

At least 2 dead, more than 20 unaccounted for after Grand Canyon flash flood

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On Saturday afternoon, a flash flood tore through Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona, killing at least two people and leaving more than 20 missing or unaccounted for. At least 62 people were evacuated by helicopter from the Bright Angel Canyon and Phantom Ranch areas.

An estimated 0.84 inches (2.1 centimeters) of rain fell within a single hour, sending water, mud, boulders and other debris surging through the canyon.

The flooding was intensified by the burn scar left by last year's Dragon Bravo Fire, which burned nearly 150,000 acres along the North Rim, including portions of the Bright Angel Creek watershed. By stripping the slopes of trees, brush and ground cover that absorb rainfall and hold soil in place, the fire left the terrain less able to contain the downpour, accelerating runoff, mudslides and debris flows into the canyon.

The flood destroyed trails and nearly every footbridge across Bright Angel Creek while damaging or destroying roughly 40 percent of the Transcanyon Waterline.

The 12.5-mile (20-kilometer) pipeline supplies potable water and fire protection to every facility on the South Rim and parts of the inner canyon. It serves millions of visitors annually, roughly 1,600 residents of Grand Canyon Village and as many as 2,500 residents across the broader South Rim and inner-canyon service area.

The aging pipeline had broken more than 85 times since 2010 before the latest catastrophe. A \$208 million rehabilitation and replacement project, begun in 2023 and scheduled for completion next year, was under way when the flood struck.

The destruction of the waterline prompted the closure of every overnight accommodation inside the park beginning August 31, with no reopening date announced. With storage tanks no longer being replenished, officials restricted camping and ordered residents to sharply reduce their water consumption. Residents and remaining visitors have been directed to limit showers to five minutes, flush toilets selectively, run only full loads of laundry and dishes and eliminate unnecessary water use.

One of the two people confirmed dead has been identified by his family as John Giusti, a 46-year-old chiropractor from Granbury, Texas and the father of three daughters. Giusti, who worked at the ChiroHabit clinic, was visiting the Grand Canyon for the first time. His younger sister, Valerie Gibbs, described him as an active and experienced runner and hiker.

Giusti arrived at Bright Angel Campground on Friday with two friends. The three planned to hike, fish and camp in the inner canyon. His family last heard from him at approximately 2 p.m. Saturday, about 30 minutes before the flood began tearing through the campground.

"To his daughters, he was their ultimate hero. To me, he was my whole world," his wife, Janet Giusti, said in a joint statement released by the families Monday.

Giusti's traveling companions, Brent Rosenkranz, 42, of Granbury, and Timothy Smith, 42, of Star Valley Ranch, Wyoming, remain missing. Rosenkranz is a married father of three sons and a martial arts instructor and school owner. Smith is also a married father of three and works as a pilot for NetJets. The identities of the second person killed and the other missing hikers have not been publicly released.

The two flood victims bring the number of publicly reported deaths at Grand Canyon National Park this year to at least seven.

On February 19, Aaron Benjamin, a 30-year-old resident of Post Falls, Idaho, died after entering the Colorado River at Hance Rapid. Members of his boating group pulled him from the water and began cardiopulmonary resuscitation, but neither they nor park rangers flown to the scene were able to revive him.

Four hikers died from apparent heat-related illnesses over a two-week period in June. An 18-year-old man died June 3 while attempting a day hike from the South Rim to the Colorado River and back along the Bright Angel Trail. A 72-year-old man died on the South Kaibab Trail on June 12. Four days later, a 67-year-old man and a 68-year-old woman died on the North Kaibab Trail. Temperatures in the inner canyon had exceeded 109 degrees Fahrenheit (43 degrees Celsius) in the shade.

Despite these tragedies, the national parks remain relatively safe for the hundreds of millions of people who visit them every year. National Park Service data recorded 2,149 deaths between 2014 and 2019, an average of approximately 358 annually. The park system recorded 323 million recreational visits last year.

Even this limited accounting has become more difficult under the Trump administration. An internal Interior Department memo issued in December 2025 instructed employees that “Interior shall not confirm a death.” The directive applies to fatalities, suspected fatalities, serious injuries and other “emotionally sensitive incidents” across every Interior Department bureau and office.

Seven current and former National Park Service employees told the *Washington Post* that the directive broke with the agency’s long-standing policy of releasing factual information as quickly as possible. Dan Wenk, a former acting director of the Park Service and superintendent of Yellowstone, described the previous approach as an effort to “get people as much information as you could give them as soon as possible.”

The information blackout has been imposed as the Trump administration systematically guts the National Park Service, adding to the cutbacks already inflicted under the Democratic Biden-Harris administration. Grand Canyon’s own figures show its permanent, term and seasonal workforce falling from 584 in fiscal year 2021 to 427 in 2024 and 369 in 2025. This represents the elimination of 215 positions, nearly 37 percent of the park’s workforce, in four years. Only 93 employees were assigned to visitor and resource protection across more than 1.2 million acres in 2025.

The figures document a longer-term erosion of staffing that accelerated under Trump. At least 10 probationary Grand Canyon employees were fired in February 2025 during the first wave of cuts carried out under the Department of Government Efficiency. Six of them had been working on the Transcanyon Waterline replacement, delaying the same \$208 million project now severely damaged by the flood.

Nationally, the Park Service lost more than 4,000 permanent employees during the first months of the Trump administration, approximately 24 percent of its permanent workforce. The cuts eliminated park superintendents, scientists, maintenance workers, emergency personnel and employees responsible for protecting visitors and natural resources.

The Park Service says the flood began at approximately 2:30 p.m. The National Weather Service did not issue its flash-flood warning for the Bright Angel Creek basin until 2:42 p.m., 12 minutes after the event had begun. The

warning itself stated that life-threatening flooding was “ongoing or expected to begin shortly.”

Reaching hikers below the rim presents another problem. Cellular service is extremely limited in the inner canyon. The park’s backcountry alert system sends warnings to Garmin, SPOT and other satellite-texting devices, but hikers must possess compatible equipment and register for the service before entering the canyon. Whether the dead or missing hikers received any warning and whether staffing reductions affected monitoring or evacuation procedures remain unknown.

The Grand Canyon flood came only days after a glacier collapse unleashed catastrophic flooding across Nepal, killing more than 900 people and leaving as many as 5,000 missing. In Nepal, warming destabilized Himalayan ice and rock. At the Grand Canyon, intense rainfall struck a landscape stripped of vegetation by wildfire. Both demonstrate how climate change is producing increasingly destructive “natural” disasters whose real cause is the capitalist system.

Governments from Washington to Kathmandu have subordinated public safety to private profit. Nepal lacked adequate monitoring, warning systems and resilient infrastructure, while the Trump administration has fired park workers, weakened scientific agencies and delayed repairs to the Grand Canyon’s only water pipeline. Vast resources that could protect lives and eliminate dependence on fossil fuels are instead diverted to war and the enrichment of the financial oligarchy.

Humanity possesses the technology and productive capacity to provide safe infrastructure, clean energy and a high standard of living for all. Implementing these measures requires taking the energy corporations and banks out of private hands and reorganizing the world economy through socialist planning based on human need, not profit.



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