

TRUSTEES FOR THE PARKS

NEWSLETTER FALL 2021



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GRAY WOLF RECOVERY IMPERILED

NPCA Fights to Save Park Wolves

One of the greatest wildlife restoration efforts in the 48-year history of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is at risk of being lost. A new rule issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service late last year removed federal protections for gray wolves in the lower-48 states.

NPCA, represented by our partners at Earthjustice, is playing a unique role in a lawsuit to restore ESA protections for gray wolves, which are nearly extinct in the vast majority of their former range across the contiguous United States. Our participation gives voice to wolves dependent upon and recovering in national park ecosystems.

For the first time in decades, gray wolves are being seen in or near Dinosaur National Monument in Colorado, North Cascades National Park in Washington State, Crater Lake National Park in Oregon, Lassen Volcanic National Park in California, and other public lands. For wolf populations making a comeback, each new pup is a glimmer of hope for the species' recovery from the brink of extinction. This burgeoning recovery is severely jeopardized by the unlawful delisting decision.

Hunted, Trapped, Poisoned

Years of concerted and cruel efforts to wipe out gray wolves drove the total population down to fewer than 1,000 by 1967. And those dwindling survivors were in just one isolated part of the upper Midwest. Listing the gray wolf as endangered

under ESA in 1974 marked the start of a long recovery process that is not yet complete and could be severely impacted if the unjustified delisting is allowed to stand.

Gray wolf recovery has progressed despite the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) proposing questionable delisting rules that federal courts have consistently rejected as invalid. FWS has attempted to get around unfavorable court rulings by dividing the wolf population in the lower-48 states into smaller groups and then declaring them "recovered" without consideration of the species' overall health across their historic range.

After years of this divide-and-delist strategy being blocked by litigation and public opposition, FWS has now removed all federal protections for gray wolves.

Defeat from the Jaws of Victory

NPCA *Trustees for the Parks*, our wildlife experts, Tribal partners, conservation groups and wildlife professionals have worked long and hard to give gray wolves a chance at a full, sustainable recovery. And now, that time and effort is at risk of being wasted.

As NPCA Wildlife Program Director, Bart Melton, noted when we filed our lawsuit in January, "The U.S. Fish and Wildlife's decision to remove Endangered Species Act protections from gray wolves in the lower-48 states threatens populations just beginning to make a comeback in national parks. Gray wolves are once again starting to re-inhabit park landscapes in Oregon, Washington, California and Colorado."

A few individual gray wolves or small packs being sighted in national park landscapes, however, does not mean the



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species' survival is ensured. "These populations are far from recovered," Melton says. "Rather than working alongside communities to support the return of wolves, the previous administration unlawfully said 'good enough' and removed crucial ESA protections. We are hopeful the court will reinstate these protections."

Removing federal protections for gray wolves puts their future in the hands of state officials responsible for hunting and "predator management" policies. The dangers of this approach are evident in states such as Wisconsin, Idaho and Montana where delisting has led to increasingly aggressive hunts that could negatively affect the wolf population as a whole.

Ignoring Science Endangers Wolves

NPCA, along with one hundred scientists, 367 veterinary professionals, Jane Goodall of the Jane Goodall Institute, 86 members of Congress and more than 1.8 million Americans all submitted comments opposing the delisting of gray

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife's decision to remove Endangered Species Act protections from gray wolves in the lower-48 states threatens populations just beginning to make a comeback in national parks."

**—Bart Melton
NPCA Wildlife Program Director**

wolves. Even the scientific peer review commissioned by FWS found the agency's delisting proposal ignored science and appeared to come to a predetermined conclusion.

And while the gray wolf recovery we have seen is good news, we know they still need federal protections to ensure their future. You can count on NPCA to continue working with our partners in court to fight this shortsighted delisting.



*View of the Green River on Harper's Corner Trail
in Dinosaur National Monument (CO)*

© esloyka/depositphotos.com

All Thanks to You

Leaves will soon be changing colors near my home in the Washington, DC area. Whether autumn brings colorful displays to the trees where you live or less spectacular seasonal transformations, there's no doubt that change is in the air.

But I take comfort all year-round by two things that never change: your commitment to protecting and enhancing national parks, and NPCA's determination to stick with fights for the parks' future for as long as it takes to win.

Helping make sure gray wolves will always grace national parks, for example, is a struggle that we have been involved in for more than 50 years and continues to this day. You can read about those efforts and the latest grave threat to the gray wolf in this *Trustees for the Parks* newsletter. You will also learn how your support is helping expose and fix the problem of orphaned oil and gas wells in close proximity to national parks. It's another battle certain to drag on as we look to clean up leaky messes made years ago.

