



A Big Win for Middle Georgia

In March, President Trump signed into law the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (S.47) which included provisions to 1) expand the Ocmulgee National Monument, 2) re-designate the unit as the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park, and 3) authorize an NPS special resource study of the Ocmulgee River corridor to examine potential options for conserving and managing additional cultural heritage sites and natural resources along the river. For middle Georgia, this achievement caps almost five years of concerted effort across four separate Congresses to enact the Ocmulgee legislation into law. This legislative odyssey brought together many constituencies in Georgia and Oklahoma, including the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and several other tribal governments. It also inspired bipartisan cooperation by local, state and national elected officials.

A great debt of gratitude is owed to Senators Johnny Isakson and David Perdue, as well as Congressmen Sanford Bishop and Austin Scott, for their leadership and perseverance in building the necessary consensus to advance this bill through Congress.

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NPCA'S SOUTHEAST HISTORY OF IMPACT A Quarter-Century of Park Protection

This year marks NPCA's 100th year of working to protect America's national parks. For over a quarter of that century, NPCA's Southeast Regional Office—under the leadership of Don Barger—has fought to fulfill that mission. As we prepare for the next century of challenges to our national parks, we wanted to take a look back at a few of the park protection victories to which this office has been integral during its 27-year presence in the Southeast.

Much of the day-to-day work of park protection is largely invisible to the public. From tireless research and detailed comment-writing to strategic coalition-building and dogged lobbying, we've learned that vigilance is its own victory. That said, these highlights provide a brief summary of some the more visible victories our staff and allies have achieved in this region.

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Top: Dark night skies on Hazel Creek inlet; Fontana Lake, NC adjacent to Great Smoky Mountains NP. ©Matt Brass **Above Left:** Historic frontier cabin at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park ©Zrfphoto | Dreamstime **Above Right:** Expansive view from the Rough Ridge Trail off the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina ©Cvandyke | Dreamstime **Bottom:** Great Smoky Mountains NP ©Gelyngfjell | Dreamstime

FIELD REPORT

Fall 2019

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Advocating for national parks in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina

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About National Parks Conservation Association:

For 100 years, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice in safeguarding our national parks. NPCA and its more than 1.3 million members and supporters work together to protect and preserve our nation's most iconic and inspirational places for future generations. For more information, visit



100 YEARS
NPCA.ORG

A FAREWELL MESSAGE FROM DON BARGER



Retirement is a strange beast. After 27 years serving as NPCA's Southeast regional director, this is my final message. But I leave with the confidence that I am passing my work into very good hands.

Writing the piece on the history of the Southeast office left me with a profound sense of gratitude for the support and participation of so many of you over the years. Together we have endeavored to preserve for future generations the ability to experience, understand and become part of this amazing national experiment: the national parks.

Behind each highlighted victory for our parks is a story rich with discoveries, conflicts, relationships, values and heroes.

We are blessed by the richness of our public lands in the Southeast. The continued preservation of these lands must be part of a larger national discussion of who we are as society and who we want to become.

America challenged itself 100 years ago to protect the national parks unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. America is still an experiment and the national parks are the beating heart of that experiment.

You, the volunteers and supporters of NPCA's work, are the engine that makes all this possible. My commitment to you is that I am leaving my job to become one of you. See you on the trail.

Above: Don and Lisa Barger in the Hooker Valley near Mt. Cook, South Island, New Zealand.

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TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

What do you like about this newsletter? What other topics or features would you like to see? Please contact us with your feedback at southeast@npca.org.

Victory for the Buffalo National River

Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson announced in early June that a deal had been reached to remove C&H Hog Farms, Inc., an industrial swine facility from the Buffalo National River's watershed. Governor Hutchinson also declared a permanent moratorium on large confined animal feeding operations in the river's watershed. Now this treasured landscape will be properly protected for future generations to safely experience and enjoy.

In November 2018, after a lengthy review, the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) issued its final decision to deny an operating permit to C&H Hog Farms and directed the facility to cease operations within 30 days and submit a closure plan within 60 days of the final day of operation. ADEQ argued that C&H did not meet the specific requirements for the needed permit and should not be allowed to continue operations that threaten the national park's resources, local economies and park visitors. And with Governor Hutchinson's announcement, the Buffalo National River and its watershed will be permanently protected from C&H's industrial practices.

NPCA's campaign director, Emily Jones states: "For more than six years, NPCA and its allies—the Ozark Society, Buffalo River Watershed Alliance and the Arkansas Canoe Club—have been fighting to protect the waters of the Buffalo National River, America's first national river, from untreated hog waste produced by C&H Hog Farms within the river's watershed. Our members and supporters, partner organizations and thousands of Arkansans and national park advocates from across the country have submitted comments calling on the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality and Governor Asa Hutchinson to do the right thing and prohibit C&H industrial hog farm from operating in the national river's watershed. And with the governor's announcement of the closure of C&H and a permanent moratorium on large confined animal feeding operations in the watershed, we celebrate this victory. Now this treasured landscape will be properly protected for future generations to safely experience and enjoy.

