



FIELDREPORT

Southeast Region | Winter 2019



Engaging Muscogee Youth at Ocmulgee National Monument

NPCA continues to work with diligence and determination, in partnership with Oklahoma's Muscogee (Creek) Nation, to expand protection of their ancestral homeland in Georgia through passage of the Ocmulgee Mounds Boundary Revision Act. In the 115th Congress, the bill passed the House of Representatives by a huge margin (396-8) and was very close to passing in the Senate but was derailed by the partial government shutdown in December. We are working to ensure the bill's reintroduction in the new 116th Congress and are building on our momentum and our growing partnership with the Muscogee by engaging with the Mvskoke Nation Youth Council in a series of experiential learning and service activities at the Ocmulgee National Monument in Macon.

The Muscogee Creek people, or Mvskoke in their native language, were historically indigenous to much of Georgia and Alabama prior to the era of Indian Removal which, for the Creek, took place from about 1814 through 1837. Today the Muscogee (Creek) Nation is among the largest federally recognized tribes in the U.S., with its seat of government in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, roughly 850 miles from the great mounds in Macon, Georgia.

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No More Hogwash for the Buffalo National River?

NPCA supporters and allies fought for six years to stop a polluting industrial hog facility, C&H Hog Farm, Inc., from operating on a tributary of America's first national river. In November, the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) finally denied the company a permit to continue spreading millions of gallons of waste in the watershed. Before the ink was dry on ADEQ's decision, C&H filed three appeals in Arkansas courts to delay that closure and there is concern that the Arkansas State Legislature will work to craft legislation to weaken regulations and shield C&H.

Background

The Buffalo River is America's first national river and a beloved national park. The health of the Buffalo is dependent on the water quality of its tributaries, many of which lie outside the park's narrow boundaries. In 2012, the ADEQ granted a permit to an industrial swine facility, C&H Hog Farms, Inc. Millions of gallons of hog waste from this swine facility have been spread over hundreds of acres of porous land along the banks of Big Creek, a major tributary of the river. The waste threatens the health of the



watershed and the enjoyment of visitors who swim, fish and boat there.

C&H's facility was the first large swine concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) in the state. The CAFO supplies pork to the multi-national company JBS, the largest animal protein processing company in the world. After C & H's permit expired in 2016, it applied to the state of Arkansas for a new permit that would allow it to operate indefinitely in the Buffalo National River watershed. The company submitted incomplete paperwork in its

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Top: Boxley Valley, Buffalo National River, Ponca, AR ©2014 William Rainey

Above: ©iStock | Aaron_Siegler

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Since 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its 1.3 million members and supporters, and many partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for our children and grandchildren.

A MESSAGE FROM SENIOR REGIONAL DIRECTOR, DON BARGER

NPCA's Second Century

In 2019, NPCA will celebrate 100 years of working to protect the resources and the meaning of America's national parks. What does it mean that an organization has not only existed but also grown stronger over a century of historic events and unprecedented change?

Our nation's growth since 1919 has dramatically heightened the pressures on our remaining natural areas and greatly increased the stories of national identity we must preserve to inform generations to come. NPCA's mission has always been about remaining vigilant, and—a century after our creation—we remain so. NPCA has achieved a remarkable record of success protecting and enhancing the air, lands, water, wildlife and cultural resources that are integral to the long-term health of our national parks. That mission is as vital today as it's ever been, and the challenges to the integrity of the national parks are as great as they've ever been.

In our centennial year, we're looking back in reflection and looking forward with determination to ensure that the visionary mission of the National Park System continues to enlighten and delight those who discover our country's stories and experience our parks' connective wonder.

To that end, we'll be holding hundreds of on-the-ground events in parks and park landscapes around the country, and we'll be storming Capitol Hill in April to guarantee that those who represent us in Congress understand the park values we seek to preserve. We will continue to build the strongest, most engaged and diverse generation of park advocates in history so that the national parks continue to tell the stories of all Americans and thrive into the next century for the enjoyment of all.

In a nation that is increasingly divided, protecting our parks is a mission that can unite us around a common purpose. National parks connect visitors to the cultural and natural treasures of a diverse people and to the evolving story of the quest to achieve a more perfect union. National parks must continue to inspire and provide a sense of hope for the future. The National Park

System provides a powerful model of the democratic ideal, essential commons set aside for the common good. Equitable access for all people must remain fundamental.

