



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

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



There are no adequate words to describe last year. The Coalition significantly expanded its efforts to address the unprecedented volume of issues facing the National Park System. Under the leadership of outgoing Chair Phil

Francis and our new Executive Director, Emily Thompson, we prepared and engaged the Executive Council (EC) and our members to respond to countless unknowns in an extraordinary year.

We cannot know what 2026 will bring, but the National Park Service will continue to face chronic understaffing, inadequate funding, and ongoing threats to natural and cultural resources. The Service and its employees will need our continued support, advocacy, and “Voices of Experience” as we confront these challenges.

I am honored to serve as Chair of the Executive Council and will rely on our exceptional EC members, Coalition members, and staff as we advance our mission. Thank you to Phil - and all those rotating off the EC - for your leadership and hard work. We are also pleased to welcome five new EC members: Alex Picavet, Jindtana Prugsawan Harlow, Wendy Berhman, Mike Ward, and Larry Frederick. You can learn more about our EC members, and our work, at ProtectNPS.org

This past year brought many hardships, yet as Jane Goodall reminds us, “hope is what enables us to keep going in the face of adversity. It is what we desire to happen but we must be prepared to work hard to make it so.” The Coalition will continue to work hard and offer that hope. All the best for the new year and with gratitude to all of you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheryl A. Schreier".

Cheryl Schreier
Chair, Executive Council

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and our team. I have been with the Coalition for over seven years, serving as the lead on advocacy and communications prior to taking on the role of Deputy Director.

In April 2025, I accepted the Executive Director position and hit the ground running. I am so appreciative of the solid foundation that has been built, and I look forward to expanding our reach and our impact.

We have a great team at the Coalition, including a fantastic government affairs specialist and communications specialist we hired in 2025. We continue to benefit from the experience and skill of our other support staff, including our business manager, staff assistant, report editor, and website and social media managers. I am thankful for the

time, passion, and commitment of our volunteer Executive Council, who have spent countless hours speaking with Congressional offices and media, and participating in events to help raise awareness of the challenges facing our parks and public lands.

Ultimately, it's you – our members and the Voices of Experience – who are helping us make a difference. Your wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of our National Park System has given us credibility and authority on local, state, and national levels. 2025 was an unprecedented year and I don't anticipate the challenges to fade or the work to slow down. With your support, we will continue to serve as trusted advocates for our parks and public lands and, hopefully, make a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily W. Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Emily W. Thompson
Executive Director



WHO WE ARE

The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks (Coalition) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and protecting our National Park System. Through advocacy, education, and collaboration, we work to ensure that the values and ideals that shaped the National Park System continue to guide its future.

Our organization is composed of nearly 5,000 members – current, former, and retired National Park Service (NPS) employees and volunteers. We count among our members former directors and deputy directors, superintendents, maintenance staff, interpreters, scientists, administrators, and others who have devoted their careers to caring for the nation's irreplaceable resources and stories. Collectively, our members bring over 50,000 years of hands-on experience and a deep understanding of what it takes to steward these exceptional places.

All current, former, and retired NPS employees and volunteers are welcome to join as a Member of the Coalition. Membership is free, though our work is made possible through donations. Individuals, organizations, and companies who share our commitment to protecting national parks but are not current or former NPS employees or volunteers may also join as Supporters. Supporters stand with us by contributing financially, staying informed through our publications, and amplifying the voices of those who have dedicated their careers to our national parks.

Our work is led by a volunteer Executive Council and a small but dedicated staff of Coalition employees and contractors. Together, we form a powerful network of experience and advocacy, working to ensure that America's national parks remain protected and accessible for current and future generations.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUES

The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks utilizes targeted advocacy, education, and strategic communications to help engage our membership, work with partners, and influence policy, legislation, and guidance. The issues we undertake are evolving, but they fall into three general categories:

Park Specific Issues – These are issues at the park level that have the potential to set a precedent. The Coalition can help support park managers who make tough decisions consistent with law and policy in the midst of especially challenging political and/or media attention. Our capacity to participate in these issues is limited and 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 units of the National Park System.

