

College of the Atlantic
Senior Project 2019

Strengthening Parks, Strengthening Communities

*National park gateway communities and their roles during
government shutdowns*



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Impacts of Government Shutdowns on National Park Gateway Communities

Strategic Planning for Acadia National Park

Senior Project by Amy Erving

College of the Atlantic 2019



Photograph by Amy Erving (Acadia National Park, February 2019)

Abstract

Before national parks were established in the United States during the late 19th century, wild lands were at risk of privatization, urbanization, and monopolization. There were no park gates, no visitor centres, no mapped trails, nor interpretive programs. These spaces, relatively uncharted by European settlers, were pristine bodies of land and water that gained recognition from the federal government as worth protecting for recreation and pleasure for future

generations, for the preservation of natural resources, and as being invaluable in terms of the park's potential economic revenue. When Congress enacted an initial general management purpose, appointing the National Park Service in charge of both conservation of resources and visitor experience under the Organic Act of 1916 (16 U.S.C. §§ 1 2 3, and 4), the national park mission and objective became more clear;

“... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” (Organic Act 1916).

Although removing national parklands from the hands of potential private owners and placing them into public hands (by means of the federal government) is slightly contradictory in nature by having a primary mission with “two quite opposite directions” (Winks 1996), this enactment led to the development of dozens of national parks throughout the following decades. Millions of visitors began travelling to parks across the nation to experience what the environmental philosopher Henry David Thoreau referred to as “wildness” (Thoreau 1905). The establishment of Civilian Conservation Corps (a relief program developed in the 1930's under the Roosevelt administration), the construction of railroads and infrastructure (which eased transportation and transit), the Great Depression and Franklin D. Roosevelt's resulting New Deal (Rothman 2000), the National Park Service's Mission 66 (to expand and develop parks), as well as other significant events of the 20th century contributed to drastically increasing park visitation. No matter what the purpose of a visitor's trip—be it rock climbing El Capitan in Yosemite, taking a stroll through the Wild Gardens of Acadia, or paddling a section of the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon—a major incentive for tourists remained, and remains to be, that these are public spaces.

Visitors have the right to access and experience what land has been, and will hopefully continue to be, preserved. It is somewhat easy to forget or to simply overlook the relationship that the federal government shares with the National Park Service; however, when government shutdowns occur, the ties that link these two entities becomes increasingly clear. This paper discusses how, as the trend of shutdowns in the United States becomes more common practice and spans longer durations(Appendix A) (likely not foreseen when national parks were established under federal mandate), identifying issues that arise and addressing them with practical solutions is fundamental to upholding the National Park Service mission, outlined in the Organic Act. Even more, if policies regulated by federal legislation continue to manage public lands, wildlife, and natural resources on wavering procedural grounds, decision-making processes should emphasize preservation, rather than simply the visitor experience.

I. Context of Shutdowns for National Parks

December 22nd of 2018, marked the beginning of what soon became the longest government shutdown in U.S. history (Francis 2019). This partial shutdown began when Congress and the White House were unable to reach an agreement on the United States 2019 federal budget, with the controversy primarily over an appropriations bill for border security and the construction of a wall to trace the Mexican/U.S. border (Andrews and Peterson 2018). On December 19th of 2018, the Senate passed a resolution associated with the Further Additional Continuing Appropriations Act (2019) to keep the government open (H.R. 695); however, the House and President Trump disagreed with the bill, hence the partial shutdown ensued.

Unlike previous shutdowns where the entire government was not working, the partial shutdown in 2018 meant that some services were not able to proceed with operations, while others were extremely cut back with the exception typically being emergency, medical, and law enforcement workers (Appendix A). In September of 2018, seven of 12 bills were passed by the government (in relation to the United States federal budget) and the shutdown only impacted a portion of federal agencies (Bryan 2019). This included the Department of the Interior, under which the National Park Service falls.

During a partial government shutdown, nonessential employees are not permitted to work or even access their workspaces, whereas essential employees (such as law enforcement and medics) are expected to continue working with the expectation of back pay once the government reopens. The National Park Conservation Association mentions,

“The Department of the Interior directed its staff, including National Park Service staff, to keep national parks as accessible as possible while still obeying the law. This means that approximately a third of our national park sites are completely closed ... Gates at many other park sites remain open, but few if any staff are on hand to protect visitors and park resources, and many visitor centers and restrooms remained locked and roads are closed due to weather” (Douce and Garder 2019).

As a Canadian citizen living in Maine, I was inherently less aware of the harm that furloughing government employees poses. Yet when the 2018-2019 shutdown began, it quickly became apparent to me that not only were employees not receiving paychecks, but parks were going unmonitored, hiring periods were pushed back, collection of data was paused, outdoor experiences were being hindered, and national park gateway communities were being impacted educationally, environmentally, economically, and morally in ways that had not been foreseen. Thousands of federal employees (many of whom are National Park staff) had little to no job security during the weeks of the shutdown. Even after the short-term joint resolution was

reached, known as the Consolidated Appropriations Act (2019), reopening the government from January 25th to February 15th, there was still no certainty as to how long the resolution might last and what it would entail for National Park Service operations (H.J.Res.31, 2019). On February 15th, a bill continuing the Appropriations Act (2019) passed by the United States Congress and signed by President Donald Trump reopened the government, stating the Act would be funded until the end of September (H.Res.131). This enactment helped to prevent the partial government shutdown from continuing, as it extended funding for departments, including the Department of the Interior, until September 2019.

Another aspect of this experience that made this shutdown so problematic, other than it being the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, was the fact that the Trump administration ordered parks to remain open. During the 2013 government shutdowns, national parks closed their gates, which meant no visitation, tourism revenue, or customer influx for local businesses, and an overall hit to national park gateway communities—economically speaking. As a result, parks as resources were able to remain protected and preserved. Park staff were, for the most part, furloughed and unable to work; however, the amount of management—in terms of facilitating visits and tending to park infrastructure—was not a pressing need or concern. Recognizing that national parks can be major economic engines for different states throughout the country, the desire to keep their gates open during shutdowns has been more common. However, this decision significantly impacts communities and public lands. During partial government shutdowns of this nature, visitors are permitted to enter and recreate in the park, however, “the experience without park employees is very similar to not leaving a vehicle” (Saxx 1980).

II. Foundation of Senior Project Work

When developing my senior project, my interests initially pertained to designing experiential lesson plans that could be integrated into science classrooms in Mount Desert Island communities (in close proximity to Acadia National Park). The government shutdown was not on my radar as being an obstacle that would restrict the completion of this graduation requirement. As a student of Human Ecology, I found that the nature of this senior project would nicely combine my interests in education, science, and community building. Although designing education programs from K-12 classrooms studying species such as bats and beavers seemed fascinating to me at the time, I was unable to submit a project proposal that claimed I would be working with Acadia National Park staff, as there was no certainty the shutdown would come to an end by the time my work needed to start gaining momentum. Jokingly, I told a peer that perhaps addressing the issue of government shutdowns impacting national park communities would be a more worthwhile project. I let this idea brew, writing what I thought would be another proposal that I would never send, but on Friday of week 1, Winter Term, I sent it off and began an exploration of a different nature—navigating the impacts and effects of shutdowns on national park communities. I began to tackle a national issue that deserves attention and the drafting of possible solutions.

