

Thousands protest at national parks against Trump's mass firings

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2 March 2025

On Saturday, thousands gathered at 145 national parks across the United States to protest the Trump administration's mass firing of at least 1,000 workers at the National Park Service (NPS) last month.

Protests were held at high profile locations, including Yellowstone National Park, the Grand Canyon and the Gateway Arch. In Yosemite, park staff hung an upside-down American flag off of El Capitan, while protesters led by fired workers from the area rallied outside the visitors center in defiance of the attacks on federal workers.

In Montana last week, a rally for public lands packed the state capitol with people carrying signs decrying the illegal dismissals and disregard for natural resources. At an earlier protest, a worker from the United States Forest Service (USFS) held a sign reading, "They laid off my whole crew." His co-worker's sign declared, "Immigrants didn't steal my job. The president did."

Those fired from NPS were part of the Valentine's Day Massacre of federal workers, which included the dismissal of at least 5,600 "probationary" workers. Each was a member of the agencies which oversee the 640 million acres of federal lands in the United States.

Those cut included firefighters, park rangers, trail workers, wildlife biologists, botanists, skilled tradespeople and many others who manage public and private lands in the public interest. These cuts came as agencies were already reeling from the federal hiring freeze, which effectively eliminated many seasonal workers who form the bulk of the workforce at these agencies. These devastating reductions will lead to more disasters, such as the Los Angeles wildfires, some of which started on federal land.

The protests erupted both in recognition of this danger and in solidarity with the workers who lost their jobs. Many workers have also lost their housing as a

result, which was part of their compensation for doing critical environmental work in remote parts of the country.

In the aftermath of the cuts, chaos was the rule of the day, with one Forest Service worker losing his job while on a fire assignment in Louisiana across the country from his home in the Pacific Northwest. This while the Trump administration absurdly claims that it did not remove any firefighters.

Clearly unprepared for the degree of popular opposition, the Trump administration has re-allowed the parks service to hire seasonal workers after freezing all federal hiring. This may be in part to appease small business owners, who depend on the tourism dollars of the national parks, but it certainly does nothing for the thousands of public lands employees laid off from permanent positions.

For those who remain, the situation is chaotic at best. Rangers are reporting trying to do the work of their fired colleagues while also managing the complicated federal hiring process and dealing with the uncertainty of their own job security. It is hard to predict exactly what this coming season will look like for workers, but it is doubtful that parks will be able to hire up to their previous levels and maintain even basic safety and sanitation standards for visitors.

Along with physical protests, fired workers are posting their stories online, garnering millions of views across social media platforms. These posts share the challenges of losing jobs that workers spent their entire careers building towards and which they often moved across the country to rural areas to pursue.

Included were sharp criticisms of the anti-democratic firings and what many see as a Trump's program to further open up public lands to corporate profit.

In one widely circulated post, Brian Gibbs, a fired

Effigy Mounds National Monument education park ranger in Iowa, includes a list of his job responsibilities and duties. They included: “I am the protector of 2500-year-old American burial and ceremonial grounds. I am the defender of your public lands and waters. ... I am the lesson that showed your children that we live in a world of gifts—not commodities, that gratitude and reciprocity are the door to true abundance, not power, money or fear.” He continued, “I am tired from weeks of being bullied and censored by billionaires.”

Jamie Tommins, who had to leave a job with the USFS before the layoffs because he contracted Long COVID, provided powerful insights to his fellow workers just now losing their jobs. Writing on his personal website, he called on them to “remember that we are not only fighting for our jobs. We are fighting for a dream ... for a truly public system of public lands, managed by and for the people, both for us and the generations to come.”

Such principled democratic sentiments, or even the most basic efforts to defend workers’ jobs, find no expression in the union apparatus. Despite the illegal character of the mass firings, the leadership of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and other public sector unions have opposed calls for collective strike action and are telling members to rely on the courts.

The Democrats, for their part, are maintaining the lie that calls or letter-writing campaigns to congressmen, senators and even local and county officials can stop the hemorrhaging. Typical was the letter last week penned by Oregon Democrats to Trump acolytes Brooke Rollins and Doug Burgum, Secretary of Agriculture and Secretary of the Interior, respectively, which urged both to “reconsider” the slash-and-burn policies.

At present, a total of six federal employees of the tens of thousands fired, have received even temporary stays on their removal through legal challenges. Even this temporary relief though is deeply vulnerable to political pressure from Trump. Both the agency pursuing the complaint, the US Office of Special Counsel (OSC) and the agency reviewing the complaint and issuing the stay, the Merit System Protection Board (MSPB), are only nominally independent federal bureaucracies

housed within the executive branch.

Historically, both these agencies are favorites targets of presidential meddling because of their oversight role. There is little doubt that some combination of Elon Musk and his illegal firings by DOGE or Trump and his governance by executive order will quickly crush whatever component of this bureaucratic wall cracks first.

Already, Trump’s attempted direct firing of the head of the OSC, Hampton Dellinger, has reached the Supreme Court with its extreme right-wing majority. The court declined to hear an appeal by the government to reverse a lower court’s stay of Dellinger’s summary removal without cause, so the final outcome remains uncertain for even this high profile and nakedly illegal action.

This is the judicial and executive bureaucracy that workers are being asked to trust with their futures. In opposition to the cowardice and complicity of the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, opposition by National Park Service workers is growing more determined.

As fired USFS ranger Liz Crandall from the Deschutes National Forest in Oregon declared, “I have dedicated my career and life to the US Forest Service. I have found my community, my people, and my purpose. I won’t let that be taken away. I will not be silenced, and I will use the same tenacity I did when I demanded to become a volunteer all those years ago. Let’s go.”

Crandall speaks for the vast majority of public lands workers, and indeed the vast majority of workers, who are more and more coming into conflict with the Trump administration and the capitalist social order which it defends.



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