"More than a million people visit Buffalo National River each year to enjoy its spectacular setting, fish and swim in its

waters, visit its historic sites and hike the park's 100 miles of trails. We are thrilled with the state's decision to put federally protected waters and local economies above private industry and not allow C&H to continue operations that threaten the national park's resources, local economies and park visitors."

We hope that you'll take a moment to write or call Governor Hutchinson and thank him for protecting the Buffalo!

SEND THANKS

Governor Asa Hutchinson

State Capitol Room 250

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Little Rock, AR 72201

Phone: 501.682.2345

Email: <https://governor.arkansas.gov/online-services/contact-us>

Below: Still waters reflect the autumn colors on the Buffalo National River. ©Lynnbellphoto | Dreamstime



NPCA'S SOUTHEAST HISTORY OF IMPACT (continued from page one)

We fought and defeated a proposal to build a dam in the headwaters of the Obed Wild and Scenic River. As a result of our work, the river was designated as Outstanding National Resource Waters, the highest level of protection under the Clean Water Act. In addition, the first-ever "regional utility district" in Tennessee was created to look comprehensively at water supply issues, and NPCA was appointed to a statewide water supply examination group.

1



2

NPCA led an effort to secure \$11 million in appropriations for the renovation of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in advance of Atlanta's 1996 Olympic Games. The park was operating out of a run-down community center with only on-street parking and little interpretation to honor one of America's best-known world citizens. The successful effort resulted in a dynamic historical presentation of America's Civil Rights Movement that continues to educate, inspire and challenge visitors to this day.

NPCA played a critical role in freeing up a \$19 million appropriation to protect 1,100 acres, about half of the remaining unacquired land on Cumberland Island National Seashore, by crafting a negotiated deal with landowners to provide appropriate access to historic sites on the island.

3



4

NPCA helped preserve the viewsheds and natural sounds of parks such as the Blue Ridge Parkway and Great Smoky Mountains National Park by stopping the growth of intrusive air tours and the proliferation of cell towers.

NPCA and the City of Middlesboro, KY partnered to defeat a proposed coal strip mine within the Fern Lake watershed adjacent to Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. Our petition to have the watershed designated as 'unsuitable for surface mining' succeeded, protecting both the historic viewshed seen from the park's Pinnacle Overlook and the city's water supply. The watershed was later added to the park via federal legislation to ensure its permanent protection.

5



6

After Hurricane Opal devastated the Florida unit of Gulf Islands National Seashore, NPCA worked with scientists and regulators to convince the Park Service to rebuild the roadway in a thoughtful, sustainable way. Not only did we help further a plan that would better protect and restore habitat, but we secured the donation of building materials and personnel for the restoration and ensured the roadway was open in time for the spring tourism season.

NPCA worked with local allies to stop a dam proposed on a principal tributary of the Buffalo National River in Arkansas. This decision set a legal precedent for National Park Service jurisdictional authority to extend to such projects outside of park boundaries that impact protected park resources.

7



A Quarter-Century of Park Protection

We created a coalition of state government and partner organizations that succeeded in preserving 10,000 acres of biologically rich mountainside adjacent to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, linking it permanently to national forest lands in a continuous biological corridor. This work included years of dam re-licensing negotiations and an agreement with the Aluminum Company of America.

8

NPCA worked with local residents to reverse the granting of a permit by the State of North Carolina for a rock mining operation that would have removed an entire mountainside adjacent to the stunningly beautiful Roan Mountain section of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The story of that fight, now told in the award-winning book *Stand Up That Mountain*, also set an important legal precedent for environmental protection in North Carolina.

9

NPCA helped organize a coalition of conservation groups and local officials to successfully oppose the construction of the North Shore Road through the most remote section of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The resulting February 2010 agreement preserves one of the largest and most biologically rich, roadless areas remaining in the Eastern United States.

10

In 2011, after 10 years of litigation and an intensive public outreach campaign to illuminate the impacts of air pollution in our parks, NPCA entered into a settlement agreement with the Tennessee Valley Authority and others that guaranteed the largest cleanup and retirement of coal-fired boilers in U.S. history. Though much continuing progress is needed, the agreement has produced significant improvement in the views of and from Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

11

We convinced the National Park Service to declare a moratorium on improvements to unpaved side roads to the Blue Ridge Parkway until the long-term impacts could be understood and the scenic experience protected. NPCA has spent years developing much of the needed information for a future comprehensive access management plan.

