

# The Signpost

November–December, 2013



## Elections

OK gang, it is that time of year again. This year we are electing a President, and Directors for Region 2, 4, and 6. If you or someone you know is interested in making a difference, throw your hat (or theirs) into the ring. Operators are standing by. (OK, so the Nomination Committee is really standing by.) Really it is not that difficult. Duties include, an article for the *Signpost*, (if I can do it so can you); taking on some challenges to move this organization and profession forward; and being there to try and direct members to the best info we have on current issues facing their agency or jobs. Probably the hardest part sometimes is getting members (that is you) involved. We all get something from this organization otherwise we

would not be reading this. If you have been taking all these benefits for a while maybe it is time to think about giving back a little. We are all here to help you make this an organization that works for you.

Nominations are accepted until November 15, with ballots going out in early December. You can send your nominations to our fearless leader at [President@calranger.org](mailto:President@calranger.org)



# From The Presidents Desk

*"Many small people, in many small places, do many small things, that can alter the face of the world."*

*Anonymous*

On October 16<sup>th</sup> I attended a small function in a small zoo in San Jose. The Heart of the Congo event, held annually by Happy Hollow Park and Zoo, raises money to support the Advanced Force Park Rangers in Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These brave men work long hours in the midst of a horrific civil war, some having gone years without pay, to protect the endangered Mountain Gorilla and their habitat.

Virungas Advance Force Park Ranger Program was created in 2006 as an emergency unit that could be deployed throughout Virunga National Park, assisting in the protection of Mountain Gorillas, protecting one of the last populations of hippo in the DRC and carrying out anti-charcoal-burning patrols. In addition, they provide essential backup and advise, support, and training when other rangers are overwhelmed with the challenges.

Virunga National Park was established by [King Albert I of Belgium](#) in 1925 as Africa's first national park and was designated a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) in 1979.

Happy Hollow Zoo has been supporting the Virunga Advance Force Rangers for over six years. Over that time over \$100,000 has been raised and the funds are sent to Virunga through the non-profit corporation WildlifeDirect. WildlifeDirect takes no administration fee for the funds that are sent. One hundred percent of the financial support goes to where it is intended. WildlifeDirect is a program of the Africa Conservation Fund, a US- and UK-registered charitable organization founded and chaired by African conservationist Dr. Richard Leakey, who is credited with putting an end to the elephant slaughter in Kenya in the 1980s.

While \$100,000 dollars seems like a small amount of money by American standards it is a large portion of the donations raised in support of our colleges at Virunga. Over the years the funds raised by Happy Hollow have been used to:

Provide salaries for Rangers who had not been paid in almost 10 years, and to equip them with uniforms, boots, tents and rations for patrols into the park.

Improve the water sanitation system at Bukima patrol post in the gorilla sector, which houses 17 rangers and used a 20-year-old well in which the water was filthy.

Restocked the pharmacy at the park headquarters, which serves the rangers and their families.

Help toward the purchase of a surveillance plane to provide aerial support for surveillance, getting law enforcement teams in place rapidly when poachers are located, and provide for medical evacuations and logistics.

Perhaps the most important area the funds have been allocated for is the establishment of a widows and orphans fund. Over 150 rangers in Virunga National Park have been killed in the line of duty over the last 10 years. One might think the ranger's biggest fear is death. We have been told their greatest fear is that their widows and orphaned children will be abandoned and left destitute in a society that cannot care for them.

A small zoo, a small event, a small dedicated group of people. Combined they make a huge impact in the lives of others and in protecting rare and endangered species.

Stay safe and don't ever think what you do isn't important. We can all make a difference one small step at a time.

**Pam Helmke**

# New Director for Orange County Parks

Stacy Blackwood was appointed as Director of OC Parks in September 2013, succeeding former Director Mark Denny, who was promoted to Chief Operating Officer in July. With an annual budget of \$130 million and more than 260 full-time staff, OC Parks is responsible for 60,000 acres of parkland, open space, and shoreline throughout the County of Orange. Providing public programs and recreational opportunities to more than twelve million visitors per year, the department is also charged with the stewardship of significant sensitive natural, cultural, and historic resources.

