

# THE SIGNPOST

Second Quarter, 2019



Dear Members and Supporters of the Park Rangers Association of California,

Please enjoy this issue of *The Signpost*. Use the hyperlinks below to jump to a specific article, or scroll through and read the whole newsletter whenever and wherever is convenient for you.

## In This Issue:

[Conference Partnership a Win-Win](#)

[Under the Flat Hat](#)

[Why PRAC?](#)

[History of the Ranger Stetson](#)

## Conference Partnership a Win-Win

By Aleta Walther

The decision to merge PRAC's and the Park Law Enforcement Association's (PLEA) 2019 conferences into one event resulted in a winning partnership for all who attended the conference. Ninety-five PRAC members and 32 PLEA members from across the country attended the joint event at the beachfront Crown Plaza Hotel in Ventura, March 4-8.



The conference offered off-site activities and 34 continuing education programs across four tracks: resource management, public safety, park law enforcement and interpretation. Twenty-five individuals attended the free pre-conference visit to the Ventura County Sheriff's facility at the



Camarillo Airport. Attendees had the opportunity to experience seemingly real crime situations via the sheriff department's 3D simulator, including school hostage and drug bust scenarios. The all-day event also highlighted one of the stars of the sheriff's canine unit and the department's search and rescue helicopters. Attendees learned how the sheriff department and Ventura Fire work in tandem to ensure public safety and coordinate search and rescue airlifts from the Channel Islands.

Tuesday's joint luncheon included keynote speaker Kerry Plemmons, a professor with the University of Denver, Daniels School of Business Public Safety Leadership Program. Plemmon's presentation highlighted his four-step process for Creating Unity Through Collaborative Cultures, including Leading a Culture of Purpose and Resiliency and Creating Unity Throughout the Parks and Public Safety Community.

The conference was not all work. E-bikes were available for attendees to cruise along the coast trail. The optional cruise to Santa Rosa Island on Friday included a picnic and a ranger led hike. About half of the island adventurers opted to hike on their own while experiencing the island's forever views, windswept cliffs, historic ranch buildings, wild flowers and the native island fox.

It is not too early to start planning to attend the next conference! It will be in March of 2020 in Reno, Nevada! If you are interested in presenting at the 2020 conference in



Reno, have questions or suggestions for the conference, please contact conference leaders: [Andy Brown](#) or [Matt Cerkel](#).

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## Under the Flat Hat Notes from PRAC President Matt Cerkel

With the recent press about the federal government shutdown earlier this year and the more recent problems with the “Super Bloom” in Southern California, both of which resulted in bad behavior, litter, resource damage, and other problems in our parks many people have expressed surprise that some people abuse the parks. Having worked in the parks for nearly 28 years the bad behavior does not surprise me at all. In fact, the recent situation actually illustrates the importance and need for

Park Rangers. It is the presence of Park Rangers, Ranger Naturalists, Fee Collectors, Park Maintenance Workers and all the other park employees, both permanent and seasonal, that help protect our parks and keep the bad behavior in check.



The State of California understood this in 1866 when it appointed Galen Clark as the Guardian of the Yosemite Grant. Clark was California's first State Park Ranger. The federal government understood this in the 1880s when it sent the US Army into Yellowstone National Park. Also, in the 1880s San Francisco established their park patrol program. Following the success of using the Army to patrol Yellowstone the federal government sent the Army into the then new Yosemite, Sequoia and Grant Grove (Kings Canyon) National Parks in the early 1890s. The need to protect, patrol and manage the National Parks along with the need to promote, educated, supervise and oversee visitor use led to creation of the National Park Service in 1916. In 1917 the Marin Municipal Water District established park ranger program to patrol and protect its watershed and park on Mount Tamalpais.

In the 1920s Gilbert Stanley Underwood, the architect of The Ahwahnee Hotel, and Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, had a discussion about the national parks: "They belong to everybody," Mather said. "We've got to do what we can to see that nobody stays away because he can't afford it." Underwood replied: "I hear lots of complaints about the tin-canners. They dirty up the parks. Strew cans and papers all over." Mather replied: "What if they do? They own as much of the parks as anybody else ... It's a cheap way to make better citizens."

