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An upside-down American flag hangs at El Capitan in Yosemite National Park during the annual firefall on Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025. Photo by: Brittany Colt - www.brittanycolt.com

'A desperate plea': Bold display pops up at Yosemite National Park after layoffs

By [Amanda Bartlett](#), Assistant Local Editor Feb 23, 2025

A striking sight unfurled thousands of feet over the steep granite face of El Capitan in [Yosemite National Park](#) on Saturday — and it wasn't the annual [firefall](#).

A group of six demonstrators rigged ropes and rappelled down to hang and secure four corners of an inverted American flag over the 7,500-foot cliff. As many as hundreds of unsuspecting spectators were gathered below to take in the last weekend of the sunset spectacle that transforms the waters of Horsetail Falls into a glowing bright orange hue.

Photographer Brittany Colt, who lived and worked in the park's [Ansel Adams Gallery](#) for over four years and now resides in nearby Bishop, told SFGATE she was in the area with her partner to capture a surprise proposal for their [wedding photography business](#). Since they were in the valley, they decided to join the crowds to watch the natural phenomenon.

“Little did we know we would get to witness history in the making,” she said. “I knew instinctively right away that it must be a desperate plea for the American people to help protect our public lands. Protected lands that are at huge risk of being taken away and exploited.”

The bold display comes in the aftermath of an announcement [earlier this month](#) that multiple full-time staff — including EMTs, wildland firefighters and [Yosemite's only locksmith](#) — had been terminated from their positions as thousands of other new employees' [job offers](#) were rescinded following Trump's [federal hiring freeze](#). The news not only meant the loss of their jobs, but also housing for many of the people who lived on site.

“The purpose of this exercise of free speech is to disrupt without violence and draw attention to the fact that public lands in the United States are under attack,” read a statement released by the group of demonstrators, as the Chronicle [first reported](#). (The Chronicle and SFGATE are both owned by Hearst but have separate newsrooms.) Among them was Gavin Carpenter, a maintenance mechanic for the park who provided the flag and helped hang it.

“The Department of the Interior issued a series of secretarial orders that position drilling and mining interests as the favored uses of America's public lands and threaten to scrap existing land protections and conservation measures,” the statement continued. “Firing 1,000s of staff regardless of position or performance across the nation is the first step in destabilizing the protections in place for these great places.”

Spanning roughly the size of Rhode Island, Yosemite is one of the most popular national parks in the U.S., bringing in between 3 million and 5 million visitors each year. Officials had been preparing to implement a reservation system during peak periods this spring and summer, but that plan is now on hold and remains under review by the Trump administration, potentially leaving the park subject to uncontrollable crowds amid severe short-staffing.

Yosemite officials did not immediately respond to SFGATE's request for comment. Meanwhile, Colt wondered aloud what would play out if the people and agencies that act as the stewards of the park weren't there to protect the land and its visitors, whom she said are in “great peril.”

“What happens if someone gets hurt and there’s no EMT to respond? What happens if the roads and campgrounds don’t open due to no personnel to tend to them? What happens when the restrooms get locked and people who don’t know how to responsibly go to the bathroom start leaving feces and toilet paper everywhere?” she said. “We need to make our voices heard and let the powers that be know that we will not stand for this.”

Over the weekend, the Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks, which represents over 3,400 current, former and retired employees and volunteers of the National Park Service, condemned the Trump administration for sending emails to federal park employees on Saturday demanding that they [summarize their accomplishments for the workweek](#) to an unsecured external email address, noting that [“failure to respond will be taken as a resignation.”](#)

“This Administration continues to cause unnecessary chaos,” Phil Francis, chair of the executive council of the coalition, said in an emailed statement. “Federal employees are held accountable for their work through an established and pre-existing chain of command, with supervisors who understand the needs and priorities of specific positions. This mandate is so ridiculous it’s hard to formulate a response. Those in power seem to have forgotten the law and their human decency.”

