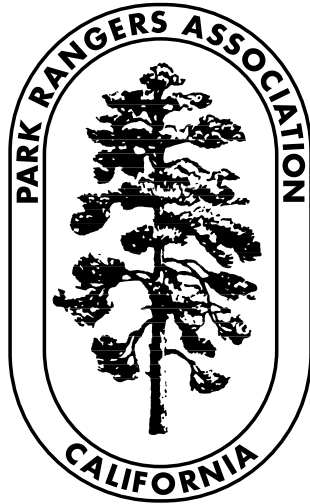


# The Signpost

November–December, 2005



## 2006 Parks Conference

by Lee Hickinbotham Jr.

Come on lucky number 7, let it all ride on lucky number 7. That's the theme of the **2006 Parks Conference in Laughlin, Nevada**, "Let it ride on the River, Uniting Parks through Professionalism."

The 2006 Parks Conference is being held March 6–9 in Laughlin Nevada at Harrah's Hotel and Casino. PRAC and CSPRA have once again come together to provide both Associations and the park professionals from Arizona with a conference to remember.

You are probably asking why are we having a conference in Laughlin? After I am done telling you about it, the real question will be "when can I register."

Laughlin is located a few hours from Southern California and approximately one and a half-hours southeast of Las Vegas in the beautiful Nevada desert. Traveling is easy by bus, car or plane. If you prefer to fly direct visit [www.suncountry.com](http://www.suncountry.com) and book one of many flights departing from Los Angeles, San Diego, or San Francisco.

Show up on Monday and attend one of many fun field trips. The conference team has gone above and beyond to provide you with exciting activities such as a tactical combat pistol shoot, golf tournament, Hoover dam tour, and a tour of an old ghost mine. Don't let the cost of the activity determine what to do because the team has priced each activity at a low \$20 per person. Later in the evening attend the State Park's Foundation dinner which is included in the full registration fee. Then head off to your favorite gaming table to donate your hard earnings back to the state of Nevada. Did I actually write that? I meant to say head to your favorite gaming table and become a big winner.

On Tuesday you won't even be thinking about gambling. Not because you lost all of your money the night before but because of the many awesome sessions the team has lined up for you. Take your big winnings and visit the vendor area for some great deals on conference merchandise.

Wednesday brings more sessions and a banquet to remember. PRAC is celebrating 30 years as an association. After a short program and I mean a short program, we head into the evening dancing the night away.

Thursday brings PRAC certified trainings and the trip back home feeling fulfilled that you've attended another awesome conference.

*But wait there's more...* I didn't even mention the best part...Rooms are only \$25 a night. Yes, you read it right. As long as you make your reservation with Harrah's Hotel and Casino by February 10, 2006 you will receive the special low room rate of just \$25 a night. The Hotel has informed us that they will not extend the deadline under any circumstance so please register as soon as possible.

I will see you at the conference...Come on lucky number 7...

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## It's Election & Renewal Time!

**With the year coming to a close, it is once more time to renew your PRAC membership for next year and elect a new President and Directors for Regions 2, 4 and 6.**

**Your should soon be receiving your renewal notice along with your ballot. Don't forget to mail them back! Your vote and participation in this organization counts.**

# From the President's Desk

The winter holiday season is upon us. Winter storms will be bringing us wet and windy weather and our parks quiet down a little bit. As we approach the winter and the end of another year, I also see the end of my four years of service to you as the President of PRAC. As I look back over the last four years I am reminded of all that PRAC has gone through over that time and the accomplishments we have made. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time serving as the PRAC President for my two terms, as well as my time as Region 1 Director for three years before that. Although my term as president will come to an end on December 31, my commitment and dedication to PRAC and the park profession will continue. I will have the honor to serve on the PRAC Board for at least another two years as Past President and I will continue to contribute to PRAC in any way I can beyond that.

As I am writing my last "President's Message," I would like to thank the members for putting their trust in me to lead this organization for the last four years. I would also like to send my thanks to all of the Directors and committee members, both present and former, that I have had the honor of serving with over the last few years. It is only through such volunteerism that an organization like PRAC continues to flourish. I also want to thank our newsletter Editor David Brooks, Web Master Jeff Price, and the Executive Managers that I have served with. The dedication of these people has also been instrumental in keeping PRAC functioning and providing our organization a professional means to communicate with our members and the public. Finally, I would like to thank Past President and Honorary Member John Havicon, who is the only board member who has been on the current board longer than me and has not only served as a positive role model for me but was also the one who originally nominated me to run for the office of president. Had it not been for John's guidance and confidence in me, I might not have ever decided to undertake the responsibility of president.

