

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

*FISCAL YEAR 2023*



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National Park Service

Land Resources Program



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# Program Overview

## FY23 Year in Review

### *By the Numbers*

The National Park Service (NPS) is guided by the Organic Act of 1916 to protect and preserve resources within units of the National Park System while providing for public use and enjoyment of those resources. Today, the National Park System totals more than 85 million acres, yet more than 2.6 million acres of nonfederal lands remain within NPS boundaries. Acquisition of all nonfederal land within a given boundary is not always necessary—and, in some cases, not feasible. However, many of these lands are important for visitor use and preservation of resources and have therefore been identified to be protected in fee or by scenic or conservation easement interest. This work is carried out by the Land Resources Program (Lands) and is done in cooperation with states, local and tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, and private property owners. Land acquisition funding is provided by the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and uses zero taxpayer dollars. LWCF invests earnings from offshore oil and gas leasing to help strengthen communities, preserve history, and protect our national endowment of lands and waters.

In 2020, pursuant to the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), LWCF funding became mandatory at the full authorized level of \$900 million per year. This significant investment has allowed Lands to increase its capacity and efforts in carrying out its mission. This report highlights several of Lands' accomplishments in Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23). These achievements are made possible by the hard work of the Lands staff, as well as the support of many critical partners. Thank you for joining NPS in celebrating these successes!

**21** staff hired or promoted into new positions in Lands

**41** units where acquisitions were made

**120** parcels of land acquired

**19,000+** acres of land protected

**\$100M** in LWCF funding allocated to Lands

# FY23 Year in Review

## Administrative Accomplishments

### External Programmatic Review

After nearly a year of research, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) released its final report evaluating Lands and the American Battlefield Protection Program. The report includes 24 recommendations across five categories for Lands. Lands has developed a plan to implement these programmatic recommendations to improve program efficiencies and the delivery of services.

NAPA's report, including a summary of observations and recommendations, is available on Lands' public-facing [Reports and Data webpage](#).

### Training

In FY23, WASO Lands, with the assistance of many regional Lands staff, developed and deployed a formalized national realty training program. The training program included an inaugural week-long Lands Academy, 20+ virtual self-paced "microlearnings" for NPS staff, a series of monthly synchronous virtual training sessions, and a multi-day virtual right-of-way (ROW) training.

### Cartography, Boundary Management, and Realty Management

In addition to land acquisition, Lands provides crucial support for cartography and boundary management, realty management, and the NPS ROW program. In FY23, Lands provided real estate guidance and expertise throughout NPS, including preparing cartographic resources, providing critical boundary management support, managing and solving real estate encroachments, consulting on easements and encumbrances, and supporting ROW permitting activities.

### Appraisal Streamlining

Following the release of the FY23 House and Senate Interior Appropriations Bills, which each contained language and directives regarding the Department of Interior's (DOI) appraisal process in the accompanying Committee Reports, DOI formally established a Land Acquisition Workgroup. Through the Workgroup, Lands collaborated with offices across DOI to evaluate the merits of several opportunities for streamlining the appraisal process, including options for returning some appraisal and valuation capacity to the bureaus on a pilot basis. In FY24, NPS will continue collaborating to find solutions for streamlining and expediting appraisal services across DOI.

### National Trails Land Acquisition Office and Tiger Team

The National Trails Land Acquisition Office (Trails Office) was redelegated authority to execute land acquisition for all trails servicewide. In FY23, the Trails Office facilitated trail acquisitions servicewide, as well as non-trail donations and acquisition projects in coordination with regional staff. The Tiger Team provided appraisal liaison assistance to regions and supported appraisal efficiency efforts.

### Partnerships

In FY23, Lands continued to collaborate and build relationships with national and local NGO partners. Partners are critical to the federal land acquisition program and assist with our mission to protect and preserve critical lands. We are so grateful for the generosity and support of our partners!



### Transition to PMIS

This year, the Land Acquisition Ranking System (LARS) was hosted on the Project Management Information System (PMIS) for the first time. LARS is the process by which the regional and WASO Lands offices vet and rank land acquisition projects for potential inclusion in the President's Budget Request to Congress. PMIS is a servicewide intranet application for NPS that manages information about project funding requests. Hosting LARS on PMIS allows for the use of standard technology across NPS programs and provides a common platform to hold information about funding from the creation of the request through the

expenditure. Using feedback from regional Lands offices, WASO staff continue to make improvements to the process.

### Pilot of LPP

At NPS, parks complete land protection plans (LPPs) to identify land protection priorities and methods. Historically, completion rates of LPPs were low, with little to no consistency in their content. To increase completion and uniformity of LPPs, Lands staff are working with staff across NPS to develop an improved, user-friendly LPP template. This year, Lands staff worked with the Denver Service Center (DSC), the Northeast Regional Office, and Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park to pilot a new LPP template. Through consultation with DSC, regional, and park staff, Lands staff helped test out the LPP template, make improvements, and create a revised template that will be rolled out in FY24. Piloting the template with the park was critical to ensuring its practical use once it is scaled to all parks. The updated LPP template will afford more guidance for parks as they identify their land protection priorities and methods to preserve public lands.

# FY23 Year in Review

## *New Hires and NEW Solutions*

In FY23, Lands continued to prioritize staffing up the WASO and regional Lands offices, including internal promotions. Filling staff vacancies across Lands is critical to supporting full and permanent funding authorized by GAOA, preparing for the future, and succession planning. Throughout Lands this year, staff were welcomed into the following 21 positions:

### **Intermountain Region**

- » Surveyor
- » Realty Specialists (2)

### **Midwest Region**

- » Surveyor
- » Cartographer

### **Northeast Region**

- » Surveyor
- » Realty Officer
- » ROW Coordinator

### **Pacific West Region**

- » Surveyor
- » ROW Coordinator
- » Supervisory Cartographer

### **Southeast Region**

- » Realty Specialist
- » Supervisory Cartographer

### **WASO**

- » GIS Specialist
- » Program Analyst
- » Realty Officers (2)
- » Cartographers (2)
- » Supervisory Realty Specialist
- » Boundary Program Manager

Through the Experienced Workers Program, Lands benefited from the additional support of seven National Experienced Workforce (NEW) Solutions contractors in FY23. The NEW Solutions program allows NPS to utilize the talents of workers 55 or older to fill workforce gaps, accomplish unexpected or non-routine projects, prevent skill attrition, and mentor newer employees. Experienced workers provided expertise across various projects and subject areas in WASO and regional Lands offices.