In a media-driven society bombarded by undefined images and uncertain information, parks are the real deal. The natural and cultural resources preserved in our parks are as real and genuine as it gets. Bedrock park protection laws and science-based decision-making must remain uncompromised to provide the basis for fact-based recommendations for park management. Attacks on these bedrock laws and attempts to weaken them or limit public participation threaten the protection of our national parks as well as the general well-being of our natural world, upon which we rely for clean air, clean water, intact wildlife corridors and a healthy environment resilient to climate change. The challenges are not new, but they are more ubiquitous than ever before. In our next century, NPCA will continue to fight to protect this precious heritage and work to see that the parks are funded sustainably and in perpetuity.

The common denominator of NPCA's past successes and future endeavors is you—our members, supporters and allies who walk the walk to protect these precious shared assets. As NPCA begins a new century in this labor of love, we are counting on you. Your actions, your support, your voice, your involvement in the ongoing vigilance to protect these places will determine the success of our collective efforts. Let's celebrate the work we've done and commit ourselves to the work before us to protect America's "common ground."

American songwriter Harlan Howard once defined good country music as "three chords and the truth." Whether you like country music or not, that's a pretty sweet way to describe something you really care about. Perhaps our national parks are like that.

The truth is out there. Go to your park. Listen to its music. Learn from its song. And let's make sure that all our grandchildren have the life-affirming experience of being the stewards of its excellence. Happy birthday, NPCA.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

What do you like about this newsletter? What other topics or features would you like to see? Please contact us with your feedback at npca.org/southeast.

'They Taught the World to Fly!'

After World War II, visitation to national parks rose dramatically. To meet the demand, the National Park Service invested over one billion dollars toward the development of new infrastructure, including the construction of new visitor centers. Known widely as the 'Mission 66' era, this 10-year focus on modernizing national park infrastructure began in 1955 with a view toward ringing in the National Park Service's 50th anniversary (in 1966) with updated infrastructure.

The visitor center at the Wright Brothers National Memorial, the first of these post-World War II buildings, reflects the cutting-edge style of the time.

This past October at the reopening of the Wright Brothers Visitor Center, NPS Southeast Regional Director Bob Vogel spoke of the building's history. "The Wright Brothers Visitor Center served as a prototype for the use of modern architecture in the National Park Service and was one of more than 100 visitor centers constructed for the Mission 66 project," he said. "[Its]



mid-century modern architectural style represented innovation, achievement and a future improved by technology."

According to David Hallac, the National Parks of Eastern North Carolina superintendent, the Wright Brothers Visitor Center's significance extends beyond being the

inaugural Mission 66 visitor center. "It highlights several important American themes: survival, popular culture, ingenuity,

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Above: Dare County 4th graders entering visitor center on reopening day. ©NPS **Below:** The original Wright Brothers Visitor Center in 1962. ©NPS | Alexandre Georges 1962

"It highlights several important American themes: survival, popular culture, ingenuity, and beautiful landscapes"



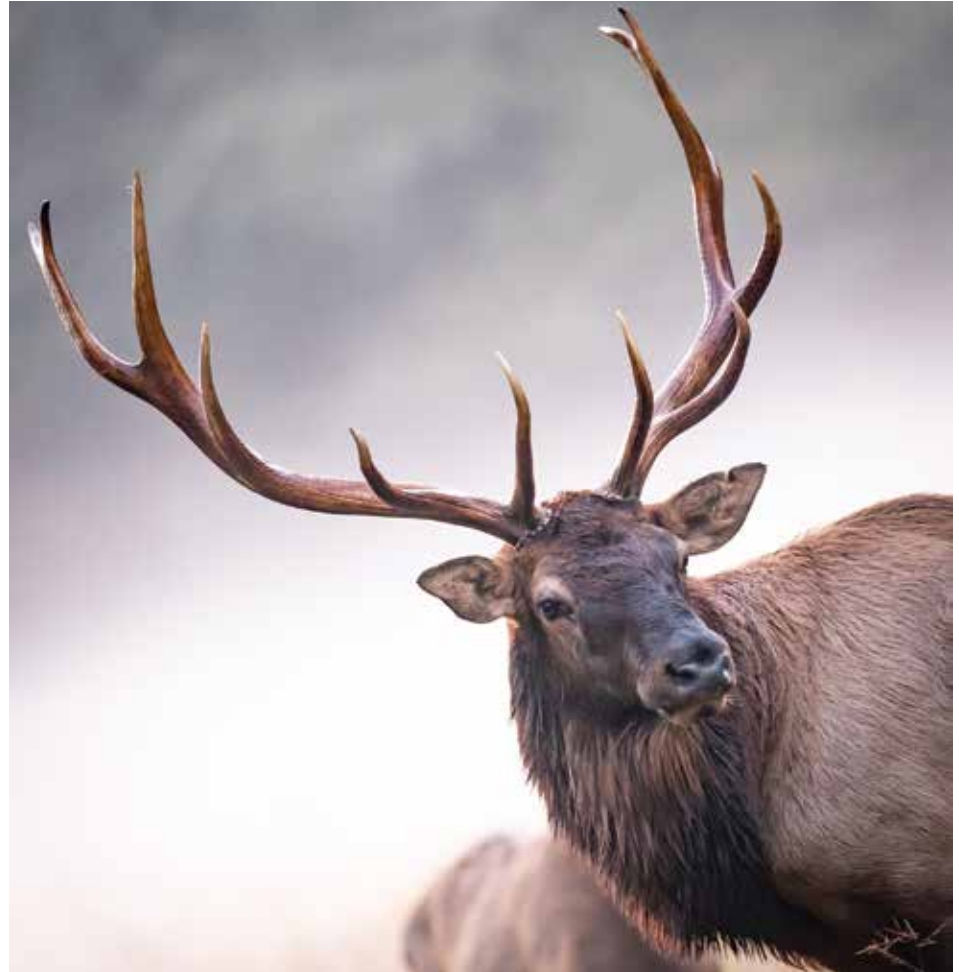
Making Connections for Improving Wildlife Crossings