Multiple Agency Issues – These broad issues, often politically driven, may impact multiple federal agencies or jurisdictions, including the NPS.

While we are focused on defense of the federal workforce and the parks, programs, and offices of the National Park System, we continue to track and participate in a variety of issues, ranging from energy development near national parks to support for national monument designations. We typically share the total count of our actions taken throughout a year, but we have participated in more actions in 2025, including media interviews, Congressional meetings, letters, events, and other outreach, than we can count.

While it feels like the successes are few and so many challenges remain, our Voices of Experience have never been stronger. Here are the highlights of our 2025 work.





THE STATE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

The National Park System is facing a growing set of pressures that threaten the ability of the NPS to fulfill its mission. Visitation continues to grow – with more than 325 million visits in 2023 and a record 331.9 million in 2024. At the same time, the NPS is operating with significantly fewer personnel since January 2025, following decades of insufficient staffing. This mismatch between increased demand and diminished capacity is having real consequences.

In addition, the current administration signed a budget reconciliation bill during the summer of 2025 that rescinded \$267 million in previously committed funding for the National Park Service – resources desperately needed to help rebuild the NPS workforce. The FY 2026 budget includes flat funding for the Operation of the National Park System. While the agency avoided the dramatic cuts proposed by the Administration, our parks, programs, and offices remain understaffed and underfunded at a time of record visitation, worsening climate

impacts, and unprecedented threats to the continued protection of our environment, our parks, and our public lands.

There are hundreds of vacant positions across the National Park Service at parks, programs, and offices across the country, including numerous superintendencies, and the Director of the National Park Service. Those in Acting positions are often doing the work of several people or managing multiple park units. This is not sustainable.

Despite the popularity of the NPS with the public — and the roughly \$50 billion annual economic benefit our parks deliver — it is becoming a nearly impossible task to serve massive visitor numbers, while ensuring the protection of natural and cultural resources for the future. In short, the National Park System remains a national treasure, but one that is being tested by underfunding, understaffing, and sharply increased demands on its resources.

A WORKFORCE IN CRISIS

The National Park Service is grappling with a serious staffing crisis that threatens the ability of the agency to uphold its mission. The NPS has been understaffed and underfunded for more than a decade, with a 20% decline in the workforce between 2010 - 2025. And since January 2025, the NPS has lost almost **25% of its permanent workforce**. The losses last year, driven by a hiring freeze, pressured buyouts and retirements, and a pending reduction in force, are devastating the agency's ability to protect park resources, ensure visitor safety, and deliver basic services. Programs and offices have been gutted and national parks across the country are struggling to remain "open and accessible" to fulfill the order of the current administration. Employee morale is lower than ever.

In addition, the longest government shutdown in history pushed National Park Service employees – already strained by staffing losses – to the brink. Parks were left largely open

and accessible without the necessary NPS staff to ensure visitor safety and protect park resources. The long-term impacts to resources and programs, the economic hit to gateway communities and national parks, and the health and morale of NPS employees, are still being assessed.

The Coalition worked to defend and support NPS employees through media interviews, Congressional meetings, and other efforts to spotlight the incredible importance of park staff and the dangers inherent in the sweeping cuts to the federal workforce.

To our friends, families, and colleagues in the National Park Service – we see you, we stand with you, and we thank you. Our parks couldn't exist without your dedication, and we will continue to fight for you. Protecting the NPS workforce is inseparable from protecting the parks themselves.





SAFEGUARDING AMERICA'S PUBLIC LANDS

In 2025, the defense of America's national parks and public lands took on renewed urgency. The Coalition has actively stepped into the fray, addressing emerging threats that could reshape the nature of public lands for generations.

We are concerned over the broader picture of shrinking protections and accelerating development on public lands. Threats include revisiting boundaries of national monuments, loosening environmental reviews, and prioritizing extraction—actions that threaten cultural heritage, wildlife, clean water, and public enjoyment of the outdoors.