III. Project Description and Outline

This senior project looks at national parks and how they are impacted by government shutdowns. More specifically, the project uses interviews, media coverage, and background research to dissect the issues that surfaced during the most recent 2018-2019 government shutdown under Donald Trump's administration. The role of community partnerships in fostering collaboration between diverse organizations, such as nonprofit partners, local businesses, and other groups within the national park gateway vicinity, is a particular focus in the strategic planning that ensued from my research. After travelling to Yosemite National Park, Joshua Tree National Park, and Zion National Park to explore how other communities and parks were impacted by, and responded to the recent shutdown, I synthesised their findings to better understand how they may apply to parks across the country, with specific considerations for Acadia National Park.

My project analyzes the impacts of the recent shutdown by conducting interviews with previously furloughed park employees and workers from nonprofit organizations (Yosemite Conservancy, Friends of Joshua Tree, and Zion Forever Project) about their experiences, so as to increase my awareness of the whole picture, while documenting the ripple effects of shutdowns during various seasons, climates, and degrees of visitation. This information will be available for Acadia National Park and Friends of Acadia to assist them in determining appropriate plans of action which could be implemented in the event of future shutdowns. Recognizing the inherent value and importance in involving students and communities in local research, cultivating a sense of environmental stewardship is a key feature of the strategic planning component of the project. The interdisciplinary nature of this senior project uses the framework of human ecology

to help dissect all of the government shutdown crisis components: environmental, moral, economic, educational, cultural, social, and political.

During the spring of 2019, I travelled to three national parks to interview locals, affiliated organizations, and park employees to better understand the impacts of the shutdown, as well as to see what kind of physical educational infrastructure exists at these sites (looking at what resources were not accessible to visitors during the shutdown). These three case studies, Yosemite National Park, Joshua Tree National Park, and Zion National Park, help provide an overview of impacts with situational and contextual similarities and differences. Using this information along with my background research, I drafted the action plan included in this document with the assistance of staff from Friends of Acadia. National parks symbolize an opportunity to learn experientially, while simultaneously preserving these invaluable places. Even when funding and/or federal support may waver, as members of this community, we have the right and the ability to better protect these spaces.

IV. National Park Interview Summaries

Recognizing the political nature and sensitivity of discussing government shutdowns and their implications for the livelihoods of national park employees and members of local communities, all interview notes have been synthesized to protect the identities of those who contributed to this senior project. Positions of those interviewed included public information officers, nonprofit partner directors, interpretive rangers, hiring personnel, park volunteers, and other employees of both national parks and affiliated conservation groups. Details from conversations in each of the three parks are drawn upon to depict the issues and strategies that were implemented in each park; however, names and official job titles have been removed out of respect for individuals' anonymity. Each park summary outlines the key points, concerns, and suggestions raised by interviewees. The general template of interview questions is attached (Appendix B).

In some cases, national parks used supplemental funding from partner groups and state budgets to stay open, diverting resources from maintenance projects and park programs. In other cases, parks initially remained open and park superintendents later made decisions to close areas such as campgrounds and roads due to health and safety concerns from overflowing toilets, hazardous weather conditions, and other dangers. In some national parks, roads which are normally plowed remained impassable due to lack of maintenance. Consequently, the parks remained open but were relatively difficult to access. In summary, the effects of the shutdown differed from park to park with some overlap, as outlined in the following sections.

➤ Yosemite National Park – Conservancy Case Study



Photograph by Amy Erving (Yosemite National Park, April 2019)

General Overview

Yosemite National Park was the third national park developed within the United States, its creation dating back to October 1890 (Muir 1890). For this reason, my research in this particular park focused primarily on understanding how a park with such an extensive history and a well-established conservancy nonprofit partner group, the Yosemite Conservancy, dealt with the recent shutdown . I also looked at what documentation or planning may already exist within the Yosemite park community. The primary concerns raised in Yosemite were volunteers being unable to work (as they were ineligible for work person's compensation), sanitation concerns which threatened watersheds and risked general degradation of natural resources; the

distance of the park from nearby towns and cities, leaving workers who are housed within the national park gates relatively isolated; as well as general issues related to overcrowding.

Yosemite is close to many larger cities in California and without employees working to facilitate experiences, control traffic flow, maintain campsites, and other operational tasks, visitor experience was at risk of degrading. On the other hand, this national park has previous experience responding in the event of shutdowns, as outlined below.

Previous Shutdown Experiences

During interviews, many employees compared the park shutdown that had just occurred on July 24, 2018, to this 2018-2019 government shutdown. The shutdown in July 2018 was a result of multiple nearby forest fires, including the Ferguson and Detweiller fires, which sent smoke up through Yosemite Valley (Nace 2018). This resulted in a major decrease in air quality, and the area was soon deemed unsafe for both visitors and workers. Seeing as July is a busy month, “the superintendent was inclined to keep the park open for the economic benefit of the park,” one conservancy member explained. As visitor experience declined, the closure quickly followed. This longtime park volunteer and nonprofit partner emphasized the correlation between the level of enjoyment and economic benefit for the community, believing that if parks are not staffed then, gates should be closed, seeing as experiences will decline in value.

Another previous experience that Yosemite National Park had in relation to shutdowns occurred in 2013, when gates were closed for 17 days. Seeing as this happened in October, the tail end of Yosemite’s peak season, “a lot of money was lost for the local economy.” This worker who was employed in Yosemite during both the 2013 and 2018-2019 shutdowns also mentioned

that “in 2013, cones were placed in pullouts, people were having stealth weddings, and tour buses continued to drive through, but were asked not to stop within the park.” This differed from Yosemite’s experience in 2018-2019 when gates remained open and there were no restrictions for visitor movement. Thankfully as a donation to the park, concessionaires remained open. The local community also donated many essential services such as providing portable bathroom facilities for tourists to use.

Other Issues and Impacts Raised

Ideal weather during the months of January and February 2019, in what is normally a slower season for Yosemite, led to an unexpected increase in visitation.. During this time, minimal law enforcement was on duty, as they were some of the few employees not temporarily laid off. One death occurred during the shutdown (Miller 2019); however, a medical professional working during the shutdown stated that with Search and Rescue and emergency personnel still staffed, it is unlikely the outcome of this event could have been different, despite the circumstances of the federal shutdown. Seasonal hiring was severely delayed, daycare operations were shortened to as few as three days a week, and some road entrances were closed. Sanitation was also a concern, such was the case in most national parks, as the amount of human waste, biological and otherwise, built up quickly without facility maintenance staff to address this concern. The Hetch Hetchy Reservoir in Yosemite underwent a two-week full closure because, as one employee believes, “it is one of five municipalities in all of the United States where you can drink water without having to filter it.” Hence, staff considered it invaluable and a priority

for preservation efforts. Additionally, the park's south entrance was only open to locals as a result of concerns regarding icy roads and dangerous winter driving conditions.

Yosemite National Park employees agreed that generating a list of food banks and pantries, as well as local options for places with discounts or social events would be useful in long shutdowns, especially seeing as communication is cut off between employees (no work email or phone use). Having local gatherings for furloughed workers was also reported as a way to help boost morale during the shutdown. For this reason, focusing on community partnerships and support can be exceedingly beneficial in combating issues that arise under these circumstances. Interestingly, one issue raised in Yosemite by a park employee relates to how rent for employees housed within the park typically comes out of their paycheck. Within Yosemite during the 2018-2019 shutdown, there were around 100 employees living and relying on park housing. While they were not being paid, they were initially still being charged and expected to pay their rent. Upon identifying this systematic issue, these individuals were given permission to hold off on their rent payments until back pay occurred.

