



ANALYSIS

Conservative Groups Warn Against Trump Admin Proposal To Give Away Piece Of Beloved National Park

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September 01, 2026 12:42 PM ET

Conservative conservation groups are warning against a Trump administration proposal to give away a piece of Yosemite National Park in California's Sierra Nevada mountains to a private developer.

National Park Service (NPS) staff in California and Washington, D.C., have been trying to arrange a Yosemite land exchange between the federal government and a Nevada-based developer since the spring of 2025, NOTUS reported Aug. 28. But two conservative conservation groups, Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship (CRS) and the American Conservation Coalition (ACC), are pushing back against the proposal, which they believe does not serve the

public interest and reverses longtime precedent. (RELATED: Hunters Cry Fowl Over Trump Review They Fear Could Hammer Duck Populations Nationwide)

“This move by the administration is quite unprecedented, and I fear it is a harbinger of additional efforts to give away our iconic natural treasures,” David Jenkins, president of CRS, told the Daily Caller. “While land exchanges are quite common, they occur when doing so offers a clear benefit to the park and is in the public interest. This is different; it appears to be for the sole benefit of a private interest.”

Jeff Pori, the CEO of Kingsbarn Realty Capital, wants to build a short road connecting an 83-acre property five miles outside Yosemite’s western boundaries to one of the park’s main thoroughfares, NOTUS reported. Owned by private developers, the property’s access road is over 10 miles from a park entrance and even further away from Yosemite’s best attractions, according to the outlet.

The property could be developed into a resort or hotel — even a private residence. If that were the case, visitors and tourists would need to drive an hour and a half to reach the

iconic Yosemite Valley, according to NOTUS. A shorter drive and easier access would benefit developers and whatever businesses might spring up on the land, historically known as the Hazel Green Ranch, in the future. (RELATED: Hunters, Fishers And Outdoors Experts Rejoice As Mike Lee Backs Off Plan To Sell Public Lands)

Lewis Geyser, Hazel Green Ranch's former owner, lobbied the Bush and Obama administrations for years to allow him to build a similar private road into the park, but was unsuccessful, NOTUS reported. Geyser wanted to build a resort.

After Kingsbarn Realty acquired the land from Geyser in 2024, Pori's company quickly renewed the push to build a road, NOTUS reported.

"We got an email from the new owner, reopening this issue that we felt was long closed," Cicely Muldoon, a 40-year veteran of the NPS who served as Yosemite's superintendent before retiring in 2025, told the outlet. "Whoever bought the land hadn't done their due diligence and realized that this was not a possibility by law, to build a new entrance

essentially into Yosemite National Park for private purposes. So happily, when I left, it was still in that place.”

A source told NOTUS there is an unusual amount of “political pressure” coming from top leadership at the Department of the Interior (DOI), which oversees the NPS.

“They want us to be responsive to the property owner and their lobbyists or people, and they want us to work with these folks,” another source told the outlet.

In a statement to the Daily Caller, the DOI denied any “political pressure.”

“This story relies on anonymous allegations to manufacture a political narrative that simply is not true,” the DOI said.

“There has been no political pressure to reach a predetermined outcome, and claims suggesting the Department is secretly working to hand over National Park Service land to a private developer are false.”

The DOI added that no final decision has been made and that “any land exchange or access proposal involving

National Park Service lands would be subject to all applicable federal laws, regulations and Departmental policies, including required environmental review and public notification processes.”

“If a proposal advances, the Department will follow established procedures to ensure appropriate coordination, transparency and public involvement consistent with federal law. Anonymous speculation does not change those facts,” the DOI said.

ACC warned in an X post Aug. 28 that although land swaps are “routine” and often “good policy,” this exchange reverses longtime precedent. In a land swap, the private entity agrees to purchase a separate parcel of land of equal value, which it then gives back to the park service.

“Exchanges are supposed to run toward the public. An agency identifies land it wants and trades to get it. In this proposal, the direction is reversed: the initiating party is a developer who wants commercial access. There is zero precedent for NPS shedding parkland to serve a corporation’s bottom line,” ACC said.

ACC also disputed a claim made by NOTUS that the U.S. government has only expanded National Parks over the last 150 years, pointing to Congress' decision to open up Yosemite to mining, grazing and logging in 1905-1906.

ACC added that the NPS can grant bounded, conditioned right-of-way permits to allow access to a National Park in special cases but noted: "courts already found this parcel isn't landlocked."

"'Inconvenient' is not a reason for a land swap," the organization said.

Jenkins told the Caller the Trump administration has "time and again ... ignored the intrinsic natural values of our public lands, choosing instead to subordinate those values to private gain." (RELATED: America Looks Beneath The Waves As Critical Mineral Race Heads Offshore)

In a blog post in January, the DOI's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) touted significant rule changes that have made it easier for oil and gas, mining and logging companies

to access public lands. Among many examples, the BLM highlighted a nearly 64% increase in onshore federal and Indian drilling permits and the opening of 13.1 million acres of federal land to coal leasing.

“There is nothing conservative about allowing swamp politics to dictate the fate of our nation’s natural wealth,” Jenkins told the Caller. “President Reagan, speaking about our parks and other public lands, once said: ‘This is our patrimony, this is what we leave our children, and our great moral responsibility is to leave it to them either as we found it, or better than we found it.’ That’s real conservatism.”