The common thread running through all of our park-protection efforts is YOU. Your exceptionally generous support as a *Trustee for the Parks* member keeps NPCA in action and on the forefront of conservation season after season, year after year.



The past year has been an especially hard one for all of us. I hope you and your loved ones are safe and well as the pandemic continues to upend our lives. I am forever grateful for your unwavering commitment to your national parks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Abby Evans".

Abby Evans

Associate Director, *Trustees for the Parks*



Colorful autumn view of Blue Ridge mountain ridges from Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park (VA)



Bill and Peg at Maroon Bells (CO)
Courtesy of the Albrets Family

PEG & BILL ALBRETS

Instilling a love for parks in the next generation

The first time Peg and Bill Albrets and their two young children rounded a curve into a valley in California's Yosemite National Park in the 1980s, the spectacular peaks made Peg feel as if her heart had stopped. The family began exploring other national parks and their love for parks grew. When overseas friends visited, they'd proudly take them to share the experience.

The Albrets chose to focus their charitable giving on the parks and environmental issues and discovered NPCA aligned with their passion for parks. They take trips with NPCA's travel program, and plan to set up an endowment for the parks when they turn seventy and a half.

Though their children are grown now, Peg and Bill have passed on their belief that national parks are sacred places. Their daughter and her husband hike the Appalachian Trail. Their son and his wife are starting a family. The theme of the nursery decor? National parks, of course.

**“We believe that
as Americans, we have
an obligation to keep the
parks and public lands in
good and natural condition
so that we can all
enjoy them for
generations to come.”**

**— Peg Albrets, NPCA donor
and parks advocate**

ORPHANED WELLS THREATEN PARKS

Responsible oil and gas development poses a risk to national parks long after the drilling, fracking and pumping is finished. The extent of that risk has been documented in new analysis conducted by NPCA and FracTracker Alliance showing more than 31,000 orphaned oil and gas wells within a mere 30 miles of national park sites.

An “orphaned” oil and gas well is one that is no longer being used and the owner is either insolvent or cannot be found. These abandoned wells are more than eyesores. Left unplugged, they leak methane and other air pollutants, contaminate groundwater and deepen the climate crisis. Resulting health problems — from asthma to headaches and nausea — are especially prevalent in rural, Tribal and communities of color.

Orphaned wells also impair the many streams and rivers flowing through national parks and threaten the health of entire park ecosystems. More than 5,700 orphaned wells can be found near Santa Monica National Recreation Area alone, and another 1,585 are near Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

SEE FOR YOURSELF

You can get a big picture view of this often overlooked problem, and check for orphaned wells near your favorite national parks, with an interactive map developed by NPCA. Visit npca.org and search *orphaned wells* to start exploring and better understand why oil and gas companies should be held accountable for cleaning up their orphaned wells.

Legislation that would do just that is being considered by Congress as this *Trustees for the Parks* newsletter goes to press. H.R. 2415, the Orphaned Well Cleanup and Jobs Act, in the House of Representatives; and S.2177, the Oil and Gas Bonding Reform and Orphaned Well Remediation Act, in the Senate should be passed immediately to protect national parks and park visitors against the dangers of orphaned wells.

The bills include provisions that would increase bonding rates for well operators so taxpayers don't get stuck with the bill for future cleanups, provide funding to plug abandoned wells on public lands, and create as many as 120,000 jobs for oil and gas workers while ensuring a just transition from fossil fuels.

As always, you can speak up for your national parks on this issue and others on the *Take Action* page of npca.org. Your voice matters and is greatly appreciated as we work together to protect and enhance national parks across the country.

Oil and Gas development near Theodore Roosevelt National Park (ND)

© Chris Boyer, Kestrel Aerial Services, Inc





PRESERVING NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAS

When President Ronald Reagan signed the law creating the first national heritage area in 1984, he declared the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Area to be, “a new kind of national park.”

These lived-in landscapes include unique cultural, historic and natural resources that are supported but not directly managed by the National Park Service (NPS). Instead, they are managed and maintained by local coordinating entities (LCEs) — local experts who want to use their national heritage area (NHA) to help protect and promote resources and stories that are both regionally distinct and nationally significant. National heritage areas have become one of the NPS’s most cost-effective and grassroots-driven programs.

Congress allocates a modest amount of annual funding for national heritage areas — funding that must be matched dollar for dollar to create a public-private conservation partnership. All 55 national heritage areas exceed this minimum matching requirement. Indeed, they raise an average of \$5.50 for every federal dollar received and invest all of that money in the communities they serve.