Similarly to housing, any benefits like childcare and healthcare were not processed and were eventually billed later. Timekeepers were still required to keep payroll and were brought in when more exemptions regarding permittance to work were agreed upon. Regarding employees with living accommodations outside of the park, hundreds of workers associated with Yosemite National Park live in the nearby community of El Portal and Mariposa county (approximately one hour away), all of whom "received no pay during the shutdown, but were occasionally asked to drive long commutes into the park when asked to show up for work." The unpredictable and elongated nature of this particular shutdown intensified this particular problem. A long-time

national park employee highlighted one positive change made to a policy regarding national parks and shutdowns, adding that “in 2018, the federal government passed a law stating that everyone would get paid after shutdowns came to an end.” Although it does not guarantee or address the issue of financial insecurity that some employees may fall subject to during a shutdown, it does solidify that federal employees will eventually be compensated.

Volunteer Involvement

An issue raised in all national parks that I visited involved locals and visitors being highly interested in volunteering during the shutdown to reduce the impacts, yet the parks not permitting this type of volunteerism because work person’s compensation forms could not be completed. Hence, these individuals would not be protected if anything were to happen to them, normally covered under park liability. Yosemite Conservancy, acting as the non-profit partner, typically offers opportunities to aid with trash removal, revegetation, and trail building; however, they too were hesitant to have individuals working in the park without guidance from official federal park employees. One year, during a well-known event called Facelift, where numerous volunteers, mainly rock climbers, come to Yosemite to help collect trash, a park project worker recalls “historical trash” being collected by accident. They also explained that if any article is left within the park boundaries for over 50 years, it is considered a historical national park artifact. “This raised the importance of clear communication with park volunteers.”

A major cleanup effort, led by roughly 30 members of the local community, occurred during the shutdown. The nonprofit partner mentioned that if this was to recur during the event of a future shutdown, it may be beneficial for these types of volunteers, acting as “citizens of the

park” to receive some sort of information beforehand that could direct their efforts, so as to avoid tending to sensitive park areas meant for the attention of strictly park staff and to make the most of the aid they provide. As one employee reiterated, “you want to encourage people to volunteer, as the park was founded for preservation and conservation, but you do not want to make it look as if the park can run off volunteers alone because it simply cannot.” Even when fully staffed, “it is hard to keep a handle on it all.”

Summary of Report

From fires to government shutdowns, to flooding events, and overcrowding “We deal well with crises in Yosemite,” one furloughed employee explains, yet, they believe that “if you cannot strike a balance between protecting the park and helping visitors enjoy it, you should close the park.” When the visitor centre closed, the Conservancy and the park both lost revenue, particularly in entrance fees, which one employee hypothesized could be as much as one million dollars. Seeing as the park is “dependent on transient occupancy taxes, a 10% tax placed on tourists that was unable to be collected,” less money was generated that typically supports road maintenance, hospital infrastructure, and other community needs, all because no funds could be collected during the shutdown. One park employee concluded our conversation by questioning, “how can you possibly expect people to stay overnight and not use a bathroom?” When tourists enter a park during a shutdown, “they should think of it all as wilderness.”

➤ Joshua Tree National Park – Environmental Case Study



Photograph by Amy Erving (Joshua Tree National Park, April 2019)

General Overview

Joshua Tree National Park received a notably larger amount of media coverage that highlighted the issues of shutdowns resulting in increased problems with vandalism, sanitation, and overall resource preservation. My research in this park pertained mainly to environmental issues that ensued, along with the importance of communication to the general and local public. Other key points of conversations in Joshua Tree related to how this national park was able to allow a large amount of volunteers into the park during the shutdown to assist in conservation efforts with the leadership of Friends of Joshua Tree (something Yosemite employees were hesitant to permit), the reality of resources impacted and at risk, the economic impact for three

main nearby communities, and the allowance of a skeleton crew returning into the park mid-shutdown.

One of my favourite reflections from Joseph Sax's book, *Mountains Without Handrails*, reminds me of the events reported in Joshua Tree during the most recent government shutdown. Sax reflects on public lands in relation to how before national parks were established, visitors would chop down trees as souvenirs or as ornamental pieces, described as a "barbarous pastime" (Sax p. 8 1980). Interestingly, this event repeated itself during the 2018-2019 government shutdown in Joshua Tree National Park. Multiple news sources, such as CNN and New York Times, commented on how Joshua Trees were being cut down while gates remained open without park staff present to manage visitors (Diaz 2019 and Stack 2019). Hence, I dedicated the majority of my time to interviewing and questioning individuals about the degree of damage the park staff observed after the government reopened.

Previous Shutdown Experiences

During the 2013 shutdown, the gates at Joshua Tree National Park were locked. Visitors were turned away and as a result, one employee recalls seeing many petitioners with signs at the gates, saying things such as "you shut us out of the park!" They were angry that access to public land was being denied. During the 2018-2019, President Trump's administration used a different approach. There was a major incentive to keep the gates open, recognizing that Joshua Tree and many other parks function as "economic engines" for their respective regions. Furthermore, the public is also resistant to full, hard park closures, as it prohibits their access to public land.

Interestingly, the same employee who commented on the protestor signage explained that if you look at photographs of individuals at the park gates in Joshua Tree from 2013 compared to the recent 2018/2019 shutdown, you can see that “for the most part they were the exact same locals.” In 2013, they protested at the west entrance with signs that read “let us in!” whereas in 2018/2019, the signs read “close the park.” This represents how strongly the media influences communities and visitors, as well as the public’s general perception of the National Park Service and the challenge of balancing the dual mission of preservation and visitor experience.

Another comparison was that in 2013, 80% of the funds typically collected at gates and campgrounds for future projects were not permitted to be used to help pay for day to day operations in Joshua Tree. Under the current administration, they “looked at these yes, you can use those funds to keep the park running,” stating that the government would later pay this money back. With donation money received, Friends of Joshua Tree was able to make “no-interest loans available to park employees, which would later be repaid after their back pay occurred,” using a list of park employees who had not received paychecks. For example, 19 park employees each received \$500 after the shutdown ended. Some concessionaires, restaurant workers, maintenance workers, and various other employees are not federally employed, but work inside the park and therefore benefited from setting up this type of compensation. Workers from the Great Basin Institute (environmental reserve and conservation organization) were among people who did not receive any back pay, although contracted by the park service.

Other Issues and Impacts Raised

During the 2018-2019 government shutdown, 8 to 12 law enforcement rangers were still able to work; however, there are not many of them since it is a smaller park. Some additional law enforcement officers were eventually brought in from the surrounding areas, not due to more vandalism or illegal activity happening in the park, but simply to “help cover the 800,000 acres of park land.” 8 to 12 employees covering this desert, entails roughly 66,000 acres that they were responsible for. When the skeleton crew of 40 to 50 people returned to work in the park in January, the majority were workers in facilities for campgrounds, vegetation, and maintenance. Thankfully, they were able to address the major concerns of overflowing restroom facilities and other sanitation hazards. “We were fortunate the Department of the Interior said that because of the 30 million people from nearby major cities of California [referencing San Francisco, Los Angeles, the Bay area, etc.], and because of it being peak season, we were permitted to have a skeleton crew return during the shutdown.” This was fundamental in preserving and protecting the park, as well as ensuring management ran as smoothly as possible. The employee who reflected on this aspect of the shutdown hypothesized that the public pressure on the government through media to address these growing concerns may have incentivised them to make this change.