Our areas of focus include the push to sell, give away, or privatize public lands, and shrink or eliminate national monuments. The Coalition and our partners sounded the alarm when language permitting public land sales, including the transfer of key parcels in Nevada and Utah to private

interest, was inserted into budget reconciliation proposals. While we successfully defeated that effort, we continue to track ongoing threats to public lands and national monuments and stand ready to fight back.

In addition, the Coalition submitted detailed comments opposing the complete rescission of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) groundbreaking 2024 Conservation and Landscape Health Rule. We urged BLM to retain key definitions and other provisions of the rule that will help the agency keep conservation as an integral part of their mission “to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.”

Through formal comments, letters to decision-makers, coalition building, and public education, the Coalition is working to guard the integrity of our parks and public lands.

EXTERNAL THREATS TO PARKS

Oil and Gas Leasing – In 2025, there was a significant uptick in the number of BLM oil and gas lease sale proposals on public lands near national park boundaries. Drilling oil and gas in close proximity to our national parks has the potential to adversely impact a variety of park resources and values, including air quality, natural sounds, dark night skies, and wilderness character. The Coalition collaborated with other conservation groups to submit comments on numerous lease sale proposals in western states, as well as preparing our own comments on multiple lease sale proposals close to the NPS wilderness boundary at Theodore Roosevelt National Park (THRO) in North Dakota. To date, we have been successful at getting the BLM to “defer” (i.e., postpone indefinitely) on the leasing of parcels within three miles of the THRO boundary. However, the onslaught of proposed lease sales continues.

Protecting Minidoka – In 2024, the BLM approved a plan to allow a massive wind farm of up to 241 wind turbines up to 600 feet tall to be constructed adjacent to Minidoka National Historic Site, a WW II Japanese-American internment camp. Known as the Lava Ridge Wind Project, the wind farm would cause significant visual impacts in this remote but historic setting. As a result, the Coalition and other groups actively opposed the project throughout the planning process. In one of the few “victories” for park protection to occur in 2025, in August the Department of the Interior announced it was cancelling its prior approval of the wind farm project, citing concerns about the project’s impacts to the historic site.

Regional Haze – While millions of visitors travel to national parks each year to enjoy the incredible scenery and stunning

views, haze pollution has degraded those views and harmed public health. Much of this pollution comes from extracting, developing and burning fossil fuels. Today, 98% of national parks are plagued by haze pollution that can travel hundreds of miles. In 2025, with the help of our partners at NPCA, we sent letters and participated in numerous state and federal comment periods, supporting strong state plans to limit haze pollution and defend existing plans. We also remain involved in litigation involving haze pollution in several states. although the legal action was largely on hold in 2025.

Ambler Road – We have long opposed the construction of a 211-mile industrial mining access road in Alaska that would cross BLM lands and a remote, undeveloped portion of the NPS-managed Gates of the Arctic National Preserve. If constructed, the road would cause significant adverse

impacts to a variety of arctic natural resources and enable highly impactful industrial mining activities to occur in an otherwise pristine, remote setting. After years of NEPA planning and analysis, litigation, and then replanning and more analysis, in June 2024 the BLM issued a Record of Decision selecting the No Action Alternative, in effect, denying the permits needed for construction of the mining access road across federal lands. However, in October 2025 the White House announced that President Trump had approved the appeal of Ambler Road proponents and federal agencies would be issuing the permits needed to allow Ambler Road construction to begin. Park advocates, including the Coalition, are evaluating this latest development in the Ambler Road saga and will continue to strongly oppose this ill-conceived project that would do irrevocable harm to pristine Arctic resources.

DEFENDING TRUTH IN OUR PARKS

The current administration has moved to erase history at national parks throughout the country. National parks have been forced to flag content that may be “disparaging” to Americans past or present – including materials in parks that address slavery, the removal of indigenous peoples from ancestral homelands, climate impacts, and LGBTQ+ contributions.

