

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 8, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Burgum,

We write to express our urgent concern and demand answers regarding the historically low staffing of lifeguards within the National Park Service (NPS) at the height of the summer beach season. Units of the National Park System are meant to be safe, welcoming places for families to enjoy the outdoors, and it is essential that they remain safe and well-managed. The Trump Administration's policies and lack of transparency are putting American lives at risk.

The newly dangerous situation within these units this summer is the direct result of actions taken by the Trump Administration, including the illegal decision to slash staff and budgets approved by Congress and signed into law. For months, the Department of Interior (DOI) has refused to share information with Congress regarding the consequences of its hazardous staffing policies. This unprecedented situation extends to the staff at National Parks, National Recreation Areas, and National Seashores in our districts, who have been forbidden from communicating with Congressional offices without express permission from DOI headquarters – approval which never arrives.

These policies include President Trump's misguided January 20<sup>th</sup> Executive Order freezing hiring of federal employees, Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) cuts to NPS staff, and the deferred resignation offers made to permanent staff.<sup>1</sup> Due to public outcry, the Interior Department partially reversed the cuts made to NPS seasonal employees, including lifeguards.<sup>2</sup> However, much damage has already been done. As of May 13, only 3,300 of the 7,700 seasonal positions had been filled – nearly 40 percent less than fiscal year 2023.<sup>3</sup> It's clear the cumulative impact of these policies has left the NPS units in our districts with skeleton crews. If the Trump Administration stands by these unlawful and chaotic changes, there should be no need to hide their consequences from the public.

This vacuum of information has created confusion and concern in our communities. Our constituents and the millions of other Americans that visit National Parks, National Recreation Areas, and National Seashores deserve to know whether these areas are ready to accept visitors for safe recreation. The high levels of visitation that these parks experience in the summer months are why they must be fully staffed with both year-round and seasonal employees.

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<sup>1</sup> ["Hiring Freeze." The White House](#), January 20, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> ["National Park Service will fire 1,000 employees – but hire 5,000 seasonal employees."](#) Maxine Joselow, *The Washington Post*, February 14, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> ["Parks Group Rebukes Secretary Burgum's Misrepresentation of National Parks Staffing,"](#) National Parks Conservation Association, June 2, 2025

Historically, despite warnings not to swim, people have drowned at National Recreation Areas and Seashores when the beaches are not open and fully staffed with federally employed lifeguards.<sup>4</sup> We cannot let this situation repeat itself this summer, but the Administration's failure to prioritize the vital health and safety roles of NPS staff may result in catastrophe.

American families and international tourists flock to our beautiful beaches and recreational areas every summer to enjoy swimming, surfing, and fishing, among other activities.<sup>3</sup> These visitors rely on the national parks for their summer vacations, and their visits generate significant contributions to state and local economies. The government should protect the ability of the parks to serve Americans and contribute to the tourism economy, not create potentially hazardous conditions. 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 NPS that preserve and steward natural resources for families to enjoy.

To rectify this outrageous lack of information on whether the NPS is prepared for basic operations at its open water beaches this summer, please provide written responses to the questions below by Monday, July 14, 2025:

1. How many lifeguards are currently employed by the NPS compared to this time last year?
2. How many lifeguards does the NPS expect to employ on August 1, one month before Labor Day Weekend and the end of the summer season?
3. Which NPS beaches will be open during the 2025 summer season? What are the dates and hours of each beach's public access compared to this time last year?
4. Will any NPS beaches be closed due to lack of staffing?
5. Which NPS administered 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 at each beach this year compared to last year?
6. How is the NPS communicating to visitors about the days and hours that beaches will be lifeguarded and the risks of swimming at these beaches when lifeguards are not present?

We proudly advocate to keep the beaches and facilities of the nation's National Recreation Areas and National Seashores safe, clean, and accessible for all Americans and ensure they continue to be a place of safe harbor for the marine and riverine wildlife which bring delight to visitors. The NPS must hire qualified staff in a timely manner and clearly communicate the agency's ability to host the American public. Instead of working against Congress, I hope we can work together to ensure the entire system of national parks continues to thrive for generations to come.

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


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<sup>4</sup> ["Teen drowns, 5 other people pulled from water at NJ beach during Memorial Day weekend,"](#) Jorge Fitz-Gibbon, *New York Post*, May 29, 2023.

Sincerely,



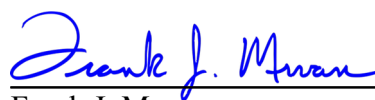
Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Member of Congress



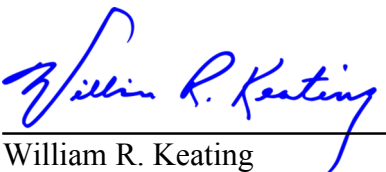
Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress  
Ranking Member, House  
Natural Resources Committee



Gregory W. Meeks  
Member of Congress



Frank J. Mrvan  
Member of Congress



William R. Keating  
Member of Congress