**“NEW solutions provided the best way for me to retire and yet return to work to take my time at ‘letting go.’ This gave me peace of mind that I could continue to support the Lands team and the ongoing projects and bring as much of my experience back to the group while they transitioned with new staff being hired. My work life isn’t a light switch. I still have the desire to contribute and feel needed.”**  
**–Kathy Hanson, NEW Solutions Experienced Worker Contractor, Intermountain Region**

# FY23 Year in Review

## *Internships*



This year, Lands participated in the NPS Build Up Technical Internship Program for the first time and hosted four interns. This internship program works to expand and diversify the NPS workforce while addressing critical needs by providing practical internship opportunities and professional experiences to high-achieving undergraduates, graduate students, and recent graduates in technical fields from diverse backgrounds. Utilizing Public Lands Corps and NPS Conservation Fellows Program hiring authorities, the program attracts talented youth and establishes a pipeline for converting them into career positions at NPS. The Build Up Technical Internship Program has been a great tool for Lands to hire interns and build new leaders at NPS.

The first intern, who worked with Lands in early 2023, focused on an encroachment project. This project consisted of conducting legal research and consulting other federal agencies’ policies and procedures related to encroachments. Using that research, the intern developed guidance for identifying and addressing encroachments on NPS land. The intern also wrote a legal brief based on their research and presented their guidelines to Lands leadership.

In the summer of 2023, three Lands interns worked to identify the locations, legal responsibilities, and interests pertaining to rail bridges in several NPS units. They conducted research on legal land documents, including deeds, easements, agreements, and railroad ROW plats, to identify parties with legal ownership or easement interests and the extent of those rights. Their final products—a comprehensive summary and detailed map for each rail bridge—were presented to NPS leadership at the conclusion of their project.

The interns were an excellent addition to the Lands team, and we are thrilled that they may continue working with NPS in the future. We look forward to seeing the impact their work has across NPS in the years to come. Looking ahead, we are also excited to continue hiring interns through the Build Up Technical Internship Program and support the next generation of leaders at NPS.

# FY23 Year in Review

## Lands Academy

In June 2023, Lands hosted its inaugural Lands Academy at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. This week-long training was an opportunity for Lands staff from across the country to meet in person and learn from their Lands colleagues and other guest speakers from parks, DOI, the Federal Highways Administration, and NPS nonprofit partners. The event was attended by more than 96 participants and presenters, two ASL interpreters, and one transcriber.

The topics covered during Lands Academy ranged from the constitutional foundations for federal land acquisition to the required due diligence steps for a federal land acquisition project. Along with traditional lecture-style training, participants engaged in active learning experiences, breakout groups, and small group discussions. In addition to the academic agenda, attendees also participated in networking and social events such as morning birdwatching, evening trail walks, and a nighttime gathering at the fire pit to make s'mores and play music together.

The inaugural Lands Academy was a great achievement, and we are so proud of this incredible



accomplishment! A ton of hard work went into making Lands Academy such a hit, and we are so grateful to our staff who made it possible. This event was a wonderful opportunity for Lands staff from across the country to learn and interact in person for the first time in years. Looking ahead to FY24, Lands is planning to host a Lands Symposium that will build on the basics of Lands Academy by providing more in-depth

courses and collaborating with other NPS divisions and partners to explore how our work mutually contributes to the NPS mission.

“We are so grateful for all the attendees that made the Lands Academy a huge success through their engagement and participation in the learning process. As important as the educational aspects of the Lands Academy were the opportunities to connect with other lands professionals and develop a national network of friends and colleagues.” –Jen Cherry, Realty Officer, WASO Lands

# FY23 Year in Review

## *Boundary Management Program*

In FY23, Lands' Cartography, Mapping, and Boundary Branch achieved an incredible milestone in its efforts to stand up its Boundary Management Program. The foundation of the program was initially laid in 2018 when there was only one land surveyor attempting to support the boundary needs of multiple park units and new acquisition projects. After recognizing the tremendous need for boundary support, the chief of the Cartography, Mapping, and Boundary Branch spent the next four years securing funding for specialized equipment, developing position descriptions, working with HR, and undertaking hiring efforts. As of the end of FY23, all regional Lands offices, excluding the Alaska and Trails Offices, have hired land surveyors dedicated to their region. This year, WASO Lands also hired a manager to lead the new Boundary Management Program.

Despite only being formally established this year, the Boundary Management Program has already provided great value to Lands and NPS as a whole. The program regularly fields inquiries from parks and regional offices about boundary locations and legal and physical access, and provides informed,

expert opinions. The team also completes technical reviews of contracted boundary surveys. They also assist the budget formulation process by vetting land acquisition projects for boundary issues. Prior to acquisition, they review existing land descriptions and boundary surveys when necessary. When new NPS units are established, the team helps ensure the boundaries are identifiable on the ground and the tract data is published in a timely manner.

The Boundary Management Program has already instituted regular meetings with regional surveyors and other NPS staff with active interests in the program to increase efficiency and cohesiveness. The team continues to set goals, establish processes, and standardize outputs. Looking ahead to next year, the Boundary Management Program will continue to provide technical assistance and work to establish a consistent workflow between surveyors and cartographers. The program will also focus on the phased implementation of a DOI policy requiring expert review of boundary data for land acquisitions. Lands is thrilled to have this program up and running and is grateful for all the hard work that went into making this happen!



