

Report: President Trump’s Attacks on National Park Service are Hurting Communities Across Washington State

This report is part of a series detailing the harm President Trump and Elon Musk’s reckless and devastating attacks on the federal workforce are causing on the ground in Washington state. The Trump administration’s mass firings and harmful actions have real consequences for Washington state residents and their communities.

This report focuses on how the Trump administration’s cuts and planned cuts of National Park staff will reduce access to our public lands, harm Washington’s gateway communities, jeopardize natural resources, and make National Parks less safe for visitors.

National Park Service is Critical to Ensuring All Americans Can Safely Visit Our Most Iconic Public Lands This Summer and Beyond

Across the country, National Park Service rangers work hard to keep visitors safe, protect natural resources, and create an inspiring and educational experience for visitors. For over a decade, the National Park Service has had to operate at low staffing levels, despite significant increases in visitation.¹ Yet, under the Trump Administration, the National Park Service has frozen hiring, rescinded seasonal employment offers, pushed employees to resign, and laid off 1,000 permanent employees.² The National Park Service has also been ordered to submit a restructuring plan, and the Department of the Interior plans “additional massive layoffs” in the coming months.³ Without sufficient staff, visitor centers and campgrounds may close, bathrooms will not be properly maintained, emergency response times will drop, and important ranger services from interpretation to providing safety advice will be unavailable.

Layoffs at the National Park Service Will Reduce Access to Washington’s National Parks.

The National Park Service has a significant footprint in Washington, home of the iconic Mount Rainier, Olympic, and North Cascades National Parks, along with historically significant sites across the state—like Fort Vancouver, the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial, and more. At the Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area, Sam Peterson was one of the National Park Service staff fired on February 14, after accepting a promotion to become a park ranger just three months prior.

“Americans aren’t getting what they’ve paid for—they’re not operating under a new budget. The Park Service is supposed to have a park ranger in my position at Lake Roosevelt, so there’s going to be fewer visitors who get important safety messaging, fewer visitors who can have their questions answered, and fewer kids that can go on a field trip led by a ranger. There may be safety impacts during the busy season, if we aren’t able to get out safety messaging as

¹ National Parks Conservation Association, <https://www.npca.org/articles/6680-how-the-new-administration-s-actions-will-affect-national-parks>, (last visited March 31, 2025).

² National Public Radio, <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/26/nx-s1-5307908/national-parks-layoffs-visitors-disruptions>, (last visited March 31, 2025).

³ National Public Radio, <https://www.npr.org/2025/03/15/nx-s1-5328721/reduction-in-force-rif-federal-workers-job-cuts-musk-doge-layoffs>, (last visited March 31, 2025).

effectively. There's supposed to be a team of nine interpreters at Lake Roosevelt—now there are only three,” said Peterson.

In response to court orders, the National Park Service offered many fired employees, including Peterson, their positions back.⁴

“I want to return to the Park Service someday, but right now, it doesn't feel stable for either myself or my family, because we just don't know what the next couple of months—and certainly the next couple of years—will bring. I turned down my job when it was offered back to me, because I was living in government housing at the time of my termination—I was given 60 days to leave. I signed a new lease and started a new job six hours away just before I was offered my job back. Even though it was tempting to accept my job back, I couldn't do it,” said Peterson.

Washington state's outdoor recreation community has a front row seat to the local impacts of cutting staff at the National Park Service. Last year, the Mountaineers—an outdoor recreation group—led 727 trips, activities, and courses in Washington's National Parks, serving 3,456 students.

“We got word that the only plumber at Mount Rainier National Park was fired. That's the kind of thing that you don't see when you're visiting the parks. But if a wastewater system goes down then they're going to have to close bathrooms, that's a public safety issue. You can't have people visiting our parks if there are no sanitary facilities,” said Betsy Robblee, Conservation and Advocacy Director for the Mountaineers.