On to other news, nominations are being accepted for 2006 Honorary Member awards. Any member can nominate anyone that they feel has performed distinguished service dedicated to the objectives of the Association. The purpose and objectives of PRAC are to promote the best interests of uniformed park personnel; to establish statewide professional communication for rangers and park agencies; to educate governmental agencies and the public as to the role of the park ranger, and to establish statewide professional standards for the park ranger profession. Nominees must be approved by unanimous vote of the Board of Directors. Honorary Members receive lifetime benefits of regular membership, including registration discounts to the annual conference and training events, and all publications. If you would like to nominate somebody for this award, you may contact any board member with your nomination and supporting information. All nominations must be received by January 7, 2006.

You should be receiving membership renewals and ballots if you are a voting class of member in the mail soon. Please be sure to return both as soon as possible. Elections are important and give you a voice in who the leadership of the organization is. Renewing your dues in a timely manner is important as well, as this volunteer organization operates almost entirely from membership dues. All memberships expire December 31, 2005. As I did last year, I will be sending a special gift to those that renew their membership by January 31, 2006. Thank you in advance for your prompt support of your association.

Next year is PRAC's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. To celebrate, the board is looking at many activities for the membership. The 30 year celebration will start at the 2006 Parks Conference in Laughlin, NV and continue through December 31, 2006. To help celebrate this event the PRAC Board is encouraging all Founding Fathers, Honorary Members, and former Board Members to attend this event to help celebrate this milestone. A committee is being formed to help plan anniversary events. We are also looking for any photos you have of PRAC-sponsored events. Photos can be in any format but digital is preferred. If you have ideas or would like to volunteer on the committee, you may contact me directly at [mchiesa@mcn.org](mailto:mchiesa@mcn.org).

The 2006 Parks Conference in Laughlin, NV, is fast approaching. The planning committee, led by Dave Updike, (PRAC), and Pam Armas, (CSPRA), are working hard to bring you yet another fun-filled, exciting conference. Laughlin will prove to be one of our more unique conference venues that you won't want to miss the chance to say you were a part of. Information should be reaching your mailboxes soon. Be sure to get your registration in early to take advantage of space-limited field trips and cheaper rates at the hotel.

My last exciting news is that Tom Smith, "Smitty" has written and published a book on his experiences as a seasonal park ranger for the National Park Service at Yosemite National Park.

(Continues on page 3)

# You Should Know

by Lee Hickinbotham Jr.

There are two things I never talk about with people, money and politics. I never talk about money because I don't want to be responsible if you make bad investments. I never talk about politics simply because political discussions are like attitudes; everyone has one. However, I am going to break that rule to inform you on an issue that can affect your career.

Since I don't like to talk about politics let alone write about them, I will keep this short. **Vote no on propositions 75 and 76.** As much as I would like to end it there, I think it's only fair that I give a little background on both propositions.

## **Proposition 75**

Proposition 75 prohibits public employee labor organizations from using dues or fees for political contributions unless the employee provides written consent each year. By voting yes on this measure it would require your union/association to get a written consent from each member and nonmember to use any dues/fees for political purposes. As it stands right now you can request how your dues/fees are used.

A **No** vote would allow your union/association to continue to use dues/fees for political purposes. This proposition only affects nurses, fire fighters, teachers and peace officers. If the Governor takes away the voice of the unions, it just opens the door up for anti-union legislation to walk right in.

## **Propositions 76**

Proposition 76 "School Funding, State Spending, Initiative Constitutional Amendment" puts a cap on spending and would allow the Governor to make cuts to the budget. A yes vote would change the minimum requirements that were set in Prop 98 on school funding. This just shows us that Arnold is going back against his word when he told California that he would not tamper with the school funding. This could have a serious impact on funding for schools, fire and police as well as health care.

Please take some time to familiarize yourself with both propositions and get out there and vote.

