



THE SIGNPOST

Third Quarter 2022

President's Message:

The 2023 California Parks Training Conference will be March 5th-9th, 2023 at the Rush Creek Lodge at Yosemite. The room rate is \$125 a night. On Monday March 6th we will be hosting a hike to Wapama Falls at Hetch Hetchy. Visit the Rush Creek Lodge website <https://www.rushcreeklodge.com/> and use the promo code PRAC to make your reservation.

We will have the draft schedule available on the PRAC website after Labor Day and will open registration at the same time. We have added the following speakers to the conference too:

- Phil Gaines – retired director of South Carolina State Parks and co-host of the Park Leader Show.
- Bevin Carithers – Chief Ranger of Boulder County Open Space, who will discuss the use of NAI's Certified Interpretive Guide training by Boulder County Open Space's patrol staff.
- Daniel Brewster – City of Los Angeles Park Ranger and founder of the Black Park Ranger Experience.



Wapama Falls at Hetch Hetchy



Park Trivia: The 1914 Park Naming Contest

By: Jeff Ohlfs



Media Park

Who wouldn't enter a contest to name a park if the winner received a trip around the world? That's exactly what Harry H. Culver, founder of Culver City and the Harry H. Culver Company hoped in 1914.

The company received hundreds of entries. On September 22, 1914, judges from four Los Angeles newspapers selected the entry of Palms (a Los Angeles neighborhood) druggist Ross M. Mason. Mason's winning entry was "Media" Park. The name referred to the park's location as approximately halfway between Los Angeles and Venice. Mason didn't take the trip but preferred a lot of land in Culver City.

Today, the 1.1-acre Media Park is managed by the Los Angeles City Department of Parks and Recreation for Culver City. It is located at the intersection of Culver and Venice Blvd. A unique way to name a park!

(Source: Los Angeles Times, Sept. 23, 1914, pg 19 and Los Angeles Herald, Sept. 26, 1914, pg. 11)



Ode to a Park Ranger

by Russ Hauck, PRAC's 10th President, 1996-1997

I started my day in the usual way
putting on my uniform and belt;
I climbed in my truck and counted on luck
to be kind for the day I'd be dealt.

The radio sings with multiple things
which one should I choose first.
Problems here, problems there, I really don't care;
I guess I'll start with the worst.

"There's a transient down" said the camp host with a frown
as I walked up to check out the site;
"I'm not sure he's breathing or if his heart's beating
and it looks like he's been here all night."

I gave him a nudge but he didn't budge;
with a harder one he woke with a jar.
My mind was at ease as he started to wheeze,
I won't have to do CPR.

He rose to his feet smelling far less than sweet
I searched him, my hand in a glove;
I asked him some questions, he replied with suggestions
I'm physically not capable of.

He had a real attitude this cantankerous dude
and an evil sinister laugh.
His eyes were shifty, is he fifty-one-fifty?
No, just fifty-one-forty-nine-and-a-half.

So he picked up his stuff, walked off in a huff,
turned, looked and shook his clenched fist;
I said "Have a nice day!" as he shuffled away;
I thought "I spent four years in college for this?!?"

I'm back on my way to continue my day,
to see what I might see;
I stir up the gravel and continue to travel
wondering what's in store for me.



Communing with nature is quite an adventure,
it's entirely what you make it;
Maybe they were communing, but it looked more like mooning,
when they came out of the bushes naked.

I yell "STOP" as they near, "You can't do that here.
There are families, and young and old folk;
Besides, I've a notion you'll need Calamine lotion,
cause those bushes are poison oak!"

So off of the trail and down to the jail
I carted this birthday suit pair;
Booked and confined, one cried and one whined,
as I drove off leaving them there.

Now back on patrol, I continue to roll
my eyes searching for suspicious activity;
There are those out there who are likely to share
in this less than noble proclivity.

As I continue to scan, my eyes soon land
on a group with something to hide;
My eyes then fix on an assorted mix
of plastic baggies all open wide.

"I'm not real clear why you're doing that here"
I state as I whiff their strong odor;
"But we all know that's not oregano
and that stuffs not good for your motor."