PHOTO: NPS



PHOTO: NPS

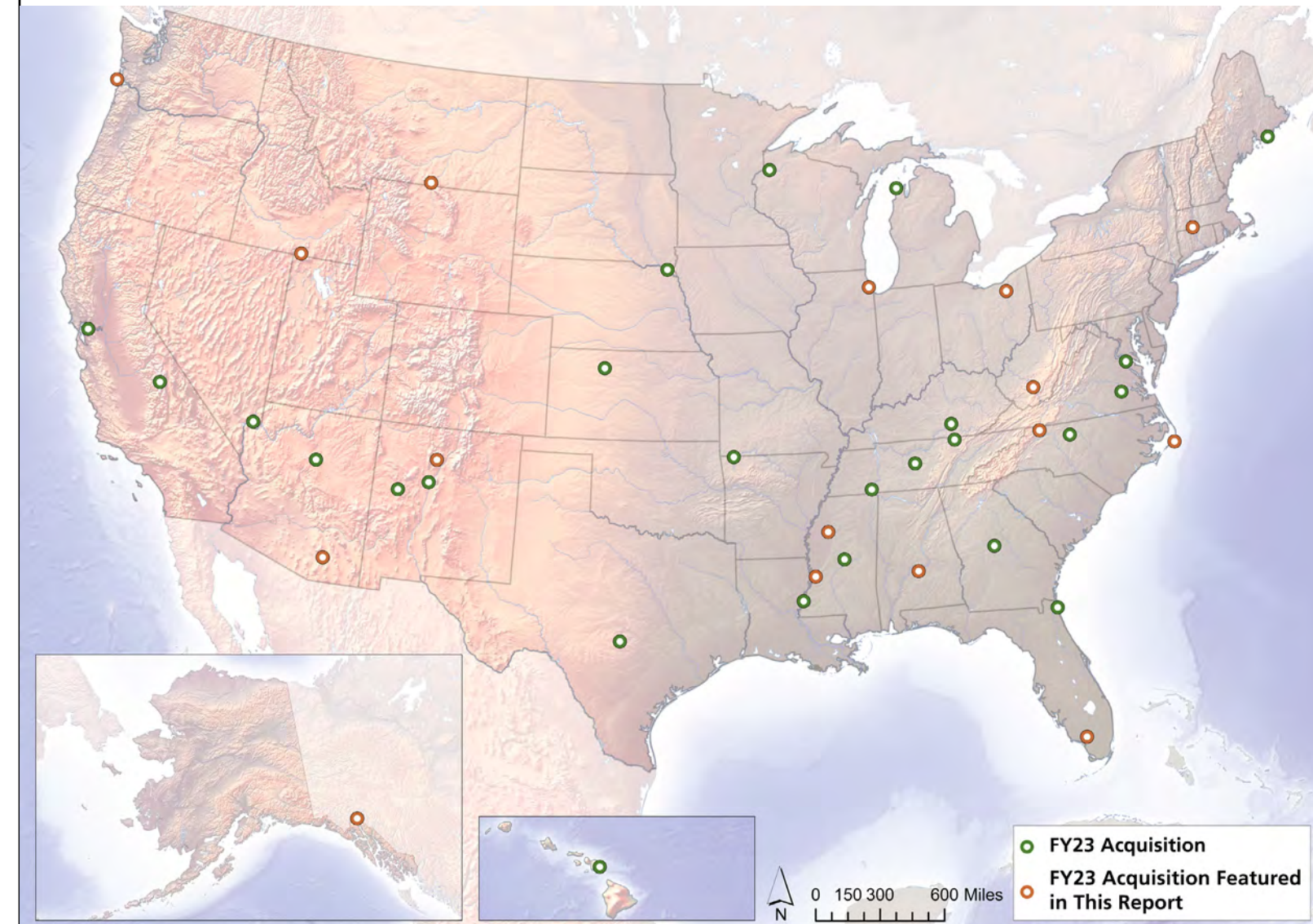


PHOTO: NPS/A. VANDERSTUYF

# Acquisitions

This year, Lands protected over 19,000 acres of land at 41 NPS units. Acquiring these lands, or interests in lands, directly supports the NPS mission of protecting and preserving resources and providing public use and enjoyment. Each of these acquisitions contributes something wonderful to the National Park System—from conserving large landscapes to preserving cultural sites to providing new recreational experiences. The projects highlighted on the following pages demonstrate just a few of Lands’ incredible accomplishments this year. Following is a list of units at which acquisitions occurred in FY23:

- Acadia National Park
- Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail
- Big Cypress National Preserve
- Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area
- Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Cape Hatteras National Seashore
- City of Rocks National Reserve
- Cuyahoga Valley National Park
- El Malpais National Monument
- Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument
- George Washington Birthplace National Monument
- Guilford Courthouse National Military Park
- Haleakala National Park
- John Muir National Historic Site
- Kings Canyon National Park
- Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park
- Lake Mead National Recreation Area
- Lewis and Clark National Historical Park
- Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park
- Mill Springs Battlefield National Monument
- Missouri National Recreational River
- Natchez National Historical Park
- Natchez Trace Parkway
- New England National Scenic Trail
- New River Gorge National Park and Preserve
- Nicodemus National Historic Site
- Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park
- Pea Ridge National Military Park
- Petersburg National Battlefield
- Petroglyph National Monument
- Saguaro National Park
- Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway
- Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail
- Shiloh National Military Park
- Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
- Stones River National Battlefield
- Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument
- Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve
- Valles Caldera National Preserve
- Vicksburg National Military Park



“I am so proud of all we’ve accomplished this year, which is due in part to the increased funding resulting from enactment of GAOA. GAOA has provided the resources needed for the Land Resources Program to build capacity and meet the needs of a growing program. Each dot on this map represents countless hours our team, in collaboration with our incredible partners, has dedicated to acquiring and safeguarding land across the country. Preserving and protecting these lands for generations to come is a tremendous honor, which we carry out with pride.” **–Pam McLay, Chief, Land Resources Division**

# Big Cypress National Preserve

In the wetlands of southern Florida, Big Cypress National Preserve stretches across 729,000 acres between Miami and Naples. The park is largely a freshwater wetland ecosystem and is home to a dynamic mixture of plants and animals, including federally and state listed threatened and endangered species. It protects the flow of freshwater from the Big Cypress Swamp into estuaries of the neighboring Everglades National Park and Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge. The protection of the Big Cypress Watershed is critical to the survival of the greater Everglades ecosystem. The park also contains archeological evidence of approximately 15,000 years of continuous human occupation. Today, the park sustains resources that continue to hold importance to traditionally associated cultures,

including the Miccosukee and Seminole people. Traditional uses such as tribal use and occupancy, hunting, and fishing still continue in the park.

This year, NPS acquired more than 14,000 acres of land within the park. The newly acquired land includes 22 noncontiguous sections of land in Collier and Miami-Dade Counties. The land contains wetland habitats that support native species, including threatened and endangered species like the Florida panther, one of the most endangered mammals in the world. Other animals that call the area home include manatees, alligators, crocodiles, and nearly 200 bird species. The acquisition of this land preserves these important habitats and protects the land from uses that may threaten the health of the ecosystem.