“We're also concerned about campgrounds opening up. There's a lot of staff that are needed to open campgrounds, whether that's removing hazardous trees from areas near campsites or opening up and testing the water system. If you don't have staff to do that, that's going to either delay or maybe prevent many campsites from opening. Hurricane Ridge, in Olympic National Park, lost one of their road crew members as part of the firing of probationary employees. If you don't have enough road crew members to clear the road up to Hurricane Ridge, that area just can't open,” said Robblee.

In addition to the critical work conducted by National Park Service staff, Washington state has a uniquely strong volunteer community. The Washington Trails Association contributes thousands of volunteer hours to critical trail maintenance projects in places like Mount Rainier National Park.

“We have had a decades-long relationship with Mount Rainier, but it's built on working with National Park Service staff to plan projects so that we can leverage volunteers and bring them to the Park to help steward those places. The fear is that the public side of that public-private partnership is being eroded. We won't be able to complete our mission to take care of these places without the Park Service being there as our partner,” said Michael DeCramer, Policy and Planning Manager for the Washington Trails Association.

⁴ Politico, <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/03/24/nps-puts-rehired-workers-back-on-the-job-instead-of-leave-00244633>, (last visited March 31, 2025).

DeCramer is keenly aware of how reduced staffing will impact visitor experience.

“There are just enough people at Mount Rainier National Park in the winter to keep the roads open and if somebody calls out sick, the gate doesn't open,” said DeCramer, highlighting how vital staff are for providing access to our public lands.

Following public outcry, the National Park Service proposed expanding their hiring of seasonal workers to meet the needs of increased visitation during the high season.

“While that's great in theory, a lot of parks haven't been allowed to repost seasonal job postings, so they're having to use the candidate pool from when the job was posted in October or November of last year. That's now almost six months ago—a lot of the people who applied have already moved on,” said Peterson.

“Seasonal employees do great work, and they're absolutely necessary, but you also need stability year-over-year through permanent employees to train those seasonal employees and maintain institutional integrity, especially in the off season. Even though we think of parks as places we go to in the summer, staff are still needed for visitors during the off season and shoulder season. The off season is also when a lot of maintenance and repair work takes place, so that parks are ready for their high season. It's not efficient to just say, ‘oh, we will fire all of these people and then hire a bunch of part time workers instead,’” said Peterson.

Reduced Park Access Will Hurt Local Economies in Washington's Gateway Communities

In 2023, outdoor recreation contributed \$22.5 billion to Washington's economy and made up 3.2% of the state's total jobs.⁵ This economic impact is particularly important for gateway communities—those located closest to Washington's National Parks.

The American Alpine Institute is a mountain climbing school and guide service with 60 employees and a significant presence in Washington state. Executive Director Jason Martin is also a mountain rescue volunteer, a former president of the Bellingham Mountain Rescue Council, and has worked extensively with the American Mountain Guides Association. After the initial round of layoffs, he reached out to people working in the National Park Service to try to understand how the layoffs may impact outdoor recreation.

“Throughout the outdoor industry—which I represent in a couple of different ways: as a commercial operator, as a volunteer rescuer, and as an outdoor recreationalist—in many cases, we just don't know what's going on right now. We don't know who to talk to. We don't know who to ask about things,” said Martin.

The Mount Rainier Business Alliance is a coalition of local business owners in Ashford, Elbe, Alder, and Mineral, Washington, whose members deeply understand the economic impacts of staffing cuts to the National Park Service.

⁵ Axios, <https://www.axios.com/local/seattle/2024/11/27/washington-outdoor-recreation-industry-economic-impact>, (last visited March 31, 2025).

“In Ashford, which is the main town right outside of Mount Rainier National Park, everything is closely tied to the National Park—from our economy to our safety. So these cuts, while perhaps just seen as being cuts to the National Park, in some ways are really cuts to our community,” said Nickolas Neville, President of the Mount Rainier Business Alliance.

For small business owners near Mount Rainier National Park, reductions in staffing at the National Park Service could make it impossible for them to keep their doors open.