“The media made it look like the wild west,” one park employee explained. Some news sources stated that numerous Joshua Trees were cut down (Daley 2019), but this interviewee corrected them by saying, “we lost one tree,” which cannot necessarily be attributed to the shutdown. Furthermore, there was one incident of a Joshua Tree being backed into by a visitor’s vehicle and one old juniper tree cut down for firewood. Most of the damage that did occur was at

the west entrance, explained one park employee. This area is the Mojave Desert section of the park with iconic rock formations, Joshua Trees, and pristine wilderness. Then again, “the environmental impact was still primarily an issue of bathrooms, sanitation, and trash removal,” along with “off-roading being an issue.” Luckily, there were three days before the media showed up to Joshua Tree after coverage began to spread. A volunteer and worker from Friends of Joshua Tree said, “this helped us get ahead of the power curve, so when the media did arrive, they had already addressed bathroom facilities, trash removal, and general maintenance. We did find over 108 out of bounds fires,” which the employee reflected on by saying that just one fire could have catastrophic effects, particularly in a desert. Fortunately, that did not happen during this shutdown.

Volunteer Involvement

Joshua Tree “enjoys a strong gateway community,” which has an adverse effect on the park, one of the park employees who works closely with park programming and volunteer coordination described. Volunteers, the majority of whom were locals, took it upon themselves to clean the toilets, which were a primary concern. One local company pumped the septic tanks, saying their services were a “donation to the park.” Most national park campsites have long term “hosts” who stay and help with after-hours reservations, general camp management, and park volunteer work. During the shutdown, they were told to remove their signs. This was important to communicate so that they also were not held liable.

To avoid the issue of liability and volunteers not being eligible for work person’s compensation, unable to complete the 301a Volunteer Service Agreement form, locals began

referring to their actions within the park as doing the “work of citizens of the park.” This meant that they were still able to volunteer, but without the official title of park services volunteer—something that may be an applicable solution for other national parks in the event of future shutdowns. One consideration raised by a Yosemite National Park employee was to err on the side of caution regarding having volunteers in the park during shutdowns, as they need proper guidance and direction toward priority task and areas of sensitivity to avoid in the park. For example, Joshua Tree has historic mining sites which have a variety of debris in their surrounding vicinity. These may appear to an average volunteer like trash to collect; however, they are historic to the park and may not be removed, as protected by law under the Code of Federal Regulations (National Park Service 2017).

Summary of Reports

As a national park, Joshua Tree gets coverage in many papers through nearby cities, such as Los Angeles and San Diego. For this reason, journalism took an interest in how the federal government shutdown was impacting this particular national park. One employee mentioned how challenging it can be to both ensure that resources remain unharmed and pristine, while also communicating details of the park services with the public, especially when furloughed employees cannot speak to the details of parks when temporarily laid off. “We were ground zero,” so in order to cover how national parks were being impacted, Joshua Tree was used as an example. Although the story related to vandalism may have been exaggerated, a Friends of Joshua Tree employee explains that it did increase their turnout for volunteers, donations to the

park through the conservation group, and also the permittance of a skeleton crew returning to work.

Despite efforts (such as strategic planning or volunteerism) to reduce the negative effects of government shutdowns of national parks and surrounding communities, one park employee explained that they believe “there is not much that can be done to prepare in advance for a shutdown, especially when there is such short notice. Christmas and New Year’s are the busiest times for Joshua Tree.” Yet, this individual also believes that having people act as citizens in the park can help, meaning they are still able to volunteer under the supervision of a conservation group. “We are strained protecting the resource [park land] on an everyday basis,” which is a reason for why the shutdown was particularly tough on smaller national parks, such as Joshua Tree. “Having that crew back helped, but the shutdown still impacted operations.”

One volunteer from Friends of Joshua Tree commented on how historical and archaeological artefacts, such as petroglyphs by Native American people, are “pieces we forget about because everyone is talking about the big trees and pretty flowers being impacted,” rather than discussing the magnitude of ripple effects that did and could happen.



Photograph of Petroglyphs by Amy Erving (Joshua Tree National Park, April 2019)

➤ Zion National Park – Gateway Community Case Study



Photograph by Amy Erving (Zion National Park, May 2019)

General Overview

The town of Springdale, Utah, is Zion National Park’s gateway community which makes it highly intertwined, economically, culturally, and geographically to the national park. As a result, there are many parallels that can be drawn with Zion and Acadia National Park (being closely connected to Mount Desert Island gateway communities). The information Zion employees can speak to, in regard to operating during shutdowns in busier seasons, being

affiliated with surrounding businesses, as well as impacts to the livelihoods of locals is an important variable to cover.

Upon entering Zion National Park, visitors pass through the gateway community of Springdale. Numerous local businesses associated with outdoor recreation (rock climbing, canyoneering, rafting, etc.) are based in this town and guide tourists throughout the national park. There is a large hotel located within the park gates, many accommodations surrounding the park, as well as several other popular national park destinations in the nearby vicinity, such as Arches National Park, Bryce Canyon National Park, Canyonlands National Park, and Grand Canyon National Park. During Christmas and New Year's, Zion receives an influx of visitors who aim to visit the intricately detailed sandstone desert. This past year, this peak in visitation coincided with the dates of the 2018-2019 government shutdown. The park was far from fully staffed with a skeleton crew called back to help primarily with maintenance, yet open gates and operating businesses meant that the majority of tourists proceeded to recreate and frequent the park. Some of the key points raised by those interviewed included, but were not limited to, delays in hiring and training, the importance of community and having a platform of communication for those furloughed, as well as the role that public engagement can play in shaping the outcome for national parks during government shutdowns.

Previous Shutdown Experiences

During the last major shutdown of 2013, Zion National Park closed their gates and informed visitors that they could not recreate in the park. Tourists were asked to stay in their vehicles upon arriving to Zion, despite it being "public land." One park staff explained that

“during this shutdown, multiple counties declared a state of emergency within Utah, specifically caused by the loss of tourism revenue.” They also explained how some businesses closed during this 16-day shutdown, along with many restaurant and hotel cancellations throughout Springdale. In terms of environmental impacts, there were five out-of-bounds fire rings found, one pregnant elk poached, and other issues that likely went unreported or noticed. In 2013, many national monuments, such as the WWII monument, were closed until a group of veterans demanded that it be reopened as a public space. The employee who spoke to these environmental impacts believed that the government was doing their best to keep things open during the 2018-2019 shutdown, so that the public does not complain and so that the government does not receive political backlash.

Issues and Impacts Raised

One interviewed park employee referred to Zion as the “cash cow of Utah” because of the amount of revenue this park and national parks around the state accumulate per annum. During the Christmas and New Year’s season, the park experiences a major influx of visitors. This means that it was in the state’s best interest to keep the park open. Three main funding sources made this possible: the state of Utah, Zion Forever Project (the name of their nonprofit partner organisation), and Washington County (that ranges from Springdale to Saint George). These funds were primarily used for maintenance and the visitor centre, so that visitors could still have some of their basic questions answered. Having a skeleton crew return part way into the shutdown was “critical because being partially staffed meant that we could have some

restrooms open, some campsites in operation, and could also communicate what visitors should expect upon arriving.”

Although funding was somewhat addressed in this regard, the first week of the 2018-2019 federal government shutdown ironically coincided with the start of the park shuttle bus service operations for the season. Out of the \$35 park entrance fee that each visitor pays, 75% of that goes toward the cost of the bus system. Park rangers could not charge this fee at the gate, hence, there was a financial deficit in this regard. One interviewed park ranger and volunteer coordinator was curious about how much money was lost in park revenue when the buses were in operation but the entrance fees were not being collected during this first week, suspecting the losses to be significant. This is addressed in the summative and concluding sections of this paper.

