

# The Signpost

March-April, 2017



## 2017 California Parks Conference

The conference is rapidly approaching and I encourage everyone to get their registration turned in if you have not already done so. Anyone who would like to bring a raffle prize; it is much appreciated. You can drop them off when you register. We will have raffle tickets to purchase at the registration desk and at the banquet for \$10 (one arm's length) or \$20 (two arm's length). We also need AV equipment-two screens, two laptops and two projectors. Please contact [region5@calranger.org](mailto:region5@calranger.org) if you are bringing any AV equipment.

With all the rain we have been getting, we should have a spectacular wildflower season. I encourage everyone to take advantage of the two field trips offered in the program. On Monday, February 27<sup>th</sup> from 2-4pm there will be an interpretive walk through the demonstration garden on the Ed Hasty Trail followed by a presentation on the National Monument and how it's managed through partnerships. On Thursday, March 2<sup>nd</sup> for you early morning risers at 8am, there will be a hike at Thousand Palm Oasis Preserve managed by the Center for Natural Lands Management. The hike will cover 2.4 miles and last 2 ½ hours. Directions are located in the program and will be at the registration table. We will carpool to the field trips and meet 30 minutes prior to the start of the trip in the main lobby of the hotel.

I would like to thank our sponsors City of San Jose and California Casualty for their generosity to the conference. I would also like to thank Monica Edwards for providing the logo for two years in a row.

This marks our 41<sup>st</sup> California Parks Conference. We have many great speakers and classes for you to enjoy. You can purchase a t-shirt for \$20 at the registration table.



California State Parks is offering a six hour OHV course. Please contact them if you are interested in taking this POST course. We are happy they joined us this year.

Finally, we will have our awards banquet honoring many deserving Park Rangers in California.

See you in La Quinta,

***PRAC Vice President***

Candi Hubert

# Under the Flat Hat

by Matt Cerkel

I recently had the opportunity to travel to South Africa on vacation and later to West Virginia for training. Along the way, I visited several parks and other protected areas. I also met the rangers who protect these areas. I learned while the resources we protect may be different, the issues we deal with are often the same.

South Africa has a very dynamic park and protected area system. The first place I visited in South Africa was Table Mountain National Park, which preserves Cape Town's Table Mountain with its unique plant community, the Cape of Good Hope, and a colony of African Penguins. Table Mountain is very heavily used, being located next to one of South Africa's major metropolitan areas. The Cape Town region of South Africa has a major issue with invasive plant species, that seems very familiar to many of us. There was the typical bad tourist behavior and lack of respect of the park and its resources at The Boulders portion of park, home of the only mainland colony of

African Penguins. I also encountered things that were not familiar, such as: baboons, ostriches and cobras. This serious, but amusing, sign at Cape Point in Table Mountain National Park, does get the point across!



After Cape Town and Table Mountain we headed to eastern South Africa where we went on Safari. We primarily visited private game reserves, which play a key role in South Africa's wildlife conservation efforts. It was interesting to learn that much of wildlife in South Africa is privately owned, unlike here in the United States. The private game reserves protect both the wildlife and the habitat. The safaris hosted by the reserves help pay for the conservation efforts. It was an interesting way of doing things, but it



works well in South Africa and is helping to preserve lions, elephants, cheetahs and rhinos.

We also learned of another other type of "private reserves" that promote canned hunts of elephants, lions and other wildlife on their properties. We learned they stock animals from lion parks or petting zoos

for the international trophy hunters.

We also went to iSimangaliso Wetland Park, which is a public park preserving estuaries and the coastline in St Lucia on the Indian Ocean.

There we saw park signs that reminded us that "we were not in Kansas anymore."

I think the warning sign would encourage me not to swim.



I had the opportunity to talk to guides and rangers in South Africa. Many of the duties they perform and issues they deal with are quite familiar to all of us. From interpretation, to resource protection, to enforcement, limited budgets, more visitation, and visitors behaving badly, it seemed all very familiar. However, the game rangers in South Africa face considerable dangers on two fronts, poachers and the wildlife. Poaching, especially of rhinos, is a tremendous problem in South Africa and many game rangers have lost their lives in the battle against poachers. The wildlife, especially in parks and reserves containing any of the Big Five species (African lion, African elephant, Cape buffalo, African leopard, and rhinoceros) or Hippos, can pose a tremendous danger to game rangers and park visitors

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# Under the Flat Hat

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alike. Our safari guide, a former South African National Park game ranger, lost coworkers to both poachers and wildlife. Learning a healthy respect of wildlife is vital to remain safe in many South African parks and reserves. In the reserve we stayed at you could do a walking safari, but only if there was an armed game ranger available to accompany you the entire time.

A few weeks after returning home I was off again, this time to West Virginia for year two of the State Park Leadership School, which is a joint effort of the National Association of State Park Directors

and North Carolina State University. The school is a two-year program designed to prepare future park managers for the challenges they will face as they move into leadership roles in their respective organizations. The subject matter is familiar to those of us working in parks, but it is being taught from a management perspective. The school is a great opportunity to learn from state park directors from across the country. The school also allowed students to network with fellow rangers and park professionals from across the country.



*The graduates of the 2017 State Park Leadership School*

These travel and training opportunities has reminded me that the park ranger profession is largely the same not just around the US, but around the world. It is a small group of dedicated professional trying to protect the parks for current and future generations, while also protecting the people who use the parks. Rangers worldwide are “protectors, explainers, hosts, caretakers, people who are expected to be knowledgeable, helpful, courteous and professional: people who find you when you’re lost, help you when you’re hurt, rescue you when you’re stuck, and enforce the law when you or others can’t abide by it.”