PHOTO: NPS

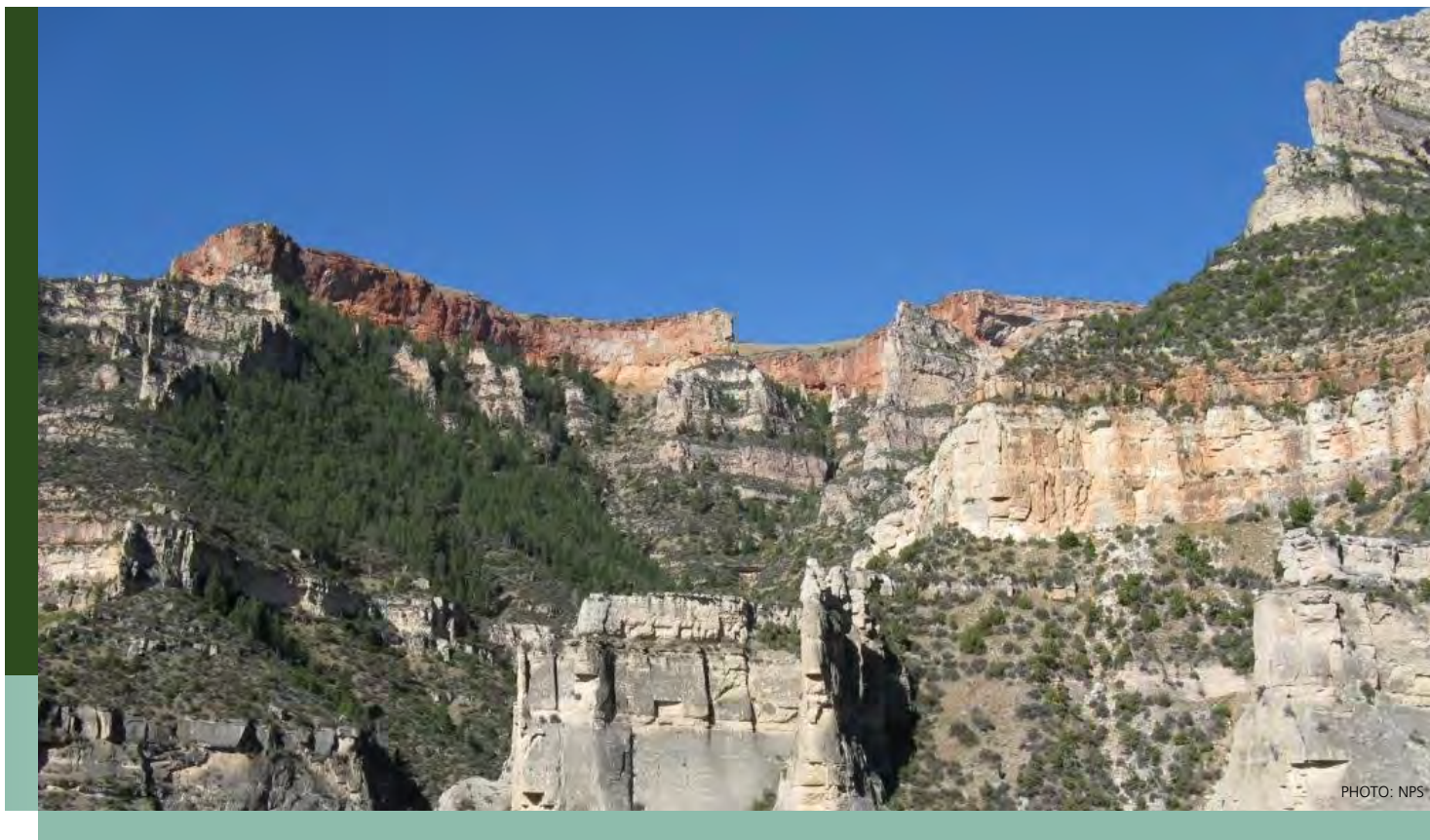


PHOTO: NPS

# Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area

Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area spans approximately 68,000 acres between the Pryor and Bighorn mountain ranges along the Montana-Wyoming border. The park has a vast and diverse landscape, including forests, mountains, canyons, valleys, lakes, rivers, and wetlands. Those landscapes are home to lots of animals (including bighorn sheep, the park's namesake), various vegetation communities, critical wildlife habitats, fossils from the Jurassic Period, and archeological history dating back over 10,000 years. Today, the park serves as a living laboratory at the Bighorn Canyon Research Center and provides recreation opportunities like boating, fishing, hiking, and wildlife watching.

In March 2023, NPS purchased nearly 700 acres in the Frozen Leg Canyon area of the park. The acquired land encompasses an array of valuable natural and cultural resources, including several caves that contain paintings of unknown origin, some of which are estimated to date between 800 and 1200 CE. Acquisition of this land also further protects the wildlife habitats that support bighorn sheep, black bears, birds, elk, fish, bison, and wild horses in the area. Critically, the acquisition of this land prevents further private development that would negatively impact the resources in the canyon and surrounding viewshed. Instead, under NPS ownership, the resources are protected, and opportunities for visitor recreation that don't currently exist in this part of the park (like boating or hiking) are expanded.

# Blue Ridge Parkway

Spanning 469 miles through North Carolina and Virginia, the Blue Ridge Parkway offers views and experiences unlike any other. The parkway meanders along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains and reveals stunning long-range vistas and pastoral landscapes of the Appalachian Highlands. Along with these incredible views, the park protects an enormous diversity of plants and animals. This summer, NPS acquired more than 100 acres along the parkway to help protect those resources.

Approximately 30 acres in the Elk Mountain Meadow were purchased from the Conservation Trust for North Carolina (CTNC). Since portions of this property are visible from the parkway, the acquisition of this land preserves and protects the viewshed from the Elk Mountain Overlook. This acquisition also protects water quality in a tributary of Gap Creek—one of the more than 1,000 stream segments found along the parkway that are home to many fish, frogs, salamanders, turtles, beavers, and

other animals. In addition, the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, a 1,200-mile footpath from the Great Smoky Mountains to the Outer Banks, passes within feet of the property. The acquisition and protection of this property ensures a more enjoyable experience for hikers.

Furthermore, NPS acquired a property of approximately 72 acres near the EB Jeffress Park, where visitors can see Cascade Falls less than half a mile from the parkway. Like the Elk Mountain Meadow property, parts of this property are also visible from the parkway, further protecting the parkway viewshed. This acquisition protects unique pine swamps, wetlands, springs, and glades in the headwaters of the South Fork New River. This property was donated to NPS by the Blue Ridge Conservancy. Blue Ridge Conservancy and CTNC are among the many critical partners who help make land protection possible across the National Park System.