“Roughly 10% of the normal staff were working during the shutdown, yet Zion was experiencing the same amount of visitation.” Supposedly, some of the visitors did not even realise that the park was in a shutdown. For those who did know and wanted to make donations to support the National Park Service and Zion during this time period by offering to pay the typical amount of the camping sites and park entrance fees, locals suggested that they consider donating to the Zion Forever Project instead, as that money would support both conservation efforts and park operations. This strategy was recommended as a way to avoid conflicts regarding the acceptance of donations by a federal agency during the government shutdown, while simultaneously helping decrease fiscal ramifications. On the other hand, another impact was that someone reportedly, “tried to steal the campground site fees from the box.” There were

also many illegal fire pits noted, and even some car break-ins, which is “abnormal for the Zion area and the park” said one ranger.

The employees who continued to work throughout the shutdown were law enforcement, medical staff, dispatch, some interpretation staff (after the park received some funding from external sources), and maintenance and custodial staff with the support of outside funds. During this 2018-2019 shutdown, “the park community of Springdale was not extremely hit, economically speaking ... if recreation remains open, people will still come, so economically we will be more stable.” Contractors, for example, represented some of the people not able to work during the shutdown and who did not receive any form of backpay. Another issue that ensued, related to contractor work, was that the timeline to complete pre-season projects ended up being extended by 35 days, running into the busier parts of the year. This had a ripple effect on traffic, park operations, and general functionality of the park. Toward the end of the shutdown, restrictions related to park accessibility loosened up, permitting some employees to use the roads and to access trails where they could assess park damage.

Similarly to the situation reported in Yosemite National Park, daycare facilities within Zion were operating as per usual during the first part of the shutdown and later switched to three days a week, posing a challenge especially for parents and guardians with dual careers in their family (both furloughed). Furthermore, scheduling childcare for families was less predictable and affording this type of care, along with healthcare and other personal needs, presented financial challenges. One employee mentioned that “if you consider the demographic of people putting children into daycare, it is typically younger families who are less financially stable, so finding childcare for two days and paying for it was likely challenging.”

One of the most significant impacts on Zion was the hiring and training process for seasonal workers. A member of the hiring committee explained that they hired their last seasonal employee the day before our interview (May 3, 2019), which is months later than usual. Typically, Zion hires 8 to 12 interpreters to work from mid-April to October. The hiring process begins in late November with the work primarily being background checks, communications, and interviewing starting mid-January (after receiving a revised list of qualified candidates). The shutdown coincided with the middle of their search. Once the park hires its employees, the workers usually start in mid-April, six to eight weeks after signing their contracts. This year during the 2018-2019 shutdown, they received a list of 703 qualified candidates. One park ranger and supervisor said that “after we received the list in mid/late February, it needed to be processed (which takes roughly two to three weeks). As a result, we were over five weeks later than we should have been in the process of hiring post-shutdown.” Many hiring personnel felt a sense of “crunch time” from being subjected to the human resources adjudication process.

February is the time that the “season is ramping up in terms of visitation.” Similarly to Yosemite National Park, Zion gets millions of visitors per year and struggles with overcrowding during peak seasons. For this reason, this ranger and supervisor believes it is pressing that Zion hires “people who are experienced and successful in a busy environment. Many of the people we eventually offered the position to responded to us by saying ‘I would love to work in Zion but because of the shutdown, I decided to go back to my old position at a different park.’” According to them, the sheer number of people turning the position down was shocking. Hiring a group of predominantly “less experienced staff,” they explained, “it is like throwing new employees into a den of lions.” because there is a major learning curve when going from a smaller park workplace

to a park as popular as Zion. Even after the five weeks of searching and hiring, they only hired seven interpreters (one person shy of their typical minimum), directly a result of the mass filtration process. The training for their new employees was completed in the last week of April, leaving this employee to feel that they are “finally caught up from the shutdown.”

Volunteer Involvement

One federal park worker who helps organize volunteer initiatives explained that they had to remind volunteers that they were not permitted to volunteer in an official capacity, but seeing as the gates were open, they technically were not held back from volunteering independently as “private citizens.” As the shutdown persisted and spring break approached (a busy time for Zion), they were preparing to have their volunteers sign an agreement to work through the Forever Project. Park officials drafted a document; however, it was not needed, as the government eventually reopened. “We got many offers from big companies like REI, Black Diamond, and colleges/universities like South Utah Dixie State University, who wanted to help but we had to say no.” This was primarily because Zion National Park did not have staff to coordinate these events and because they were “generally okay,” said one ranger involved in volunteer project work. Nonetheless, they reflected on how if the shutdown lasted longer or occurred in a busier part of the season, it might have been a different situation and the need may have been greater.

In terms of the ways that citizens could be involved, they were able to walk the trails acting as stewards of the park, collecting trash, and assisting when community initiatives were proposed. In the face of a shutdown or not, one ranger reminded me that people’s actions should

always reflect the same amount of respect toward the environment and parks. “Be a good trail steward on your own. You don’t need to be an official volunteer.” That being said, if a volunteer agreement was to be drafted, it should indicate that volunteers “expect nothing extra,” other than simply aiding during the event and that “the park cannot protect you with work person’s compensation.” They described the volunteer predicament during shutdowns as being a “political minefield, but it should not have to be this way, as these citizens just want to help.”

Summary of Reports

Overall, this government shutdown “decimated morale,” said one employee who struggled while temporarily laid off from their position at the park. The museum workers were not back paid, so the morale of non-government park workers was also hit. In this regard, one park employee argued that this issue of back pay was likely a “harder hit for the outside community.” To combat this issue of declining morale, Zion Rotary organized multiple dinner events and meetings to allow park employees a chance to meet, share, and compile lists of personal emails and phone numbers. This helped the park community stay in touch with each other regarding events, donations, and other resources available to them. The town began collecting a large amount of donations for the food bank, something that occurred in Acadia National Park’s surrounding gateway communities as well. Seeing as they are government employees they are not supposed to accept offers, such as discounts and donations and it was “tricky to navigate with so many people in the community wanting to show their support.” One example was how the Zion Rotary created anonymized gift cards to avoid these political and ethical issues.

When looking at a national park gateway community like Springdale and Zion or Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park, there is a clear full circle relationship between the park and the community. If the park continues to bring millions of visitors, the local economy and surrounding populations will benefit from tourism. In this regard, local businesses should be and in this case were incentivised to provide support and aid during shutdowns. During the 2013 full government shutdown, the public was “angry, which led them to call, write, and reach out to their local representatives in congress.” This reaction by locals and visitors is what many park employees believe could benefit national parks, especially when park employees are unable to communicate or advocate for themselves and for the parks as invaluable resources. The Organic Act, one federal worker articulated, “talks about natural and cultural preservation, with the last line mentioning that it is for the enjoyment of future generations. This ‘dual mission of preservation and enjoyment’ is tricky—especially striking this balance during a shutdown.” Similarly to reactions from employees in Yosemite National Park, Zion locals and employees reflected that they were “lucky things worked as they did” because “your entire life can go into crisis mode during a shutdown.” For this reason, creating strategic action plans, which are specific to a national park and take into consideration the complexity of government shutdowns, seems increasingly pressing.