So back to the station with a stack of citations
and an envelope full of their dope;
A piece of advice to each of these guys:
"Next time use your hemp to make rope."

The next call I'm sent on is a mountain biker who went on
a trail that's a challenge to all;
Needless to say, he didn't go all the way
before the terrain caused a spectacular fall.

I pick up the skin that once was his chin
as I shift into medical aid mode;
I hope he's learned his lesson and won't again soon be messin'
cause the road rash is more abundant than road.



I do a quick patch job with an alcohol swab
and a package of four-by-four gauze;
I question his sanity, ignoring pain-induced profanity,
“Was this challenge for some worthy cause?”

He says “There’s no limit to life while I’m in it
and man’s quest to control the earth’s elements.”
I scoff, “When all’s said and done, Mother Nature’s the one
and you might as well try juggling elephants.”

I arrive for my lunch with the service club bunch
to speak of my profession’s worth;
Of mammals and bees, and flowers and trees,
and commitment to protecting the earth.

I put on a show to let them all know
of all the good things we do;
I speak of our mission and of our ambition
To the environment we must all be true!

My message is strong, and it isn’t too long,
til they listen not making a sound;
They seem to have learned, when my attention is turned
to a table where sits the group’s clown.

He raises his hand, I acknowledge the man
he says, “I’ve a question and I must ask it...
What can you do about Yogi and Boo-Boo
and have you recovered the pic-a-nic basket?!”

The rest of my day goes the usual way
with a little of everything;
Interpretation, education, information, incarceration;
What will my next contact bring?

A lot of the time it’s not hardcore crime
that seems to demand our attention;
It’s thoughtless actions and other infractions
that arise and are worthy of mention.

“Pardon me there, but were you aware
it’s illegal for you to pick poppies?
You didn’t know? You will now, though,
Sign here, press hard, three copies.”



My next assignment is to work on refinement
of people's respect for the land;
The method I like is leading a hike
and discussing the objects at hand.

I've prepared a talk on the red-tailed hawk
in flight they're as majestic as religion;
But in this urban lair, the city slickers don't care
you might as well talk about pigeons.

Interpretation is a celebration
of what nature has to offer;
But it's real hard to try when supplies you must buy
and there's no money left in the coffer.

It's quite an obsession this chosen profession,
and the giant reward that one gets;
For blood, sweat and tears over so many years
and only being paid in sunsets.

From jacking up hoodlums to preserving rare woodlands
and checking the daily fire index;
From high mountain rescue to planting of fescue
to spraying for harmful insects.

The most peaceful of trails to riotous jails
to relocating an errant bee hive;
From smelly old skunks to smelly old drunks
to patrolling God's country by four-wheel drive.

From fallen trees to infectious disease
to contributing to an Environmental Impact Report;
From flowers with pistils to gangsters with pistols
to testifying in Superior Court.

We're enforcers, we're teachers, we even fix bleachers,
we fight fires, build trails, protect nests;
The tools of the trade - a field guide, a spade,
and even a bulletproof vest.

We're underpaid, we get teased, our budgets get squeezed
and we face our fair share of danger;
But with not one bit of sorrow, I'll be back tomorrow
for another day in the life of a ranger.

Note: Russ allows use of his copyrighted © March 25, 1997, poetry, but with conditions. Contact me for his e-mail to get details on use this prose. Jeff Price, webmaster@calranger.org.



The Black Park Ranger Experience

By Daniel Brewster



How many Black Park Rangers have you worked with throughout your career?

When I became a Park Ranger, the first thing I noticed was the lack of diversity not only within my department, but also within the Park Ranger profession. As a trainee fresh out of the academy, it was not a conversation I felt comfortable having at that time. I promised myself to revisit the topic and do whatever I could to address the need for more representation.

Two years later, I found myself in my patrol vehicle with one of our dispatchers on a special assignment. This dispatcher and I have an amazing relationship, which often includes joking with each other. As I drove, she asked me whether I had read an article in *The New York Times* about Black Park Rangers.

At this point, this was the third time she asked and I could tell that she was not joking - this was something she was passionate about. As I opened the article, I saw the title, “Bringing Black History to Life In The Outdoors.” (James Edward Mills wrote the article and Channel Stone composed the pictures).