Stacy joined the County in 2012, and functioned in a dual capacity as a division manager for OC Parks' North parks operations and an administrative manager for OCCR's Central Project Office. As a parks operations manager, she was responsible for oversight of approximately 90 staff within nine parks in the northern region of the County, and development and implementation of the division operating budget, work plan, and performance standards consistent with OC Parks Strategic Plan and Balanced Scorecard metrics. As an administrative manager within the Central Project Office, she had full management responsibility for execution of a comprehensive internal performance assessment, focusing on core business objectives and service needs; organizational alignment, structure, and staff development; and standardization of project and construction management procedures consistent with cross-departmental customer objectives and industry best practices.

Her more than fifteen years of public and private sector experience include implementation and

management of multi-million dollar public works programs, strategic planning, financial management, resource conservation, urban planning and entitlement, and organizational development. Over the last eight years, Stacy's professional responsibilities have focused on City and County parks and open space management. She has worked for the cities of Irvine, San Clemente, and San Diego and as a consultant with the cities of Carlsbad, Palm Springs, National City, and Avalon. Her aptitude for needs analysis and delivery of solutions yielding positive internal and external outcomes has been demonstrated through her engagement in a wide range of policy and business initiatives, including: establishment of depreciation reserves for parks and open space assets; creation of green action and sustainability plans; facilitation of system-wide branding and sign age program; compensation studies and wage ordinance impact analysis; implementation of computerized maintenance management systems; partnership with private sector vendors for just-in-time commodities delivery and inventory management; negotiation of habitat conservation and resource protection plans; and execution of numerous high-profile public improvement programs and projects.

Stacy holds a Master's in Architecture from NewSchool of Architecture and Design in San Diego, a Master's in International Business and Public Policy from UCSD, and a Bachelor's in Spanish and French Linguistics from Trinity University. She was born and raised in San Diego, and enjoys backpacking, cooking, and volunteering in her leisure time.

*The history of America has been the story of Americans seizing, using, squandering, and belatedly protecting their natural heritage.*

*President John F Kennedy 1963*

## Park Rangers Association of California

# Valor and Life Saving Award Nominations

Public safety personnel are routinely charged with handling emergency situations, and may be called upon at any time to put their own personal safety at risk. Park Rangers and other park professionals fight wild land fires, conduct search and rescue operations, apprehend criminals, provide emergency medical services, and perform other duties to ensure the safety and welfare of the public they serve.

Periodically, park professionals will face emergency situations that are so extreme that by engaging in the emergency, they not only jeopardize their personal safety, but risk their own lives. In other instances park professionals may also act with great skill during a rescue or in rendering emergency medical care that their actions directly lead to saving a persons life.

There is nothing more precious than human life. There is nothing more noble than saving or attempting to save human life.

The Park Rangers Association of California would like to recognize those park professionals that go above and beyond. Anyone may nominate a park professional for an award. Nominees do not need to be Park Rangers or PRAC Members. The nominee need only be a uniformed park professional working for a

park or open space agency in California or Nevada.. Nominations are currently being accepted for:

The Medal of Valor, our highest award, may be presented to any park professional who risks his or her own life to an extraordinary degree in saving or attempting to save the life of another person, or sacrifices him or her self in a heroic manner for the benefit of others. This award recognizes the recipient's demonstration of unusual courage involving a high degree of personal risk in the face of danger. The heroic act does not have to be related to the recipient's official duties nor occur at their official duty station.

The Medal of Honor may be presented by the Association to individuals whose actions are admirable, but do not rise to the level required for the Award for Valor.

Life Saving Award may be present by the Association to an individual whose direct actions and superior service lead to the saving of a life.

If you are aware of any uniformed park professional that you feel is deserving of recognition please go to [www.calranger.org](http://www.calranger.org) for more information. Nominations are due by January 1, 2014 for incidents that occurred in calendar years 2012 and 2013.