V. Strategic Planning for Future Government Shutdowns

Introduction

Although impacted in regard to hiring, training, trail maintenance, financial stability of those furloughed, and other various effects did take place in Acadia National Park, the surrounding gateway communities were fortunate that this shutdown did not coincide with the busiest times of the year— May through October. For this reason, it seems increasingly important that the partner organization, Friends of Acadia, as well as the surrounding communities apply lessons learned in other national parks, such as Yosemite, Joshua Tree, and Zion. After drawing parallels between these parks and finding feasible ways to apply their experiences and strategies to Acadia National Park, the following strategic planning evolved.

Strategic Planning for the Gateway Communities of Acadia National Park

Spring 2019

Description

A culmination of reports related to the impacts and effects of the recent 2018-2019 United States federal government shutdown helped generate an action plan for Acadia National Park and its surrounding communities that may be used in the event of future shutdowns. This document may prove useful as a point of reference for solutions-focused ideas to aid in preventing damage to cultural, historical, economic, and environmental resources. The various sections outline the ways in which the surrounding community, volunteers, local businesses, tourists, and nonprofit partners can remain actively involved in park conservation, preservation, and if the conditions of the shutdown permit it, safe forms of recreation. The finer details of each shutdown may permit or prohibit implementing some of the strategies outlined below. The goal of creating this document is to highlight efforts that proved effective in other national parks (Zion, Yosemite, and Joshua Tree), as well as actions taken in Acadia National Park (ANP). It should be noted that interviewed employees from all four parks reported major long-term issues with regard to the 2019 hiring process caused by the 2018-2019 shutdown. This strategic plan offers few solutions that would aid or remedy this particular problem because the filtration process depends on communication with multiple departments of the federal government before hiring and training can commence.

The topics addressed within this strategic plan include the fundamental goals of the plan, a list of general potential impacts for parks and their surrounding communities, as well as important considerations to make when deciding how to determine the most suitable actions and strategies to implement. Toward the end of the planning document, there are a number of general strategies to be drafted in advance of future government shutdowns (typically by the non-profit partner organization), along with suggestions for involvement by volunteers, tourists, and other community partners.

Fundamental Goals

The goals of this plan in part reflect the mission of the National Park Service and the hopes of park employees and partners—conservation and preservation of resources, visitor safety and experience, community stability and morale. Specific strategies which may aid in Acadia National Park are highlighted in the final section.

Potential Impacts of Shutdowns for Parks and Gateway Communities

- a) Sanitation may be a primary concern, regarding visitors having access to restroom facilities, as well as the general maintenance of buildings and national park facilities.
- b) Hiring processes may be delayed, as applicant processing, filtration, selection, and training are completed by different federal departments, workers, and levels of HR.

- c) Transit and traffic personnel, particularly in parks that deal with overcrowding during peak seasons, must consider how bus operations will run, the general safety of commuters and pedestrians, the potential to collect gate entrance fees, accessibility regarding key roads that pass through parkland, as well as enforcing laws related to off-roading.
- d) A loss in park revenue typically occurs during shutdowns, which may impact locals, restaurants, hotels, recreation-based businesses, employees working in the park who do not receive back pay and are not furloughed, and well as feasibility of health services.
- e) Scientific data cannot be collected during shutdowns, hence gaps in long term studies will lose legitimacy and invaluable information for park resource management.
- f) Park entrance and interpretation will have a reduction in the facilitation of experiences for visitors if rangers are no longer able to communicate rules, regulations, safety, and educational knowledge to tourists.
- g) Resources may be threatened by damage to, or removal of historic trash, creation of out of bounds fire pits, poaching of wildlife, and the vandalism of invaluable (watersheds, archaeological artifacts like petroglyphs, and other sensitive park attributes).
- h) Construction that typically occurs during off-seasons may be delayed as these workers are not permitted to enter parkland to tend to infrastructure-related needs.
- i) Communication to and among park employees is halted, making it challenging for them to confer regarding community resources, work return dates, road accessibility, etc.

Shutdown Circumstantial Considerations

- a) Is it a partial shutdown, meaning only some agencies are funded? If the Department of the Interior remains in operation, the National Park Service may not be impacted. If Congress cannot agree on a federal budget pertaining to this specific agency, parks will inherently be impacted.
- b) Are the national park gates and entrances remaining open or closed?
- c) Is access to the park completely restricted? How does it impact daily commutes?
- d) Are Search and Rescue still permitted to enter the park in cases of emergencies?
- e) Would state or nearby county funding cover some expenses, such as road and gate operations, funding a skeleton staff, and/or subsidising research grants?
- f) Is there an option to continue collecting entrance fees, particularly if bus shuttles continue to operate and are primarily funded by these funds?
- g) How might volunteerism be orchestrated through a partner organization? Volunteers are ineligible for work person's compensation during shutdowns, as the federal volunteer paperwork 301a will no longer authorize their support, but might they be able to work as “citizens of the park” to avoid this issue?
- h) Which local gateway communities might be impacted and in what ways?
- i) How does the season during which shutdowns occur affect citizens, the local economy, and the furloughed park employees?
- j) Would any particular health concerns warrant declaring a state of emergency, such as the proximity of pristine watersheds, air pollution, risk of disease outbreaks, etc.)?

General Strategies to be Completed in Advance of a Shutdown

- a) Compiling a list of resources available to park employees furloughed and/or in need of support can aid those who suffer economically. Examples of this may include free healthcare clinics, businesses with discounts, food pantries, drop-in childcare facilities, and community meeting spaces and events.
- b) Preparing documentation to educate visitors about the specific circumstances and implications for a shutdown with a clear outline of the park's policies and the expectations that visitors should have may increase transparency and safety.
- c) Identifying individuals who are not receiving back pay but who may have been unable to work during the shutdown may lead to potential temporary loans or stipends being created using money donated to the partner organization.
- d) Ensuring rent costs for those housed within the park are waived or postponed, as typically they come out of a worker's paycheck (which they will not receive during a shutdown).
- e) Pinpointing areas of sensitivity for conservation, such as freshwater resources, nesting sites, and historic places), is important so as to direct skeleton staff toward these particular sites. Additionally, conservancy workers could use signage and information for the public to address species of management concerns, such as peregrine falcon nesting sites (putting up signage and taping off trails), eagle nesting sites on Mount Desert Island and surrounding islands, nesting shorebirds, occasional marine mammal strandings, key public watersheds and sources (Eagle Lake, Jordan Pond, and the Hadlock Ponds), as well as protecting habitats vulnerable to disturbance (Gilmore Meadow, Great Heath, etc.) .

- f) Developing signage that explains where restroom facilities can be accessed in nearby towns, while reminding visitors of “carry in carry out” practices to decrease the likelihood of sanitation issues arising.
 - g) Considering issues to address overcrowding during peak seasons. An example might be to only permit locals and tourists with previously purchased park passes and reservations to enter the park. ¹
 - h) Sharing in advance personal emails and phone numbers among furloughed employees to help easier communication during shutdown events regarding returning to work, childcare, community support, and available resources.
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Acadia-Specific Strategies

Partner Organizations – Friends of Acadia (FOA)

- a) Coordinating stewardship initiatives as articulated above, which may require a written agreement with the park service, can help capitalize off individuals willing to assist in conservation-related efforts.
- b) Communicating with the public regarding their expectations and options for volunteer involvement, while simultaneously promoting environmental stewardship.

¹ * Note: This may not be feasible in Acadia National Park due to the interconnectivity of communities surrounding the national park along with the isolated nature of inhabiting a relatively small island.