As I prepared myself to read, there stood Shelton Johnson, a Park Ranger at Yosemite National Park standing in front of Cathedral Rock. As I continued, I saw the stories of Kelli English (John Muir National Historic Site), Jerry Bransford (Mammoth Cave National Park), Olivia Williams, and Victoria Smalls (Reconstruction Era National Historical Park). After completing the article, I took some time to reflect. The next thing I knew, I was in tears.

As I sit back now and reflect, I realize I was overcome with emotion after reading the article because I was so proud to see Black Park Rangers highlighted in the manner in which they were. To be able to learn about the amazing work these Black Park Rangers were doing made me think about that time as a probationer when I had thoughts about the lack of diversity and representation in the Park Ranger profession. I knew that I wanted more - I wanted to see more Black joy from outdoor professionals who looked like me. I was determined to do something.



I was compelled to try to connect with other Black Park Rangers, so I searched social media to see what I could find. As you could imagine, I did not find much. So I did some research on the origins of Black Park Rangers in the United States, and learned the history of the National Park Service as well as the stories of the Charles Young and the Buffalo Soldiers.

These revelations were mind blowing for me. Discovering Charles Young's history and his contributions such as being the first black National Park Superintendent made me proud. Learning that the 24th infantry, 25th infantry, and 9th Calvary of the Buffalo Soldiers are regarded as the first Park Rangers of Yosemite, Sequoia, and General Grant National Park sent me into a frenzy.

Again, the question presented itself. What am I going to do? I was inspired and motivated by *the New York Times* article. And the story of Charles Young and the Buffalo Soldiers lit a fire underneath me.

I decided to start an Instagram page sharing stories of Black Park Rangers and other outdoor professionals. My goal would be to inspire future generations to work in outdoor settings by sharing the stories of people who have done the same.

People have mixed opinions about social media. For me, if done correctly, social media can be a vital tool. So I had to clarify my intention. I determined that sharing stories could inspire, motivate, and encourage not only the Black community, but all POC communities to realize that there are amazing employment opportunities working in open spaces and public lands.

The last question was what I would call this initiative. I ran through several names I felt could properly encapsulate what I wanted to convey. One name continued to stand out.

My name is Daniel Brewster, and I am the creator of The Black Park Ranger Experience.

I remember how hard it was for me to post something for the first time. At that point, I did not know any other Black Park Rangers except for my two coworkers, and I was not going to ask them to share their story to strangers on social media. Imposter Syndrome made an appearance early as I anxiously wondered if anyone would care about what I wanted to communicate. Eventually, I got out of my own head and started to work on a post about myself.

On October 1, 2021, the first post went live and despite my nerves, optimism slowly started to creep in. I then started to use #parkranger on Instagram to find as many Park Rangers as I could to ask them if they had any colleagues who were Black. This strategy started to pay dividends as I slowly started to find Black Park Rangers and other outdoor professionals who, to my surprise, wanted to tell their story.

Through this process, I have had the pleasure of meeting amazing outdoor professionals from around the world. There are several that completely changed my outlook on life and what it means to be Black and to work in public service.

In November of 2021, I received a message from Benson Kanyembo, who is a Law Enforcement Advisor at the Conservation South Luangwa in Mfuwe, Zambia. Benson reached out to tell me how he found The Black Park Ranger Experience on Instagram and how he was so excited to read the stories of American black professionals who were Park Rangers just like him.



Benson asked if he could share a bit of his story on the Black Park Ranger Experience platform, which I immediately said yes to. Benson sent me his story and I learned about his early exposure and dedication to the protection of wildlife while growing up during the worst poaching crisis in Zambia's history. Benson's career, which spans over 30 years, has seen him go from an entry-level scout to him eventually winning a Tusk Award in 2019, due to his ongoing commitment and contributions to anti-poaching efforts in Africa.