Recently, while driving south on Interstate 26 on my way to the NPCA office in Asheville, a scene unfolded just as it does tens of thousands of times each day across North America. Several car lengths in front of me, a white-tailed deer made a mad dash to cross the busy highway. It was a young, healthy buck. The critter narrowly missed getting hit, then skidded and fell to the pavement 100 yards in front of me. I jammed the brakes and, as I slowed, the deer rose and scampered off the highway in the direction from whence it came. It all happened so quickly. Thankfully, no one—including the deer—was injured in this near miss.

Even so, actual accidents are far too common. The roads of North Carolina were the scene of more than 18,500 wildlife-vehicle collisions last year according to the state's Department of Transportation. In an effort to reduce these numbers and save lives and property, NPCA took a bold step this fall by bringing together top professionals for a two-day wildlife crossing workshop in Maggie Valley. This workshop was an important step forward in our ongoing effort to improve wildlife's ability to safely cross Interstate 40 and U.S. 19 near Great Smoky Mountains National Park. NPCA, as the lead in this collaborative project, secured workshop facilitators from the Eco-Logical division of the Federal



Above: FHWA/NPCA Wildlife Crossing Workshop participants discuss connectivity in the Pigeon River Gorge near Great Smoky Mountains NP. ©Tracy Kramer | NPCA • Black bear and two cubs crossing Interstate 40 in the Pigeon River Gorge. ©Susan Detwiler **Top Right:** A bull elk in Cataloochee Valley, Great Smoky Mountains NP ©Shutterstock | Jo Crebbin



Highway Administration (FHWA). The event was attended by 65 individuals from 25 different stakeholder groups, including the National Park Service and both the North Carolina and Tennessee Departments of Transportation (NCDOT and TDOT).

The workshop was designed to facilitate peer exchange. FHWA brought guest speaker Mark Lawlor to the workshop. As a wildlife biologist from Colorado DOT, Mark shared his agency's considerable efforts and tactics used to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. NPCA added an international flavor to the gathering by bringing in the expertise of highway engineer Terry McGuire from Parks Canada and road ecologist Marcel Huijser from Western Transportation Institute. Additional guest presenters included retired University of Tennessee bear researcher Dr. Mike Pelton, U.S. Geological Survey research ecologist Dr. Joseph Clark, and Dr. Joe Kolowski from the Smithsonian-Mason School of Conservation.

I was encouraged by the spirit of partnership and cooperation that was displayed

throughout the two-day workshop. Together, we built relationships, knowledge and trust among the many stakeholder groups. Dr. Ryan Valdez, director of conservation science & policy at NPCA, summed it up when he said, "this is conservation work at its finest."

Next steps for this working group include continued research in the project area coordinated in partnership by NPCA's Wildlife Research Fellow Steve Goodman and Dr. Liz Hillard from Wildlands Network.

This project demonstrates the need for NPCA to work beyond park boundaries in order to protect the conservation values found inside our national parks. If you would like to learn more about this project, join us at the first-ever North Carolina Elk Festival in Maggie Valley, North Carolina, planned for August 23 - 25, 2019.