- c) Permitting national park interns or park volunteers to work temporarily within the Friends of Acadia office spaces, so as to develop further partnerships with these members.
- d) Developing agreements with volunteers that permit them to work, so as to address the issue of liability and work person's compensation not being an option for park volunteers during shutdowns.
- e) Helping ensure media coverage remains apolitical and informative for tourists, locals, park employees, and other parties through an official public information officer or park representative.
- f) Encouraging the Department of the Interior to consider allowing a skeleton crew to return to work, particularly during peak seasons and long-term shutdowns.
- g) Considering the implementation of temporary closures for dangerous trails with extensive incident reports. High volume trails, such as the Precipice and the Beehive, may require at a minimum increased signage to lower the risk of accidents within the park.
- h) Redirecting visitors to other public lands with similar facilitated experiences, such as the Maine Coast Heritage Trust Lands, when gates and access to the park are restricted.

Volunteer and Community Involvement

The relationship between parks and gateway communities is symbiotic. When parks are developed and maintained, millions of visitors will come. This influx of tourism brings significant revenue to the local economy. The incentive for businesses and local gateway communities to support parks during shutdowns is evident within this exchange of services and support. By providing resources, time, and aid during shutdowns they allow national parks to be

less negatively impacted by a shutdown, meaning visitor experience will be less impacted. When visitor experience declines, park closures typically ensue. Hence, the incentive for gateway community involvement is fundamental in finding local and impactful solutions.

Additional Strategies for Friends of Acadia (during the event of prolonged shutdowns)

- a) What could the Schoodic Institute's role be in future shutdowns? How might they operate? During the shutdown, they were unable to operate out of their facilities and could not collaborate with ANP. Research and general work that is independent of the National Park Service was able to continue. Schoodic Institute can also serve as a channel of communication to visitors and the public.
- b) Business owners may contribute with donations, such as restroom maintenance, discounts for those furloughed or not working, hosting gatherings, and other items or gestures.
- c) Campground hosts or long-term volunteers should be asked to remove any signage associated with the park system at private campgrounds during the shutdown.
- d) Promote advocacy for local federal government workers impacted during the shutdown.
- e) Volunteer work might focus more closely on maintenance related tasks, such as trash collection, facility clean-up, and trail building or revegetation with the guidance of FOA.
- f) The Chamber of Commerce may be able to offer assistance, such as through the donation of bags for trash removal. Furthermore, other informative materials for visitors may prove useful if gates are closed and tourists require redirection.
- g) The Public Lands Alliance may be a useful contact as they may have documentation on which individuals may not receive back pay and may need more community support.

- h) Public forums with speakers from the Chamber of Commerce, incident reporters associated with the park, and workers from Friends of Acadia, could be hosted to provide the general public with as much information and as many answers as possible. This proved successful during the 2013 shutdown, allowing park workers and partners to remain transparent with gateway communities.

Finally, although some solutions may exist, if a balance cannot be found between protecting the park and helping visitors enjoy it, perhaps the gates should simply be closed.

VI. Summative Thoughts Regarding National Parks and Government Shutdowns

As noted in the strategic planning section above, a number of issues that arise during government shutdowns regarding national parks operations and conservation can be addressed beforehand. Nevertheless, despite our best efforts to avoid or mediate conflict, Joseph Sax reminds us that “the tension between service of conventional recreation and the preservation of national parks will never wholly disappear” (Sax p. 66 1980). After completing interviews in Yosemite, Joshua Tree, Zion, and Acadia, I realized that two issues affected all of the parks which I visited, yet few to no solutions surfaced during conversations with park employees or non-profit partners. First, in terms of long-term scientific data collection that is normally conducted within national parks, there were gaps in research during the window of late November 2018 through the end of January 2019. When funding and/or grants are processed through the federal government for these studies, they may not be used, and the individuals typically collecting the data cannot do so during government shutdowns. Gaps in research can be particularly problematic for a variety of reasons, such as decreasing the validity of the study, providing insufficient information for certain seasons or periods of time, and possibly making decision-making processes related to policy or future research more challenging. An example of this is a long-term study in Zion National Park that focuses on Bighorn Sheep, which employees reported now may suffer from a decrease in credibility caused by the 2018-2019 shutdown. Additionally, moose and wolf wildlife studies with over 60 years of research in Isle Royale (one of the longest ongoing studies in the United States) suffered from a similar fate during this past shutdown (Myers 2019).

The second major issue for which I was unable to draft any solutions relates to the hiring process of national parks. During a regular hiring cycle, without the interruption of government shutdowns, most seasonal positions are posted in November of the year prior for summer employment. At that point, applications are received, which human resources (HR) workers in higher administrative positions process. Background checks for the large number of applicants the NPS receives inherently means time-consuming work, with seasonal employees typically hearing from parks mid-February, so they can then begin working in March/April, depending on the seasonality and peak times for a park. A fundamental problem in regard to the hiring process comes down to the fact that administrative workers (furloughed during the shutdown) must first process and review employees eligible for various park positions before the national park can interview, hire, and train qualified workers. The majority of ranger seasonal positions, for example, were unable to be processed by HR workers until at the least the end of January 2018. With tens of thousands of applicants throughout the nation applying for these positions, the process is no simple task (Repanshek 2019). A key issue to address would be the job insecurity that this mass of citizens face during a shutdown, especially seeing as they are met with silence when attempting to contact their potential employers. This delay in hiring and training is increasingly problematic when we consider that no federal workers are permitted to use their official work emails to communicate when the government is not in operation (as emphasised by employees in Zion National Park).

As previously articulated, my research and conversations with park staff did not show any signs of remediation for these two issues (gaps in scientific data collection and delays in the hiring process). For this reason, it seems more worthwhile to discuss the areas of the National

Park Service responsibility, which can be aided or supported by groups, such as nonprofit partners, volunteers, and/or local communities. These areas include, but are not limited to, focused volunteer work, sanitation and general buildings/facilities management, visitor safety and education, media coverage and public outreach, environmental protection and preservation, accessibility and transportation (particularly for surrounding communities), roles of skeleton crews able to work, local business involvement, communication with furloughed employees, protection of historically significant resources and places, economic stability of those left unpaid or awaiting back pay, entrance fee collection and options to donate to parks, as well as the overall morale of national park workers who strive to uphold the dual mission of visitor experience and park preservation for future generations.

VII. Senior Project Conclusion

Past Director of the National Park Service, Jonathan B Jarvis, quotes author and environmentalist Wallace Stegner who believes, “National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst” (Jarvis 2019). Jarvis goes on to state that “Now left unattended and gathering trash and human waste, the [current administration] has let them reflect us at our worst.” The strategic action plan included above contains only a handful of solutions that would benefit national parks during the event of future government shutdowns. If the National Park Service continues to fall under the branch of federal jurisdiction, leaving public lands and natural resources in the hands of policymakers, it seems increasingly important that the public identifies ways in which they can stay involved and active.

A recent report published through the National Park Service showed that Acadia National Park generated \$387.7 million dollars in economic revenue in spending across the state for Maine in 2018. This was predominantly made through gateway communities in the Mount Desert Island region, while supporting a total of 5,600 jobs affiliated with park services and recreation (Anastasia 2019). During the 2018-2019 government shutdown, a 35-day long event, an estimated \$400,000 was lost per day in park fees across the country (Lu and Singhvi 2019). Environmental, moral, political, and other aspects aside, the inherent economic and cultural value of national parks is undeniable. If shutdowns of this duration continue to gain in frequency and magnitude, the effects—particularly for gateway communities—may be far-reaching and lasting.

