

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 19, 2025

THE HONORABLE DOUG BURGUM
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

National parks are some of our country's greatest treasures, offering recreation opportunities that are at the heart of the American experience; however, we are concerned with insufficient staffing levels within the National Park Service (NPS). Without the necessary staff and resources, essential visitor services are reduced, and the local economies that depend on park services and visitor access will suffer avoidable economic losses. To ensure that our national parks remain safe, accessible, and well-managed, we respectfully urge you to maintain appropriate staffing levels and refrain from pursuing any Reductions in Force (RIFs) for NPS employees and the Department of the Interior (DOI) personnel who support them.

Since January of 2025, NPS staffing has decreased by more than 24 percent.¹ As a result, parks have experienced a significant decline in essential visitor services such as emergency search and rescue, educational programs, park and facility maintenance, as well as harmful economic impacts to our gateway communities. For example, at Yosemite National Park, staffing cuts combined with record-setting visitation from January to July led to a 40% increase in search and rescue efforts compared to the same period last year.² At Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park in Montrose, Colorado, the South Rim Fire burned campsites, maintenance vehicles, and other infrastructure, which, when taken along with a one-third reduction in workforce, will impact the local economy as well as park operations such as fire remediation and safety.³ Furthermore, at Joshua Tree National Park, staffing shortages have reduced fee-booth coverage and eliminated evening shifts, limiting visitor safety information, cutting needed fee

¹ *Ongoing staffing crisis and looming government shutdown create more risks to national parks, visitors and communities nationwide.* National Parks Conservation Association. (2025, September 23). <https://www.npca.org/articles/10839-ongoing-staffing-crisis-and-looming-government-shutdown-create-more-risks>

² Richards, H. (2025, August 26). *Yosemite Feels the Burn of an Understaffed Summer.* E&E News by POLITICO. <https://www.eenews.net/articles/yosemite-feels-the-burn-of-an-understaffed-summer/>.

³ *Staffing crisis at national Parks reaches breaking point, new data shows 24% decline in permanent workforce.* National Parks Conservation Association. (2025c, July 3). <https://www.npca.org/articles/9551-staffing-crisis-at-national-parks-reaches-breaking-point-new-data-shows-24>

revenue, and increasing the likelihood of congestion and search-and-rescue incidents.⁴ And at Haleakalā National Park, staffing shortages are delaying critical conservation work and backcountry maintenance, limiting both visitor access and protection of endangered species. Additionally, the recent 43-day government shutdown has further strained park operations, delaying essential work on fire management, invasive species, and facility repairs.

These challenges extend far beyond park boundaries. In 2023, national parks supported 415,000 jobs, generated \$56 billion in visitor-related economic activity, and returned \$10 in economic benefit for every \$1 invested.^{5,6} When parks lack the staff needed to operate effectively, the visitor experience suffers and the communities that depend on park tourism face preventable and potentially severe economic losses.

Recent court filings indicated DOI plans to lay off 2,050 employees across 89 offices, including 272 positions at NPS.⁷ While the continuing resolution passed by Congress on November 11, 2025 prohibits federal agencies from initiating or implementing RIFs through January 30, 2026, we remain deeply concerned that such actions may take place when this prohibition expires.

We recognize the importance of efficiency within the federal government. However, reducing National Park Service staff, including positions in supporting offices across DOI, would only intensify the operational challenges parks already face. We respectfully encourage you to work directly with NPS career professionals, including regional directors, associate directors, and Senior Executive Service staff, to identify practical solutions to staffing constraints. Engaging with these employees and examining existing operational hurdles collaboratively is far more likely to yield meaningful improvements, cost savings, stronger resource protection, and a safe and rewarding experience for the millions of visitors who depend on a well-functioning park system.

America's national parks are already feeling the effects of significant staffing shortages. We respectfully urge you to refrain from pursuing additional staffing reductions and instead work closely with Congress and NPS staff to identify sustainable approaches that ensure safe, accessible, and well-managed parks for the millions of visitors who depend on them.

⁴ Internal National Park Service data show how parks are struggling to get by. (2025, August 27). <https://www.nationalparkstraveler.org/2025/08/internal-national-park-service-data-show-how-parks-are-struggling-get>

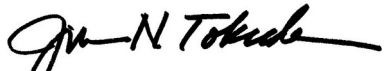
⁵ U.S. Department of the Interior. (2024, August 27). *National Parks contributed record high \$55.6 billion to U.S. economy, supported 415,000 jobs in 2023*. National Parks Service. [https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/national-parks-contributed-record-high-\\$55-6-billion-to-u-s-economy-supported-415-000-jobs-in-2023.htm](https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/national-parks-contributed-record-high-$55-6-billion-to-u-s-economy-supported-415-000-jobs-in-2023.htm)

⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior. (2020, June 11). *National Park Service visitor spending generates economic impact of more than \$41 billion*. National Parks Service. <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/06-11-20-nps-visitor-spending-generates-economic-impact-of-more-than-41-billion.htm>

⁷ Court filings reveal secretary Burgum's plans to Terminate Key National Park Staff. National Parks Conservation Association. (2025a, October 21). <https://www.npca.org/articles/11135-court-filings-reveal-secretary-burgum-s-plans-to-terminate-key-national>

We appreciate your attention to our concerns and look forward to working with you to ensure the long-term safety and enjoyment of our national parks.

Sincerely,



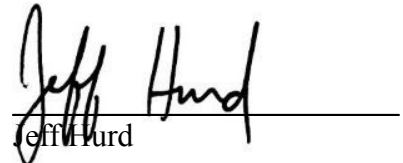
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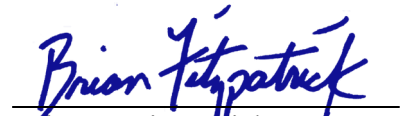
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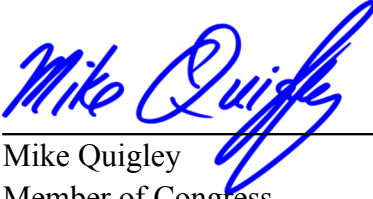
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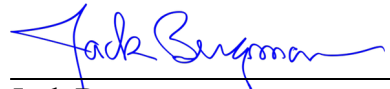
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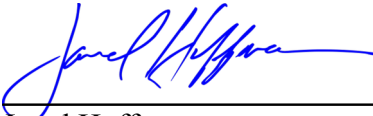
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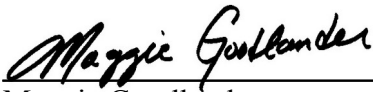
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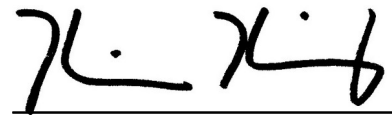
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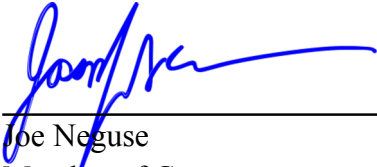
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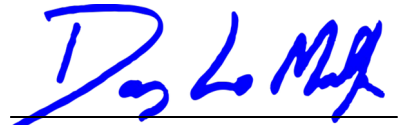
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