

The Signpost

November–December, 2016



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 person's life.

There is nothing more precious than human life. There is nothing nobler 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, Oregon 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 for more information. Nominations are due by December 31, 2016 for incidents that occurred in calendar year 2015-2016.

Under the Flat Hat

by Matt Cerkel

Just after returning from a Yosemite backpacking trip last month the news story broke of about the hostile work environment, due to sexual harassment, gender bias and bullying, faced by many female park employees in Yosemite. At a Congressional hearing on the issue it came out that 20 employees interviewed by investigators "described Yosemite as a hostile work environment as a result of the behavior and conduct of the park's superintendent." It was also reported that "park employees accused the park superintendent of failing to adequately address the widespread complaints of harassment." Within a week, Yosemite's Superintendent, Don Neubacher, and his wife Patty who was the Deputy Regional Director for the Pacific West Region both announced their retirements from the National Park Service. This was not the only such incident in the National Park Service's Centennial Year, the superintendents of the Grand Canyon and Canaveral National Seashore were also removed over similar circumstances. I find these situations to be disheartening, in 2016 you think we should have moved beyond accepting gender bias and sexual harassment in the parks.

California and Yosemite National Park have played an important role in the history of women in the park ranger profession. In 1918, Clare Marie Hodges is hired as a seasonal park ranger in Yosemite thus becoming the National Park Service's and California's first female park ranger. This was one year before the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote. In 1921 Enid Michael became Yosemite's first female ranger naturalist (interpretive park ranger) where she served for 20 years. She was an accomplished naturalist and botanist. She published over 500 articles about Yosemite. Hopefully, in the future, Yosemite can be a catalyst of change by exposing the ongoing issue of gender bias and sexual harassment in the parks in order to truly put these issues behind us in parks and other professions too.

Looking further into the history of women in the National Park Service, the second female ranger hired by the Park Service was Isabel Bassett Wasson, who served as a ranger naturalist in 1920. Horace Albright, then the superintendent of Yellowstone, hired her to lead interpretive tours and give lectures about the geology of the park. "After she was hired she wrote to the Wellesley alumnae magazine, 'Next summer I am to be a ranger in Yellowstone Park. You never heard of a woman ranger? Well, neither have I.' She gave over 200 public talks on the geology of the park that summer, and is credited with setting the template for interpretive talks by NPS rangers. She suggested that the park hire college students on summer break to give talks (become seasonal ranger naturalists), and this became a tradition at Yellowstone and many other parks." In 1940 Gertrude Cooper becomes the first female superintendent in the National Park Service. In 1947 the first official uniforms for women were authorized by the National Park Service. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 which included Title VII was enacted, prohibiting discrimination by employers on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. More National Park Service jobs became open to women. But it took until 1978 for women at the National Park Service to be authorized to wear the standard park service uniform. Prior to that the NPS female uniform "did not look like a ranger," as they were usually dresses or skirts, and had smaller badges and different hats than male counterparts, at one point even including what can only be described as "go-go boots." <http://www.parksconservancy.org/about/newsletters/park-e-ventures/2013/04-main.html>

Which brings us to today. As park agencies, not just the National Park Service, struggle with the issues of diversity and inclusion in the parks and their workforces, why is gender

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bias and even sexual harassment still being accepted by some in our profession? I know the National Park Service struggles with this issue and other issues because there is a seemingly ongoing tradition of supervisors, chiefs, superintendents and directors “circling the wagons” to “protect” the image of the agency. At times the Park Service seems to go after those reporting wrongdoing and protect the wrongdoers at all costs. One just has to read about Chief Ranger Robert Danno’s experience to see how far the Park Service will go after an employee who “blew the whistle” on wrongdoing. To learn more about his experience, you can read his book “Worth Fighting For—A Park Ranger’s Unexpected Battle Against Federal Bureaucrats & Washington Redskins Owner Dan Snyder.” <http://www.nationalparkstraveler.com/2013/10/ranger-robert-danno-reaches-settlement-national-park-service-takes-new-career-path24050> I also personally know a national park ranger who reported a mistake made by an acting supervisor that cost that ranger a certification and after reporting the mistake the leadership of the park turned on the reporting employee, harassed them and even violated labor laws until the employee resigned. When the employee reported the harassment that led their resignation to the National Park Service their “investigation” protected the supervisors and managers that committed the harassment and violated labor laws. Another ranger I know previously has dealt with a male supervisor who would only forward job announcements to male employees, excluded the female rangers from any park or program planning, and assign the women to a disproportionate amount of public contact duties, and would only mentor the male rangers, the behavior continued even after it was reported to the Chief and Superintendent. Sadly, that park’s unwillingness to address obvious gender bias is teaching some rangers that behavior is ok. In such climates no wonder employees are scared to speak up when they see wrongdoing, such as gender bias and sexual harassment.