“Conservation Trust for North Carolina is thrilled to celebrate yet another successful project that protects the integrity of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Every acre protected means that the land, forest, wildlife, and headwater streams are free from incompatible uses and safeguarded in perpetuity. We will continue our efforts in partnership with the park service and others to protect this national treasure known as ‘America’s Favorite Drive.’” —Rusty Painter, Land Protection Director, CTNC

# Cape Hatteras National Seashore

In 1937, Cape Hatteras National Seashore was established as the first national seashore and designated to preserve the dynamic barrier islands, vegetation, wildlife, and coastal processes, as well as provide recreation and enjoyment for the public. The park provides a special opportunity to protect a diverse wildlife community and a robust collection of cultural resources while providing an unspoiled seashore for visitors to enjoy. Recently, however, the park has faced increasing threats from the impacts of climate change. In recent years, a number of beach homes along the Outer Banks have toppled into the Atlantic Ocean as a result of more intense storms, continued erosion, and rapid sea level rise. As fierce storms and rising tides claw away the sand that separates these homes from the ocean, turtles and birds are not able to utilize the shore as they typically would, homes are at risk of collapse while their septic systems face inundation, and visitors cannot navigate the beach safely.

To help mitigate such threats, NPS purchased two threatened oceanfront properties. The acquisition process began in early March 2023, and in six months, NPS closed on the properties, each containing homes facing the precarious threat of being swept away into the ocean. These critical acquisitions would not have happened on such a truncated timeline without support from the National Park Trust (NPT). As hurricane season approached, NPT funded and expedited the appraisals of the properties. NPT played a pivotal role in the timely and successful completion of this acquisition. The acquisition closed in September 2023, and the park



removed the structures in November. Next, the park will work to restore the beach landscape and turn the properties into sorely needed public beach access.

These acquisitions are critical examples of what actions are possible to ensure resource protection and assuage the impacts of climate change on our national parks. Over time, the natural barrier island dynamics will continue to cause erosion, and combined with the increasing rate of sea level rise and significant increase in the frequency and intensity of storms, boundary and resource management will only become more challenging. These acquisitions were a pilot project—the first of its kind for NPS—and there are hopes of scaling it up. The park is currently aware of more than a dozen threatened structures that impact the vista and wildlife habitat and could pose a threat to public safety and health. As climate change continues to inflict damages on our national parks, efforts like these are becoming ever more critical to the mission of NPS.

# City of Rocks National Reserve

Despite what its name may suggest, City of Rocks National Reserve has a lot more to offer than just rocks—although it does have some pretty cool rocks! The park spans more than 14,000 acres in the Albion Mountains of south-central Idaho. In addition to its dramatic geologic landscape of ancient granitic spires and monoliths, the park also stewards the historic landscape of the California Trail. It holds great cultural value to the Shoshonean people who lived on the land long before the emigrant wagons bound for California passed through. This “city” is home to rich biodiversity and offers plenty of recreational opportunities for visitors, from wildflower watching and landscape photography to mountain biking and world-renowned rock climbing.

This year, NPS acquired more than 100 acres of land and a mile-long access easement to increase access to City of Rocks National Reserve. A new public access road will be constructed along the easement, creating an important new access point to the park. The acquired land features granite outcrops, mature aspen groves, and ideal overwintering locations for moose. It also includes portions of Graham Creek, with numerous pools and tumbling fern-shaded falls.

This acquisition was completed with significant help from partner organization The Conservation Fund (TCF). TCF acquired a total of 360 acres, 100 of which were transferred to NPS, and the adjacent 260 were transferred to the Idaho State Parks Department for the neighboring Castle Rocks State Park. Altogether, this project creates a permanent connection between City of Rocks National Reserve and Castle Rocks State Park, protects more than 360 acres of spectacular resources, and increases recreational opportunities for the public.

“Acquisition of this key tract helps support big game habitat for moose, mule deer, and mountain lions, expands recreational opportunities, and provides additional access to the Reserve,” –Wallace Keck, Superintendent, City of Rocks National Reserve



## Cuyahoga Valley National Park

A short distance from the urban areas of Cleveland and Akron, Ohio, Cuyahoga Valley National Park’s 33,000 acres reclaim and preserve the landscape along the Cuyahoga River. Once known as the “river that burned,” the Cuyahoga served as a symbol of the plight of America’s rivers and the need for federal clean water legislation. Today, the beauty of its surrounding landscape and abundance of wildlife is a sharp contrast with the environmental abuses it suffered just a few decades ago. The valley sits at the transition between the Appalachian Mountains and the Great Plains, a location that allows for rich biological diversity. The park’s vast open spaces provide refuge to an assortment of native plants and animals and recreational opportunities for the nearby urban populations.

This year, NPS purchased 198 acres of land at the heart of the park from the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park (Conservancy). The Conservancy initially purchased the land on behalf of NPS to prevent developers

from purchasing the property and turning it into a residential development, which would have impacted the viewshed and introduced additional environmental threats to the river. In instances like this, the ability of partner organizations to act quickly on the real estate market is invaluable. This acquisition is an important part of the park’s long-term plan for improved public access and habitat restoration in the area. The property was formerly a golf course, and due to the industry-standard practice of routinely applying mercury-containing fungicides and herbicides, the presence of mercury was identified in some soil. The Conservancy will oversee the remediation of the property, which entails removal of the contaminated soil and is funded by an Ohio Brownfield Remediation Program grant from the Ohio Department of Development. For safety reasons, the property remains closed to the public as this work continues. Upon completion of the remediation, a site plan, including visitor amenities, will be established in coordination with community input.

# Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park

In 1896, gold was discovered near the Klondike River in Canada's Yukon Territory, precipitating a major human migration that is commemorated today by the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park. The park includes more than 13,000 acres across three units in southeastern Alaska. By visiting Skagway and Dyea, former boomtowns of the gold rush, and hiking the Chikoot Trail, a "gold rush highway," visitors can retrace the steps of the gold rush stampede. Throughout these units, the story of the gold rush is revealed in thousands of historic artifacts, photographs, and archeological features. In addition to the historic resources, the park also offers a high level of plant biodiversity due to its unique ice-free corridor and strong climatic gradient from intertidal to alpine to interior boreal forest. The glacially influenced landscape includes

spectacular vistas, glacier-clad mountains, river valleys, and marine waters.

