The Effects of Government Shutdowns on National Parks: A Case Study of Joshua Tree

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Abstract

The 35-day government shutdown between December 2018 and January 2019 – the longest in U.S. history – caused myriad problems. One of these problems that was highlighted by the media was vandalism at Joshua Tree National Park (JOTR). An unknown number of chopped-down Joshua trees, ATV tracks in the sensitive crypto-biotic crust of the Mojave Desert, and locks cut off entrance gates that caught national attention. The National Park Service (NPS) struggled to protect the parks that serve as a haven for wilderness, wildlife, and iconic landscapes as the number of workers in the parks dramatically decreased during the shutdown while the majority of parks were left open, leading to overflowing sewage and immense trash accumulation. By reviewing media articles and conducting primary interviews, I present an overview of damage to national parks with the government.