's Executive Council (EC). As I reflect on my time on the EC, I am amazed at how much our organization has grown and increased its engagement on issues over the years. Several major turning points have contributed to our increased growth. In 2015, the organization formally changed its name from the Coalition of National Park Retirees to the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks to include current employees and ensure that the organization stays current and engaged on the relevant

issues of the day. In 2016, Amy Gilbert was hired as our first full-time Executive Director. Amy began raising funds to hire additional staff and contractors to support our work and “amplify our voice.” Since then, membership has steadily grown to over 2,500. We have been able to produce and distribute the bi-weekly Coalition Report as a service to our members and significantly increase our level of engagement on issues. It has been a pleasure and an honor for me to have served on the EC for the past ten years and help represent our collective “Voices of Experience.” I leave the EC in good hands, with highly experienced and passionate park advocates who are ready to carry on the work of the organization.

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

Mike Murray
Chair

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



When I hit my alarm in the morning, it can feel like Groundhog Day. With the government shutdown threats, looming elections, and recurring battles we fight on behalf of our public lands, we've stayed

busy on a number of continuing issues over the years. There are still many concerning policies and actions that were implemented by the previous administration we are trying to address. We continue to encourage the current administration to take action on other issues prior to the next election, which will be here before you know it.

This year, we're welcoming eight new members to our Executive Council (EC) - our largest group ever - and I'm looking forward to their fresh perspective and new ideas. Thank you to our EC members whose terms have ended: Michael Allen, Sarah Allen, and Richard Ring.

A special thank you to Mike Murray, who has been on the EC for a decade and served as Chair for the past two years. Mike's tireless commitment to the Coalition's issues work has been unparalleled during his time with the EC. We would not have had such a measurable impact on issues related to the National Park System without Mike's passion and dedication.

As we kick off the new year, much of our work will continue - but with each year comes renewed hope and progress. We will keep plugging away. Here's to a productive and impactful 2024!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Gilbert Fehir". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amy Gilbert Fehir
Executive Director



INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUES

The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks utilizes advocacy, education, and communication to help protect our national parks and public lands. The issues we undertake are continually evolving, but they fall into three overarching categories:

- **Park Specific Issues** – These are precedent setting issues with the potential to be adopted in additional park units or system-wide. Because our capacity to engage in park-specific issues is limited, the Coalition is selective in the park-specific issues in which we engage.
- **NPS System-Wide Issues** - These are broad issues, often based on Congressional actions, that could impact numerous, if not all, parks in the National Park System.
- **Multiple Agency Issues** - These broad issues, often politically driven, may impact multiple federal agencies or jurisdictions, including the NPS.

In 2023, we engaged in more than 120 actions, thanks to the commitment of our Executive Council and members. In celebration of our 20th anniversary, we focused on issues pertaining to NPS employees, including housing, hiring and retention, and employee morale. We continued to advocate for national monument designations, engaged in ongoing regulatory issues, and advocated to protect our parks from adjacent energy development projects.

We are proud to present the highlights from our 2023 advocacy work.

THE STATE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

When members of the majority party of the House of Representatives announced their intention to cut funding in the discretionary portion of the federal budget, we knew the impact would be dramatic since this discretionary spending represents only a small portion of federal spending.

Twice during 2023, a shutdown of the federal government appeared imminent due to the inability of Congress to pass a continuing resolution to allow further federal spending. As of press time, federal spending for the Department of the Interior lasts only through February 2, 2024. A budget for the entire FY 2024 is pending, which hampers the ability of the NPS, its programs, and the parks, to know how much they can spend well into the second quarter of the fiscal year.

The Coalition devoted a large amount of time in 2023 conducting outreach to members of the appropriations

committee regarding the need to provide funding to replace hundreds of lost positions over the past decade. Unfortunately, the House version of the Interior Appropriations Act provides NPS with \$3.039 billion – \$436 million less and a nearly 13% reduction in funding from the previous fiscal year. The Senate version of this act would provide \$3.457 billion for the NPS in FY 2024, about \$18 million less than in FY 2023.

The Coalition will continue to advocate for adequate funding to help ensure the NPS can meet the needs of park operations, protect park resources, provide for the enjoyment of all visitors, and maintain strong partnership and technical assistance programs.