With help from partner organization TCF, NPS acquired a critical 80-acre inholding along the Chilkoot Trail this year. The 33-mile recreational trail sees over 10,000 visitors every year who come to day hike, backpack, trail run, or trek the historic route of the stampede. The trail's dynamic environment is in a similar state to what stampede experienced during the gold rush. In the backcountry, visitors can experience solitude in the unique, transitional natural environment of the southeastern Alaska ecoregion. The acquisition of this land enhances the conservation and preservation of the park's incredible natural and historical resources and ensures preservation of the land for years to come.



# Lewis and Clark National Historical Park

At Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, visitors can travel back in time to experience the western United States as it was at the time of the arrival of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The expedition party trekked 4,000 miles across the newly acquired Louisiana Territory in 1805 to establish a claim to the region and assess wildlife, resources, economic assets, and potential transportation routes. Today, the park preserves and restores diverse ecosystems representative of the natural and cultural environment documented by the expedition. At the time of their arrival, expedition members encountered diverse ecosystems, including Sitka spruce rainforest, freshwater wetlands, tidal

estuaries, and coastal prairies. Although these ecosystems have been greatly altered since the time of the expedition, park staff continue to protect and restore these lands today.

This year, NPS acquired over 300 acres of land near the mouth of the Columbia River in Washington and Oregon, a location marking the end of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery Expedition to the Pacific Ocean. The acquisition included more than 70 acres of land in fee and a 268-acre scenic easement, and was completed with support from the National Park Foundation (NPF) and TCF. This acquisition protects the cultural, scenic, and natural resources of the area.



“The purchase of these lands at Middle Village helps achieve the long-term dream of preserving this vitally important site. Of course, the fascinating history of the Lewis and Clark Expedition's time at the site is incredible, but the deep tribal history of the site is a relevant reminder of the living tribal culture's connection to the place. We are proud to steward this site and share its stories.” —Jonathon Burpee, Superintendent, Lewis and Clark National Historic Park

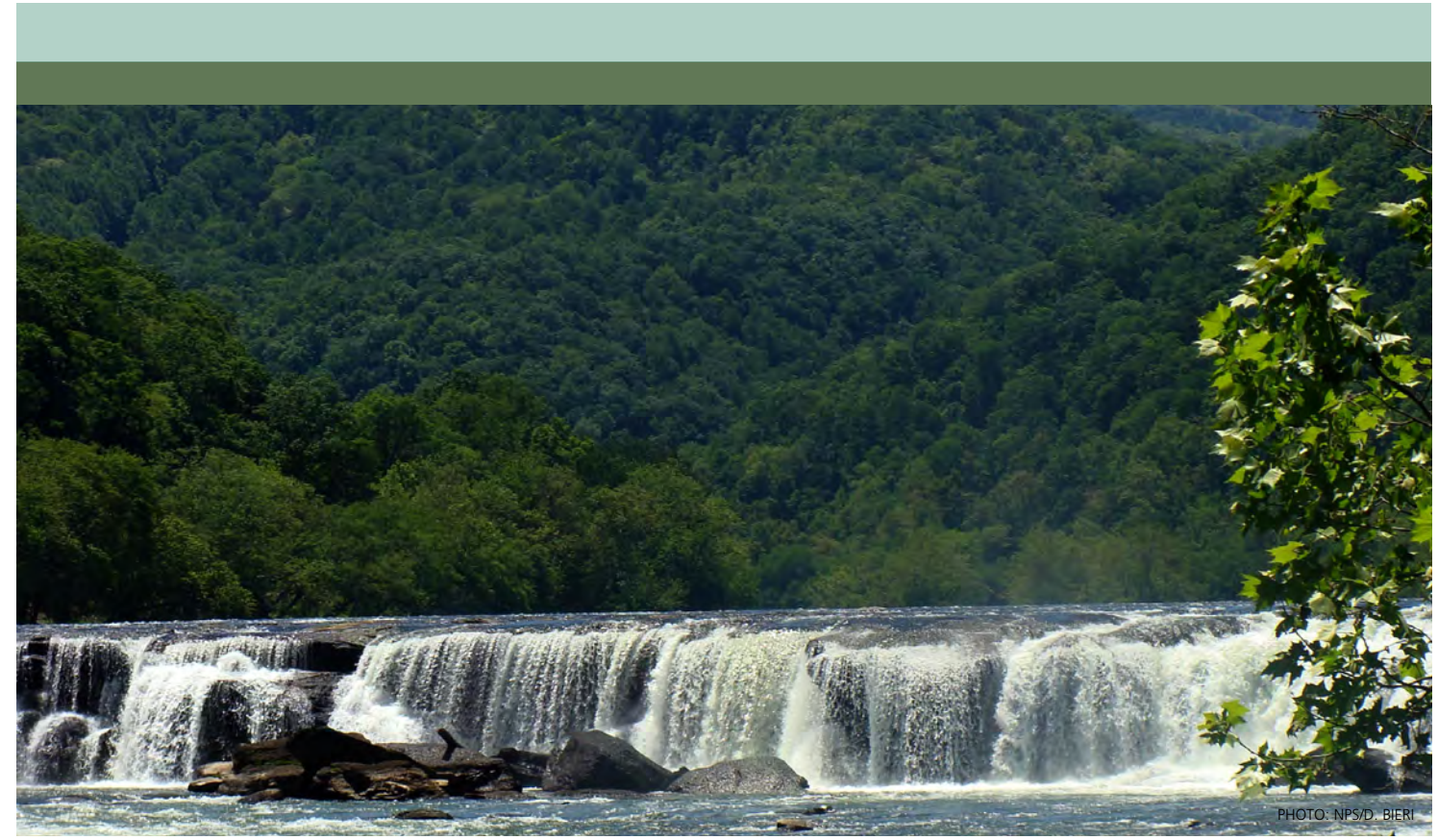
# New England National Scenic Trail

The New England National Scenic Trail traverses 215 miles from the Long Island Sound in Connecticut to the Massachusetts-New Hampshire border. Along the trail, visitors will encounter the beautiful landscapes of the northeast, including open fields, deep forests, mountain peaks, waterfalls, small streams, and unique geologic formations. This all-season trail provides recreation opportunities for both those taking an afternoon walk and those seeking a multi-day backpacking adventure.

Along the trail, NPS acquired 196 acres of land—locally referred to as Southwick Farm—representing the first NPS acquisition for the trail. This purchase was made possible by the Trust for Public Land (TPL), who provided critical assistance with the acquisition process. The trail occupies a ridgeline on the very eastern edge of the property, which overlooks a forested landscape mixed with agricultural fields and ponds. The land will be managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge under a Memorandum of Understanding with NPS. The refuge conserves, protects, and enhances the abundance and diversity of native plant, fish, and wildlife species and ecosystems throughout the Connecticut River watershed. It is comprised of nearly 40,000 acres throughout New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, representing a wide variety of unique habitats.