The flag was up for a few hours on Saturday before the group took it down themselves. The last time a demonstration was held at El Capitan was in June, when [climbers](#) scaled the dome to hang a banner that read “Stop the Genocide” in solidarity with Palestinians. Recently, other messages of distress regarding the federal layoffs have popped up at Point Reyes National Seashore and at Sand Beach in Acadia National Park.

Conservancy at 57 percent of rights needed to preserve Walker Lake

The Walker Basin Conservancy announced a new water rights acquisition that permanently conserves water for the region’s environment.

The Conservancy successfully acquired surface water rights to benefit Walker Lake totaling 617.60 acre feet of New Land storage rights. Additionally, the Conservancy acquired an additional 596.4 acre feet of supplemental groundwater rights in Smith Valley that will be permanently conserved. The acquired water has historically served two Smith ranches from the West Walker River, and the appurtenant land will remain in production under new ownership

With this acquisition, the Conservancy now owns 57 percent of the water required for the long-term restoration of Walker Lake.

By boosting freshwater inflows to the Lake from the Walker River, the total dissolved solids will be reduced to a level that the water can again sustain native species such as the Lahontan cutthroat trout and the Tahoe sucker.

The groundwater will be permanently relinquished with the State of Nevada, protecting it from future extraction and further stabilizing groundwater tables in Smith Valley. This action reduces impacts of groundwater withdrawal on the Walker River, supports long-term agricultural production, and helps align water use with available resources in the region. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation funded this transaction through the Walker Basin Restoration Program.

This partnership provides matching federal funding to the Nevada Water Conservation and Infrastructure Initiative, launched by the State of Nevada in 2024.

The Walker Basin Conservancy is a nonprofit that leads efforts to increase the flows of the Walker River and restore a fishery at Walker Lake while protecting agricultural, environmental, and recreational interests throughout the Walker Basin. Over the last decade, the Conservancy has worked with 157 farmers and ranchers on temporary and permanent water rights transactions and has relinquished more than 11,000 acre-feet of groundwater since 2014.

<https://www.recordcourier.com/news/2025/feb/21/conservancy-at-57-percent-of-rights-needed-to-preserve-walker-lake/>

More like this story

- [Conservancy acquires 500 acre-feet of Walker groundwater rights](#)
- [Walker Lake recovery takes a 320-acre step](#)
- [Tahoe Conservancy announces acquisition of 31 acres in Upper Truckee](#)
- [Lyon County Position Statement regarding Walker Lake/River water quality standards](#)
- [Walker Lake at highest elevation in a dozen years](#)

What Park is this?

#1

This State Recreation Area dates back to the Newlands Project from the 1902 Reclamation Act. Shortly thereafter, its dam and reservoir became the Bureau of Reclamation's first to deliver water for irrigation purposes.

The project draws water from the Truckee and Carson River Basin and redirects it toward Fallon to produce hydroelectric power. It also supplies drainage water from irrigated land flows into the Stillwater Wildlife Management Area.

Today, the dam is 162 feet high and 1,700 feet long. It's capable of holding 312,000 acre feet of water and named after an ancient lake that covered 85,000 square miles of the western Great Basin during the last Ice Age.

The project and its property became a Nevada State Recreation Area in 1971.

#2

In 1859, an Ohio settler purchased land in Pleasant Grove near the Carson River. This land soon became the site of a ranch that eventually served as a stop on the Pony Express. The ranch also provided vegetables, barley, hay, and cattle to western emigrants and Fort Churchill staff during the 1860s

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**Mountain West News Bureau: A new Interior directive encourages energy exploration and could redraw national monument borders**

**The Nevada Independent: 'No explanation as to why': Nevada federal funding recipients navigating freezes**



## The only animal of which Australians are afraid



The cassowary is one of the world's largest birds, and it looks like a relic from another geologic era. It's as tall as a person, has glossy black feathers and piercing eyes, walks on two feet, can weigh up to 140 pounds and has a large dagger-like claw on each foot.