Information for this article was obtained from the PORAC web site, [www.porac.org](http://www.porac.org)

## **From the President's Desk** **(Continued from page 3)**

Smitty is a founding father of PRAC, an Honorary Member, a former President of PRAC and an all-around nice guy who cares deeply about parks and the park profession. Smitty's book, "I'm Just a Seasonal—The Life of a Seasonal Ranger in Yosemite National Park," is available for purchase, directly from PRAC. We are offering the book for \$12.00, including shipping and handling. 100% of the sales of the book from PRAC will go directly into the scholarship fund. Hurry and buy your copy from PRAC and help support the PRAC Scholarship Fund. Smitty has my greatest respect and admiration and I would like to thank him for his generous support of PRAC. Smitty is donating proceeds from his book that are purchased from other sources, to the PRAC scholarship fund. I urge you to buy a copy of Smitty's book and next time you see him, please shake his hand and tell him "thank you" for all he has done and continues to do for parks and the park profession.

OK, folks, that's all I have this time. I hope you have a happy and safe holiday season and I wish you all a Happy New Year! Again, thank you kindly for giving me the privilege and opportunity to serve as your PRAC President for the last four years!

Stay safe,

**Mike Chiesa**

# Park Ranger Image

by Bill Orr

How many times have you heard “You don’t get a second chance to make a good first impression?” Usually it is during a training session on public relations, often at the beginning of the season and with new employees. The fact is it’s true! Unfortunately, that first impression may be obtained when we are unaware of our being observed. For example, you may be cleaning a messy campsite, having a heated discussion with an employee or eating lunch at a picnic table and say or do something that you would not do or say if you were aware of being observed. That first impression may adversely affect the observers image of a park ranger. And that could be very important.

When looking at the subject of image, it is important to consider how others perceive us rather than how we see ourselves, which is usually within the context of our organizational position description. To most people a park ranger includes any uniformed employee who is working with park visitors or park resources. Persons at entrance stations, visitor centers, campgrounds, interpretive activities, and on patrol will all be seen by most visitors as park rangers.

Park rangers are usually seen by the public to be skilled in many highly specialized fields such as fire fighting, search and rescue, law enforcement and emergency medicine in addition to their knowledge about the park and environs. For these reasons, park rangers by reputation enjoy a favorable public image. Although they may not know the difference between a regional park and a state park, visitors do have an image of a park ranger that is valid to them and will affect their actions when they visit a park.

So if we can agree that a good image is important to us and to the agency for which we work, lets look at some ways it can be improved. First and foremost must be appearance. Since the park ranger is viewed as an outdoor person, capable of performing many arduous tasks he/she should appear athletic and in excellent physical condition. He/she should also be well groomed at all times. The uniform, of course, is an important part of a physical appearance and should be given special attention by the wearer each and

every day. The park ranger uniform is symbolic of natural, cultural and historic resources conservation as well as host of visitor services. Since it symbolizes authority and professionalism, the uniform validates and enforces whatever the wearer says or does, and magnifies his/her actions and attitudes.

Because the uniform calls attention to the wearer, the ranger’s actions are projected to everyone in view, and all are receiving impressions that result in forming image. Again, it is important for park rangers to understand that by their very presence they may be responsible for creating a lasting image in the minds of park visitors.

The park rangers actions on the job also create image. Rangers must be skilled in the technical aspects of the job, especially those involving the park visitor. In dealing with the public, the park ranger must learn how develop rapport. He/she must learn to initiate public contact. He/she must portray an image of someone who likes people, who wishes to help visitors and is sensitive to their needs. He/she must take the time to fully answer the visitors’ questions and assist them in enjoying their park experience.

The purpose of law enforcement is to gain compliance with park rules and regulations. Some methods of gaining compliance include educations, increasing understanding and appreciation of park features, and fear of reprisal. It is usually preferable to attempt the more positive approaches first. The better image the park ranger has, the easier this is to accomplish.

Image should be recognized and used as a tool. When used properly it can give a ranger an advantage in a difficult situation. It can help establish communication, gain support from bystanders, project competence, validate the ranger’s authority and gain respect and confidence.

Ranger image is a vital part of the total ranger package, even though it cannot be relied on exclusively, it can be an extremely valuable tool. In general, park rangers have an excellent image—lets protect it, improve it and use it effectively.