Also in the 1920s, but on a more local scale, members of the Tamalpais Conservation Club were appointed as Marin County Deputy Sheriffs in order to assist the park rangers patrolling Mount Tamalpais. This was due to the growing popularity of hiking and because "an element of rowdyism and vandalism arose among a certain class frequenting the trails." Beside showing people behaving badly in parks is nothing new it also illustrates the willingness of the public to step forward and volunteer to help protect our parks and open spaces.

Today compounding the problem of bad behavior in parks is the record levels of use many of the parks are now receiving. In a 2017 Bay Nature magazine reported that "East Bay Regional Park District

visitation has jumped by almost 80 percent since 2000, with the annual number of visits now

exceeding 25 million." East Bay Regional Parks is not alone in seeing such double digit increases in use. Unfortunately funding and staffing has not kept pace with use.

In reality people's behaviors have not changed and some people will always abuse and misuse our parks, while others will step forward to protect them. The difference is today there are a lot more people and the impacts from misuse and abuse of parks are therefore much greater, especially with a reduced or absence of an official

park employee presence. Now more than ever the parks need “the thin green line” of Park Rangers (and other park employees) and those in the public willing to step forward to defend the parks and even volunteer to assist the rangers in protecting our parks.

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## WHY PRAC?

### *By Ranger Amy Wolitzer*

*This article is especially intended for people who attended the PRAC conference but are not currently PRAC members. Hopefully, it is a worthwhile read for those who are already members as well.*

We do important work. We make our parks better, safer places. We seamlessly create the best possible experience for all who visit and our enthusiasm is contagious. We know the secrets of our parks and protect them. This is valuable work, worthy of a profession. People think of it as a fun job and it is. But it is an exhausting job. A dirty job. A heartbreaking job. But a job worth doing well.



We are at a time when there is some sentiment that parks can take care of themselves. Or that volunteers can take care of them. While volunteers can do a lot to better our parks, the ranger profession is invaluable and we need to work to preserve it.

Our parks are magical places that are different than cities. They are places people can go to remember that humans are still part of nature. Visitors should enjoy them with great glee and a sense of ownership but also with great care. Rules are different in parks. There are still rules, in fact many rules, but our law enforcement should be done with a different philosophy than in the cities. The amount of law enforcement we do or our proficiency at law enforcement cannot be measured by the number of citations or arrests. If a ranger simply chatting with a violator about why what they are doing is undesirable can prevent the violation from re-occurring that is a wonderful thing.

We also need to acknowledge that the profession is changing. We need rangers who are young and fluent in social media. We need rangers who are people of color. We need people from communities that are historically underrepresented in parks. We need people who are older and know what rangers used to be. We need Rangers of all types - true generalists, interpreters, trail and maintenance experts, resource managers, and parks police. Together we will figure out what we are becoming.

PRAC Membership is open to all uniformed park professionals, even those who are not peace officers. Naturalists, maintenance personnel, trail specialists, open space technicians etc are welcome!

Even if your agency has a membership, you should become a voting member to show your support for the profession. Voting allows you to influence direction of PRAC.

Signs you should be a member of PRAC:

- It's not just a job; it's a calling
- People refer to you as "Ranger \_\_\_\_" even if your job title is not ranger
- You frequent parks on your days off and vacations
- Your job is unlike any other job out there... but you encounter some of the same issues as other park professionals.
- When people ask "What's a typical day at work like for you?" you have trouble concocting a short answer - there is no typical day. And you wouldn't have it any other way.

#### Benefits of PRAC Membership

- Ready access to a pool of great minds on the PRACnet google group. Stop reinventing the wheel - if you are dealing with an issue at your park you can bet other agencies have had the same problem and can advise you on what worked and did not work for them.
- Be the first to hear about job opportunities!
- Listing your membership on your résumé shows you are serious about the profession.
- Conferences and trainings: Our annual conference is held each year in March, alternating between Northern California/Nevada in even numbered years and Southern California in odd numbered years. Become a member and get discounts on training and events.

- Access to the ranger directory: Get direct access to park agency contacts. This directory was designed for the member who wants to know who employs rangers in the State of California and needs to know about their qualifications, training and duties. The 2019 Directory is currently in draft form and the final version will be available this summer.
- Networking with other rangers from across California and Nevada

How to become a member:

Visit <https://www.calranger.org/membership.html>

Download and fill out the one page application and send it in with your dues!