Benson's story directed me to the work of other African Rangers throughout continent and the work being done in regard to conservation and environmental protection. I have had also had the privilege of meeting black Park Rangers from other countries such as Portugal, Brazil, The Dominican Republic, and Australia to name a few. Not that I needed a reminder, but The Black Park Ranger Experience reaffirmed that the African diaspora is vast. It also made me aware of some of the challenges our Park Ranger colleagues face in other parts of the world.

The last story I will share is the one of Georgia Ellard, who in 1983 became the first Black female superintendent at Rock Creek Park, which is a part of the National Park Service. Ms. Ellard was hired by the Department of Interior in 1955, and she made history throughout her career becoming either the first woman or Black person to serve in several roles. Throughout our conversations, Ms. Ellard shared the highlights of her career as well as some challenging moments.

The thing she was most proud of was her overall ascension from clerk typist to superintendent, and what it would mean for future generations of young Black girls who might be interested in working in public service. Ms. Ellard expressed her excitement in discovering the Black Park Ranger Experience on Facebook due to what it stands for and sharing stories, past and current.

Ms. Ellard, who is 94 years young (she gave me the ok to share her age) mentioned that she had always wanted to learn the stories and history of other Black Park Rangers and she hoped that one day a person would write a book doing just that. Ms. Ellard expressed that she wants me to be the one to do it.

Well, I can't let Ms. Ellard down, right?

The stories of Benson and Ms. Ellard are just a few examples of the impact I feel the Black Park Ranger Experience can have. I did not understand it in the beginning, but it created a sense of belonging and community long desired by Black professionals who work in outdoor spaces.

The response and support from everyone has been great and it motivates me to do whatever I can to increase representation in the Park Ranger profession, using the Black Park Ranger Experience as the vessel.

So how does this happen? What actual steps can be taken to close the disparity gap in relation to the underrepresentation of Black Park Rangers and other Black outdoor professionals?

My belief is that it starts with the youth. Ideally, I would like to collaborate with organizations with like-minded goals or create one geared towards not only getting Black youth, but also all youth of color outdoors to start forming those early connections with nature during those early impressionable years. I did a career fair at a high school in Pasadena, and I asked the group of children whether they



had ever been camping or spent extended time outdoors and the collective response was no.

I then proceeded to ask the group whether they had ever seen a Park Ranger before or even knew that it was a viable career option, again a collective no. For these kids, their first exposure to seeing a Park Ranger was my partner (who is Black) and I. Will any of those kids go on to be Park Rangers? Maybe. They however all know that it is now a possibility. Exposure and access are everything.

I started to do some research and eventually learned about the International Park Ranger Federation and the amazing work they do to support Rangers from around the world. I was hoping to discover an association of black Park Rangers that I could connect with to share my mission and further develop this worthy cause. Are you shocked to know an association of that type does not exist?

It is time to create one.

What better way to show a commitment to the advancement Black Park Rangers than by creating an association? The goal of the association would be to raise awareness, support the interests of Black Park Rangers, and advance the efforts to increase representation in our profession. It is important to have a space where Black Park Rangers feel comfortable coming together in a conference setting to meet, share experiences, and to develop professionally.

Supporters of The Black Park Ranger Experience always ask, “How can I support the platform?” For one, taking the time to read this article is huge help. Thank you! Following the Black Park Ranger Experience platform on social media also helps as well. Matt Cerkel started following the Black Park Ranger Experience in its initial stages and immediately recognized the importance of the mission. (Matt thank you by the way!)

Lastly, please advise if you know a Black professional who works in open spaces and public lands in the field’s conservation, preservation, and environmental protection. The Black Park Ranger Experience would love to connect with them.

I remember a time early in my career when a park patron walked up to me and just stared. I was a bit confused as to what was happening. I said, “Hi ma’am, is there something I can help you with?” She politely said, “No sir, I am just very stunned and proud to see a Black Park Ranger. I have never seen one before, you are like a unicorn.” While that park patron was genuinely shocked and excited to see a Black Park Ranger, the fact that she reacted that way was very telling and indicative of the work that needs to be done by us all.

Who knows, maybe the Black Park Ranger Experience can play a role in that not being such a unique experience moving forward.

Thanks for reading!