DOI AND NPS NEWS

During 2023, the Coalition continued its dialogue with a range of officials in the Secretary of the Interior's office, the National Park Service directorate, program and regional offices, and with park staff. This included regular updates on the progress made in addressing the NPS deferred maintenance backlog, as well as the implementation of the various climate-related, habitat restoration, and wildland fire portions of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act.

Within the NPS, Director Chuck Sams selected Frank Lands as the deputy director for operations after having served as the Pacific West regional director. Frank came to the NPS after 20 years with the U.S. Army, managing their natural and cultural resource and conservation programs. The NPS also appointed Kate Hammond as the Intermountain regional director in April of 2023.

Secretary Haaland led the effort to ensure the protection of significant NPS resources by announcing that the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks, which are anchored in Hopewell Cultural National Historical Park, have been designated as the 25th World Heritage Site in the United States. Additionally, Secretary Haaland announced a 20 year moratorium on leasing and mining claims surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Further, the secretary assured continued support for national park lands and related resources by appointing fifteen new members of the NPS Advisory Board, which had languished during the previous administration.

The Coalition was also supportive of the NPS' seven-year initiative to focus on hiring more women in law enforcement positions at national parks across the country, with a goal of having a 30% female law enforcement workforce by 2030.

PROTECTION OF PUBLIC LANDS

This year the Coalition celebrated the designation of four new national monuments: Avi Kwa Ame, Castner Range, Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley, and Baaj Nwaavjo l'tah Kukveni. Each designation brought us one step closer to achieving the conservation goals laid out in the America the Beautiful Initiative: to conserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. These designations were possible through the judicious use of the Antiquities Act, which authorizes the president of the United States to proclaim national monuments on current 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.

Further supporting these efforts, the Coalition updated and republished its report, *In Support of the Antiquities Act: A Continued Look at the Lasting Impact of National*

Monuments, and identified additional natural and cultural sites worthy of increased protections. We issued statements of support, drafted letters and comments, conducted media interviews, hosted webinars, and amplified community and Tribal voices in support of several new national monument campaigns.

The regulatory arena also continues to provide valuable tools for protecting public lands. The Coalition provided comments in support of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) proposed Public Lands Rule to elevate conservation as an important use of these lands, on par with energy development and recreation. We will remain engaged throughout the year as the rule advances through the rulemaking process.

We are eager to continue our advocacy efforts to help protect parks and public lands throughout 2024.





SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE EMPLOYEES

The NPS continues to struggle with low employee morale, a problem compounded by understaffing and overcrowding at parks across the country. Threats of a federal government shutdown have not improved the situation.

The Coalition urged Congress – through testimony, public statements, and meetings – to provide appropriate levels of funding for our national parks and the programs and offices that support them.

To help support NPS employees, the Coalition worked in close partnership with the Association of National Park Rangers (ANPR), the National Parks, Conservation Association (NPCA), and the Park Institute of America (PIA) to engage in advocacy focused on numerous issues related to our most important resources – human resources. The NPS Workforce Issues Committee communicated our support to NPS leadership for the agency’s RISE initiative,

an action plan to address work issues impacting employee morale. The committee submitted comments on housing proposals and preserving merit system principles, organized meetings with the new NPS recruitment team to discuss diversity and hiring initiatives, and surveyed NPS employees in the field to better understand on-the ground impacts of challenges related to housing, hiring, and employee morale.

The Coalition also met regularly with park advocates and partners to help advance pending legislation and funding for additional employee housing in parks. These efforts will continue this year as the Coalition works to improve employee morale by addressing the critical need for housing of the permanent and seasonal workforce at national parks across the country.

Our support of NPS employees will remain at the center of our advocacy work in 2024 and beyond.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

The Coalition participated in numerous actions related to the conservation of wildlife. In early 2023, the NPS issued a new proposed rule on hunting and trapping in Alaska's National Preserves. We submitted detailed comments on the proposed rule and coordinated with numerous organizations in the preparation of a letter expressing support for the NPS proposed rule.

At Point Reyes National Seashore, the Coalition applauded the park for creating the Tomales Point Area Plan and providing direction for the management of the park's thriving tule elk population. The Coalition supported the alternative that meets current law guiding the management of national park areas, and the specific legislation for Point Reyes, the Wilderness Act, and NPS policy that tiers from the Organic Act.