[https://currently.att.yahoo.com/lifestyle/only-animal-australians-afraid-bird-000047482.html?.tsrc=daily\\_mail&uh\\_test=1\\_11&.tsrc=daily\\_mail&segment\\_id&ncid=crm\\_-1295960-20250224-311&bt\\_user\\_id=m2wknWC65IalnnS0i2qVT8dxn%2Fs1s%2BJ5nqRtjbp%2B7LD7ldUtSkhttRDywhPLzwmY&bt\\_ts=1740385720808](https://currently.att.yahoo.com/lifestyle/only-animal-australians-afraid-bird-000047482.html?.tsrc=daily_mail&uh_test=1_11&.tsrc=daily_mail&segment_id&ncid=crm_-1295960-20250224-311&bt_user_id=m2wknWC65IalnnS0i2qVT8dxn%2Fs1s%2BJ5nqRtjbp%2B7LD7ldUtSkhttRDywhPLzwmY&bt_ts=1740385720808)

### **Nevada Legislature to Consider Heat Mitigation Strategies for Urban Planning**

AB 96 was put forward in the Nevada legislature last week, which would require Nevada counties with populations over 100,000 to incorporate "heat mitigation" into their urban planning strategies.

If passed, the bill would directly apply to Washoe County and Clark County, home to the two fastest-warming cities in the country: Reno and Las Vegas, respectively. That's according to two recently published studies on urban heat: the [Reno-Sparks Heat-Mapping Project](#) and the [Southern Nevada Heat-Mapping Project](#)

### **From the Water Maven:**

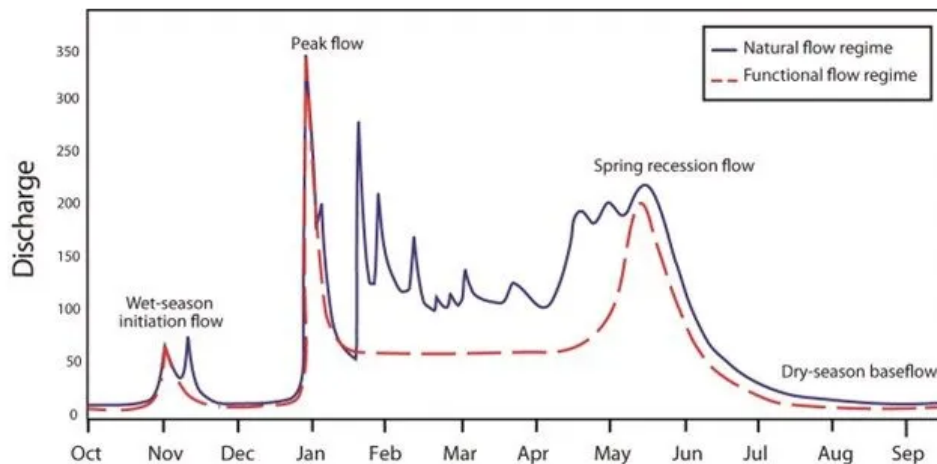
#### **AI takeover: Automated fish counting cameras**

"Artificial intelligence (AI) is integrated into evermore tasks, but can it be used to identify and count salmon migrating upstream? Traditionally, counting fish that enter rivers, hatcheries, and fish ladders requires an observer to tally fish as they swim past an underwater viewing window or

to generate counts by reviewing footage from fish passage structures captured on video – both time-consuming and tedious endeavors. Technological advancements resulted in sensors and cameras that automatically detect fish, replacing the human observer or drastically reducing the time required to review footage of fish passages. Now, with artificial intelligence and neural network programming, it is possible to use 3D cameras and computer vision (AI that uses images and videos) to automatically identify fish. FISHBIO recently stepped into the world of AI fish identification with the acquisition of cameras and software from Simsonar, a Finnish company that specializes in automated fish monitoring cameras. ... ” [Read more from FishBio.](#)

### **Functional flows are good for California’s native fishes (*good model for others*)**

**Figure 2.** Natural and functional flow regimes in a Mediterranean–montane climate, where spring occurs April to June. ...