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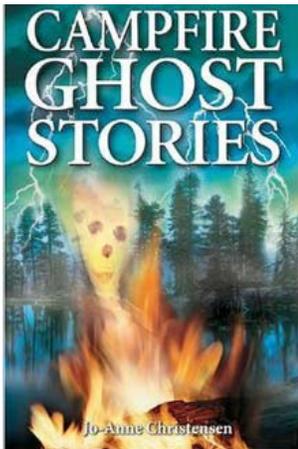
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## From the Bedside Table of Patrick Boyle Region 1

# Campfire Ghost Stories

### by Jo-Anne Christensen

I have been feeling a bit like the Ghost Hunters lately. I have been searching for some good short ghost stories to tell around the campfire. Honestly I spent a few too many late sleepless nights reading way beyond my bedtime. (I need all the beauty rest at my age I can get.) I read some truly bad ghost stories and a few all too real encounters that left me with some nightmares. I finally think I discovered a book with a nice balance of tales. This book has a number of short, easily adaptable creepy stories, which are not only entertaining but just chilling enough to give you goose bumps. Almost every night on my evening patrols I get asked if I know or can tell any good ghost stories. They are as much a camping



tradition as the Smore, and I am always looking for some new material.

This book is broken down into three chapters all filled with short ghost stories from beyond the grave. The first section "*Stories Told by Firelight*", is probably the best for a good tale around the campfire. The other two sections, "*Stories Told by Moonlight*" and "*Stories Told by Candlelight*," are a little longer and more involved but still fit well within the campfire tale lore. The internet has also become a hot bed for ghost stories. If you are looking for more creepy tales just search under **Campfire Ghost Stories** and you can get lost in the tales from beyond the grave. As always I hope you get a chance to do a little reading by the fire this winter. And hopefully these tales will not keep you awake all night. Just remember to leave the night light on when you go to bed. And whatever you do check under the bed and in the closet before retiring for the night.

# 2013 Thomas Smith Scholarship Award

by T. Drew Mashburn, Committee Chairman

The PRAC Scholarship Committee is proud to announce the awarding of the annual “Thomas Smith Scholarship.” The committee is comprised of Thomas “Smitty” Smith, Jeff Ohlfs and myself. The committee is quite happy to inform you that their vote was unanimous.

This year’s recipient is Helen A. Ale of San Jose, California and currently a student there at West Valley College. Helen’s current major is Park Management. Helen more than met all of the Selection Guidelines and Eligibility Guidelines as required by the “Scholarship Application.” The committee found her application to be quite impressive.

Helen sent the following letter to the PRAC Board of Directors and Scholarship Committee:

“I would like to thank the Park Ranger Association of California Scholarship Committee for awarding the Thomas Smith Scholarship to me. I am truly honored to accept this award. Thank you President Helmke for coming to West Valley College and speaking to my internship class about your organization, scholarship opportunities, and working in the City of San Jose Parks. This scholarship will truly support my future educational goals and help me reach my goal of becoming a Ranger. Thank you again for bestowing this honor upon me. I am truly grateful and appreciative.



Sincerely,

*Helen A. Ale*

Job well done, Helen! Your PRAC Board of Directors and the PRAC Scholarship Committee are extremely happy that persons of your high caliber are working so diligently to enter the professional career of Park Ranger.

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## Search and Rescue Training in Region 2

On August 22<sup>nd</sup> twenty-seven park professionals from eight agencies came together for a full day of training in the *Initial Response to a Missing Person Incident*. Park rangers and other uniformed park personnel are typically the first persons contacted for a missing person in our parks and open spaces. The actions taken by the first responders can be critical to a successful search. Kim Aufhauser, from the West Valley College Park Management Department, donated his time to share his experience in the field of search and rescue with the course participants. Kim has 16 years of experience as a National Park Service ranger, including over five years in Yosemite National Park working and leading numerous missing person events.

The course covered key elements such as locating and protecting the point last seen or last known location, preserving evidence such as tracks and

scent articles, and interviewing the reporting party and witnesses. This interactive class was highly rated and due to student demand Kim will be teaching a follow up course on the basics of tracking in the Spring of 2014.