Jeff Hunter, NPCA's senior program manager in the Asheville Field Office, leads this wildlife connectivity program and can be reached at jhunter@npca.org.

Volunteer Spotlight – Will Skelton



I am, and have been, a longtime supporter of our truly outstanding National Park System and of National Parks Conservation Association. The two go together, and I support and volunteer with NPCA because it helps protect our national parks and make them stronger. Over the years (I'm now retired), I've visited all of our "big N, big P" national parks except three—American Samoa, Cuyahoga Valley and Kobuk Valley. I continue to check more off the list every chance I get, spending time this past July in Alaska's Katmai National Park and Lake Clark National Park and Preserve.

My favorite recreational activities have always been hiking and backpacking in beautiful natural areas, and I have sought out our national park units and wilderness areas throughout my life for such purposes. I've also traveled a lot throughout the world and can confidently say that we have in our National Park System something precious and unique. Our parks protect wild and scenic treasures that are quite simply extraordinary and incomparable. We also have numerous historical parks that do an outstanding job of documenting our country's history. And, the National Park

Service's protection of our parks is better than about anywhere else in the world.

But at the same time, all our park units are fragile and subject to harm by ill-considered human activities and underfunding of maintenance and management.

That's where NPCA comes in. I've seen the organization really make a difference in both protecting our existing parks and in accomplishing the inclusion of deserving additional park lands and historical units.

So, I'm very proud of both NPCA and our national parks and hope you will join me in supporting the work that NPCA does to help ensure the future of the system for all.

Will Skelton was a founding member of the NPCA Southeast Regional Council and now serves on the NPCA National Council and is a Trustee for the Parks. When he's not visiting national parks (and volunteering for NPCA), he's an enthusiastic greenways and public lands advocate in east Tennessee. To learn more about becoming a Trustee for the Parks, visit npca.org/trustees.

Top Left: Will Skelton at the Gates of the Arctic National Park in 1979. ©Will Skelton **Top Right:** At Joshua Tree National Park in 2017. ©Will Skelton

Welcome Wildlife Research Fellow Steve Goodman

NPCA is pleased to welcome Steve Goodman to our Southeast team. As our new wildlife research fellow based in Asheville, North Carolina, he leads field research related to NPCA's wildlife connectivity project outside of Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Prior to joining NPCA, Steve spent 10 years at Eglin Air Force base in Florida where he studied red-cockaded woodpeckers and gopher tortoises for Virginia Tech. Steve's work experience also includes five years with Arizona Game and Fish and several years with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. As a result, Steve brings a wealth of experience working with a variety of wildlife to NPCA.

Steve holds a B.S. in Biology from the University of South Florida and an M.S. in Biology from the University of West Florida.

Steve's first few months with us have been busy. In late October, he gave a presentation at our Wildlife Crossing Workshop facilitated by the Federal Highway Administration (see article at left), and he has already established working relationships with several different stakeholder groups. Look for updates about Steve's work in future field reports!

Right: Steve Goodman working with NPS wildlife biologists to collar a bull elk near Great Smoky Mountains National Park. ©NPCA



Engaging Muscogee Youth at the Ocmulgee National Monument

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In 2015, the tribal government established the Mvskoke Nation Youth Council to cultivate in tribal youth the understanding of their importance within the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, to empower them to become the leaders of today and tomorrow, and to thereby sustain the Mvskoke way of life. Membership is open to citizens aged 12-24, with the Youth Council focusing on four areas of endeavor: community service, cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, and healthy lifestyles. Currently, there are about 40 active members who convene for monthly meetings and planned activities. The Council is also a part of UNITY (the United National Indian Tribal Youth), a national federation of tribal youth organizations.

Today the Muscogee (Creek) Nation is among the largest federally recognized tribes in the U.S., with its seat of government in Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

In September, NPCA for the first time engaged with the Youth Council at the Ocmulgee National Monument's 27th annual Indian Celebration. This year, approximately 90 Muscogee made the long journey from Oklahoma to attend the Celebration, one of the largest contingents to date. Included in the group were several members of the Youth Council, as well as members of the Lighthorse Explorers (a scouting program associated with the tribal police department) and their adult advisors. On the Friday before the weekend celebration, NPCA hosted the youth for a canoe trip down the Ocmulgee River Water Trail, followed by lunch and fellowship at a downtown Macon pizzeria, accompanied by an informative discussion of the history of park expansion efforts.

