



## **ISSUE ADVISORY – Change Demanded for Widespread Sexual Harassment in National Park Service**

By Jan Erickson, NOW Government Relations Director, and Luna Floyd,  
NOW Government Relations Intern  
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The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service (NPS) will be celebrated on August 25. President Obama observed the coming anniversary in late June by touring Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico and Yosemite in California, the oldest national park. Obama has added 22 sites to the National Park system, set aside over 265 million acres – more public lands and water systems than any other president and says that he is not finished setting aside land for conservation.

Approximately 290 million visitors tour the NPS's 412 sites each year and the sites' popularity – along with the failure of Congress to adequately fund the park system -- has meant a maintenance backlog estimated at \$12 billion. One example of the parks' popularity is the 5.3 million visitors to the Grand Canyon National Park in 2015 with even more visitors expected in 2016. Recently, attention has been drawn to another aspect of the parks – one that relates to a decades old culture of sexual harassment, discrimination and retaliation in the National Park Service.

The motto of the Canaveral National Seashore on Florida's Atlantic coast is simple: "The Way It Used to Be," meaning the pristine white sands and crashing waves. But that motto also reflects a disturbing reality for women in the National Park Service (NPS), who are routinely sexually harassed and discriminated against in a male-dominated work culture that truly is "the way it used to be." In recent years, numerous disturbing allegations have come to light that illustrate the sexual harassment problems that plague the National Park Service, as well as the retaliation that whistleblowers face.

**Secretary Jewell Says "Just the tip of the iceberg"** - Interior Department Secretary Sally Jewell said on Tuesday, July 12, that reports of sexual harassment in the National Park Service are probably "just the tip of the iceberg" and indicated that heightened attention to the issue will unearth cultural problems throughout the system, the Washington Post reports.

Complaints by numerous female employees in two parks have been investigated by the department's Office of the Inspector General and a similar report of misconduct in at least a third park is under investigation. Jewell said that the Park Service is beginning face-to-face training for managers and employees for the first time and will survey its workforce to determine the extent of the problem. On June 20, the Secretary took strong action in sending an email warning to 70,000 departmental employees, directing them to "comply with the ethical responsibilities...of all federal employees."

An agency within the Interior Department, the National Park Service employs about 20,000. Men made up 63 percent of the workforce in 2015 and were about 85 percent of the law enforcement rangers.

**House Members Want Action** - House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform chair Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah) and ranking member Elijah E. Cummings (D-Md.) and other members sent a letter on July 28 to National Park Service Director Jonathan B. Jarvis calling attention to a “lack of accountability as a significant and recurring problem with respect to preventing and responding to sexual harassment at NPS.” The letter said that NPS has permitted sexual harassment, discrimination and hostile work environments at various sites to persist for at least 16 years and failed to implement recommendations for change that were reached in a 1999 Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) settlement agreement.

A report that grew out of the EEO settlement agreement recommended that NPS conduct a survey on sexual harassment, a training program and a hotline for reporting grievances to the EEO office to be completed by 2005. The July 28 letter indicates that the Park Service never implemented any of these recommendations and observed, “It is disturbing that some of the same officials who knew of these issues sixteen years ago allow the same serious misconduct to occur again.” The House committee is seeking a number of documents from Director Jarvis by August 11.

**Allegations charge verbal harassment, attempted sexual assault** - In the River District of the Grand Canyon National Park, a lax culture that glorifies boatmen and focuses heavily on alcohol creates systemic harassment - summed up by “what happens on the river stays on the river.” In other places, hostility against women in the male-dominated workforce causes many problems. If women rebuffed sexual propositions, they were sometimes refused to be taken to work sites or denied food. A remarkable article detailing the harassment of NPS female employees, “Out Here, No One Can Hear You Scream,” appeared in mid-March as a *Huffington Post* Highline feature, by Kathryn Joyce and Emily Kassie, with breathtaking photos and videos of park scenes. Brief summaries of just a few of the more egregious incidents follow:

**Grand Canyon incidents** - In 2006, marine biologist Cheyenne Szydlo went on a routine boat trip to study endangered birds in the Grand Canyon. Her guide, Dave Loeffler, asked frank questions about her sex life, invited her to sleep with him in the boat, and asked her to pose naked for a photo. After Cheyenne rejected his sexual advances he endangered her life on the river in a white-water incident and later provided her with only minuscule portions at meal time. When she later complained to the agency’s human resources office, she was told she needed dates, times, and witnesses to file a complaint. Obviously, there were no witnesses - as is often the case when sexual harassment and sexual assault occur at remote locations.

The incidents of sexual harassment of women by men in the boat crews continued and several women registered complaints with supervisors. A third woman filed an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) complaint about one of the boatmen, Mike Harris, who removed all his clothes on one trip and invited a female river park ranger, Chelly Kearney, to join him in the water. Kearney refused and later wrote a letter about this incident to

park officials. Harris is reported to have repeatedly asked a female biologist to sleep in his tent; the biologist emailed her supervisor about the episode and another employee filed an EEOC complaint about Harris's behavior in 2013.

Kearney resigned in 2012 and a year later wrote a 29-page letter to Grand Canyon Chief Ranger Bill Wright providing documentation of the many instances of harassment, assault and retaliation and described a practice of protecting male harassers while permitting victims to be subject to retaliation. The Park Service requested a formal EEO investigation; the Huff Po article reports that the EEO report was never distributed beyond that top level of park management and no disciplinary actions were pursued.

A friend of one of the accused said the boatmen on the Grand Canyon did not do anything wrong: as the *Washington Post* reported, "A longtime friend of Boatman 3 and the supervisor said that the men were 'free spirits' and that women were at fault for being 'scantily clad' and flirting with their male colleagues." An anonymous source who participated in the initial investigation into Grand Canyon river culture said: "It was a culture of victim-blaming perpetuated by all levels of management. I repeatedly sat in meetings in which victims who had reported sexual violence were degraded and discredited."

**Canaveral National Seashore** – A series of recent reports by the *Washington Post* focused on incidents at Canaveral National Seashore on Florida's Atlantic coast where multiple female employees have experienced sexual harassment and both men and women have endured a hostile workplace for at least five years, according to an Inspector General (IG) report released in June. The IG found a pattern of unwanted advances and attention to female subordinates by the chief law enforcement officer, Edwin Correa. Correa was found to have sexually harassed women on this staff in three substantiated cases in less than two years.

Reportedly, Correa instructed an employee to go with him to the home of a park volunteer. Once there, he attempted to kiss her and propositioned her for sex. Correa also demanded to see a female employee's gynecological records before approving her medical leave. Correa was reported to have repeatedly complimented one employer about her physical appearance, asked her out on dates and tried to engage her in conversations about sexually explicit content in movies, according to the *Post* article. Earlier Correa is reported to have harassed another woman repeatedly by asking her out and calling her on a personal cellphone after hours. After the woman told co-workers, Correa and another manager took her to a small supply room and shut the door to discuss the matter; the women said that she felt intimidated.

Asked by an interviewer, Correa denied any inappropriate behavior, saying that it all amounted to "cultural misunderstandings."

"For years, Canaveral has been run like a fiefdom where the brass broke the rules to hire friends and relatives for jobs and contracts and punished employees who blew the whistle and mistreated subordinates they did not like," noted the *Post* article. A biologist, Candace Carter who reported nepotism and procurement irregularities, was mistreated in retaliatory actions.

In 2012, a Deputy Inspector General documented contracting violations and nepotism at Canaveral by Correa and other managers. They were later reprimanded. As of mid-June, Correa was still working in the park, although his commission has been removed and he is

limited to working from home. Reportedly, the Volusia County state attorney was considering criminal charges against Correa in relation to the documented incidents.