PRAC would like to thank Kim for donating his time and expertise to the Association.



# When a Good Tree Goes Bad

## Patrick Boyle Region 1

This year a tree in my park finally tipped the balance scales and turned our season upside down and inside out. My campground is situated in a grove of old growth redwood trees and one of these gentle giants started letting us know it was going to lay down on the job. When a 1000 year old tree starts speaking to you after being silent for the better part of its lifespan it is time to start listening. This is a 300-foot tall redwood, with a 12-foot diameter, and a beautiful canopy cover. Unfortunately at some time during its life span it suffered some severe fire damage that burned out the back half of the tree. This spring after a heavy wind event, the tree started snapping and popping, while letting out internal groans and started showing ever growing and widening cracks. At times some of these pops sounded like 22 shots. Over my 20 years here in the park any tree that starts making sounds like this have only stood for 4 months to 4 years before it fails completely. (Note.... these trees were not in a target rich area.)

We called in the state park old growth ecologist and he agreed that the tree was a definite concern and a hazard. Unfortunately for us the tree is located in the middle of our campground. The direction it wants to go threatens not only the campground, the bathroom / shower facility, a popular picnic area, and a number of campsites. Our Hazard Tree Program dictates we close the target area or remove the targets. That is an area a tree length and a half, or 450-feet in the fall direction. This pretty well closed our camp ground loop due to the size of this tree, the large potential for a domino effect, and the target area. Most tree failure scenarios do not account for domino effect, but old growth redwoods are a different breed of tree. When you have a tree that has more biomass than an acre of rainforest it definitely makes quit the boom when it falls, even if no one is there to hear it. This one has a high potential to bounce off and possibly knock down a number of other trees when it fails. My old growth climber/faller did not even want to get up in the tree to attempt any rigging or topping, and considers it a totally ground based operation.

Our problem is that this tree started showing increased signs of failure in March. The park is considered critical habitat for Spotted Owls and Marbled Murrelets. This restricts our ability to remove the tree during the breeding season. (March 15–September 15.) So 2/3 of our campground, a popular picnic/swimming area were closed for the summer. Trust me this became more work than having things open and running normally. Needless to say, at the end of the summer season the tree was still standing. Sometimes I think we over rate the hazard potential and failure of trees, but I certainly do not feel that way about this tree. This one is one that scares me. Even my faller is looking at a possible demolition job due to the trees condition. There is no crystal ball we can look at to determine exactly when this tree, or for that manner, any tree will fail. It has brought up some very interesting conversations about how we proceed in the future.

Creating a Habit Conservation Plan for this type of situation. This can be expensive and still does not rule out the possible closure of areas or the campground during the nesting season, if another one of these majestic trees decides to fail. It would allow for an incidental take permit to remove habitat but that still usually still requires a 60-day permit process for all the agencies to sign off. (We are currently perusing this option in the short run.)

Attempting to change the type of activity that goes on in the park. We could convert this very popular local campsite into a day use area only. This reduces the target rating by not having people under the trees 24-hours. There may be some money available to move the campsite to an adjacent piece of property that has been logged and is not situated in the old growth. However local politics and locals alike do not seem to like this idea and it will be an uphill battle. Many other big parks are going this route. (National/ State)

Many of my strongest voices in the park, who oppose the cutting of any tree for any reason,