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## Volunteer Management

by Lori Gerbac, Region 5

With the trend toward shorter volunteer commitments, government agencies and nonprofits are faced with maintaining effective programs while balancing volunteers’ needs. Janice Forsyth (Author of: *Volunteer Management Strategies: Balancing Risk & Reward*, Non Profit World Magazine May/June 1999) identifies these five elements of a successful volunteer program include: 1) assessment of needs, 2) recruitment, 3) risk management audit, interviewing and screening, 4) orientation, training and monitoring, and 5) retention and recognition. As you put these elements of a successful program into practice, you will discover how difficult it is to achieve a proper balance. You must manage the risks associated with volunteer assignments. Forsyth recommends looking at volunteer management through layers. Layers of necessity refers to the degree of intensity required for effective volunteer management. When deciding what layer a job fits into, consider time and resources, and impact and risk.

(Continues on page 6.)

# Threats to Our Pensions, Benefits, Labor Rights and Park Funding

by Matt Cerkel

While PRAC has not normally taken stands on statewide elections it is important for our members to be aware of some critical issues and initiatives that would have very negative impacts on our professions, benefits and funding for our agencies. There is an effort to “steal” our hard earned pensions and blame us for the budget problems. To help accomplish this there is Proposition 75 which is an attempt to silence public employees. Finally, there is Proposition 76 which would give the Governor the power to change the budget and make unilateral cuts to funds available to local agencies. These are all “clear and present” dangers to park employees, the long term health of our profession and funding available to local parks. Propositions 75 and 76 needed to be defeated.

Earlier this year our Governor and his handlers attacked the retirement system for public employees in California. It was an underhanded and deliberate attack on public employees and our hard won (and negotiated for) pensions and retirement benefits. The Governor and others have attempted to blame many of California’s budget problems on the “lavish and extravagant” public employee retirement system. After taking heat from the various public employee unions the Governor tabled his plan for forcing us into a “risky, private retirement system, with no stability and no guarantees.” But he promised “he’d be back” with the same plan again in 2006 (“... our pension proposal will go to the ballot in June 2006.” Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (April 7, 2005). What’s scary is that others are jumping on the anti-public employee bandwagon. Recently, the Marin County Grand Jury published a highly inflammatory and inaccurate report on the “Bloated Retirement Plans” for public employees and the Marin Independent Journal then ran a series of articles over a three day period that could best be described as a “hit piece” against public employees and our pensions. I have also seen the bad press about our pension system is becoming commonplace statewide. We, as public employees, have made many sacrifices in our service to the public, in return we have negotiated for and won fair, reasonable and sound retirement plans. Now this is threatened by those who call us “special interests,” try to demonize us and imply that we “live high on the hog.” This has led to Proposition 75.

As with many previous California ballot initiatives, Prop 75 has a hidden agenda. Proposition 75’s real agenda is to cut funding for public schools, cut health care and roll back retirement security. Proposition 75 is an attempt to silence the voices of public employees statewide. The author of Prop. 75 has admitted he was urged to file this measure by a top aid to the Governor. And he admits the goal of Prop 75 is to weaken those who oppose the Governor’s bad ideas.

In reality the voters of California have already turned down a similar proposition in 1998. Prop. 75 is entirely unnecessary, since the U.S. Supreme Court has already ruled that no public employee can be forced to join a union or association and contribute to politics. And all public and private employees in a union or association have the right to opt out of having their fees used for politics. Prop 75 is also unfair since it only targets public employees and our unions, it is expressly designed to increase costs and red tape for unions and associations, while simultaneously decreasing the amount of money unions and associations could spend on fighting for workers’ rights. If Prop. 75 wins public employees will be left without an effective voice and those who wish to steal our pensions and rollback our labor rights will be virtually unopposed. Vote No on Prop. 75.

Finally, there is Proposition 76, the so called *School Funding. State Spending. Initiative Constitutional Amendment*. Is a very dangerous and damaging measure. Prop 76 slashes funding for our public schools, cutting nearly \$4 billion every year, or \$600 per student. It even overturns the voter-approved Proposition 98, eliminating the minimum funding guarantee for education.