A recent Los Angeles Times article stated “Jeff Ruch, executive director of the advocacy group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, argues that the anguish expressed by some employees stems from the agency’s basic structure. “The part of the Park Service culture that facilitates these problems is a sort of caste system within a militaristic hierarchy led by officials who believe they can do no wrong,” he said. “That problem is compounded by a decentralized federal agency in which park superintendents have the autonomy of a ship captain.” “The result is a dysfunctional power dynamic,” he added, “in which problems raised by rank-and-file employees are not allowed to leave the park, or are strongly discouraged.” Indeed, the Park Service ranks close to the bottom among 320 federal agencies ranked by the annual Best Places to Work in the Federal Government survey.” In fact, the National Park Service ranked 259th on the list in 2015 and it has steadily declined over the past six years.

Our parks deserve better than this! The National Park Service failure in effectively dealing with the issues of gender bias and sexual harassment impacts park agencies at all levels. Often when people think of parks and park rangers they first think of the National Park Service. How many women and minorities might choose not to join our profession because they feel they will face some form of bias or harassment in the workplace that will not be dealt with? As someone who has encouraged and mentored men and women into the park ranger profession I know we collectively are better than this. I hope these recent revelations will lead to real change, the many dedicated employees of the National Park Service and the park ranger profession deserve better!

Mountain Lion Closure

by Candice Hubert

This last month at Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, we had several mountain lion sightings which caused us to close the park for five days. It started with one trail runner who spotted a mountain lion on the trail where he was running. He did all the right things of making himself look large and yelling to scare off the animal. At first the lion did not appear to back away but then left the area so the runner continued on his way. The same day we had two more sightings on different trails after 5pm. One mountain biker said a mountain lion jumped out of the tree in front of him startling him. He raised his bike and the cat went into the brush. Others on the trails also reported seeing a mountain lion in the general area of the mountain biker.

In addition to these sightings at Whiting Ranch there were additional sightings at O'Neil Regional Park which is our sister park 3 miles away. Due to the frequent sightings over a short period of time, the Game Wardens advised us to close both parks to allow the animal time to leave the area and for them to investigate.

The media attention grew after the first day in our parking lot. Channel 2, 4 and 7 drove into our Glenn Ranch lot to interview park users who had seen the mountain lion. They stayed all day getting various stories from different visitors.

So we closed our parks for the safety of visitors and had a challenging time of getting about 26 staff members for two parks to keep the park closed to the public. We had each gate covered and instructions were given to volunteers and ranger reserves about what to tell the public as to the closure.

I did tracking each day with another ranger but did not find any cougar tracks just bobcat, deer, coyote, brush rabbits and quail. The Game Wardens tracked a mountain lion but it went up a steep rock face where they could no longer follow.

After five long 13 hour days, we reopened. Ironically, the day after opening another mountain lion was seen at O'Neil Park. The below photo was sent to me by a park visitor but I never found out where this photo was taken. Park Rangers always have good stories and never a dull moment.



Technology in the Parks – Mobile ID

Pam Helmke, Senior Park Ranger

The City of San Jose's Watershed Protection Team (WPT) is a specialized park ranger unit in the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services. It is assigned to patrol the City's riparian corridor trail system to deal with the impacts of unlawful encampments and illegal dumping. The unit is a joint operation funded by the City of San Jose Housing Department's Homeless Response Unit, the Santa Clara Valley Water District and the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services. The team also works closely with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The WPT focuses on enforcement of resource protection and local ordinances to prevent damage to the City's watershed including three major streams that provide salmonid habitat. The City currently has 54 miles of riparian trails open to the public and are planning to build out to 100 miles of hiking and biking trails across the Santa Clara Valley.

The WPT rangers encounter a large number of transients during their patrols and many of these people do not have valid forms of identification. Rangers frequently encounter people who provide false or no identification and in response to this issue the Ranger Program implemented a Mobile ID program.