The Coalition also submitted comments on the Draft

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a Bison Management Plan at Yellowstone National Park. The draft plan clearly explains the evolving science of how many bison Yellowstone can support based on plant productivity, summer and winter conditions, migration patterns, and hunting outside the park. We supported the alternative that would prioritize treating bison more like the ecosystem's other wild ungulates and supported ceasing the capture of bison for shipment to slaughter.

Finally, the Coalition weighed in on a draft EIS that evaluates options for restoring grizzly bears to the North Cascades Ecosystem. The Coalition supported the plan alternative that would reintroduce a small number of grizzly bears and permit flexibility by managing for a 'non-essential, experiment population' to address conflicts that may occur. We believe the grizzly bear recovery area has sufficient habitat to support a viable reproducing population.





PARK USES

Visitor Use Management Plans (VUMs)

Overcrowding, declining budgets, and reduced staffing have forced national parks across the system to grapple with safely and effectively managing the increasing numbers of visitors. The Coalition provided comments on VUMs at Grand Teton, Glacier, Yosemite, and Rocky Mountain National Parks. Many parks are considering a combination of strategies such as timed entry to certain areas, day-use reservations, seasonal reservation systems, peak time limits, and other methods. The Coalition is supportive of setting visitor capacities and developing appropriate indicators and standards for measuring resource conditions and the quality of the visitor experience.

Air Tour Management Plans (ATMPs)

The NPS and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) continue to issue legally-mandated plans to manage commercial operators conducting air tours over parks. We

previously commented on plans for 19 parks, and in 2023 we submitted comments on five additional proposed ATMPs. The recent proposals represent a significant improvement in the thoroughness of the planning process, as well as in the protection of park resources and values.

Electric Bicycles (e-bikes)

Since the NPS issued a final rule authorizing the use of e-bikes on designated trails, the Coalition has continued to advocate for prudent management of their use in parks. We submitted detailed comments on an NPS programmatic environmental assessment (PEA) on the potential impacts of e-bike use on park roads and trails, and we joined other groups in advocating for the Interior Secretary to revoke a 2019 Secretarial Order that had mandated that e-bikes be allowed in parks everywhere that traditional bicycles are allowed.

EXTERNAL THREATS TO PARKS

Threats to park resources can involve actions by other agencies. For example, oil and gas drilling managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) near park boundaries can and has degraded air and water quality, disrupted wildlife habitat, and resulted in carbon emissions that contribute to climate change. Although the Biden Administration initiated efforts to reform BLM's oil and gas leasing program, the agency continues to hold lease sales based on outdated guidelines. In 2023, the Coalition joined other groups in advocating repeatedly for the BLM to defer on issuing new leases until program reforms are completed. We also submitted comments on a much-needed update to BLM's "fluid mineral" leasing rule.

In 2023, we also submitted detailed comments on several BLM-proposed renewable energy policies, including a wind farm project near Minidoka National Historic Site. Our comments focused on improving BLM project-siting criteria

to ensure that park landscapes in isolated locations are not overwhelmed by poorly located wind or solar farms in the future.

The Coalition also commented on updates of numerous state regional haze implementation plans, which will help to address pollution that threatens public health, nature, and visibility at national parks. We supported legislation to improve protection of old growth forests, which play an important role in providing wildlife habitat, species diversity, hydrological regimes, nutrient cycles, and carbon storage. Lastly, the Coalition joined other groups in opposing the development of a large data center on the edge of Manassas National Battlefield Park and in advocating for improved mitigation of impacts caused by the construction of a major high voltage transmission line across the James River just south of historic Jamestown Island.