Under the Flat Hat

By Matt Cerkel, President



With the wisdom and experience of 31 years in the park ranger profession, I know rangers are often good at public communication in the park setting but can struggle with communications in the political setting. This is especially true when rangers are speaking with elected officials and senior staff and can lead to serious issues that affect ranger operations in negative ways.

As park rangers we face many issues that impact our jobs. Increased use, stagnant or decreased staffing, funding issues, need for better training and equipment, recruitment and retention, increased fire danger, climate change are all impacting our profession and parks. All these issues have political components. Knowing the importance of what we do as rangers is not enough when it comes to the political aspects of these issues or building support for addressing them in a way that addresses our concerns effectively.

Identify the issues.

Identifying the issues that affect the ranger program where you work is a first step. You will know some of them just from the day-to-day operations. But others occur at a higher level and you don't want to be left unprepared. These higher-level issues can often be identified by reading the agendas of an agency's governing body or by listening or watching meetings online. Keeping informed of what your agency is dealing with at the senior or governing level is vital.

It's also crucial to talk with your co-workers to identify issues that may impact your program:

- Try to develop a standard message about the issue.
- Have talking points that cover the concerns and try to offer solutions to the issues.
- Work with your union or association to develop your messaging.



Doing this will help communicate your concerns more effectively and will present a unified front.

Coordinate with external allies.

To help communicate concerns about issues impacting your ranger program, having external allies can help get the message out. Identifying interested parties and park visitors is vital. They are often more effective in lobbying elected officials than employees. When developing these relationships avoid sharing privileged information, listening to their take on the issue and let them get the message out in their own words. Be careful to avoid people whose communication style comes across as too blunt or angry. You want to build support with senior management and elected officials, and avoid alienating them.

Often other agency groups face similar issues (think funding and staffing). Presenting a unified front may help sway senior management or elected officials to see your perspective. In addition, supporting other work groups increases the likelihood of them supporting you when in counts.

Build relationships with leadership

Try to build positive relationships with your agency’s management team and elected officials. Be a good source of information for them. If they request information, provide what they request. If they want to know more, they will ask. If you provide too much information, they may block out much of what you have to say.

Be upfront and avoid blindsiding them. Even if you are right it doesn’t mean you are “right” to them and you want to avoid making it harder for an agency to respond in a positive manner to your concerns. It will be easier to address issues impacting rangers through a positive relationship with leadership.

Maintain balance

When possible, it is best to stick to facts when emotions run high. For example, stating that the rangers *feel* the staffing levels are inadequate can be easily dismissed. Specifically state the impacts occurring due to the lack of staffing. This will likely have more of an impact on decision makers. Of course, to do this you must also carefully be tracking what is going on in your park and documenting it. As I have discussed in a previous articles: having proper documentation can lead to better decisions, especially with complex, controversial and complicated issues. Accurate documentation can assist in the framework of decision making.