The Coalition has been fighting hard against the removal of historical information, a move which undermines the core mission of these public spaces: to educate, preserve, and provide an honest reflection of our nation’s past — so that we can build a better future together. Their removal is what disparages our collective history. National parks must remain places where all people can engage with the full, unfiltered story of America, acknowledging the reality of all of those who came before.

There have also been efforts to weaken the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and other regulations and policies that protect our air, water, climate, and wilderness. The Coalition stood in opposition to proposed sweeping changes to NEPA regulations that would reduce public input, disclosure of impacts, and transparency in decision-making processes.

Together, these efforts strike at the central mission of the National Park System: protecting not only landscapes but the truths they hold. The Coalition’s 2025 actions — submitting comments, issuing statements, participating in hearings — underscore that when science is weakened and history is reshaped, our parks lose part of their role as places of education, preservation, and national memory.





CHAMPIONING PARKS ON CAPITOL HILL

The Coalition continued to elevate the voices of our members—career professionals who understand firsthand the challenges and needs of the National Park System. Through testimony, policy feedback, and direct engagement, we ensured that elected officials and agency leaders heard from those who have dedicated their lives to protecting our nation’s most treasured places.

Over the course of the year, the Coalition provided expert testimony, submitted comments on proposed policies and legislation, and held hundreds of conversations with congressional offices and committees. These efforts focused on securing robust funding, adequate staffing, and sound science-based management for the National Park Service. We offered strong support for legislation such as the reauthorization of the Great American Outdoors Act (America the Beautiful Act) and voiced opposition to harmful measures including the FLASH Act, which would endanger resources along the southern border, and

the Fix Our Forests Act, which would strip science and public engagement from land-management decisions.

Our staff and Executive Council members also deepened relationships with key lawmakers—participating in briefings, writing op-eds with congressional representatives, and providing trusted expertise during a pivotal year. Coalition members helped shape the national conversation around the federal government shutdown, warning of the risks of keeping parks open without sufficient staffing, and spoke publicly about the dangers of continued hiring freezes, deep funding cuts, and the erosion of environmental protections and the erasure of history.

Through these actions, the Coalition strengthened its reputation as a respected, experience-based voice for the protection of parks, people, and the principles that sustain the National Park System.

AMPLIFYING THE VOICES THAT PROTECT OUR PARKS

Drawing on the expertise of nearly 5,000 current, former, and retired National Park Service employees and volunteers, the Coalition served as a powerful and credible voice in the media and continues to work tirelessly to ensure that park issues remain in the public eye and that decisions affecting our national parks are grounded in experience, science, and stewardship.

Throughout the year, the Coalition effectively leveraged national and regional media to highlight urgent challenges—including staffing shortages, the impacts of government shutdowns, harmful budget proposals, and renewed threats of public land sales and privatization. These efforts have amplified our Voices of Experience and reinforced the Coalition's reputation as a trusted source for insight into the realities facing our parks.

Coalition members joined several high-profile sign-on letters that led the national media conversation, urging the Secretary of the Interior to close parks during the shutdown to protect

visitors and resources, and raising alarm over Secretarial Order 3426, which mandates that “all park units remain open” despite severe staffing cuts. We also partnered with organizations to release a comprehensive report warning of “dire consequences” from these cuts—documenting their impact on park operations, programs, and the National Park Service's ability to fulfill its mission to safeguard irreplaceable resources for future generations.

Coalition representatives also spoke with reporters nationwide about the erasure of history in park interpretation, the risks of unchecked energy development, and the consequences of underfunding. By elevating the authentic voices of those who have dedicated their careers to the National Park System, the Coalition has deepened public understanding of what is at stake and reaffirmed its leadership in defending America's parks and public lands.



LEGAL ADVOCACY FOR OUR NATIONAL PARKS

The Coalition utilizes a variety of advocacy tools, including litigation, to accomplish our mission to help protect America's National Park System.