Functional flows (red line) mimic key components of natural flows (blue line). Figure by Sarah Yarnell.

“As California grapples with ongoing water management challenges, the question of “*how much water to leave in streams*” to support native fishes and aquatic species often arises. There is no easy answer to this question, as evidenced by the more than 200 environmental flow assessment methods that exist globally. In California, there has been movement towards using a Functional Flows approach, as described in the California Environmental Flows Framework (CEFF) to answer this question more scientifically. Several previous blogs have covered CEFF and Functional Flows (see further reading below), and the California Environmental Flow Technical Working Group meets quarterly to discuss and share related research, case studies, and applications. For people learning about this work, two common questions are often asked: “Has a Functional Flows approach been implemented anywhere in the state?” and “Is there empirical evidence that a Functional Flows approach really supports California native fishes?” In short, the answers are “to a certain extent” and “yes”. A recent study by Baruch [et al.](#) in 2024 in *Ecological Applications* helps explain these answers. ... ” [Read more from the California Water Blog.](#)

### **Salmon seen in California's North Yuba River for first time in almost a century**

“Several months after the start of a pilot program aiming to restore salmon runs in California’s Sierra County, Chinook salmon can be found in the North Yuba River “for the first time in close to a century,” the California Department of Fish and Wildlife announced on Thursday. The salmon are a result of a project studying the return of spring-run Chinook salmon to their native spawning habitat in the Sierra Nevada, the department said. The eggs that the fish hatched from were deposited in October along a 12-mile stretch of gravel riverbed in the North Yuba River east of Downieville in an effort to mimic the spawning behaviors of wild salmon. Young fish were first seen on Feb. 11 in a rotary screw trap installed several miles downstream from where the eggs were implanted, according to CDFW. The fish are being trucked downstream to the lower Yuba River, where they will then continue their migration to the ocean. ... ” [Read more from SF Gate.](#)

### **New state legislative bill package includes focus on tribal issues**

A new legislative package in the California Legislature includes several bills focusing on tribal issues. The package is being put forward by Assemblymember James C. Ramos (D-San Bernardino), the first and only California Native American serving in the state’s legislature. Some of the key bills in Ramo’s package focus on confronting the Missing and Murdered Indigenous People crisis and “furthering acceptance and knowledge of state tribes,” Ramos said. The bills in the package focusing on tribal issues are as follows. ... AB 362 (Shingle Springs Water) would add tribal water uses as a [beneficial use](#) of water in the state. AB 362 would also require the State Water Quality Control Board or a regional water quality control to describe, with both quantitative and qualitative information, how the project or regulatory program will impact tribal water uses. Sponsor: Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians. Not yet referred to a policy committee. ... ” [Read more from the Lake County News.](#)

### **TRPA's Environmental Threshold Evaluation shows improvements in standards, new long-term goals**

“The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency’s (TRPA) environmental threshold evaluation report, which monitors the regional plan’s environmental factors across 140 indicators, shows that in 2019 to 2023, 75% of the indicators trended positively. The results of the peer-reviewed report can now be accessed online through a dashboard and reveal the positive effects of the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP). The TRPA prepares a threshold evaluation report every four years—this most recent one represents the 8<sup>th</sup> comprehensive threshold evaluation since 1980. The data is collected for a three-year period, then all the data are compiled into a report, peer-reviewed by the Tahoe Science Advisory Council. For the period from 2019 to 2023, 92% of the indicators were stable or improving, while 79% of the thresholds were “in attainment” or within the accepted level. ... ” [Read more from the Tahoe Daily Tribune.](#)