12

NPCA led a 10-year effort in Tennessee to permanently protect 76,000 acres—including 569 miles of ridgelines—from mountaintop coal mining, protecting much of the headwaters of the Big South Fork National River and preserving the habitat for the dozen federally-endangered aquatic species in the river.

13

And the work continues. We're currently fighting the creation of a commercial spaceport that would launch missiles over Cumberland Island's wilderness; we're convening agencies and experts to create viable wildlife corridors across highways and other barriers near Great Smoky Mountains National Park; and, as ever, we're working to bring a new and more diverse generation of national park supporters to this labor of love. Thank you for being part of it all.

Photo 1: Obed Wild and Scenic River ©Melinda Fawver | Dreamstime **Photo 2:** Visitor Center at Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site ©Chris Labasco | Dreamstime **Photo 3:** Dungeness ruins on Cumberland Island National Seashore ©Steve Royer | Dreamstime **Photo 4:** Mt. Mitchell Overlook, Blue Ridge Parkway ©Jon Bilous | Dreamstime **Photo 5:** Cumberland Gap National Historical Park ©Zrffphoto | Dreamstime **Photo 6:** Gulf Islands National Seashore ©Colin Young | Dreamstime **Photo 7:** Buffalo National River ©Avandorn | Dreamstime **Photo 8:** Wildflowers in Great Smoky Mountains NP ©Karen Foley | Dreamstime **Photo 9:** Roan Mountain ©Cvandyke | Dreamstime **Photo 10:** Great Smoky Mountains NP ©Adam Gravett 2019 **Photo 11:** The Great Smoky Mountains NP ©Steve Kingsman | Dreamstime **Photo 12:** Chester Bay Road, Blue Ridge Parkway ©NPCA **Photo 13:** Coal terminal in the Appalachian Mountains ©Scottnodine | Dreamstime



A Win for Public Lands

Earlier this year, a package of more than 100 bipartisan bills to expand and improve America's public lands system, including numerous national park sites around the country, was signed into law. The public lands package was championed by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, unifying Congress at a time when it has been bitterly at odds.

NPCA and its supporters have worked for years to achieve some of these important park victories, including the creation of new national monuments in Kentucky and Mississippi, a major expansion and re-designation of Ocmulgee National Monument in Georgia, and protections that will prevent new mining operations near North Cascades and Yellowstone National Parks, among other provisions.

Photos (Top to Bottom, Left to Right): Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument ©Jud McCranie | Wikimedia • Joshua Tree National Park ©Petr Švec | Dreamstime • Statue of Medgar Evers ©Dimitry Bobroff | Alamy • Emerald Spring's pool in Yellowstone National Park ©Minyun Zhou | Dreamstime • Reenactors at Mill Springs Battlefield ©MSBA • Fort Clatsop in Lewis and Clark National and State Historical Park ©By Thye-Wee Gn | Alamy • President James K. Polk's ancestral home ©Jim Roberts | Dreamstime • President James K. Polk painted by G.P.A. Healy | Wikimedia

Here is a breakdown of what the bill contained and what it will mean for our park system.

What new park sites will the legislation create?

The legislation established four new national monuments, two of which will become part of the National Park System.

Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument, Mississippi. Medgar and Myrlie Evers were powerful voices for the civil rights movement. Their unwavering determination encouraged the fight for equality across the country. A veteran of United States armed forces, Medgar Evers served as the first NAACP field secretary for Mississippi after returning to civilian life. He was killed by an assassin in 1963 at age 37. The national monument will continue to preserve the legacy of the Evers family.

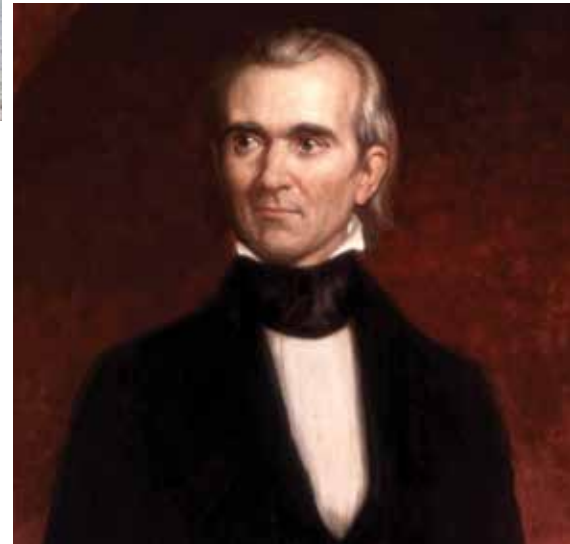
Mill Springs Battlefield National Monument, Kentucky. The Battle of Mill Springs was the first decisive Federal victory of the Civil War and the beginning of a series of Confederate setbacks in the Western Theater. The site offers intact examples of a Civil War battlefield and related properties that were occupied at the time of the battle, as well as insight into the Confederate Army's

winter field camp. In 1991, the National Park Service put Mill Springs on its Most Endangered Battlefield List.