Defense of the NPS – Due to threats to NPS staffing, including the illegal firing of probationary employees, the Coalition joined a broad array of plaintiffs, including unions and nonprofits, in a nationwide lawsuit led by Democracy Forward. In a sharply worded Summary Judgment, the judge found that the Administration's firings were conducted indiscriminately and illegally, with no regard for employees' job performance or public safety. In an advisory capacity, the Coalition has also engaged in a significant lawsuit to halt the Administration's unprecedented campaign to restructure and dismantle the federal government, including NPS, without Congressional approval. As the lawsuit moves forward and other issues arise, the Coalition will continue to engage in legal efforts to protect the National Park Service.

Badlands and Mount Rushmore Air Tour Management

Plan Litigation – In 2023, the FAA and NPS issued Records of Decisions for Air Tour Management Plans (ATMPs) at Badlands National Park and Mount Rushmore National Memorial that would prohibit commercial helicopter tours from flying less than 5,000 feet above ground level over the two parks. In 2024, commercial air tour companies sought to overturn the agencies' decision. The Coalition joined litigation as an Intervenor in order to support the plan to effectively eliminate air tours at the two parks and to provide information we believed would be vital to the eventual ruling in the case. The court denied the air tour industry's petition for review, thus affirming the legality of the agencies' ban of air tours below 5,000 feet above ground level at Badlands and Mount Rushmore.

Alaska hunting rule – In 2020, the NPS issued a final rule that allowed sport hunters in Alaska's national preserves

to use a variety of “liberalized” predator hunting methods permitted under State of Alaska sports hunting regulations that conflict with NPS management policies. Following legal challenges by the Coalition and other groups, the rule was found legally deficient, and revised. A new rule was issued in 2024 that prohibited bear baiting. However, after the change in Administration in 2025, the Interior Department announced that it plans to rescind the 2024 hunting rule and reinstate the “bad” 2020 rule. The Coalition and its litigation partners are preparing to strongly oppose this proposed reinstatement.

Wilderness Crossing – This major, mixed-use development was proposed on the border of the Wilderness battlefield, part of the Fredericksburg-Spotsylvania National Military Park. After it was passed by the Orange County Board of Supervisors, the America Battlefield Trust, Central Virginia Battlefield Trust, Friends of Wilderness Battlefield, and local landowners brought a lawsuit against the county due to several critical process failures. The Coalition joined several other organizations in

writing an amicus to support this lawsuit. So far, the challenge has overcome a demurrer hearing and is now headed towards a full trial and evidentiary hearing.

The Old Spanish National Historic Trail – This 2,700-mile trail, designated in 2002, encompasses natural and cultural resources, cultural heritage sites, and scenic vistas that remain vulnerable to impacts from individual developments whose cumulative impacts – without a comprehensive plan – are not being considered. The Coalition continues to pursue a lawsuit we filed with other plaintiff organizations and individuals to ensure that the NPS and the Bureau of Land Management comply with their long-overdue duty under the National Trails System Act to create a comprehensive plan for the Old Spanish Trail. We currently await the federal district court’s ruling on the government’s procedurally unusual attempt to have the case dismissed before moving to the merits and without considering matters outside the pleadings.





2025 FINANCIAL SUMMARY FOR MEMBERSHIP

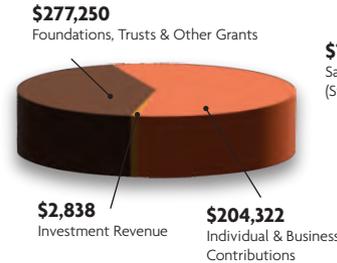
Coalition members and supporters contributed at historic levels in 2025. Our support increased substantially in all categories and enabled us to hire a communications team and government affairs specialist to help build stronger relationships with Congressional offices and the media. We plan to build on this momentum in the coming year, reaching out to our current donors and building new relationships with potential benefactors. We are so grateful to our members, supporters, and funders for their support in this incredibly difficult time for national parks and public lands. As always, thank you for helping us to protect our parks.

