

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

June 9, 2025

REPLY TO:

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The Honorable Doug Burgum
U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI)
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum,

I write to express my urgent concern and to demand answers regarding the historically low staffing at the Sandy Hook Unit of the Gateway National Recreation Area (NRA) at the start of the summer beach season. For months, the Department of Interior (DOI) has been blocking information regarding the consequences of new staffing policies from reaching Congress. This unprecedented situation extends to the staff of National Park Service (NPS) units, who you have forbidden from communicating with Congressional offices without express permission from DOI headquarters – approval which never arrives.

I am gravely concerned about the ramifications of the Trump Administration’s policies on Sandy Hook’s future as a place for safe recreation in a clean, natural environment. These include President Trump’s misguided January 20th Executive Order freezing all hiring of Federal employees, Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency cuts to NPS permanent and probationary staff, and the deferred resignation offers made to permanent staff.¹ From the limited public information available, it’s clear the cumulative impact of these policies have left Gateway NRA with a skeleton crew to run the fourth-most visited NPS unit in the country. If the Trump Administration is so proud of these unlawful and chaotic changes, you should not be so secretive about their outcome.

This vacuum of information has created confusion and concern in our community. My constituents and the two million other Americans that visit Sandy Hook for a respite from the summer heat and from their busy lives deserve to know whether the park is ready to accept visitors for safe recreation.² The high levels of visitation that Sandy Hook experiences in the summer months are why the park needs to be fully staffed with year-round and seasonal employees.

Historically, despite warnings not to swim, there have been drowning incidents at Sandy Hook when the beaches are not open and fully staffed with lifeguards. We cannot let this situation repeat itself this summer, though I am concerned your disregard for the vital health and safety roles that NPS staff play may result in tragedy at Sandy Hook.

American families from across New Jersey, New York, and surrounding states flock to Sandy Hook’s beautiful beaches and recreational areas every summer to enjoy fishing, swimming, camping, and biking, among other activities.³ These visitors rely on Sandy Hook for their summer vacations, and their visits generate significant contributions to New Jersey’s economy.³ The government should protect the ability of parks such as Sandy Hook to serve Americans and contribute to the tourism economy, not create potentially dangerous and filthy conditions in the parks by failing to hire the necessary lifeguards and maintenance staff to clean bathrooms during the busiest season of the year.⁴ It is shameful to deprive American taxpayers of their right to the services their hard-earned dollars are paying for, in this case, the services provided by the National Park Service that preserves and stewards natural resources for families to enjoy.⁵

¹ [“Hiring Freeze.” The White House](#)

² [“Sandy Hook Shore Region.” VisitNJ](#)

³ [“The New Jersey Visitor Economy 2023.” Tourism Economics for VisitNJ](#)

⁴ [“New Jersey State Parks Accepting Applications to Fill More than 800 Seasonal Positions Ahead of Peak Spring, Summer Months.” The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection](#)

⁵ [“About Us.” National Park Service](#)

To rectify this outrageous lack of information on whether the Gateway National Recreation Area is prepared for basic operations at Sandy Hook this summer, please provide written responses to the questions below by Monday, June 30, 2025:

1. How many total staff currently work at Gateway NRA compared to this time last year?
2. How many total staff have been assigned to work at the Sandy Hook unit compared to this time last year?
3. How many seasonal employees have been hired at Sandy Hook for the summer season compared to this time last year?
4. How many permanent and seasonal positions are currently unfilled?
5. Which Sandy Hook beaches will be open during the 2025 summer season? What are the dates and hours of each beach's public access?
6. Which Sandy Hook beaches will have lifeguards this summer? What are the dates and hours that each beach will have a lifeguard? How many total lifeguards will work this year compared to last year?
7. Will there be staff to maintain facilities, including restrooms, at the Sandy Hook unit throughout the summer season?
8. How many staff will be there to collect admission at the entrance to the park compared to this time last year?

For decades, I have proudly advocated to keep the beaches and facilities at the Sandy Hook Unit safe, clean, and accessible for all Americans and ensure it continues to be a place of safe harbor for the wildlife which bring delight to visitors. The National Park Service must hire qualified staff in a timely manner and clearly communicate the Sandy Hook's ability to host the American public. Instead of working against Congress, I hope we can work together to ensure Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, and the entire National Park Service continue to thrive for generations to come.

Please contact my office immediately with an update on this important issue and formally reply by the date requested.

Sincerely,


FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Member of Congress