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# When a Good Tree Goes Bad

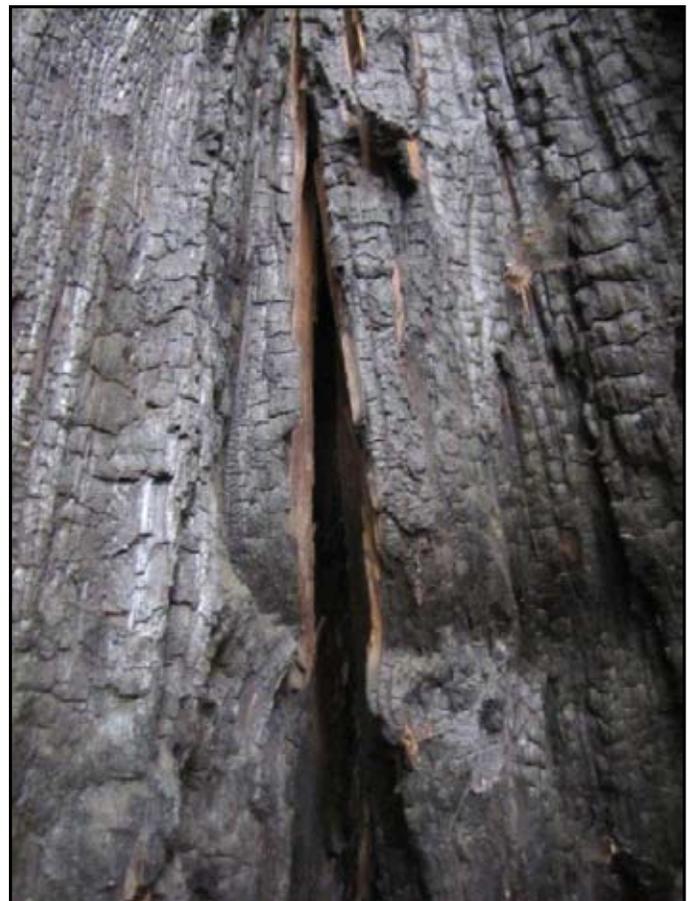
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started changing their minds once they were not able to camp in their favorite site. They began to realize the severity of the situation as well as the bigger picture when it comes to recreating in an old growth forest. Most of the old growth timber fallers I have spoken to say they would never spend the night here especially during the wet season or in windy conditions. (This is when most failures occur .As a side note we do close the park during high wind events.) Maybe another management tool we should consider is converting over to a seasonal campground. (Also a political battle.)

This situation has also brought to a head a conversation we have been having for a long time with other agencies as to how best manage a recreation area that has now been deemed critical habitat. Especially since we (collectively as humans) have cut almost all the old growth down. (We are down to the last 3.5% of what was standing before we started logging.) What old growth that is left is either in parks or in small tracts on timber property that they are restricted from harvesting. The park has been around long before they ever even thought they might run out of old growth to cut. The other edge to this sword is the idea of how do we get people to appreciate and take stewardship of old growth if we start removing them from the equation? There is nothing like being able to spend the night under these trees with the owls calling and the moonlight cascading through the canopy creating narrow shafts of light through the forest. *Pure Magic!*

This is a conversation I am glad we are having. I know that these issues will probably not be resolved in my tenure here. But it is one of the many big picture issues that we (park managers) face along with the day to day operation of parks. So at the moment we lost about \$20+K in revenue this summer not counting the cost of trying to safely put this tree on the ground. This is huge hit for a small department like ours that pretty well runs off its revenue recovery. There

is also the cost of cleanup and repair of facilities, including bathrooms, if something goes wrong in the falling of this tree. In my opinion that is a small price compared to the cost of having this tree possibly fall and risk the lives of any park visitors.



*Expanding crack in redwood tree*

# The Public Resource Impact of Unlawful Encampments.

**Pam Helmke, Park Ranger**

Homelessness, a major social issue across California, is also having a serious impact on the land and water resources of our states parks and open spaces. Much like the impacts from marijuana grows, the affects of unlawful encampments are damaging the lands, polluting the waters and impacting wildlife.

Removal of unlawful encampments can be a difficult and persistent issue. In Santa Clara County alone there are an estimated 8000 homeless individuals. In addition, there have been a number of court rulings that can make it difficult to enforce anti-camping ordinances. AB 5, the "Homeless Bill of Rights," is now working its way through the State Legislature. If passed, AB 5 will make it very difficult to regulate unlawful encampments on public lands.

It must be remembered that homelessness is not a crime and that this special needs population is entitled to all the rights and privileges we accord to any person in the state. That said, transients, like all other violators, can be prosecuted for any resource crimes committed.