Membership

In 2025, the Coalition welcomed over 1,700 new members, bringing total membership to 4,876. This year's exceptional growth is a testament to our work on behalf of our national parks and public lands. We are so grateful to our members and look forward to continued growth in 2026.

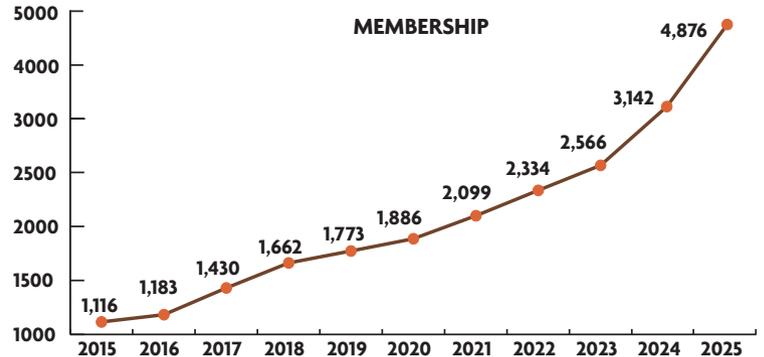
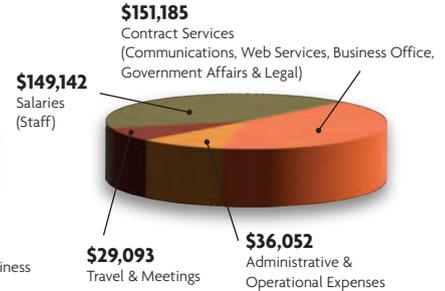
SUPPORT

Total Committed: **\$484,410**



ANNUAL EXPENSES

Total expenses: **\$365,472**







ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of our Executive Council and staff, we extend our gratitude to everyone who supported the Coalition's work over the past year. Every contribution – whether through policy research, media engagement, information sharing, or financial support - has been essential to advancing our mission to protect and preserve the National Park System.

Your collective dedication has strengthened our ability to respond to challenges and defend the integrity of America's national parks during an especially difficult year. It was truly an “all hands on deck” effort, and the passion, expertise, and generosity of our members and supporters made a measurable difference in amplifying our Voices of Experience and ensuring that park professionals were heard at the highest levels of decision-making.

Our collective impact is only possible through our partnership and collaboration with dedicated allies and friends. The Coalition extends special thanks to the following partner organizations for their support of our advocacy and issue work throughout 2025:

American Battlefield Trust, American Bird Conservancy, Animal Wellness Action, Association of National Park Rangers, Center for Biological Diversity, Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, Democracy Forward, Duke University Environmental Law and Policy Clinic, Minidoka Pilgrimage Planning Committee, National Audubon Society, National Parks Conservation Association, Park Institute of America, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Piedmont Environmental Council, Southern Environmental Law Center, The Wilderness Society, and Trustees for Alaska.



AWARDS



George B. Hartzog, Jr. Award

The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks is proud to announce **Mike Reynolds** as the recipient of the 2025 George B. Hartzog, Jr. Award. Throughout his

remarkable National Park Service career Mike demonstrated unwavering dedication to protecting national parks and supporting the National Park Service workforce. His leadership strengthened parks across multiple regions, and his steady guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic provided critical reassurance in a challenging time. Although retired, he continues to be a trusted voice and advocate for national parks and the employees who care for them. We are honored to recognize Mike's exceptional service, integrity, and lasting contributions with this award.



Bill Wade 1872 Award

The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks is proud to announce **John Garder** as the recipient of the 2025 Bill Wade 1872 Award. John has been a strong advocate for the National

Park Service throughout his tenure with the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), dedicating countless hours to strengthening federal support for our national parks. A trusted voice on Capitol Hill and an authoritative presence in the media, he has elevated critical issues ranging from appropriations to the impacts of staffing shortages and government shutdowns. His research, insight, and partnership have been invaluable to the Coalition's advocacy efforts. We are honored to recognize John's dedication, leadership, and partnership with this award.



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