This document highlights the importance of untangling the complexity of this interdisciplinary problem, which park employees and communities have felt across the United States. Many past presidents emphasized the value of protecting and supporting national parks. President John. F. Kennedy stated in 1962, “National parks and reserves are an integral aspect of intelligent use of natural resources. It is the course of wisdom to set aside an ample portion of our natural resources as national parks and reserves, thus ensuring that future generations may know the majesty of the earth as we know it today.” Dating even further back, President Franklin D. Roosevelt considered in 1936, “There is nothing so American as our national parks ... The fundamental idea behind the parks ... is that the country belongs to the people, that it is in process of making for the enrichment of the lives of all of us” (National Park Service 2015).



Photograph by Amy Erving (Yosemite National Park, April 2019)

If the dual-mission of conservation and visitor experience that is outlined under the Organic Act of 1916 cannot be upheld, perhaps we should consider which of the two goals will be the utmost priority. Will society and governing administrators opt to prioritize human experiences and rights to public land, or will we chose to protect a nonrenewable resource of immeasurable worth?

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Appendices

Appendix A—United States Government Shutdowns (1976-2018)

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www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/every-government-shutdown-from-1976-to-now

Start date	How many full days?	Over what issue(s)?	How big of a shutdown?	White House led by a	House controlled by	Senate controlled by	Ended with
Dec. 22, 2018	35	\$5 billion in funding for a proposed border wall	Significant partial shutdown. 25 Percent of government was closed, 800,000 federal workers missed a month of pay.	Republican (Trump)	Republicans (until Jan. 3) Democrats (since Jan. 3)	Republicans	Short-term funding bill
Feb. 9, 2018	0 (it was 9 hours)	Deficit spending and recent tax cuts	Technical funding gap only	Republican (Trump)	Republicans	Republicans	Short-term funding bill
Jan. 20, 2018	2	Immigration, DACA specifically	Shutdown but with limited effect, occurring mostly over a weekend.	Republican (Trump)	Republicans	Republicans	Short-term funding bill
Oct. 1, 2013	16	Affordable Care Act	Significant shutdown	Democratic (Obama)	Republicans	Democrats	Short-term funding bill and short-term lifting of the debt ceiling
Dec. 15, 1995	21	Range of issues: Medicare, possible balanced budget law, size and scope of government	Significant shutdown	Democratic (Clinton)	Republicans	Republicans	Short-term funding bills
Nov. 13, 1995	5	Range of issues: Medicare, possible balanced budget law, size and scope of government	Significant shutdown	Democratic (Clinton)	Republicans	Republicans	Short-term funding bill
Oct. 5, 1990	3	The deficit	Shutdown with limited effect, occurring over Columbus Day weekend	Republican (George H.W. Bush)	Democrats	Democrats	Short-term funding bill
Dec. 18, 1987	1	Nicaragua, Medicare spending and rules for broadcasters	Technical funding gap only	Republican (Reagan)	Democrats	Democrats	Short-term funding bill
Oct. 16, 1986	1	Spending cuts, military equipment, and the death penalty in drug cases	Workers furloughed a half-day	Republican (Reagan)	Democrats	Republicans	Full-year funding bill and raising of debt ceiling
Oct. 3, 1984	1	Slew of issues: water programs, Nicaragua, defense	Workers furloughed a half-day	Republican (Reagan)	Democrats	Republicans	Full-year spending agreement and federal crime package
Sept. 30, 1984	2	Slew of issues: water programs, Nicaragua, defense	Technical funding gap only	Republican (Reagan)	Democrats	Republicans	Short-term funding bill
Nov. 10, 1983	3	Defense spending, foreign aid, dairy policy and education funding	Technical funding gap only	Republican (Reagan)	Democrats	Republicans	Full-year spending agreement and appropriations bills
Dec. 17, 1982	3	Two missile programs and a jobs programs	Technical funding gap only. Federal workers were told to work as normal	Republican (Reagan)	Democrats	Republicans	Full-year spending agreement
Sept. 30, 1982	1	Hobnobbing. A White House barbecue and Democratic fundraiser delayed processing of the short-term deal	Technical funding gap only. Federal workers were told to work as normal	Republican (Reagan)	Democrats	Republicans	Short-term funding bill
Nov. 20, 1981	2	Spending cuts	Limited effect, occurring over a holiday weekend. The first modern shutdown. Reagan ordered non-essential federal employees to go home	Republican (Reagan)	Democrats	Republicans	Short-term funding bill
Sept. 30, 1979	11	Pay raises for congressional staff and abortion	Technical funding gap, no shutdown. Some Pentagon workers got a few days' worth of half pay	Democrat (Carter)	Democrats	Democrats	Short-term funding bill
Sept. 30, 1978	18	Abortion and defense spending	Technical funding gap, no actual shutdown	Democrat (Carter)	Democrats	Democrats	Short-term funding bill
Nov. 30, 1977	8	Abortion	Technical funding gap, no actual shutdown	Democrat (Carter)	Democrats	Democrats	Short-term funding bill and agreement to let Medicaid fund abortions for rape and incest victims
Oct. 31, 1977	8	Abortion	Technical funding gap, no actual shutdown	Democrat (Carter)	Democrats	Democrats	Short-term funding bill
Sept. 30, 1977	12	Abortion. House and Senate divided over whether Medicaid should fund abortions in cases of rape or incest	Technical funding gap, no actual shutdown	Democrat (Carter)	Democrats	Democrats	Short-term funding bill
Sept. 30, 1976	10	Spending	Technical funding gap, no actual shutdown	Republican (Ford)	Democrats	Democrats	Congress overrode Ford's veto

Appendix B – General Template for Interviews

Interview Questions for Park Employees and Non-Profit Partner Organizations

General Logistics

- 1) How did the most recent government shutdown impact your work?
- 2) What were the greatest impacts you observed (economic, environmental, moral, etc.)?
- 3) Was communication effective during the shutdown among workers, tourists, and locals?
- 4) Compared to previous shutdowns (2013, the wildfire closures in Yosemite, etc.), how did this shutdown differ?
- 5) Were bus systems in operation? What major holidays coincided with this closure for your park and how did that impact visitation?
- 6) Was the local community and park prepared for a shutdown of this magnitude?

Issues and Impacts

- 1) In what ways were local businesses able to support those furloughed?
- 2) During the October 2013 shutdown (peak season for many parks), did surrounding communities suffer economically from the closure of gates?
- 3) What resources were provided to those without pay during the recent shutdown?
- 4) Were specific resources at risk during the shutdown?
- 5) What data collection was not completed? Were any long-term studies impacted or any applications for grants and other funding sources left unprocessed?

- 6) If a skeleton crew was permitted to return to work, who was it primarily composed of?
- 7) Was the media portrayal accurate, in terms of the most significant impacts and the overall coverage of the event?
- 8) In terms of delays in hiring, what long-term effects have you observed in your department?
- 9) How was the general feedback and/or interactions with visitors? Were they supportive, understanding, educated about the circumstances upon their arrival, and/or cautious to enter the park during the shutdown?
- 10) Is the administration using park entrance fees to cover costs and deficits problematic?

Strategies and Solutions

- 1) Were volunteers permitted into the park? If yes, what were their roles and who directed their work? Was liability addressed as a concern?
- 2) Did some volunteers self-organize or were they predominantly going through the partner organization?
- 3) Do you believe the park can strike a balance between preservation and facilitating meaningful visitor experience during shutdowns? How do gates remaining open and skeleton staff being permitted to work make a difference?
- 4) How did the local community support those furloughed or unable to work and left unpaid during the shutdown? Were donations accepted and if so, how were they organized?
- 5) Was there a way to utilise campground hosts, interns, and long-term volunteers via the partner organization?