**Investigation Uncovers Long-Term Pattern** - The Interior Department's Inspector General looked at allegations of harassment made in 2014 on NPS river trips through the Grand Canyon. The river trips are used for research, education and maintenance of trails and shorelines and are staffed by both park employees and outside contractors. The trips were known for their "anything goes" culture, reportedly. One male Park Service employee said that the men on these boat trips "all tried to get laid as much as possible" and that there was "some sort of wager...or challenge between three of the boatmen (who operate the watercraft used on the trips)...to see who would get laid the most."

The IG's report, published January 12, found "evidence of a long-term pattern of sexual harassment and hostile work environment" for at least 19 people during these trips, according to the Washington Post. The investigation found 13 instances where Park Service employees were disciplined for sexual misconduct, but concluded that the harassment complaints were treated so haphazardly that many women chose not to come forward. Since then, several measures have been adopted by the NPS to more closely oversee the river trips and monitor activities. A "regional ombudsman" has been installed to deal with complaints, something new to the Park Service. Several of the boatmen who were cited in the complaints have either been suspended, have resigned or retired.

**Culture of Misogyny Strong in Park Service** - According to the *Huffington Post* article, many of the first park rangers were former cavalrymen. This infused images of masculinity into the profession, at the expense of women. The Park Service and similar organizations historically see their work as inherently masculine, and they seem to resent women's "intrusion" into spaces they see as theirs. Until 1978, female Park rangers wore a short-skirted uniform uncomfortably similar to those of flight attendants. With that history, it appears women have had to fight to be seen as competent coworkers rather than sex objects as they protect our parks and educate visitors.

**More of the Same In U.S. Forest Service** – The U.S. Forest Service, a sister organization in the Department of Agriculture (USDA), had less than two percent women employed until a 1981 class action settlement that demanded women comprise at least 43% of departments at every pay grade. This case, *Bernardi v. Madigan*, is still resented by many male employees - in 1994, a gendered slur was reported graffitied on a notice about inclusive hiring practices. In 2014, female Forest Service employees in California filed a class-action lawsuit, reportedly the fourth in 35 years, alleging a long-standing pattern of sexual harassment, disparity in hiring and promotion and retaliation against who complaint. The case is still pending.

Here is a shocking example of the abuse experienced by one woman as reported in the *Huffington Post* article, cited earlier:

**Forest Service female firefighters** - A Sequoia National Forest Service firefighter, Alicia Dabney, reported that she was told to inform a supervisor when she began menstruating. Another woman was asked to do the same. At a training academy, Dabney received lewd sexual propositions on her voicemail, a male coworker jumped on her neck attempting to ride her like a horse, and a supervisor put her in a chokehold and threw her onto his hotel bed on an assignment in Texas. Dabney filed EEOC complaints in 2011 and 2012, claiming that coworkers made disparaging remarks about her Latina and Comanche heritage and joked about sexually assaulting women. A USDA investigation documented the first of the series of reported incidents, but refused to acknowledge a pattern of harassment. In 2012, Dabney was informed that the Forest Service was terminating her employment. Dabney alleged that she was wrongfully terminated for offenses she did not commit - failure to disclose a misdemeanor vandalism charge and to report a federal debt on her application. She signed a settlement agreement with the Forest Service in 2013.

Alicia Dabney's experience was one of many similar experiences by women employed by the Forest Service. Since 1981, four lawsuits have been brought by groups of female employees, charging discrimination and sexual harassment. In 1995, a class-action lawsuit involving claims from 50 women was filed and a negotiated settlement was reached that required court oversight of the U.S. Forest Service sites in California. But when the court monitoring ended in 2006, the same old problems began to re-appear.

The story of the harassment, discrimination and retaliation in the Forest Service echoes that of the Park Service over many decades. Complaints and lawsuits are filed, corrective policies and programs are proposed or temporarily implemented, but then forgotten. The same old problems re-occur. One former Forest Service administrator who worked for the agency for 24 years, Lesa Donnelly, continues to work on the issue, according to the Huff Po article. As vice president of the USDA Coalition of Minority Employees, she travels to Washington, D.C., each year and brings 20 to 25 new allegations of misconduct with her. Donnelly convinced Reps. Jackie Speier (D-Calif.), Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) and Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.) to ask the USDA to investigate. But so far, no investigation has taken place.