“This whole part of our county relies entirely on the people that decide to make the trip out to Mount Rainier. Making that more difficult, especially with how challenging access to the mountain has been because of lack of staffing—I could see causing businesses to shut down, businesses that are already struggling. I could see it impacting how often we get tourists here renting out properties and short-term rentals. This part of Pierce County is already on life support,” said Cat Larrow, head of the Community Advocacy Committee of the Mount Rainier Business Alliance.

Layoffs at the National Park Service Will Reduce Emergency Services at Washington’s National Parks

In addition to maintaining the parks and educating visitors, park rangers ensure that visitors are safe and serve as first responders when emergencies arise.

“The Golden West Visitor Center at North Cascades National Park on Lake Chelan has struggled to stay open because they just haven't had the staff they need to operate. That's a key entry point for the Steven Mather Wilderness and the southern end of North Cascades National Park. My fear is that there's just no slack at the Park Service. These folks are already doing everything they can. And you're still going to have people wanting to visit the parks, but services are going to suffer,” said Michael DeCramer, Policy and Planning Manager for the Washington Trails Association.

“If there is a search and rescue operation needed, they might not be able to provide the staff for the level of service that we expect. Things might have to close if there's a wildfire in the Park. We may not have the staff with the skills needed to respond in the way that we're used to. And I see a lot of potential risk to the public. Not to be dire, but these cuts will be felt both in terms of loss of services but also decreased safety for the public, because park rangers are first responders,” said DeCramer.

In addition to search and rescue and wildfire response, park rangers provide valuable safety information to visitors to prevent emergencies from happening in the first place.

“Even just the rangers who sit at Artist Point handing out information to people about mountain rescues are important. I've done dozens and dozens of rescues in that area, mostly people who have broken bones. But if there's nobody sitting there to warn someone that they're actually walking into the wilderness. There's a lot of concern,” said Jason Martin, the Executive Director of the American Alpine Institute, and a mountain rescue volunteer.

Across Washington's Parks, decreased staff creates safety concerns for visitors.

"We are a very outdoor engaged state and people just go up to visit the woods constantly. I love that people are engaged, but the Park Service is putting people at risk on any given day by not having enough staff to maintain these parks," said David Beard, Director of Policy & Government Affairs for the Children & Nature Network.

Layoffs at the National Park Service Will Harm Washington's Natural Resources for Future Generations

Washington's National Parks contain some of America's most precious natural resources and iconic landscapes. When people visit these special places, it often has a lasting impact.

"We all have memories of a visit to our National Parks. My three kids have more than 50 Junior Ranger badges they have earned over the years. Are there going to be people there to raise their hand and swear in the six-year-old to be a Junior Ranger? All those things are likely going to be in question," said Tom Uniack, Executive Director for Washington Wild.

"If people aren't able to visit our Parks, or they have negative experiences, then we're losing out on those amazing connections that people have to the natural world that can change their lives. They develop a stewardship ethic. They want to care for these places, and they want to advocate to protect these places. And looking towards future generations, if this continues, future generations may not get to have the same experiences in these places as we are fortunate to have today," said Betsy Robblee, Conservation and Advocacy Director for the Mountaineers.

"Washington is a beautiful state. I was born and raised here. My dad was a climber. I really worry that whether it's the National Park Service or the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management, not having the funding and staff to clean bathrooms, keep the gates open, and haul out trash. Garbage piling up can have lasting impacts on wildlife like bears and ravens and mountain lions," said Jonathan Spitzer, Director of Operations for Alpine Ascents.

As the summer season approaches, cuts to the National Park Service will be acutely felt across Washington state—from small businesses in gateway communities to the safety and quality of visitor experiences in Olympic, North Cascades, and Mount Rainier National Parks. Washingtonians understand that these iconic public lands belong to the public, and that it takes a strong National Park Service to steward them for visitors today and tomorrow.

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