But this fall, 30 of the 55 national heritage areas are set to lose this meager federal funding if Congress does not act — soon — to renew it. In the meantime, staff are concerned about layoffs, the future of their diverse programs, and the vibrancy of their communities.

TRANSFORMATION, HEALING AND DISCOVERY

National heritage areas sometimes emerge from an opportunity to rehab community landscapes, bringing economic opportunities to residents and businesses

though heritage tourism. That is the case with the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area in Arizona, where staff worked to restore the city’s riverfront, redesign Main Street and transform overgrown wetlands into a vibrant park and historic trail. Yuma Crossing has contributed to the community’s economic development and brought rarely seen birds like the yellow-billed cuckoo back to the area.

The Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area in northeast Mississippi preserves and interprets cultural history from a part of the South where blues and rock and roll have their roots and key events in the civil rights movement took place. This heritage area has worked with residents and businesses to honor influential community elders, funded an oral history and documentary project about Black students who staged a sit-in at Delta State University in 1969, and led other efforts to heal communities by spotlighting stories at risk of being lost to history.

Stretching 14 miles along the scenic Niagara River, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area protects and enables visitors to discover historic, cultural and natural resources with ties to Native Americans, early European explorers, the American Revolution and Underground Railroad — not to mention the roaring Falls.

NPCA believes we must preserve these important sites and tell their stories. We will continue to work closely with national heritage area staff and supporters nationwide, along with park champions in Congress, to avert an end to federal funding that is scheduled for this fall so local communities can continue preserving their history, culture and natural beauty.



Crater Lake National Park (OR)
© NPS

IT'S NOT A SECRET — NPCA HAS A PODCAST

Expect the unexpected when you listen to episodes of NPCA's podcast, *The Secret Lives of Parks*.

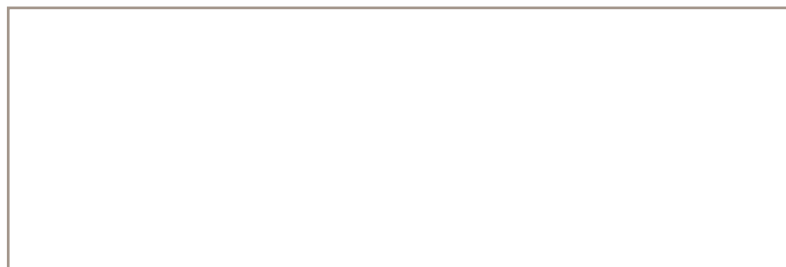
Did you know why private oil and gas drilling is allowed within the Everglades, or how the staff at Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts dealt with the loud drone of Brood X cicadas this spring? You can uncover more secrets in fast-paced, insightful conversations at thesecretlivesofparks.org.



777 6th Street, NW | Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001-3723

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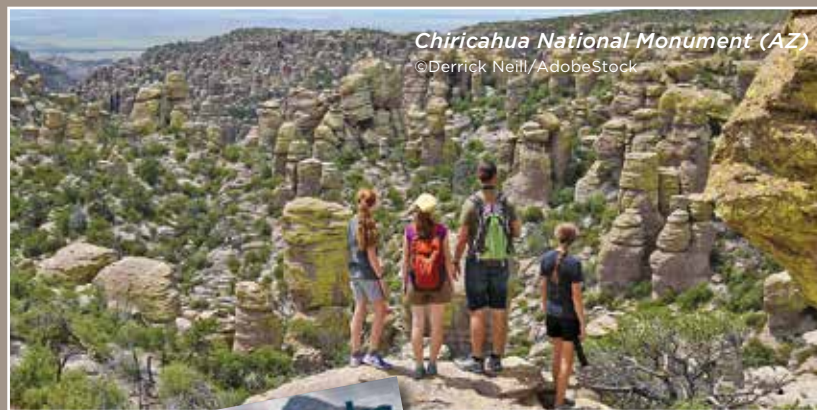


SHARE YOUR PASSION FOR THE PARKS

It's time to start thinking about the perfect gift for special folks on your holiday shopping list. No need to think too hard or even buy wrapping paper — just give a National Parks Conservation Association membership!

An NPCA gift membership includes an annual subscription to our award-winning National Parks magazine and a free bucket hat. It's a gift that truly keeps on giving by introducing friends and family to the stunning beauty of national parks and the important work of protecting and preserving them for future generations.

Plus it only takes a minute. You can visit npca.org/gift to start delighting your gift recipients with NPCA memberships, apparel and more!



Chiricahua National Monument (AZ)
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