Prop 76 also cuts funding for cities and counties, cutting police and firefighters, as well as local health care that protects children and the elderly. That means fewer police on the streets and fewer firefighters able to respond to emergencies. And as we park professionals know all too well local park agencies would face cuts, since park agencies often feel the budget ax early and often when cuts need to be made. Prop. 76 also undermines our democratic system of checks and balances by giving the Governor awesome new powers without any oversight. Under this initiative, the Governor could declare a “fiscal emergency” and cut funding for vital services like education, health care, fire and police without approval from anyone else. **Californians can’t afford proposition 76.** It would devastate our public schools, health care, fire and police (not to mention parks). It attacks our system of checks and balances. Vote No on Prop. 76.

As citizens and public servants we park professional need to be united on these critical issues facing us and our fellow public employees. Our retirement system is facing mounting attacks and now with Prop. 75 our political voice is threatened too. Finally, funding of our parks face a large threat from Prop. 76. Come November please vote No of Props. 75 and 76. Our pensions, political voices and funding are all threatened by these ill conceived and misleading measures.

# Volunteer Management

## (Continued from page 4)

Forsyth suggests that managing volunteers is a balancing act. She provides strategies that make it easier.

### Elements of a Volunteer Management Program

Forsyth refers to five elements of successful volunteer management:

**Assessment of Needs:** First, ask yourself these assessment questions: How many volunteers does the organization need? What tasks need to be done? What skills should volunteers have?

**Recruitment:** Next, devise a plan to identify and acquire the volunteers you need.

**Risk Management Audit, Interviewing, and Screening:** Assess the risk involved with volunteer positions. Create job descriptions for volunteer positions. Ensure appropriate screening techniques.

**Orientation, Training, and Monitoring:** Design an orientation process that helps volunteers understand their role. Provide a training program to develop needed skills. Initiate a continuous feedback and evaluation mechanism.

**Retention and Recognition:** Develop techniques, events, and programs that acknowledge volunteers' contributions.

As you put these elements of a successful volunteer program into practice, you'll discover how difficult it is to achieve a proper balance. For one thing, you must respond to volunteers' requests for short-term and one-time opportunities while maintaining longer-term volunteer assignments. Both are essential. You must preserve your volunteer program's integrity while devoting less time to some volunteer tasks.

At the same time, you must manage the risks associated with volunteer assignments—assessing what could go wrong and minimizing or avoiding the potential risk. You must “risk proof” volunteer positions that involve vulnerable populations. Vulnerable populations are those who are especially at risk because of their age or disabilities. Risk proofing involves conducting a risk management audit, in which you assess the following factors: 1) type of client, 2) setting, 3) type of activity, and 4) level of supervision.

Based on your assessment, designate the volunteer position low, medium, or high risk. Then decide whether you will eliminate, modify, or assume the risk.

With so many factors to consider, how do you balance the risks with the rewards of volunteering? Looking at volunteer management through “layers” may be the answer.

### The Layers of Necessity Approach to Volunteer Management

Layers of necessity refers to the degree of intensity required for effective volunteer management. The higher the risk associated with a volunteer job, the more intensive the screening process must be, and the more attention you must pay to that volunteer.

The layers of necessity approach varies the degree of time and attention for each of the five elements of effective volunteer management to ensure the efficiency and success of the placement. This approach was developed by Tessmer and Wedman for the instructional design field. They considered time, budgetary needs, and the resources available to the instructional designer and created layers to accommodate the varying levels of need. There are three layers of intensity:

**Layer 1** includes short-term volunteer opportunities such as one-time events, annual fund-raising activities, or short-term program assistance ranging from a few hours to a few months. These volunteer positions are usually very low risk, with no access to vulnerable populations.

**Layer 2** involves longer commitments, usually two to 12 months. Volunteer positions involved directly with programs and services often fall into this category. So do ad hoc board committees. Such committees are directed to a specific task and disbanded when the task is completed.

**Layer 3** is the most intensive. It accommodates the need for long-term volunteer commitments. Organizations that provide services to vulnerable populations usually require at least a one-year commitment. This is particularly important when the volunteer works directly with the public. The long-term volunteer position usually involves extensive screening, supervision, and evaluation. Board positions also fall into this layer, since they usually require at least a one-year term.

### Which Layer Should You Select?

When deciding what layer a volunteer job fits into, consider these factors:

1) **Time and Resources:** the length of the volunteer task and the human resources and materials needed to complete it.

2) **Impact and Risk:** the impact the volunteer task has on the organization and the degree to which loss, injury, or harm might occur during its completion.

