



Yosemite Conservancy talking points and FAQs on NPS + presidential orders

INTERNAL DOCUMENT - DO NOT DISTRIBUTE EXTERNALLY

If you have questions or need additional clarifications, please contact Kimiko at kmartinez@yosemite.org.

Your responsibility as a Yosemite Conservancy employee:

- **You're a representative of our organization and values** — particularly when in uniform or Conservancy-branded clothing. As such, when interacting with the public about this topic, please use your best judgement, stick to the talking points as best you can, and maintain a hopeful, supportive tone on behalf of our partners. If a conversation becomes difficult, avoid engaging in debate and politely disengage — and/or call in a supervisor.
- **You are welcome to exercise your civil rights.** During such actions, please refrain from wearing any Yosemite Conservancy uniform items or logo wear and speak only as a citizen and visitor.
- **Don't speak to media.** Please direct all media inquiries to press@yosemite.org. Do not speak to press unless it has been pre-approved and you are authorized to do so.

General notes and tone:

- **Stay factual** and avoid speculation. There's still a lot of unknowns and we don't want to spread rumors and stoke unnecessary fears.
- **Be kind.** Most people just want information. They're not trying to be insensitive. Avoid any political discussion.
- **Remember the human impact.** There are real lives and people behind every one of these staffing changes. People and families are hurting. If there's a way to remind people you're talking to about the human impacts you're seeing that — friends, colleagues, neighbors are figuring their way through this — please do.

General talking points

What we're doing ...

These are unprecedented times. There's a lot of uncertainty and the information seems to change day by day, but we're working closely with our National Park Service partners and are in ongoing conversations with park leadership to figure out how Yosemite Conservancy can best support them through this. We don't have any solid answers yet, but we're poised to help.

The park has been approved to hire seasonal employees – which make up about half of its annual workforce during peak season. But we don't know yet what that will look like (how many, when they'll arrive, etc.). So, we don't have any solid answers yet, but we're poised to help.

[The following is to be used at the responder's discretion, depending on the nature of the inquiry and appropriateness of this additional response.]

What you can do ...

If you have friends in federal service, reach out to be a support. It feels chaotic for many of them, and there's a lot of fear and anxiety around how federal decisions might impact them. (Note: Please remember our NPS friends email and chats are all subject to the Freedom of Information Act, thus subject to search.)

Also, check out what our friends at the National Parks Conservation Association are writing about [how these actions will affect national parks](#) and how you might get further involved in advocacy on behalf of our parks.

[FROM NPS YOSE INTERP – FOR REFERENCE ONLY]

Topline Message: As the National Park Service actively works to implement Presidential Actions concerning workforce management, we will continue to make adjustments as needed so we can provide the best possible visitor experience with our current staff and resources.

- We are assessing our most critical staffing and working to ensure we meet the needs of visitors.
- We are working to ensure that all visitors continue to access incredible and iconic spaces so they can have great experiences in national parks across the country.
- While discussions and planning are ongoing about which positions will be exempted from workforce management actions, we are not able to address park or program-level impacts at this time.
- Meanwhile, NPS employees around America are working hard to prepare for peak season.

Frequently Asked Questions

Impacts to park operations

- **What’s happening? Why is Yosemite “in chaos,” according to recent news articles?**
A series of presidential orders aimed at reducing the federal workforce has severely impacted staffing in national parks. A hiring freeze was announced in January that paused the hiring of seasonal employees — which account for about half the park’s staff and are critical to park operations for peak season.

Additionally, federal employees were offered a buyout offer to leave federal service and probationary employees were terminated in mid-February. This resulted in approximately 800 layoffs and 700 voluntary resignations and/or early retirements across NPS — both resulting in approximately 35 staff being cut from Yosemite’s workforce.

And the federal government is still considering additional cuts to the workforce.

Each of these employees were critical to the work the National Park Service does to protect our public lands, continue vital projects and research, and provide services to visitors. On top of that, Yosemite was already understaffed and had a vacancy rate of about 30%.