Mobile identity checking (or Mobile ID) are software applications combined with hardware to allow for the collection of a fingerprint in the field for use by law enforcement to automatically check the identity of individuals in the field. The software can operate on handheld devices, mobile data terminals or tablet devices to wirelessly connect the fingerprint taken in the field to the local Automatic Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS), with a connection to National Criminal Information Center (NCIC).

Working with the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Department, who manages the local AFIS database, park rangers selected the Intermec CN70 handheld device and mobichk AFIS fingerprint capture device

with the associated software provided through Mobizent LLC—the approved vendor for Santa Clara County.

The fingerprint capture device used in conjunction with the handheld device captures the fingerprint in approved National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) compliant formats and stores these fingerprints to ensure only quality prints are taken by the rangers. The fingerprints are then wirelessly transmitted for processing with AFIS data base. The handheld unit can also send the fingerprint to the Department of Justice (DOJ) data base to search for an ID.

Using Mobile ID in the field requires that the Ranger have probable cause to arrest or issue a criminal citation to a person who is unable to provide a valid form of identification. San Jose's Mobile ID policy requires that the subject voluntarily provide their finger print.

Once the fingerprint is scanned the device will indicate if a "hit" or match has occurred. The identifying information associated with the match; typically including name, date of birth and descriptors; is visible to the Ranger on the handhelds screen. If a booking photo is available the hand held device can display the photo. A "match" on the device is NOT sufficient to make the final ID. The arresting Ranger is required to confirm that the individual is the correct person. This is typically done by comparing the data provided by the database to the physical characteristics of the individual being detained. As with all automated finger print systems a positive identification by finger prints must be made by a trained finger print examiner.

The WPT began using the device in July and has noted several positive results. Some individuals will voluntarily provide their correct when shown the Mobile ID device, others have been positively identified by the device including individuals with active warrants that should not be in our parks and open spaces.

While not inexpensive, the device is proving to be a valuable tool for protecting our visitors and our natural resources. As more park agencies are being tasked with handling the issues associated with homelessness, unlawful encampments and illegal dumping on public lands new technology, such as Mobile ID may be beneficial to other agencies.



What are parks anyway?

by Tom Smith

Parks are special places to many people and for many different reasons. I had a friend that owned a local gas station who never missed his “annual trip to Yosemite.” For years, he would get a reservation at the Yosemite Lodge and lounge around the pool all day for a week. To people like Bill, it was his way of enjoying the park. I am certain that Bill enjoyed his surroundings very much, and those surroundings left him in a better frame of mind when he returned to his job of pumping gas and fixing cars. There is really nothing wrong with what Bill does, by the way. Parks are, indeed for people. Down deep Bill really did go to Yosemite because of a love for things natural despite what he did there, Yosemite was a great place to just be.

I often think about where my love of things natural and parks came from. It had to come from somewhere. I have spent a lot of time outdoors. But that cannot be the only reason. Lots of people spend time outside. Time on the farm and time with the Boy Scouts certainly had influenced me. But there has to be something more deep seated than that. Could it be a sense of curiosity that I had been given through birth? Perhaps. Maybe there had been a great teacher or mentor in my past. Perhaps it was someone who passed knowledge on to others. Certainly an outdoor recreation class that I took at Indiana University taught by Reynald Carlson was a huge influence. Dr. Carlson was a great motivator. But where did people like Professor Carlson get their sense of wonder about the outdoors? What tells someone that what you see in nature is beautiful? Why do people not see the beauty in parks like Yosemite or, locally, Mount Madonna or Calero, in Santa Clara County and others do? Like my friend Bill, parks mean many things to many people.

According to noted biologist E.O. Wilson, there seems to be a gravitational pull of nature on the human psyche. He calls it biophilia, or a tendency for humans to affiliate with life and lifelike processes.¹ Researchers have found that people of all cultures, when given the freedom to select where it is they would like to live, picked several choices. One was in a high place where they could look far and wide, preferable over a park savanna with copses of scattered trees and to be near a body of water, like a lake or stream. These preferences have been passed on for generation to generation as far back as primeval times. Man would find places to live that allowed protection of trees and height, a view of wildlife, and a place to obtain water.² People all around the urban area where I live, seek high places in an urban/wildland interface in which to live. They are the most expensive homes. My brother and his family moved “out of town” in order to have open space. His patch of ground was a perfect place, pond and all. I envied him. It is a dream I have had all my life that I would find to be unfulfilled. Parks then became my “escape” into the natural world. Not only does it appear that the natural world is embedded in our genes, but in other aspects of our being. Psychologists have discovered that just a view of natural environments generate a feeling of tranquility and a decline of moods of fear and anger and in some cases, even lower blood pressures.³ Buildings often have offices that open into landscaped patios because employees reported fewer feelings of stress and greater job satisfaction.⁴ Architects often design buildings to bring the outside, inside. That is exactly what I told the architect when we added a new room to our house. The result was a glassed room.