The event was so successful that we are now exploring with the Nation and the National Park Service (NPS) the creation of a series of additional park-based activities that would bring the Youth Council to Macon annually for the next several years. This proposal is still being developed, but could include components such as collaborating



with NPS's BioDiscovery Program on a multi-species bioblitz (an intensive biological inventory) that would provide a snapshot of the living creatures inhabiting the park. Another element of this inventory might involve the use of wildlife camera traps, or critter cams to visually document the stealthy movements of animals throughout the park.

This collaboration might also focus on the ecological restoration of native river cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) habitats, known as canebrakes. Historically, river cane was used by native peoples of the Southeast for many important craft, ceremonial, and artistic practices. With the advent of European settlement, canebrake habitats, which occupied desirable agricultural lands, were cleared on a vast scale, and often replaced by invasive species like Chinese privet and Asian bamboo. Today only

remnants exist of this once extensive native plant community. Revitalization of these environments would not only restore an important wildlife habitat within the park but might one day create opportunities for the Muscogee to sustainably harvest river cane for traditional cultural use.

These and other ideas are being considered in order to assist and support Youth Council members in reconnecting to their national park and their heritage in the Southeast.

Top: Members of the Mvskoke Youth Council, the Lighthorse Explorers and NPCA staff prepare to paddle the Ocmulgee River with Ocmulgee Outdoor Expeditions in Macon, GA. ©Tracy Kramer | NPCA **Bottom Left:** Families visiting the Earth Lodge. ©Sharman Ayoub **Bottom Right, L-R:** Rachael Sourjohn, Program Development Specialist, Mvskoke Nation Youth Services and Joseph Kahbeah, Mvskoke Youth Council member & former Sergeant at Arms ©NPCA | Tracy Kramer



No More Hogwash for the Buffalo National River?

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application and failed to produce geological, geotechnical, groundwater, soils, or structural testing information specified in state regulations.

NPCA and its supporters and allies, including the Ozark Society, the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance, and the Arkansas Canoe Club, opposed the facility for years. Jointly, they continue to pressure the company and state officials to move the operations from this sensitive watershed— even as C&H continued to operate during more than two years of appeals while it sought to renew its permit.

In a September 2018 draft report, ADEQ stated that segments of the Buffalo National River and its tributary Big Creek did not meet water quality standards. Further, the report indicated that the C&H facility could be contributing to the poor water quality. In November, the agency finally denied the company's permit and required it to cease operations—a major win for this important river and all the people who enjoy it.

It was always simply inappropriate for a CAFO of this size to operate in this sensitive, protected watershed. Fortunately, after six years of advocacy, ADEQ directed C&H Hog Farms on November 19, 2018 to cease operations within 30 days and submit a closure plan within 60 days of the final day of operation. C&H has filed an appeal in response.

We encourage our members and allies to continue reaching out to Arkansas Governor Hutchinson in support of the state's decision to deny C&H's application for a Regulation 5 permit as the appeal process unfolds. For more information on this issue, visit npca.org/buffaloriver.

Left: Canoeing on the Buffalo National River
©Dennis MacDonald | Alamy

TAKE ACTION

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As we go to press, the federal government shutdown continues to threaten the health and safety of park visitors and wildlife and is jeopardizing the integrity of our most precious natural and cultural resources.

To stay informed and take action, follow NPCA on twitter @NPCA or on Facebook @NationalParks and if you're not already a NPCA member, join the fight at npca.org/join. Thank You!

'They Taught the World to Fly!'

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and beautiful landscapes,” he said, noting that “the landing of the Apollo 11 lunar module on July 20, 1969, was broadcast on live television to a world-wide audience, including a crowd that gathered at Wright Brothers National Memorial to watch the historic event.”

Designated a national historic landmark in 2001, the center’s been visited by more than 15 million people since its opening—a fact that Hallac noted with pride during the center’s reopening ceremony. In addition to an incredible restoration of the structure inspired by the iconic hills of Kitty Hawk, the Wright Brothers Visitor Center received a renewed sense of purpose through redesigned exhibits that capture the imagination and ingenuity of the next generation of park visitors. Interactive activities and exhibits on aviation, historic preservation and STEAM-based activities (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) enhance the learning experience and inspire visitors of

all ages to consider man’s achievements in aviation technology.

The full-scale reproduction of the Wright Flyer, which takes center stage in the center, is surrounded by new exhibits that

demonstrate how the Wright brothers unlocked the secrets of flight, solved problems and ultimately took to the skies on December 17, 1903. To learn more about this national memorial, visit www.nps.gov/WRBR.



Top Left: Visitor Center sign ©NPS **Top Right:** Ribbon Cutting Ceremony ©NPS **Bottom:** Soar Like a Bird Exhibit ©NPS