## Why Western water managers are preparing for a ‘nuclear option’ in Colorado River negotiations



“As Arizona’s record-dry winter continues, Western water managers are quietly preparing for what many have called a “nuclear option” in the ongoing battle for who-gets-what from the quickly drying Colorado River. Seven states are locked in a standoff right now over who should use less water from the river, as climate change continues to dry it up. They’re facing a 2026 deadline to create new rules to govern it. Last month, Arizona rocked the boat by proposing a state budget that included millions to pay for a court battle over Colorado River water, they say, just in case those negotiations don’t work. Alex Hager covers the Colorado River for KUNC in Colorado and joined The Show to discuss. ... ” [Listen or read transcript at KJZZ.](#)

### **Colorado River meeting canceled by the Trump administration**

“This week’s scheduled meeting of a group focused on the management of Glen Canyon Dam was canceled by the Trump administration. It’s one of many scientific conferences and federal meetings that have been canceled or indefinitely postponed. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation says the meeting will be rescheduled to ensure new Department of the Interior and Reclamation leadership are “fully briefed” on the Glen Canyon Dam [Adaptive Management](#) Work Group. The group advises the Secretary of the Interior on how best to manage Glen Canyon Dam in keeping with the 1992 Grand Canyon Protection Act. ... ” [Read more from KNAU.](#)

### **Trump funding freeze includes payments to keep the Colorado River flowing**

“The first executive order President Trump signed in his second term, “[Unleashing American Energy](#),” wouldn’t seem to have a direct impact on how much water is in the Colorado River, at least in the short term. The order, signed the first day Trump took office, aims to “unleash America’s affordable and reliable energy and natural resources,” by ending “burdensome and ideologically motivated regulations.” But the order also says, “All agencies shall immediately



pause the disbursement of funds appropriated through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.” ... ”  
[Read more from NPR.](#)

### **US shuns climate science meeting as UN warns ‘time is not on our side’**

“U.S. representatives are not at a key climate science meeting in China, a source told AFP on Monday, sitting out a fight over the U.N.’s next blockbuster assessment of global warming research. U.S. officials declined to comment last week on reports that America’s delegation had been pulled from the U.N. talks in Hangzhou. But a source at the meeting, which opened on Monday, told AFP: “We haven’t seen anyone from a U.S. delegation, and there hasn’t been anyone representing the U.S. in plenary session so far.” U.S. President Donald Trump, who has called climate change a “scam” and made no secret of his disdain for the United Nations and climate science, has already pulled Washington out of the landmark Paris Agreement for a second time. However, observers said the decision to withdraw scientists from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, set up in 1988 to inform policymakers, was a new “blow.” ... ” [Read more from the Courthouse News Service.](#)

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### **U.S. Grant’s Eighth State of the Union Address                      December 5, 1876**

“In submitting my eighth and last annual message to Congress it seems proper that I should refer to and in some degree recapitulate the events and official acts of the past eight years.

It was my fortune, or misfortune, to be called to the office of Chief Executive without any previous political training. From the age of 17 I had never even witnessed the excitement attending a Presidential campaign but twice antecedent to my own candidacy, and at but one of them was I eligible as a voter.

Under such circumstances it is but reasonable to suppose that errors of judgment must have occurred. Even had they not, differences of opinion between the Executive, bound by an oath to the strict performance of his duties, and writers and debaters must have arisen. It is not necessarily evidence of blunder on the part of the Executive because there are these differences of views. Mistakes have been made, as all can see and I admit, but it seems to me oftener in the selections made of the assistants appointed to aid in carrying out the various duties of administering the Government--in nearly every case selected without a personal acquaintance with the appointee, but upon recommendations of the representatives chosen directly by the people. It is impossible, where so many trusts are to be allotted, that the right parties should be chosen in every instance. History shows that no Administration from the time of Washington to the present has been free from these mistakes. But I leave comparisons to history, claiming only that I have acted in every instance from a conscientious desire to do what was right, constitutional, within the law, and for the very best interests of the whole people. Failures have been errors of judgment, not of intent.