Resource crimes that commonly occur on public lands in and around unlawful encampments can directly affect wildlife or affect their habitat. Trash deposited into state waters can result in significant wildlife impacts. The two primary issues are entanglement and ingestion with entanglement the more common issue.

Entanglement results when an animal becomes encircled or ensnared by debris. Entanglement can occur accidentally, or when the animal is attracted to the debris as part of its normal behavior or out of curiosity.



*Beaver trapped in packing strap ©Greg Kerekes 2013*

Entanglement can cause wounds; impair an animal's ability to swim; and can also cause strangulation or suffocation. Ingestion can occur accidentally, but usually animals feed on debris because it looks like food. Trash ingestion can lead to starvation or malnutrition if the ingested items block the intestinal tract and prevent digestion.

Other waste products associated with unlawful encampments include household chemicals, gasoline, pesticides, soaps and human waste that are discharged directly into the water.

Physical damage to the environment causing damage or complete loss of habitat is also a common problem.

Some encampment occupants have make significant changes to the contours of stream banks by digging into the soil to create tent pads, trails and stairways. The remodeled areas are frequently stripped of vegetation and become high unstable during the rainy season resulting in erosion of the embankment and excessive siltation into the waters.

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*Homeless campsite*

# The Public Resource Impact of Unlawful Encampments.

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Transients will also create illegal fish traps, set snares or otherwise poach wildlife. Some transients take wildlife for personal consumption but others will take to barter and trade for drugs or alcohol.

Protecting our public resources is a vital part of the park ranger profession. Park Rangers with law enforcement powers should strongly consider regular enforcement of resource laws to protect areas heavily impacted by unlawful encampments. Rangers that do not have enforcement authority should consider educating their local law enforcement agencies or requesting assistance from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Common resource violations encountered in unlawful encampment impacted areas can include:

1602(a) Fish and Game Code—Alter bed, bank or channel without a permit

2000 Fish and Game Code—Unlawful Take

5650 (a) Fish and Game Code—Deposit in, permit to pass into, or place where it can pass into the waters of this state any of the following:

(1) Any petroleum, residuary product of petroleum...

(6) Any substance or material deleterious to fish, plant life, mammals, or bird life.

5652 (a) Fish and Game Code – Deposit garbage or other trash within 150 feet of the high water mark of a stream

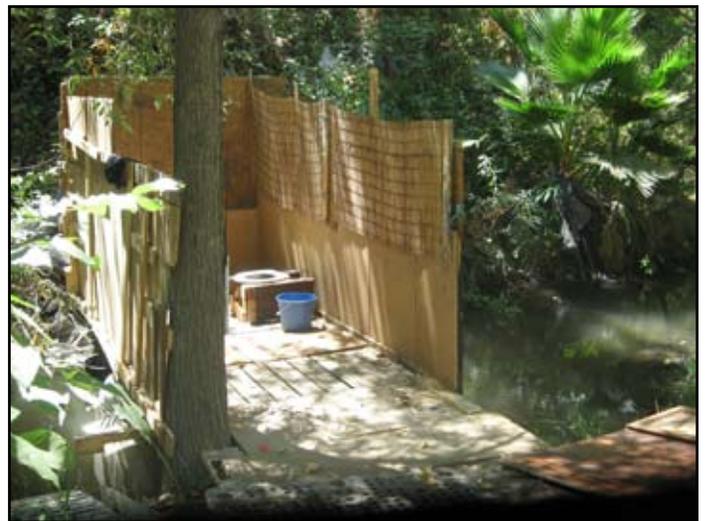
374.7 PC – Litter within State Water Ways

Section 700. Title 14, California Code of Regulations) (a) Possession of Sport Fishing License: Every person, while engaged in taking any fish, amphibian or reptile, shall have a valid sport fishing license on their person in their immediate possession, except when diving as provided in Section 7145 of the Fish and Game Code.

Changes in how the public and the courts perceive the homeless situation are evolving and there is some consideration in allowing transients to camp on public lands without penalty. Regardless of a persons housing status the laws protecting our states natural resources will still stand.



*Items found at homeless campsite.*



*Toilet discharging directly to stream.*

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