These cuts have been detrimental to morale and the ongoing impacts of this workforce reduction is still unfolding. Though the park has recently been approved to resume hiring of seasonal employees — which make up about half of its annual workforce — we still don’t know what that process will look like and how it will impact peak season.

Yosemite Conservancy is in ongoing conversations with park leadership, however, and is poised to help however we can.

- **What’s the park doing in response to the federal orders?**
As the National Park Service actively works to implement presidential actions concerning workforce management, it will continue to adjust as needed so it can provide the best possible visitor experience with current staff and resources.
 - Park leadership is assessing its most critical staffing and working to ensure it can meet the needs of visitors.
 - They are working to ensure that all visitors continue to access incredible and iconic spaces so they can have great experiences in Yosemite — and national parks across the country.
 - While discussions and planning are ongoing about which positions will be exempted from workforce management actions, park leaders are not able to address park or program-level impacts at this time.
 - NPS employees around America are working hard to prepare for peak season.

- **Is the park anticipating closures or shutdowns of the whole park?**

Park leadership is assessing what's possible with the staff they have and figuring out what staff they can hire for the upcoming season. The park has recently been approved to resume hiring of seasonal employees, but we still don't know what that process will look like and how it will impact peak season. ***And the federal government is still considering additional cuts to the workforce.***

Seasonal employees account for about half of Yosemite NPS's workforce during the peak summer season. The park already announced the delay of June-July campground reservations, pending staffing needed to run those campgrounds. We could see reduction in services, such as restrooms being closed, etc. But it all depends on NPS' ability to fill essential roles.

Park leadership is doing everything it can — given the limitations it's under — to ensure that all visitors have access to incredible and iconic spaces and so they can have great experiences in national parks across the country.

Yosemite Conservancy is in ongoing conversations with park leadership, however, and is poised to help however we can.

- **Will the Half Dome cables be put up? Are there any impacts to wilderness permits?**

We do not yet know what the impacts will be to wilderness users or the Half Dome cables. As with all park operations and visitor services, it will depend on the park's ability to hire seasonal staff — which accounts for about half the park's workforce during peak season.

Wilderness permit reservations are available now by lottery and general reservation and we have not yet seen any reductions to services. The Half Dome lottery for day hikers will open on March 1 as planned. Any changes to normal operations will be shared when they become known.

- **Can I volunteer to help offset terminated NPS staff?**

Unfortunately, no. The volunteer programs at Yosemite National Park require NPS staff as liaisons for each of the projects and roles that volunteers fill. Additionally, park staff are highly trained and vetted for the roles they fill.

Yosemite Conservancy still plans to hire in all of our Visitor Information Assistant (VIAs) volunteers and our Work Week Crews. We anticipate our VIAs will be called into new areas of need, but all within the realm of assisting visitors with information. Our Work Week Crews will remain focused on habitat restoration and trail work. Conservancy volunteers do not perform any sort of enforcement.

- **Who's going to replace Cicely Muldoon as Yosemite superintendent?**

Effective March 1, Stephanie Burkhart will assume the role of acting superintendent at Yosemite National Park for 60 days, following Cicely Muldoon's retirement. Stephanie has been part of the region's senior leadership team since 2011 and is currently deputy regional director overseeing our Sierra and Pacific Islands Network parks. There will likely be at least two interim superintendents before a permanent superintendent is hired.

Reservations

- **What's the status of the reservation system?**

Yosemite National Park has not yet announced a reservation system for 2025 season. There were limited reservations for the Horsetail Fall "Firefall" event in February to protect natural resources and habitats impacted by the influx of visitors. But the "peak hours" April-October reservation system we've seen piloted in recent years is awaiting approval at the federal level. Additionally, park leadership is uncertain whether they'll have enough staff to run park operations broadly.