- Active Membership, voting- 1-year regular membership \$50
- Active Membership, voting- 3-year regular membership \$110
- Active Membership, voting- 5-year regular membership \$175
- Retired Membership, voting \$35
- Associate Membership, non-voting \$35
- Student Membership, non-voting \$20

Not sure if your membership is current? Email [office@calranger.org](mailto:office@calranger.org) and inquire!

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## History of the Ranger Stetson

By Jeff Price, State Park Superintendent, Ret.

*John B. Stetson, stiff brim, "Nutria" quality and Belgian Belly color.* These are the original specifications that describe an item of apparel that has a proud heritage, the Ranger Stetson.



The story begins in 1858,

when John B. Stetson started west, possibly to die of "consumption", which he had contracted working with his family in the hat trade. There are innumerable tales of dying men regaining their health when confronted with the challenge and healthy hard work of "winning the West". But, John B. Stetson returned to Philadelphia a healthy man in 1863 to reenter the hat trade.

During the summer of 1862, while sitting around a campfire near Pike's Peak, Stetson, who had been showing his fellow wanderers the felting process, decided to make a felt hat. Using the fur from jackrabbits, beavers, skunks, and any other fur-bearing animal he could find, Stetson made his first genuine Stetson hat. It was big and very peculiar-looking, but it protected Stetson from the wind, rain, and sun. Some of his companions admired it, but most of them considered the odd-looking hat to be a perfect object for jokes and wisecracks. But, when a Mexican bullwhacker offered him a five-dollar gold piece for it the kidding came to an abrupt halt; at the same time the first sale of a genuine Stetson hat was made.

When Stetson returned to the hat trade in Philadelphia his first commercially successful hat was copied after the one he had made earlier around the Pike's Peak campfire. Called the "Boss of the Plains", it was a natural colored hat, with a four-inch brim and top, and a strap which served as a band. At first it was made of one grade of material and sold for five dollars. During the years the material grew finer and the cost increased until finally a thirty-dollar price tag was attached to pure beaver, or nutria hat. This "Boss of the Plains" Is truly the hat from which all of our modern Stetsons evolved.

The old Army campaign hat is thought by many to be the first ranger type hat worn by park rangers. Others believe that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Stetson, adopted in 1901, was the one that influenced the evolution of our present hat. In either case, through the years our Stetson has been at one time or another a "Boss of the Plains", modified "ten-gallon", a soft-brim Army campaign style, and finally, stiff-brim Park Ranger Stetson.

The original uniforms of the National Park Service, established in 1916, including the hat, were actually military type uniforms, adapted from those used during the period when the parks were administered by the military. In 1934 when the Stetson Company standardized the manufacturing of the Ranger Stetson, Park Rangers began wearing the stiff-brim, Belgian Belly color, named after the beautiful reddish buff, pastel like color of the underfur of the Belgian Hare.

Most California State Park Rangers wore the early soft-brim Stetson from the very birth of the state park system. At the first State Park Employees' Conference in 1938, a uniform study was requested. In 1939 the Uniform Committee recommended a State Park Uniform, consisting of Lincoln gray-green trousers and jacket, gray shirt, black tie, black leather goods, and the stiff-brim Stetson. Since this first official uniform everything but the Stetson has seen drastic change.

This hat has been called by many names, "Brush Cutter," "Lily Pad," "Smokey the Bear" and other more colorful but unprintable ones. It has been used for many purposes including protection from the wind, sun, rain and falling objects. It was also used to carry drinking water, to feed and water saddle and pack stock, to fan campfires, to shoo flies and mosquitoes, as a pillow and for many other useful purposes.

Call it what you may - but wear it proudly! This hat has become the symbol of an unusual group who have dedicated their lives to the protection and administration of our wilderness and natural resources. It is fitting that it be known by the name of a man who regained his health in the outdoors we all love so well.

It is an honor and a privilege to wear the Ranger Stetson.

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Thanks for reading! Please [let us know](#) if you have ideas for what you would like to see in future issues of *The Signpost*.



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