The law also establishes six new national heritage areas. National heritage areas are large, lived-in landscapes that preserve America's cultural history. These areas are operated as a program of the Park Service, although they are managed through innovative partnerships and are not official national park sites.

What park expansions will the legislation create?

The law expands national parks by more than 42,000 acres, adding new land to Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks, Mojave National Preserve, Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park, and Fort Frederica National Monument. Notably, the legislation will expand Ocmulgee National Monument by 1,300 acres and formally re-designate the site as Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park, preserving significant cultural resources in one of the nation's richest archaeological areas and honoring the ancestral stories of the Muscogee Creek and other Southeastern Native people. (See page 1 for story.)



The law creates 1.3 million acres of new designated wilderness, of which approximately 88,000 acres will be managed as part of the National Park System, all of it in the California desert.

The law expands the National Trails System by 2,600 miles, including a 1,200-mile extension on the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and a 1,400-mile extension on the North Country National Scenic Trail that will connect it to the Appalachian Trail.

The law expands the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System by 621 miles, including 77 miles managed by the National Park Service.

What additional protections to park lands will this legislation enable?

The law prevents new mining operations on 370,000 acres outside of North Cascades and Yellowstone National Parks. These significant, hard-won victories will preserve air and water quality, wildlife habitat, dark night skies, and the peaceful, natural character of these parks. At Yellowstone in particular, two industrial-scale operations, including one proposed mine that would have been within view of the park's Roosevelt Arch, would have had disastrous consequences

on the environment, the local businesses that depend on the area's thriving tourist economy, and the park experience that draws millions of visitors from across the globe.

The law also authorizes five new special resource studies—these studies allow the Park Service to evaluate whether a site would be significant, suitable and feasible to include in the National Park System. These special resource studies will focus on the James K. Polk Home in Columbia, Tennessee; the public school in West Baltimore, Maryland, that Thurgood Marshall attended as a youth, as well as the surrounding neighborhood; the President Street Station in Baltimore, Maryland, that served as an important railway link during the Civil War; the Amache incarceration camp in Granada, Colorado, where people of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned during World War II; and the childhood home of George W. Bush in Midland, Texas.

What other programs will this legislation enable?

The law permanently reauthorizes the Land and Water Conservation Fund, one of our nation's most important conservation tools protecting public lands from incompatible development. Congress established this trust

fund in 1965 to protect some of America's most vulnerable public lands using a small portion of federal income from existing offshore drilling royalties. These funds allow agencies such as the National Park Service to buy private land inside national parks from willing sellers that could otherwise become trophy homes, mini-marts or even mining operations.

The law reauthorizes historic preservation grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities through fiscal year 2024. These funds support preservation and restoration of buildings and structures at campuses across the nation.

The law also authorizes the Department of the Interior and other federal agencies to administer passes that provide free entry to America's public lands, including all of our national park sites, for fourth graders and their families. This initiative, known as the 'Every Kid in a Park' program, has been a popular — and fun — way of connecting young people to the outdoors since it launched in 2016.

Kristen Brengel, NPCA's Senior Vice President of Government Affairs, leads staff on public lands conservation, natural and cultural resource issues, and park funding.



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Gopher tortoises grow to be up to 15 inches long and weigh from eight to 15 pounds. They are digging specialists that need relatively deep, sandy, soils in which to burrow and open sunny sites for nesting. Their long, deep burrows provide shelter for about 360 other species, making them ecosystem 'heroes'.

A Big Win for Middle Georgia

continued from page one

Passage of the bill opens several additional opportunities. The enlarged park boundary and study of the river corridor increase the likelihood of achieving the recreation and tourism economic growth outlined in the

2017 NPCA-Knight Foundation report "Diamond in the Rough" (www.npca.org/ocmulgeereport). Additionally, the bill's passage provides momentum for developing and increasing the park's community and tribal engagement. As an example, NPCA is currently working with the National Park

NPCA is currently working with the NPS and the Muscogee Nation Youth Council on a series of activities to reconnect tribal youth in Oklahoma to the park and to their wider heritage in the Southeast.

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Please thank Senators Isakson and Perdue and Representatives Bishop and Scott for their leadership in achieving this victory. And stay tuned for the next phases of this important NPCA landscape conservation campaign.

Top: Gopher tortoise ©Herden | Dreamstime **Left:** New See America poster by Jon Cain ©NPCA