**NPS Task Force Investigates, Makes Recommendations** - *High Country News*, a publication that monitors activities of the Park Service and other public lands agencies, reported that 16 years ago park executives created a task force to investigate reports of gender bias, sexual harassment, hostile work environments and retaliation that female criminal investigators, park police and rangers encountered in multiple national parks. In 2000, the Women in Law Enforcement Task Force issued a 19-page survey report that showed that over half of Park Service female rangers and three-quarters of women park police who responded experienced sexual harassment on the job. Eighty percent of respondents said that the Park Service did not protect them from retaliation for reporting these problems.

The report went to the NPS's National Leadership Council which was composed of high level agency officials who were directed to implement a five-year plan to improve conditions for women in law enforcement. Among the recommended actions: mentorship and scholarship funding, recruitment and retention programs for women, better harassment training for all

employees, and a hotline for people to report grievances to the federal Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) office.

**But Then, Nothing Happened** - *High Country News* writer Lyndsey Gilpin interviewed former and current women law enforcement employees as well as many retired high-level administrators who all said that more of the report's recommendations were never implemented. Several people Gilpin spoke with who participated in the survey or worked in law enforcement in the Grand Canyon said that "they never heard anything about it again." A retired park service administrator who was charged with implementing some of the recommendations, Dick Ring, said that a lack of funding was part of the reason nothing happened. All 30 recommendations appear to have been ignored: *High Country News* noted, "there was no EEO hotline, no scholarship program, no mandatory extra training on harassment, and no further research about harassment and discrimination that women faced in the park service."

This was not the only investigation of gender-based harassment and discrimination: another park service official, J.T. Reynolds, spent a career fighting for better treatment of women and people of color in what he described as the white-boy culture of the National Park Service, according to the *High Country News* article. In 1998, Reynolds requested an independent, external investigation of the law enforcement program at Grand Canyon. Three years later, an in-house white-wash glossed over actual events and exonerated alleged violators.

**Congress is Demanding Change** - Another investigative report from Interior's Inspector General released on June 13 found that a law enforcement supervisor at Canaveral National Seashore made an unwanted sexual advance to a subordinate and a pattern of harassment involving this supervisor and two other employees. The report said that the supervisor denied harassing three employees and "demonstrated a lack of candor" during several interviews.

One day later, NPS Director Jarvis faced bipartisan criticism during a hearing for his handling of the harassment cases, according to a report in the *The Washington Times*. Regarding the Canaveral abuses, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee chair Rep. Chaffetz said with respect to reports about actions by Canaveral National Seashore law enforcement chief officer Edwin Correa, "How many sexual harassments does it take to fire a federal worker? Three substantiated allegations, and he still works there? The guy should be arrested. What does that say to the women? Your leadership is lacking."

Committee members condemned Jarvis for not firing perpetrators and for apparently not following through with disciplinary actions that were suggested as a result of the IG investigation of the Grand Canyon complaints. In his defense, Jarvis said that he had organized a committee of high-level executives to respond to the issue and insisted that he was taking the women's reports seriously. He added that firing a federal worker is nearly impossible.

**Calls for Ouster of Park Service Director** - After the hearing, Rep. Chaffetz called for Jarvis's removal as NPS director. In April, Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-Ariz.) and others urged institutional

and cultural change with the National Park Service. Gallego is drafting an amendment to the Interior Department's appropriations bill to direct the secretary not to rehire employees who were disciplined for harassment.

Superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park, Dave Uberuaga, was accused by federal investigators of failing to properly look into and report incidents of sexual harassment and misconduct. Uberuaga was offered a transfer to Washington, D.C. by Director Jarvis but chose to retire, effective June 1. Uberuaga said that he took the IG report seriously and had begun implementing change, including banning alcohol on agency river trips and was focused on establishing an environment where employees could express their concerns without fear of retaliation, according to an Associated Press article. Uberuaga and his deputy, Diane Chalfant, were facing disciplinary action.

*High Country News* reported recently that they have "received more than 40 letters from women and men working in federal parks, forests and lands, explaining personal experiences of sexual harassment, gender bias, assault and retaliation in the workplace." Reportedly, many former and current park employees have voiced a concern that the efforts to change the culture of gender bias and sexual harassment in the agency will fade away, as it did in the early 2000s during the transition to the Bush administration.

**NOW Condemns Park Service, Forest Service Cultures** - NOW condemns this culture of harassment, sexual assault and retaliation and calls on the National Park Service to take immediate steps to discipline offenders, create inclusive and private methods of processing complaints, and end the culture of victim-blaming within the NPS. Our concern was made more immediate when NOW's National Action Office was visited recently by a NPS police officer who reported long-term, widespread sexist behavior in the local division of the park service's law enforcement arm. The same need for lasting corrective action needs to be taken by officials at the U.S. Forest Service. Until this culture of misogyny is dismantled, our country's beautiful parks and wild spaces will be tainted by a culture where harassment runs rampant.

### **To learn more, take a look at these articles!**

Female Park Service Employees say they were propositioned, groped and bullied on Grand Canyon River Trips,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/01/13/female-park-service-employees-say-they-were-propositioned-groped-and-bullied-on-grand-canyon-river-trips/>

"Out Here, No One Can Hear You Scream," The dangerous culture of male entitlement and sexual hostility hiding within America's national parks and forests,

<http://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/park-rangers/>

Interior chief: 'Culture' of sexual harassment probably pervades National Park Service,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/07/12/interior-chief-culture-of-sexual-harassment-likely-pervades-the-national-park-service/#comments>

Why Female River Guides Aren't Welcome in the Grand Canyon,  
<http://www.outsideonline.com/2063726/grand-canyon-sexual-harassment-what-happens-river-stays-river>

Interior chief warns 70,000 employees: Sexual harassment is 'completely out of line with our values',  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/06/20/interior-chief-warning-to-70000-employees-sexual-harassment-is-completely-out-of-line-with-our-values/>

Investigations show extensive harassment history in park service  
<https://www.hcn.org/articles/park-service-sexual-harassment-discrimination-women-law-enforcement>

Congress members and activists call for ousting of Park Service director,  
<https://www.hcn.org/articles/congress-members-and-activists-call-for-ousting-of-park-service-director>

National Park Service Under Fire for Mismanagement, climate of sexual harassment,  
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jun/19/national-park-service-under-fire-for-mismanagement/>

As National Park Service confronts sexual harassment, this dysfunctional park is Exhibit A,  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/07/02/as-national-park-service-confronts-a-sexual-harassment-this-dysfunctional-park-is-exhibit-a/?postshare=1811467736957277&tid=ss\\_mail](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/07/02/as-national-park-service-confronts-a-sexual-harassment-this-dysfunctional-park-is-exhibit-a/?postshare=1811467736957277&tid=ss_mail)

Lawmakers charge Park Service chief oversees culture of sexual harassment,  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/06/14/lawmakers-charge-park-service-chief-oversees-culture-of-sexual-harassment/>

Investigative Report of Sexual Misconduct by Law Enforcement Supervisor, Canaveral National Seashore,  
<https://www.doioig.gov/reports/investigative-report-sexual-misconduct-law-enforcement-supervisor-canaveral-national>

Bipartisan Request to National Park Service: What Are You Doing About Sexual Harassment and Misconduct?,  
<http://www.nationalparkstraveler.com/2016/08/bipartisan-request-national-park-service-what-are-you-doing-about-sexual-harassment-and>

National Park Service  
<https://www.nps.gov/index.htm>