**“Trust for Public Land is delighted to have collaborated with the National Park Service in safeguarding the Southwick Farm property in Massachusetts, securing a permanent home for the New England National Scenic Trail. Thousands of people hike the trail every year and dozens of communities count on the trail for close-to-home access to the outdoors. TPL has been helping NPS acquire park inholdings for 50 years, and looking ahead, we aim to expand this partnership to include a focus on the National Trails System, where thousands of miles of congressionally designated trails are vulnerable to encroaching development and closure.” –J.T. Horn, Senior Director National Trails Initiative, Trust for Public Land**



# New River Gorge National Park and Preserve

In southern West Virginia, visitors enjoy the most dramatic Appalachian Mountain river gorge at New River Gorge National Park and Preserve. The New River, at the heart of the park, has carved more than 1,000 feet into the rocks of the Appalachian Plateau, creating a stunning landscape. In addition to its scenic views, the park also supports a highly productive aquatic ecosystem and diverse plant and animal communities. This year, the park’s protected land grew by nearly 1,000 acres when NPS acquired the largest remaining private inholding in the park with support from partner organization TCF. In April, US Senators Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito, US Representative Carol Miller, and NPS Director Charles Sams joined other state and local officials at the park to celebrate this new acquisition.

Acquisition of the heavily steeped, heavily forested land will further protect the ecosystem and enhance recreational opportunities in the area, including hunting, fishing, hiking, and birding. The land includes more than 800 acres of forest and will contribute to the park’s nationally significant unfragmented forest. Furthermore, the acquisition also preserves views of the largest waterfall on the New River, as well as scenic views from the river. The acquired land is located in the southern portion of the park, which had scattered NPS ownership and protection. Acquisition of this land improves resource protection, expands recreational opportunities, and allows for more cohesive park management.



PHOTO: NPS/T. EDGAR

# Saguaro National Park

Just outside Tucson, Arizona, saguaro cacti, the tallest cacti in the United States, tower over the desert landscape in Saguaro National Park. The park has two districts to the east and west of Tucson, which have become islands of wilderness in a sea of urban development as the surrounding city and county continue to grow. Saguaro National Park protects a superb example of the Sonoran Desert ecosystem, featuring exceptional stands of saguaro cacti, important wildlife habitat, critical riparian areas, and scenic mountains. The park also protects significant cultural resources, including archeological resources, places important to Native American cultural traditions, and historic structures. Most of the park's visitors participate in day use recreational activities such as hiking, biking, scenic driving, walking, and educational events.

With the help of partner organization TPL, NPS acquired 40 acres of land in the park's Tucson Mountain District to the west of Tucson. This vacant land is located approximately four miles outside Tucson city limits. This acquisition protects and preserves natural and cultural resources from further urban expansion. Acquiring this land is a key component of establishing the Sweetwater Land Bridge to improve accessibility between the Tucson Mountain District and the county's 800-acre Sweetwater Preserve. As urban populations continue to grow, land continues to be developed, and recreational opportunities decline, acquisitions like this are critical to preserve resources and expand recreational opportunities.

# Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail

The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail commemorates the important stories of the Selma voting rights movement, including the 54-mile route of the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches of 1965. The marches were pivotal events among the campaigns for human rights in the United States, and the movement was a critical catalyst to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Today, the park serves as an enduring testament to the continued struggle to preserve the right to vote as a fundamental cornerstone of American democracy. To this end, NPF donated six contiguous properties located near the historic Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, to NPS.

The park has operated a visitor contact station at one of the properties since 2011. The six properties were

acquired for the construction of a new \$10 million interpretive education center commemorating the marches. This expansion project—scheduled to get underway in early 2024—will expand the existing center's footprint and provide a state-of-the-art visitor experience with a focus on educational programming, accessibility, and opportunities for the community. The facades at two of the six properties will be retained and preserved as part of the historic streetscape where the marchers trekked in 1965. The acquisition of these properties and the eventual expansion project provide greater access and opportunity to better understand and appreciate the historic struggle for voting rights in Selma during a critical moment in the civil rights movement.



PHOTO: NPS

# Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument



On July 25, 2023, Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument became the country's 425th national park unit. The park was established by President Biden via proclamation at a White House ceremony on the 82nd anniversary of Till's birth. Till was lynched on August 28, 1955, for reportedly whistling at a white woman while visiting relatives in Mississippi. No one was ever held legally accountable for his death. His mother's decision to hold an open-casket funeral for her 14-year-old son caused the world to bear witness to the racially motivated violence and injustice that Black people endured in the Jim Crow South and helped spur the modern civil rights movement. Establishing this park is an important step in telling a more complete story of the African American struggle for civil rights in the United States. The park includes sites in the Mississippi Delta and Chicago (where Till lived)

that were central to Till's lynching and funeral, the acquittal of his murderers, and the subsequent activism by his mother.

Due to its diffuse nature, acquisitions for the unit are managed by both the Midwest and Southeast Regional Lands Offices. Although each office managed its own acquisition efforts, detailed collaboration and communication between offices was critical to the successful establishment of the park. In addition to the five acres acquired this year, NPS will develop a plan in consultation with local communities, organizations, and the public to support

the preservation of other key sites in Illinois and Mississippi that help tell the story of Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley.

“Being a part of this effort to tell such an important story really brings meaning to the job. It's why I love what we do—along with the incredible value it gives to the public, it also provides me with new opportunities to learn and grow, both personally and professionally,” said **Michael Bockman, Regional Realty Officer, Midwest Region**. During his site visit to Chicago for the acquisition, Bockman got to spend time with some of Till's friends and family, an experience he says was “overwhelmingly emotional.”

# Valles Caldera National Preserve

At the top of the Jemez Mountains in north-central New Mexico sits Valles Caldera National Preserve. 1.25 million years ago, a spectacular volcanic eruption created the 12- to 15-mile-wide circular caldera depression now encompassed within the park. Since then, an additional 15 eruptions and magmatic events have created multiple volcanic domes within the park. Now, the caldera is dormant, though it still displays signs of volcanic life with hot springs and boiling sulphuric acid fumaroles. The forest-covered volcanic domes are surrounded by large grassland meadows, providing a distinctive natural landscape and unique ecosystems supporting great diversities of animals, plants, and fungi. The park's unusual setting—high elevation, caldera topography, unfragmented habitats, and key hydrologic role at the top of the watershed—presents a dynamic learning landscape for the scientific study and restoration of the ecosystem. Those studies and restoration efforts are often focused on how the ecosystem processes are recovering from three centuries of human disturbances and are challenged by current and future climate change.

