

Save the National Park Service

Of all the mystifying cuts coming out of D.C. right now, some of the most head-scratching are cuts at the National Park Service (NPS).

The first national park, Yellowstone, was established over 150 years ago. The NPS itself was created in 1916. The system includes 433 areas covering more than 85 million acres in every state, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

A 2024 Pew Research Center poll showed that NPS had the most favorable rating of any government agency at 76%, with strong support from a majority of both Democrats and Republicans.

According to Department of the Interior statistics, the NPS recorded a record 331.9 million visits in 2024. That same year, the NPS received about \$3.5 billion of government funding.

But that outlay "put a whopping \$55.6 billion into our economy," again according to official government documents (according to Frommer's).

So, the NPS actually makes more money than it costs. Cutting staffing makes no sense whatsoever.

"The National Park Service just reported the highest visitation in its history, as the administration conducts massive firings and threatens to close visitor centers and public safety facilities," said Kristen Brengel, senior vice president of government affairs for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), a nonpartisan group.

"It's a slap in the face to the hundreds of millions of

PROGRESSIVE VIEWS

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people who explored our parks last year and want to keep going back," from quotes in the New York Times.

The NPCA president said, "Quite simply and astonishingly, this is dismantling the National Park Service as we know it, ranger by ranger and brick by brick."

Sen. Angus King of Maine said, "The idea of this kind of wholesale layoff is just an insult to the people of the United States."

Staffing cuts will also impact local communities that serve as gateways to the parks.

According to National Parks Traveler, "The 2023 National Park Visitor Spending Effects survey found that 325.5 million visitors spent \$26.4 billion in communities near national parks. That spending supported 415,400 jobs, provided \$19.4 billion in labor income, and \$55.6 billion in economic output to the U.S. economy."

And it gets worse.

According to the New York Times, "The Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service and the Fish & Wildlife Service manage more public lands than the Park Service. And their staffs have also been cut."

So, check your summer travel plans.

It's not just travel plans getting disrupted, either. According to ProPublica, the cuts have "thrown agencies tasked with battling blazes into disarray as individual offices and

managers struggle to interpret the directives. The uncertainty has limited training and postponed work to reduce flammable vegetation in areas vulnerable to wildfire."

Park staff provide other critical services as well. According to NPR, they "also perform more overt acts of heroism, like performing CPR and rescuing overtaxed hikers from trails, an increasing concern after multiple summers of heat-related deaths in national parks."

"One study found that the risk of heat-related illness at Grand Canyon National Park — and public lands in general — will only increase as climate change worsens."

Some NPS employees are fighting back.

On March 1, a group called Resistance Rangers, consisting of about 700 off-duty rangers, including some who were fired from the National Park Service, tried to organize protests at each of the country's 433 national park sites to stand up against what they see as threats to public lands, including the job cuts. By the afternoon, there were protests at more than 145 sites.

I urge you to contact Sen. John Cornyn (210-224-7485), Sen. Ted Cruz (210-340-2885) and Rep. Chip Roy (210-821-5024) and urge them to oppose these cuts and support our priceless national parks and their employees and facilities.

Thanks for reading. To find out more about how to get involved with local Democratic activities and activism, visit www.kcdems.us.

Laura Bray is Chair of the Kendall County Democratic Party.