



United States Senate

February 6, 2019

Mr. David Bernhardt
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Acting Secretary Bernhardt,

Now that the partial government shutdown has ended, I ask that you respond in full to the request for information I made in my January 10, 2019, letter to you. Specifically, I ask that you provide an assessment of any damages to natural resources and infrastructure and an estimate of necessary repair costs for each national park that remained open during the shutdown. The letter I received on January 11, 2019, from National Park Service Deputy Director P. Daniel Smith does not address or acknowledge my information requests. I have enclosed both letters for your reference and photos of damage to Joshua Tree National Park taken by my staff.

I am particularly concerned with the damage done to national parks in California, including Joshua Tree National Park. My staff recently visited the park and reported to me that there were more than 120 incursions and 24 miles of new tracks created by people illegally taking their cars off road through protected habitat. Joshua trees were damaged and a large number of rock formations were vandalized with graffiti. Additionally, there were 100 illegal campsites, some near historic Native American petroglyphs, at which individuals used local vegetation, including a 100-year-old juniper tree, for firewood. Joshua Tree National Park lost at least \$1 million in park entrance fees and human waste and garbage polluted the park.

The decision to keep national parks open with inadequate staffing resulted in long-term, serious damage to our public lands and national treasures. In some cases the damage incurred during the shutdown will take centuries to recover from. It is critical that Congress understand the extent and costs of the damage incurred so we may begin to make repairs where possible. I thank you in advance for your attention to this critical matter, and I look forward to your response to my January 10, 2019, inquiries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dianne Feinstein".

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Enclosures: January 10, 2019 Letter: Feinstein to Bernhardt re: park concerns and damages
January 11, 2019 Letter: Smith to Feinstein response re: park operations
Photos of damage in Joshua Tree National Park



United States Senate

January 10, 2019

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Acting Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Acting Secretary Bernhardt,

I am alarmed by reports of severe damage, human health risks, and recent deaths in understaffed national parks that remain open during the government shutdown. I ask that you provide me with an assessment of any damages to natural resources and infrastructure that have been caused during the shutdown, an estimate of necessary repair costs for each national park that has remained open during the shutdown, and your determination of whether sufficient park service personnel are available in each park to protect natural resources and human safety in order to keep the parks open during the shutdown.

The first-hand reports my office has received about current conditions and damage to our treasured parks has illustrated why previous Administrations decided to close national parks during government shutdowns when critical personnel were furloughed. It is now clear to me that during a shutdown, the Interior Department cannot properly fulfill its mission to conserve the wildlife, natural and historic objects, and habitat in national parks. I fear the costly damage incurred during these past three weeks outweighs any benefit of leaving parks open while severely understaffed. The following are some of the reports I have received regarding national parks in California:

- **Joshua Tree National Park:** Joshua trees have been vandalized and cut down as cars traverse pristine areas of the desert; historical objects from a remote section of Joshua Tree have been stolen; human waste has overflowed public toilets; and hiking has occurred outside of designated trails, which is dangerous to both people and sensitive habitats.

- **Point Reyes National Seashore:** reports of harassment of elephant seals on the beaches during their current breeding season; hazardous build-up of human waste.
- **Yosemite National Park:** Delayed investigation of a visitor's death; hazardous build-up of human waste.

I am particularly dismayed by the reports from Joshua Tree National Park, which I have spent almost three decades in the Senate trying to protect. I understand that Joshua Tree National Park was scheduled to be closed starting January 10th due to hazardous conditions and severe damage but will now remain open. The damage to these unique landscapes has already taken a serious toll: for three weeks, Joshua Tree National Park has been abused and trashed, putting visitors and park personnel in danger.

Our federal park system is a national treasure that the Department of the Interior is charged with protecting and preserving for generations to come. The Administration's decision to keep national parks open while severely understaffed has resulted in serious, long-lasting ramifications, and it is important that Congress understand these ramifications as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dianne Feinstein". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

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United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 11 2019

The Honorable Diane Feinstein
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein:

Acting Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt has asked me to respond on his behalf to your January 10, 2019, letter regarding operations of the national parks during the current lapse in appropriations.

The Department is working hard to meet the dual challenges of ensuring the public can continue to enjoy their parks during this lapse in appropriations in a way that protects those special places for future generations. To meet these challenges, the Department of the Interior recently determined that the funds collected and retained under the authority provided in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act can be used, consistent with the authority provided in that Act, to address restrooms and sanitation, trash collection, road maintenance, campground operations, law enforcement and emergency operations, and staffing entrances, as necessary, to provide critical safety information.

We have taken this extraordinary step to ensure that our parks are protected and that visitors can continue to visit many of our most iconic national parks, while providing those places with appropriate protections and basic services.

We are thankful for the efforts of our partners, including state and local governments, nonprofits, concessionaires, and other volunteers who have provided invaluable assistance during the past few weeks.

Sincerely,

P. Daniel Smith
Deputy Director
Exercising the Authority of the Director

100-year-old Juniper Tree chopped down for firewood by illegal campers



Deep ruts made by cars illegally off-road in protected habitat