For example, short-term, one-time events probably require less intensity in the steps of the volunteer management cycle. Long-term volunteer assignments are more time-intensive in terms of each of the steps.

### The Future of Volunteer Management

Accelerated technology, lifestyle changes, high unemployment, and increased competition for volunteers are factors volunteer managers are facing. To continue to meet community needs, organizations must be creative and flexible in managing volunteers. Being aware of the changing demographics in your community means adapting your volunteer management system to respond to changing needs. Developing a layers-of-necessity approach to volunteer management can be an important part of that response.

# Hot New State Law Will Help Protect Park Employees

by John Havicon

Next summer, when your patrolling around your parks on those hot days, make sure you have your bottle of water. Its the law! Actually that has been an Cal/OSHA regulation for some time now. But some new regulations regarding heat exhaustion and heat stroke are being added to help protect workers who work outdoors in hot weather.

After hearing of three heat related deaths in Southern California, Governor Schwarzeneger acted to prevent further heat related illnesses for employees who work outdoors. The Governor signed emergency regulations this August, requiring employers to provide employee training on heat illness, potable drinking water and access to a shaded area available to any worker suffering from heat illness or needing shade to prevent the onset of illness.

The Regulations will be overseen and monitored for compliance by Cal/OSHA. The regulations apply to all who work outdoors as a regular part of their job. The regulations 8 CCR 3395 are as follows:

- The regulation re-states current law requiring the employer to provide 1 quart of potable drinking water per employee per hour for the employees entire shift. The frequent drinking of water shall be encouraged.
- Access to shade. Employees suffering from heat illness or believing a preventive recovery period is needed, shall be provided access to an area with shade that is either open to the air or provided with ventilation or cooling for a period of no less than five minutes. Such access to shade shall be permitted at all times
- Training for all employees shall include:
  - The environmental and personal risk factors for heat illness;
  - Evaluating and controlling exposures to heat illness;
  - The importance of frequently consuming water during hot working conditions;
  - Acclimatizing to heat;
  - Type of heat related illness and signs and symptoms;
  - Reporting heat illnesses and emergency medical responses.

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## A Book to Report On

by Lee Hickinbotham Jr.

Like many of you, in my free time I like to pick up a book about our profession. I am especially interested in the book if is written by a former ranger. Well, the book I just finished reading was written by a former seasonal ranger. This ranger took pride in being a seasonal ranger. It was the perfect opportunity for this college instructor to live out a dream in the summer months. The book is titled "*I'm Just a Seasonal—The Life of a Seasonal Ranger in Yosemite National Park*" and is written by one of PRAC's founding fathers Thomas A. Smith or as we know him, Smitty.

Smitty shares his adventures as a seasonal ranger in Yosemite National Park as a mounted backcountry ranger from 1971-1988. Many of us looked at being a seasonal ranger as a stepping stone on the trail to becoming a permanent ranger. Smitty looked at being a seasonal ranger as an opportunity to protect the environment for future

generations and to educate the students at West Valley College with the knowledge, skills and abilities it takes to be a ranger. As I read the stories, I felt as if I was right there with him. Stories of rescues law enforcement, maintenance, trail work and interpretation. But most of all, it's a story of friendships.

This book is a not only a must read for all seasonal and full time rangers, it's a must read for anyone who wants to get an inside look of being a ranger.

So remember, take the time to read and enjoy the book.

A portion of the profits from the sale of this book will go to the Park Rangers Association of California Thomas A. Smith Scholarship, awarded to a student preparing for a career as a park ranger.

**Note:** *I'm Just a Seasonal—The Life of a Seasonal Ranger* by Tom Smith can be purchased direct from PRAC for \$12.00 including shipping and tax.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Shipping address: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of copies of *I'm Just a Seasonal—The Life of a Seasonal Ranger*: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed (number of copies x \$12.00 each): \_\_\_\_\_

Make your check payable to PRAC and send it and your request to:

Park Rangers Association of California, P. O. Box 153, Stewarts Point, CA 95480-0153

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**Submission deadlines ARE THE LAST day of JANUARY, MARCH, May, July, SEPTEMBER, AND NOVEMBER.**

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25 PERSONS-12 MAILINGS)..... \$150 \_\_\_\_\_  
STUDENT.....\$20 \_\_\_\_\_  
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**First Class**