My civil career commenced, too, at a most critical and difficult time. Less than four years before, the country had emerged from a conflict such as no other nation had ever survived. Nearly one-half of the States had revolted against the Government, and of those remaining faithful to the Union a large percentage of the population sympathized with the rebellion and made an "enemy in the rear" almost as dangerous as the more honorable enemy in the front. The latter committed

errors of judgment, but they maintained them openly and courageously; the former received the protection of the Government they would see destroyed, and reaped all the pecuniary advantage to be gained out of the then existing state of affairs, many of them by obtaining contracts and by swindling the Government in the delivery of their goods.

Immediately on the cessation of hostilities the then noble President, who had carried the country so far through its perils, fell a martyr to his patriotism at the hands of an assassin.

The intervening time to my first inauguration was filled up with wranglings between Congress and the new Executive as to the best mode of "reconstruction," or, to speak plainly, as to whether the control of the Government should be thrown immediately into the hands of those who had so recently and persistently tried to destroy it, or whether the victors should continue to have an equal voice with them in this control."

"A policy has been adopted toward the Indian tribes inhabiting a large portion of the territory of the United States which has been humane and has substantially ended Indian hostilities in the whole land except in a portion of Nebraska, and Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana Territories--the Black Hills region and approaches thereto. Hostilities there have grown out of the avarice of the white man, who has violated our treaty stipulations in his search for gold. The question might be asked why the Government has not enforced obedience to the terms of the treaty prohibiting the occupation of the Black Hills region by whites. The answer is simple: The first immigrants to the Black Hills were removed by troops, but rumors of rich discoveries of gold took into that region increased numbers. Gold has actually been found in paying quantity, and an effort to remove the miners would only result in the desertion of the bulk of the troops that might be sent there to remove them. All difficulty in this matter has, however, been removed--subject to the approval of Congress--by a treaty ceding the Black Hills and approaches to settlement by citizens.

The subject of Indian policy and treatment is so fully set forth by the Secretary of the Interior and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and my views so fully expressed therein, that I refer to their reports and recommendations as my own."

"The report of the Secretary of War shows that the Army has been actively employed during the year in subduing, at the request of the Indian Bureau, certain wild bands of the Sioux Indian Nation and in preserving the peace at the South during the election. The commission constituted under the act of July 24, 1876, to consider and report on the "whole subject of the reform and reorganization of the Army" met in August last, and has collected a large mass of statistics and opinions bearing on the subject before it. These are now under consideration, and their report is progressing. I am advised, though, by the president of the commission that it will be impracticable to comply with the clause of the act requiring the report to be presented, through me, to Congress on the first day of this session, as there has not yet been time for that mature deliberation which the importance of the subject demands. Therefore I ask that the time of making the report be extended to the 29th day of January, 1877."



## Apply by April 1

Attend the National Trust for Historic Preservation's national conference, PastForward, through the [Diversity Scholarship Program](#). Scholars receive complimentary registration and a travel stipend to attend PastForward in Milwaukee, September 16-18.

PastForward is the place to connect with a broad, diverse range of colleagues from across the country, engage with vibrant historic places, share successes and challenges, and generate ideas and solutions for the preservation movement and the various communities we serve.

[APPLY TODAY](#)

## Year Round Resources

As well as attending PastForward this fall, scholars have the opportunity to participate in bi-monthly, virtual convenings which will be held through September 2025. These convenings provide practical guidance to maximize opportunities with the National Trust and facilitate important networking opportunities with outstanding national leaders from a variety of professions within the wide-ranging movement.

**Nuclear Regulatory Commission funds new nuclear microreactor safety research** ([unr.edu](http://unr.edu)) — Researchers at the University of Nevada, Reno received a \$500,000 grant from the NRC to study the safe transport of nuclear microreactors. The project aims to evaluate fire safety risks and help develop regulations for these advanced reactors, which are designed for rapid deployment in critical situations.