

Grand Teton Upsets Zion in Sweet 16 as Cinderellas March On in Parks Madness 2025

Park fans show love for lesser-known places as tournament narrows to Elite 8.

BETHESDA, MD, UNITED STATES, May 12, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Of the 330 million visitors to national parks in 2024, fewer than 1% – around 2.4 million – made it to New River Gorge in West Virginia and Mesa Verde in Arizona. But both hidden gems are now in the Elite 8 of [Parks Madness 2025](#), selected by fans across the country. They're joined by much more popular giants like Glacier, the Rocky Mountains, Yosemite and Acadia.



New River Gorge Photo by Gary Hartley

In the biggest upset of the round, No. 5 seed Grand Teton National Park upset No. 1 seed Zion, the runner up in the tournament last year, by a solid 54-46% margin. While often in the shadow of Yellowstone, its neighbor and the 2024 Parks Madness champion, the Tetons are getting their due. “Grand Teton's jagged peaks are one of the most spectacular views you can see, and that's 50 miles from even making it to the park,” said voter William Stonick. “They look like a masterpiece painting from afar, and once you arrive, you add to the splendor with the lake and wildlife. Imaginary worlds in fantasy novels fall short of the breathtaking

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David Bryant

beauty of those mountains.”

To reach the Elite 8, No. 14 seed New River had to burble past the last historical site in the competition, No. 4 seed Gettysburg – and it did so easily, 61-39%. Despite its name, the New River is actually one of the oldest in the world, around 360 million years old, and the park also boasts the longest single-arch bridge in the Western Hemisphere. Since it became a national park in 2020, New River Gorge has seen steady growth in visitation, reaching a record 1.8 million in 2024.

By far the tightest race in the Sweet 16 was No. 10 seed Mesa Verde vs. No. 6 seed Joshua Tree, which came down to an oh-so-slender 50.2-49.8% difference. Home to over 600 stunning cliff dwellings built by the Ancestral Puebloans, Mesa Verde is also renowned for star-gazing as an International Dark Sky Park.

The [Parks Channel](#) and [EarthX Media](#) tournament is celebrating parks at a time when public lands are facing dire cuts in personnel and budgets. Round by round, park fans have championed their favorites while also reinforcing their love for all of our public lands. “What an incredibly impossible tournament when all the entries are so worthy in their own right,” voter David Bryant said.

Sweet 16 results:

Eagle Bracket

No. 4 Rocky Mountains over No. 8

Denali, 58-42%

No. 3 Glacier over No. 2 Grand Canyon, 66-34%

Bear Bracket

No. 5 Grand Teton over No. 1 Zion, 54-46%

No. 2 Yosemite over No. 14 Redwood, 66-44%

Bison Bracket

No. 16 New River Gorge over No. 4 Gettysburg, 61-39%

No. 2 Acadia over No. 3 Shenandoah, 65-35%

Owl Bracket

No. 1 Great Smokies over No. 5 Pinnacles, 74-26%

No. 10 Mesa Verde over No. 6 Joshua Tree, 50.2%-49.8%



Parks Madness 2025 Bracket



Grand Teton Defeats Zion

Voting for the Elite 8 is open now at theparkschannel.com and closes at 8 pm ET on Thursday, May 15.

Parks Madness 2025 Remaining Schedule:

Elite Eight: May 12-15. Winners announced on Friday, May 16.

Final Four: May 16-19. Winners announced on Tuesday, May 20.

Championship Game: May 20-22. Winners announced on Friday, May 23.

ABOUT THE PARKS CHANNEL

The Parks Channel is a new platform for “America’s Best Idea” – at home, on the journey and for making memories. Our streaming app is available through Roku, Amazon Fire, Samsung and VIZIO. Our mobile-optimized website, theparkschannel.com, features over 500 curated and geotagged videos, enabling visitors to discover amazing places to go, informed by park superfans and others dedicated to public lands. Users can create their own pages, unlock park badges by submitting content and create curated gear checklists for travel based on where they want to go and what they like to do.

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