Even if the reservation system is approved, NPS would need seasonal staff to carry it out at the gates. It remains unclear at this time when seasonal staff would be arriving at Yosemite.

- **Are camping reservations/lodging going to be canceled?**

It's still unknown whether NPS-run campgrounds will be fully operational for the 2025 season. Park leadership is assessing whether they can hire the staff needed to operate campsites this season. Lodging that is hosted by the park's concessionaire, Yosemite Hospitality, is not expected to be impacted. And private rentals (through services like Airbnb, VRBO, etc.) are also not expected to be impacted.

How to help

- **How can we help/mobilize?**

Yosemite Conservancy is an apolitical, nonpartisan organization. Much of the advocacy done on behalf of national parks is through our friends at the National Parks Conservation Association. (Check out their social media posts and tools on their website to take political action.)

At the most basic level, you can reach out to your legislators to let them know how you feel about the cuts to NPS staff and the impacts you anticipate on the lands you care about. And if you feel moved, you can make a donation to Yosemite Conservancy to support the park overall.

We're currently in conversations with park leadership to determine the best path forward to support critical programs and staffing needed to ensure a quality visitor experience and that the park is preserved for future generations.

- **How is Yosemite Conservancy protecting the park during this time?**

We're in close communications with Yosemite NPS leadership to determine how we can best support them. We don't have any solid answers yet, as the information we're all getting seems to change day by day, but we're poised to help and we're ready to jump in to support our partners when we've figured out the best path forward.

- **Is Yosemite Conservancy advocating for the park in any way?**

Yosemite Conservancy is an apolitical, nonpartisan organization. Much of the advocacy done on behalf of national parks is through our friends at the National Parks Conservation Association. (Check out their social media posts and tools on their website to take political action.)

However, we're working closely with park leadership to determine how we can best support them.

- **Where's the next protest?**

We're not involved with any protests and don't know any specific details. But be on the lookout for flyers in public buildings around the park.

Impacts to Conservancy grants

- **Have any grants been affected by the DEI executive order?**

We anticipate some of the grants with an explicit DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and access) focus will be cut or reduced, due to NPS staff being prevented from working on these programs.

- **Can Yosemite Conservancy help/hire NPS employees who have been terminated?**

We don't know. Some of the staff who were laid off were already underwritten, in part, by projects and funds that the Conservancy supports. Additionally, the Conservancy has not before been asked to underwrite permanent, full-time positions for the park that are outside the mission of Yosemite Conservancy.

- **How will this affect Centennial Campaign projects? (Mist Trail, sequoias and Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition, Yosemite West, Wahhoga)?**
Campaign projects are on track and moving forward. The more far-reaching impacts of the presidential orders remain to be seen, however. Staffing, in particular, could change the ways we work with our NPS partners. Although we don't yet know how things will play out, NPS and Conservancy staff continue to work on these projects, none of which is currently affected by a presidential order.

Impacts to Conservancy in-park programs and events

- **How does this impact Spring Gathering (March 21–23)? If the government shuts down on March 14, will the event still happen? Will the park close?**
As long as Yosemite remains open, lodging secured, and we can provide a safe experience for Conservancy guests, we anticipate proceeding with Spring Gathering. We may need to adjust programs and activities if staffing, access or services are curtailed.

For additional questions about Spring Gathering, please contact Riley Applewhite at rapplewhite@yosemite.org or 415-989-2560.

- **How do NPS cuts impact operations of Yosemite Conservancy programs?**
Park leadership is assessing what's possible with the staff they have and figuring out what staff they can hire for the upcoming season. So, currently, we don't know yet what that will mean for park operations overall or how we'll need to pivot our own programs to accommodate that.

We anticipate running Conservancy in-park programs as usual but will need to remain flexible pending the outcome of how park staff is able to operate in 2025.

We are in close communication with our NPS colleagues and will be sure to share any updates to our program participants. We strongly suggest purchasing trip-cancellation insurance or flexible travel options in case your plan changes for any reason.