To some people parks are like a temple. A place like Yosemite National Park and the cathedral redwoods in our county and state parks fill me with awe. So much so, that it is at times a religious experience to just visit there. I find myself day-dreaming all the time about being in a park somewhere and what it might be like to just be there and out of San Jose California, the tenth largest city in America and back in Yosemite. A large part of my heart is there. Is it the waterfalls and the rushing

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¹ Wilson, E.O., *The Creation*, W.W. Norton, New York, New York, page 63

² Ibid, page 66

³ Ibid, page 69

⁴ Ibid, page 69

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water? Or maybe it was the small fern “grottos” that good friend and long time park visitor showed me when I was the ranger at Merced Lake Ranger Station. Maybe it is about the wildflowers in secret meadows where shafts of light shine down through the trees, or maybe even about the doe that had her fawns each summer in a patch of tall Larkspur in Buck Camp Meadow. Early in the summer, she would bring them out for my family to see, often grazing in the corn lilies next to the cabin.

There is also the silence of winter and the beauty of a snow covered landscape. I noticed how quiet Yosemite was when I snow shoed to Orstrander Lake one winter with friends. Terry Tempest Williams in her book “Hour of Land,” says that parks are breathing spaces for a society that increasingly holds it’s breath. I was asked by a Yosemite park visitor on a stormy summer day, if I hated the rain. I had to tell her that I loved the Park in all moods. I will admit, however, I didn’t much care for being on a horse when lightning was around.

I assume that I have absorbed, somehow, through the culture that I am living in and the people I surround myself with, my love for things natural. The curious reasons that everything alive could somehow be connected will stay with me the rest of my life. How something as tiny as a redwood seed, could become the tallest living thing in the world astounds me. And how fire helps that seed to grow, and even a small squirrel, that cuts the cone from the tree had a place in the scheme of things.

I attended a California park ranger conference some time ago, and the Key Note Speaker was Gary Machlis, a National Park Service scientist. Gary talked about what parks meant to him. As I began typing this, I remembered some of the words that Gary gave to us that day long ago. Gary mentioned temples, along with other reasons why we have parks. He said that parks are also places set aside for their natural diversity and their interest to science. Places for people like Gary to study those things I asked about in the paragraph above. They are places of science. Dr. Jan van Wagtenonk, Research Scientist for the United States Geological Survey, has stated that science has been instrumental in the management of Yosemite since before its designation as a National Park. That role intensified as backcountry use increased in the seventies.⁵ Bill Mott, former California State and National Park Director had once said that parks are the colleges and universities of our environment. How best it is to study things natural in places natural. Antibiotics come from plants. Could be parks could also hold the mystery for the cure for cancer, or for AIDs. That is not a far-fetched thought. Many plants on this planet’s open spaces have yet to be discovered.

Another of Gary’s thoughts was about the fact that there are some people that sadly see parks only as places for commercial activity. Places where money can be made. Like my friend Bill, the gas station operator, parks mean different things to different people. Concessions and concession operations are there because of public demands and the fact that park agencies think they are needed and they do not want to provide that service themselves. Trying to get a room to stay in Yosemite sometime brings that abundantly clear. My answer always to privatization is that parks need passionate employees and there is no better place to find these people than in park agencies, and the non-profit groups that support parks. The passion about things natural or cultural should never be profit driven. John Muir said that the “money changers are in the temple,” when talking of the demise of Hetch Hetchy Valley. We do not want that to happen inside our parks in modern times, either. Gary told our conference that there should be no price tag on places like Liberty Bell,

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⁵ Van Wagtenonk, Jan “*Role of Science in Sustainable Management of Yosemite Wilderness*,” USDA Forest Service Proceedings, RMRS-P-27, 2003, page 225

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and Yellowstone, and other national treasures. There should be no price tags on local and state parks, either.