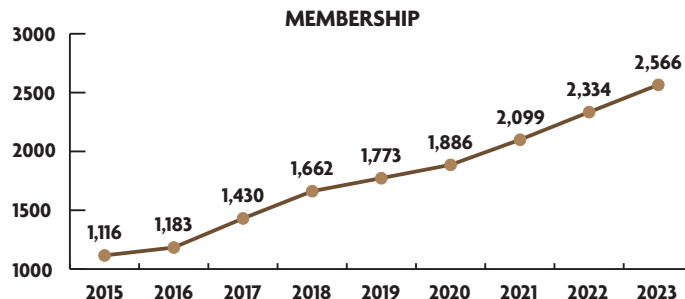
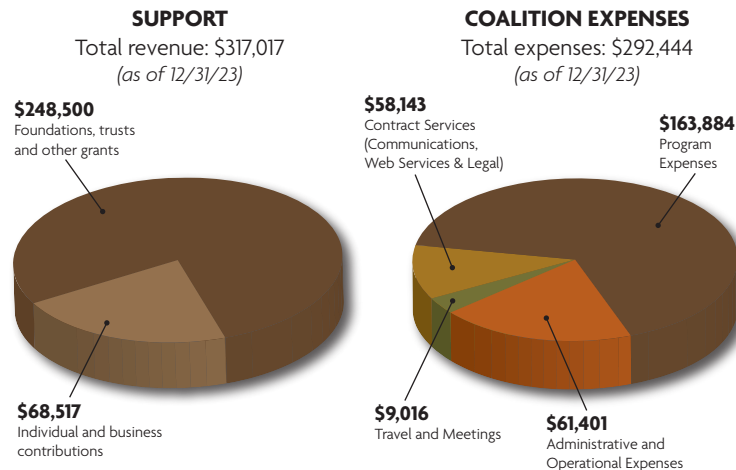


2023 FINANCIAL SUMMARY FOR MEMBERSHIP

The Coalition increased our fundraising in 2023 thanks to the generosity of our members and increased grant funding. While we had strong fundraising results, we are seeing giving trends that may be cause for concern in the coming year, with some of our larger donors deciding to dedicate their dollars to new causes after years of support for public lands. We will be proactively communicating with our funders on the value of our work and our unique voice, which will be even more important going into an election cycle. Our member fundraising accounts for a significant portion of our annual funding and we are thankful for their support.

Membership

In 2023, the Coalition added 232 new members, bringing our total membership to 2,566. For the last three years, we have added over 200 members annually. Our steady growth is tied to the use of targeted advertising on social media, and we anticipate continued growth in 2024.



2023 ISSUES CONTRIBUTORS

The following Coalition members participated in our issues work in 2023:

Michael Allen	Maureen Finnerty	David Mills	Bill Shaddox
Sarah Allen	Mary Foley	Jeff Mow	Chris Soller
Paul Anderson	Phil Francis	Mike Murray	Sheridan Steele
Rob Arnberger	Russell Galipeau	Don Neubacher	Terri Thomas
Don Barger	Don Hellmann	Cherry Payne	Michael Tollefson
Marcia Blaszak	Phillip Hooge	James Pepper	Demica Vigil
Gilbert Blinn	Jonathan Jarvis	Bill Pierce	Karen Wade
Frank Buono	Elaine Leslie	Sandy Rabinowitch	Clara Wooden
Maria Burks	Joseph Llewellyn	Richard Ring	
Judy Caminer	Richard Martin	Dan Sakura	
Sue Consolo-Murphy	Linda Mazzu	Cheryl Schreier	

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

Akinyemi Blackshear, Teresa Ford, Amy Gilbert Fehir, Greg Hughes, Theresa Manthripragada, Steve Pittleman, Emily Thompson, Katie Wallace, and Chelsea Wells.

The Coalition also thanks the following organizations that we collaborated with in our issues advocacy work in 2023: Association of National Park Rangers, Center for Biological Diversity, The League of Conservation Voters, National Parks Conservation Association, National Parks Second Century Action Coalition, the Park Institute of America, Piedmont Environmental Council, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Southern Environmental Law Center, Trustees for Alaska, Western Conservation Foundation, Western Energy Project, and The Wilderness Society.



AWARDS



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.

Patrick Gonzalez. Patrick is a climate change scientist and forest ecologist at the University of California, Berkeley. Through his research and writing, he advances science-based action on human-caused climate change to help protect nature and people. Patrick has also served as the Principal Climate Change Scientist for the NPS and Assistant Director for Climate and Biodiversity of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. Patrick has long been a strong supporter of the NPS and a champion for tackling climate change and defending scientific integrity. 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 Michael B. Murray. During Mike's ten years on the

Coalition's Executive Council, he has worked tirelessly on a range of issues that impact our national parks and public lands, from energy development, to hunting and trapping regulations in Alaska's national preserves, to improving NPS employee morale. Mike's contributions, including his two years spent as Chair, are immeasurable. Thanks to his dedication, experience, and research into complex issues impacting the National Park System, the Coalition has built our reputation as the Voice of Experience. We are proud to recognize Mike with the 1872 Award in honor of his service and commitment to protecting our national parks.



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