# Black Bear Conflict in the Lake Tahoe Region

by Heather Hill

Many of the 200 or so black bears in the Lake Tahoe Region of Sierra Nevada have become habituated to human presence and anthropogenic sources of food for generations. Meanwhile, littering, overflowing trash bins and the improper storage of scented items in this popular vacation destination has exacerbated these issues. This has resulted in bears entering cabins, automobiles and denning under homes.

## Disputes

Many locals are bear wise and have installed bear resistant or metal enclosures for their waste. These people have lived in bear country long enough to take precautions and avoid confrontation. The same cannot be said for most the seasonal residents. Even though there's ongoing education and brochures, not all the visitors read the material and some go as far as feeding the bears. Ongoing education, and outreach is critical because of the constant flow of new visitor's.

## Underlying Conflict

This is where, it really gets interesting. Let's say that most visitor's will not change their ways, how do we manage the habituated bears and reduce wildlife conflict? Does it become a matter of continued education and aversion training techniques for humans? Or is it the responsibility of the professionals to haze the bears the first time they approach garbage and use culvert traps combined with hazing to translocate? How about the bears that are deemed a problem, should they just be killed? These answers are different based upon if you are a California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) or work for the Nevada Dept. of Wildlife (NDOW) employee.

To further compound the issues are different jurisdictions on the matters of ordinances, laws, or other forms of regulation prohibiting the deliberate or non-intentional feeding of wildlife. Bears live within one region, but in two state with different views on bear management and the need for bear resistant garbage cans. Areas

such as the Incline Village and South Lake Tahoe are some the greatest offenders, when it comes to no rules or ordinances for bear resistant trash receptacles. They are some of the busiest tourist destinations in the region, hosting casinos and ski resorts.

## Identity Conflicts: Conservation Groups VS Nevada Dept. of Wildlife

One nonprofit group educates visitors and home owners by manning a volunteer phone line around the clock. During a phone interview with the Executive Director of the organization, I asked her about her perspective on governmental agencies, food conditioned bears, the drought and her thoughts on the most effective and humane way to addressing "problem bears."

The director has worked in bear education and advisory for 20 years. In that time, she has seen a shift in the CDFW from a policy of lethal control to one of co-existence through enforcement and education. They stated, "this year, no bears have been killed on the California side of the Tahoe Basin because of conflict. While in the same time, 4-5 bears have been killed by NDOW." Issues such as lethal control have been a contentious issue with government officials and wildlife advocates. This was demonstrated with the inability of the Tahoe Council for Wild Bears to come to any resolution on the issues of language in their brochures and educational material. The conservation groups wanted words such as "threatening and dangerous omitted," because they felt it promoted fear vs. education. They eventually decided to disband, due to differences of opinion and continuous arguing. The group was compiled of: Animal Protection Institute, Bear League, Defenders of Wildlife, Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, Echo Lakes Environment Fund, Humane Society of the United States, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nevada Division of Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, and McClintock Metal Fabricators Inc.

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# Black Bear Conflict

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The director believes that, “Nevada Dept. of Wildlife has regressed and is very concerned about liability.” She expressed these concerns through her 20 years of experience. She is opposed to using dogs in aversion because it only creates fear in the animal’s new habitat. They also believe that backcountry food drops can be effective if done in collaboration with experts in discouraging bears from garbage cans and raiding homes during times of food shortages. In 2007, 20–30 bears were raiding homes a night because of a critical shortage of foliage and food drops resolved this issue. This controversial technique was discussed in the Human-Wildlife Interactions Journal.

According to the NDOW website, they advocate addressing conflict bears by “trapping and tagging the bear, and then releasing it at or near the capture location and using rubber bullets and [Karelian Bear Dogs](#) for aversive conditioning. But when our trapping efforts are hampered by seemingly good-intentioned people the bear will likely follow a behavior progression that ultimately leads them into potentially dangerous encounters such as, entering homes, causing the death of the bear by officials.”

I can understand the frustration of wildlife organization’s after reviewing several county ordinances concerning wildlife: SB371 – no feeding of big games mammals in Nevada,

including black bears. First offense is a written warning, the second is a fine of no more than \$250, and third or subsequent offense is fine of not more than \$500. Several of Nevada counties only fine violators \$100.00, which is not a huge motivator for people to be responsible.

To their credit, NDOW does advocate education prevention of conflict through bear proof garbage cans, electric fencing, and the proper storage of food. The Nevada bear program, is a collaborative effort with the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#). “This includes Dr. Jon Beckmann of WCS and Carl Lackey of NDOW, who led the way in urban bear research ([www.ndow.org](http://www.ndow.org).)”

The Bear League and NDOW do in fact have some common ground on a few issues: they both are opposed to translocation, because it’s not effective, they believe that education is key and that aversion if done properly can be an effective tool to discouraging conflict. Issues involving bear conflict in the Lake Tahoe Basin, will not be solved overnight. Especially when conservation groups oppose the strategies that NDOW uses, such as lethal control, when bears are deemed “dangerous,” and repeat offenders. Yet, allowing bears to repeatedly enter homes because we’re in their environment won’t solve the safety issue either. It comes down to human behavior. Until people learn to be bear-wise there is no quick fix.



*Heather Hill is a seasonal Interpretive Park Ranger with the National Park Service and in the process of completing her masters in conservation and global sustainability.*

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**Submission deadlines are the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, April, June, August, October, and December.**

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