The congressional legislation establishing Valles Caldera National Preserve under NPS management, passed in 2014, specifically authorized the acquisition of property in Jemez Springs for a permanent Science and Education Center. In 2023,

NPS acquired approximately 16 acres under that directive. Prior to the acquisition, the park leased this property for its Science and Education Center and headquarters building. Now, with full ownership of the property, the park has a permanent Science and Education Center, can manage the property more holistically, and reduces costs by no longer leasing. The facilities also include several storage buildings, a parking lot, and a solar panel array to reduce electricity expenses. This acquisition allows the park to better support its robust science and education programs, which provide opportunities for direct experimental learning for visitors, citizen-science projects, enhanced science interpretation, and contribution to the knowledge, understanding, and discovery of the natural world.



“This acquisition is a game-changer for Valles Caldera National Preserve. It furthers the park's Congressional mandate to promote science and education, and it provides certainty for park employees and the Village of Jemez Springs that the National Park Service will remain a long-term member of the community, contributing to its cultural and economic prosperity. In addition, we can now begin to pursue efforts to expand recreational access to the Jemez River and adjacent National Forest lands that are accessible only through this property while also promoting environmental sustainability through the installation of publicly accessible electric vehicle charging stations.” —**Jorge Silva-Bañuelos, Superintendent, Valles Caldera National Preserve**



PHOTO: NPS

# Vicksburg National Military Park

At the start of the Civil War, Confederates controlled the Mississippi River from its confluence with the Ohio River in southern Illinois all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Given its location on the east bank of the Mississippi River near the Gulf of Mexico, Vicksburg was a valuable commercial port and railroad hub, making it tremendously important to the Confederate Army. In May 1862, capturing Vicksburg—fortified with riverfront artillery batteries and a ring of forts—was the most significant remaining obstacle to complete Union control of the Mississippi River. The surrender of Vicksburg to the Union marked a turning point in the war. Today, Vicksburg National Military Park commemorates the campaign, battle, siege, and surrender of the city.

This year, NPS acquired six parcels at two battlefield sites that were pivotal in the campaign—Port Gibson and Champion Hill. 152 acres were acquired via donation at Port Gibson, where, upon landing in Mississippi, Union troops met Confederate resistance and the first shots of the Vicksburg Campaign were fired. This acquisition included the Shaifer House, which was the epicenter of the Port Gibson battlefield. In addition, 378 acres were acquired at Champion Hill, the site of the most decisive battle in the Vicksburg Campaign. This acquisition was completed with the help of partner organization American Battlefield Trust. Acquisition of these properties protects the land and allows for enhanced interpretation of the important siege of the city, capture of the Mississippi River, and ultimate victory of Union forces in the Civil War.



PHOTO: NPS



PHOTO: NPS/D. J. REISER

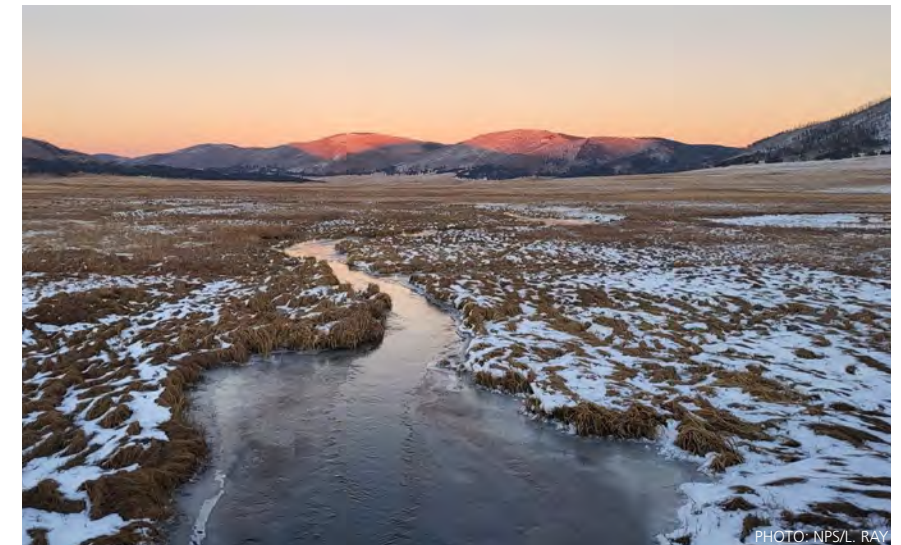
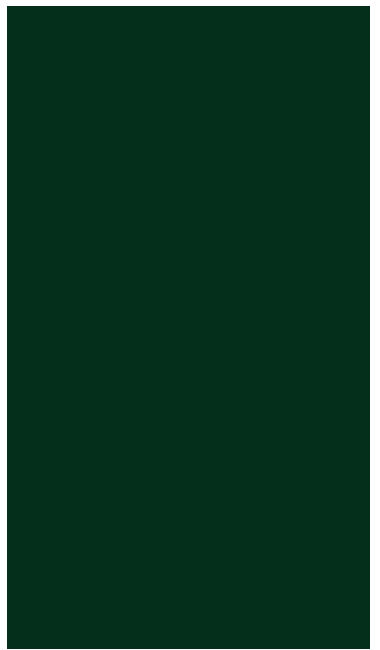


PHOTO: NPS/L. RAY

# Looking Ahead

Lands is proud to celebrate the conclusion of another successful year! Many accomplishments were made in FY23, but our work continues. Looking ahead to FY24, many more challenges and successes are expected. Two new park units created in FY23—Blackwell School National Historic Site and New Philadelphia National Historic Site—are expected to complete their first acquisitions in FY24. Along with acquisitions, Lands will continue making administrative advances. Some administrative efforts on deck for FY24 include implementing improvements to the environmental site assessment process, updating guidance for the ROW program, establishing a central geospatial database, completing geospatial data standards, expanding participation in the Build Up Technical Internship Program, continuing to cultivate relationships with partner organizations, developing more training materials for staff, continuing to streamline appraisal efforts, and hosting an in-person symposium for all Lands staff. The Lands team is grateful for this year's accomplishments and looks forward to celebrating more in the future!



PHOTO: NPS