However, parks are also the targets for Ecotourism and are an important part of this Nation and the world's economy. There are millions of dollars spent each year by people from all over the world, visiting the parks of all nations. Think about what the average family might spend visiting a local county park or state park, or for a trip to Yosemite or Yellowstone. Gas, food, lodging, equipment, are purchased from local stores and gateway communities. Yet when economic times are bad, parks are often the ones to take the monetary hits. As of this writing, Arizona is closing some state parks, and California has cut way back on when some parks are open. I am sure glad I don't own a business outside a state or national park! California State Senator who was for the closing of a local State Park in his district found out how important that park was to his district's economy. He quickly became a supporter of keeping them open.

Parks are also things cultural and are a reminder of our past. As I wrote interpretive plans for our local park district, I found that all land has a history. This was also brought home to me quickly, when I was assigned the backcountry position at Buck Camp in the South end of Yosemite. The old Buck Camp cabin is historic. Built in 1929 of vertical logs, the site where it stands was once an Army outpost. I thought that it was named Buck Camp because I had seen some pretty magnificent bucks in the meadow back of the cabin, but my research about the place told me that it was named that because that is where they sent buck privates when the army patrolled the park. That bit of information turned me on to the history of why the cavalry were there, what they did, and how that helped to save the very park I was working in. For several years there has been no ranger stationed there and the Buck Camp cabin had been left in disrepair. Dr. Jan told me that on his annual summer pack trip through Yosemite backcountry, he found someone stationed at the cabin. The Yosemite Conservancy had found the funds to not only fix the place up but to put someone there again.

It is pretty obvious that parks and open spaces are very important for the quality of life of all people and that they are more than "just nice to have." The Mission Statement for Santa Clara County Parks says that it is our duty to provide, protect and preserve parklands for enjoyment, education and inspiration of this and future generations. You could not put that any better.

Disturbing trends are beginning to happen that will effect parks and outdoor spaces everywhere. Over the years, there has been a huge urbanization of America. A very high percent of all people now live in urban areas and the resulting development is encroaching upon all of our parks, county/regional, state, and national. Wildlife corridors that allow critters to migrate from one open space to another are being cut off by housing and shopping centers and by highways and freeways. This causes parks to become "islands" in a sea of development that will eventually cause unhealthy wildlife populations caused by genetic inbreeding. Mountain lions are beginning to appear in backyards, coyotes are roaming the streets in the city that I live in, and the deer are eating the roses.

The residents of the County I live in should be extremely happy that Bob Amyx, former Santa Clara County Park Director, among others, placed a Charter Amendment on the ballot in the early seventies that gave our local park agency dollars for land purchase and, eventually, for operations. Very critical at the time, the money generated has just started to preserve lands before development closes in. Since that time over fifty thousand acres of land have been preserved for future generations in our County to enjoy. I am personally happy that I live in a state that defends it's natural character, and provides open space lands. I often reminded my students that it was a great place to learn to be a ranger.

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Now “Seeing” is not a popular activity for our youngest generation, turning more toward playing electronic games or into structured recreation with parental supervision. Most modern children are not that close to nature and therefore beginning to lack the ethics necessary to take care of the land. They are spending more time in activities like soccer than spending time outdoors just communing with their surroundings like I had the opportunity to do as a child. Even organizations like the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts are not as popular with young people anymore. An article written by Donna St. George of the Washington Post, and published in the San Jose California Mercury News on June 25th, 2007, states that there has been a 50% decline since 1997 in the number of children 9 through 12 that spent time in the outdoors in other than organized sports. The proportion then went from 16 to 8 percent today. This research, accomplished by Sandra Hofferth of the University of Maryland, also showed an increase in computer playtime and time spent watching television and video games for the same age group. That is a worrisome trend. In a few years, that age group will be the ones that the outdoor profession has to draw from for new employees and will be in charge of the environment in which we live. How we value lands comes from outdoor experiences and not from a classroom or from structured recreation. Now there are factions of our local government that want our regional park system to be more urban with more lands for structured recreation

There has been some effort in trying to turn this trend around. This has partly been due to the publishing of a bestseller book by Richard Louv, entitled “The Last Child in the Woods.” Louv says that if we do not expose children to nature we are going to pay the price in the future.⁶ I believe that Louv is right on and hope readers make him a rich man by reading his book.

⁶ “Indoor Children Worrying Parents” Donna St. George, Washington Post, Published article in San Jose Mercury News, San Jose California, June 25th, 2007

Park Rangers Association of California (PRAC)

2017 California Parks Training and Conference

SAVE THE DATE

WHEN: February 27 th – March 1 st	WHERE: La Qunita, California Embassy Suites	COST: \$250 Members \$275 Non-Members Hotel - \$110/night
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Registration to follow

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