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## **Climate Disruption is “Greatest Threat Ever” to National Parks Report Identifies 25 Most Threatened Parks, and Solutions**

Denver—Climate disruption is “the greatest threat ever” to the national parks, the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization and Natural Resources Defense Council said in a report released today. The groups identified the 25 national parks most threatened by climate disruption and proposed solutions to preserve those and other national parks.

The report names as most endangered 25 national parks, monuments, and other parts of the National Park System in 22 states. Human-caused climate change threatens them with impacts ranging from a disruption of ecosystems and a loss of wildlife to rising seas, stronger storms, and intolerable heat.

“Climate disruption is the greatest threat ever to our national parks. We could lose entire national parks for the first time, as Everglades, Ellis Island, and other parks could be submerged by rising seas,” said Stephen Saunders, president of the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization and the report’s principal author. “To head this off, we need to reduce the heat-trapping gases that are already harming them, and begin managing the parks to protect resources at risk.”

“As a country, we need to ensure that our parks have a future that is as promising as their past,” said Theo Spencer, senior advocate at Natural Resources Defense Council’s Climate Center. “Clean energy legislation is now moving in Congress that would help preserve our national treasures, while creating more jobs, economic growth and national security.”

Bill Wade, chair of the executive council of the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees and former superintendent of Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, said, “National parks are often referred to as the ‘canaries in the mine shafts’ when it comes to climate change. By their very characteristics and locations, impacts and effects of climate changes are noticed in national parks first and are a forewarning about what will happen elsewhere. That’s why this report is particularly important.”

The 25 parks identified as most at risk are Acadia National Park (Maine), Assateague Island National Seashore (Maryland and Virginia), Bandelier National Monument (New Mexico), Biscayne National Park (Florida), Cape Hatteras National Seashore (North Carolina), Colonial National Historical Park (Virginia), Denali National Park and Preserve (Alaska), Dry Tortugas National Park (Florida), Ellis Island National Monument (New York, New Jersey), Everglades National Park (Florida), Glacier National Park (Montana), Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Tennessee, North Carolina), Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (Indiana), Joshua Tree National Park (California), Lake Mead National Recreation Area (Nevada, Arizona), Mesa Verde National Park (Colorado), Mount Rainier National Park (Washington),

Padre Island National Seashore (Texas), Rocky Mountain National Park (Colorado), Saguaro National Park (Arizona), Theodore Roosevelt National Park (North Dakota), Virgin Islands National Park/Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument, (U.S. Virgin Islands), Yellowstone National Park (Wyoming, Montana, Idaho), Yosemite National Park (California), and Zion National Park (Utah).

Among the particular impacts of human-caused climate change identified in the report are:

- Everglades, Biscayne, and Dry Tortugas national parks and Ellis Island National Monument, all mostly less than three feet above sea level, are in danger of being lost entirely to rising seas, which could be three to four feet higher by century's end under a higher-emissions future. The coastal barrier islands of Assateague Island and Cape Hatteras national seashores are very likely to be broken apart by rising seas, stronger storms, and flooding.
- The original Jamestown fort in Colonial National Historical Park, where Europeans first settled in America in 1607, is in danger of being lost to erosion of the riverbank of the James River, as a result of rising seas and stronger storms.
- Grizzly bears in Yellowstone National Park are threatened by a loss of whitebark pine nuts, as higher temperatures have enabled a widespread of mountain pine beetle infestations among the high-elevation whitebark pines. Their nuts are the most important pre-hibernation food for grizzly bears, which have lower birth rates when the nuts are in short supply. Last month, a federal judge blocked the Bush Administration's removal of Yellowstone-area grizzly bears from Endangered Species Act protections, citing climate change's effects on whitebark pines.
- In Rocky Mountain National Park, a beetle infestation, spreading higher and faster because of hotter temperatures, is killing virtually all mature lodgepole pines in the park. In Bandelier National Monument and Mesa Verde National Park, higher temperatures have enabled other bark beetles to kill nearly all piñon pines.
- In Yosemite National Park and other western sites, researchers have documented an increase in tree death rates among trees of all types and ages. In Yosemite, because of warmer winters, conifer forests are retreating upslope and being replaced by oaks and scrub.
- Glaciers are melting in all parks that have them, and could be gone entirely from Glacier National Park within 12 or 13 years.
- As a result of temperature changes and related impacts, saguaros could be eliminated from Saguaro National Park and Joshua trees from Joshua Tree National Park.

The report cites evidence that the National Park Service has not yet taken the kinds of actions needed to protect parks and their resources from the effects of human-caused climate change. "With a new administration, we're hopeful and confident that the National Park Service will finally begin taking the steps needed to protect parks and their resources from human-caused climate change," Saunders said. "We've worked closely with a lot of the managers and professionals in the Park Service, and we know they are eager to do what should be done."

Among the 32 recommendations in the report for specific actions to protect parks are recommendations for new and expanded national parks, sufficient to preserve a representative sample of America's best natural and cultural resources; protection of migration corridors between parks and other areas so species can migrate as they adapt to changed conditions; expanded funding for parks, including new authority for the National Park Service to use entrance fees to address climate change in parks; management emphasis on protecting resources threatened by a changing climate; environmental education programs for visitors on climate change and its impact in parks; and restoring to the National Park Service scientific research programs transferred to the U.S. Geological Survey in 1993. The report also recommends national action to curtail heat-trapping gases, which ultimately is necessary to protect park resources.

The full report and detailed state fact sheets are online at [www.rockymountainclimate.org](http://www.rockymountainclimate.org).