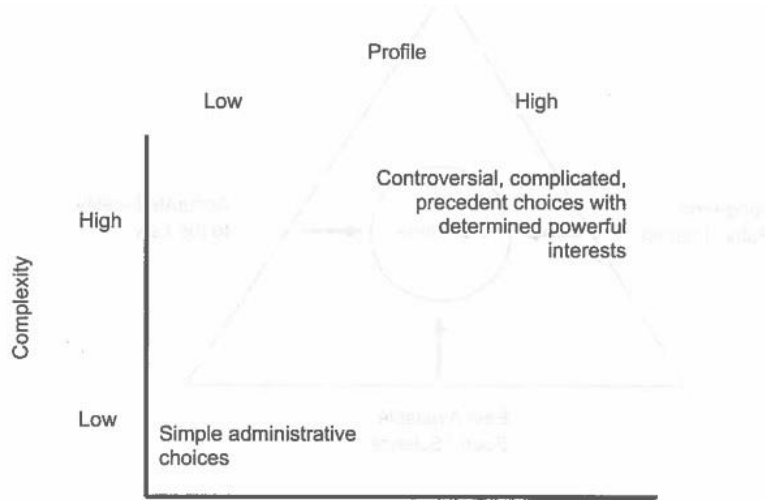


Figure 1. A Range of Decisions

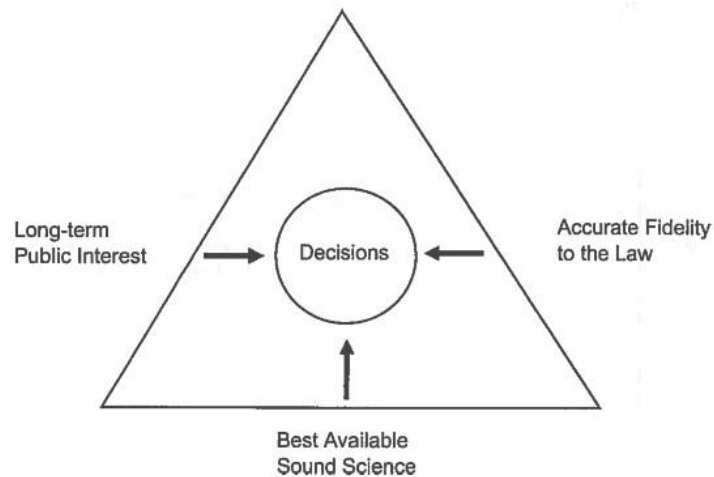


Figure 2. Framework for Decision Making

As I stated in a previous article, this framework could help agencies and individuals avoid pitfalls in decision-making. It can also point out where more is needed, such as staffing levels, in parks. It is also important to familiarize yourself with the laws that impact your agency and its ranger program. By trying to follow the decision-making framework here, rangers can more effectively present their concerns to the decision-makers, like senior management or elected officials.

Be patient

Finally, patience must be employed. Often the changes we want don't occur as fast as we would like. Government agencies can move at a glacial pace and are slow to respond to problems (especially where there are competing interests). We rangers need to play the long game to see our issues properly addressed. We must also learn to pick our battles and expect setbacks along the way. It is frustrating at times but being realistic can lessen the disappointment when setbacks occur.



World Ranger Day 2022

By Jeff Ohlfs



World Ranger Day has been celebrated on July 31st every year since 2006. World Ranger Day celebrates our profession and pays tribute to our fallen peers from the previous year. Unfortunately, this year we paid tribute to 150 rangers from 32 countries who died on or in the line of duty. You can follow messages from around the world on Facebook as our peers send their wishes. This year's theme was Diversity: in jobs, skills, protected areas and ourselves.

Probably the largest gathering in the United States was held at the International Cottages of San Diego City's Balboa Park this year. Thirty-three countries have their own cottage or are represented at the site. The city's park rangers invited their fellow rangers to share the day with them. The Ranger Foundation, California State Park Rangers Association, and Balboa Park's House of Panama sponsored the California event. This included bringing Panamanian Guardaparque Leovigildo Vargas to the gathering along with the attendance of Mexican NGO Terra Peninsular made it a true international gathering. The audience included 56 rangers from 22 agencies and 4 associations. PRAC Board Members Candice Hubert and Richard Weiner attended along with several members.

It was a great gathering (coordinated by PRAC member Jeff Ohlfs). Rangers met from adjoining jurisdictions and former NPS employee, and current California State Park Director, Armando Quintero gave the keynote remarks. Besides the keynote, rangers were given an opportunity to share their thoughts. Guardaparque Vargas shared photos of his park near the Costa Rican border. Next, there was a moment of silence observed for our fallen peers. A group photo then followed with Guardaparque Vargas cutting the cake. Finally, banners were












Park Rangers Association of California-The Signpost



made for each of the 33 countries depicting a uniformed ranger from their country and were hung outside the cottages and taken home.

Join us next year at Point Reyes National Seashore!

CALIFORNIA MEMORIAM

 HARRY C. PETERSON CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS 1941	 RAY HALDERMAN MARIN MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT 1967	 KENNETH PATRICK NATIONAL PARK SERVICE 1973
 RICHARD SCHURR CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS 1973	 PAUL GEORGE EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT 1974	 SCOTTY MCGREGOR EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT 1974
 PATRICIA SCULLY CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS 1976	 HOWARD HUANG LOS ANGELES COUNTY PARKS 1984	 GEORGE KOWATCH III CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS 1987



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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*.