



RANGER ACTIVITIES INFORMATION EXCHANGE



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Chief Ranger's Comments

There's lots going on these days. This is a full issue of Exchange, and I hope it answers some of the questions we've been getting from the field lately. It was also a pleasure to be able to meet with the Southeast Region's chiefs in Atlanta this month and field some of their questions. This was my ninth chief's conference this year.

We met with representatives from BLM and Forest Service recently to try to identify specifically what emergency law enforcement and EMS assistance the NPS might be able to provide to them upon request. A representative from the solicitor's office was also present. It was agreed that the Forest Service would specify in writing what they desired of us, and that the solicitors from the agencies involved would review it for legal sufficiency. If the agency directors agree, the requests would be formalized into an agreement. This endeavor stems from previous Forest Service requests for such assistance in wildland fire situations.

We continue to receive feedback informally that there are regular, widespread shortages of qualified seasonal law enforcement applicants. A previous personnel survey revealed very few such problems. If you aren't getting enough qualified enforcement or other types of seasonals, make sure that you report the specific deficiencies so that we can try to fix the system. Regional personnel offices should be made aware of individual park shortages. Report them right away.

Fire Season Overview

Over the past two years, all-time records for wildfire activity have been set nationally, and there's the possibility that this year will continue that trend. Those of you who are in Alaska, northern tier states and mountainous areas in the west know that there was a low snowpack this year which departed earlier than usual. Vegetation has cured early, water levels are low, and heavy fuels are drier than normal, so the stage is set for high fire activity. The only questions remaining are the number of ignitions that will occur and the levels of summer moisture.

Our first crew was mobilized in the northeast and shipped to Minnesota in May. Numerous lightning fires have already hit the Sierras, and parks are pushing up employee EOD dates wherever they can.

When fire activity occurs, it can be expected at the very least to be abnormal. Dry soils and heavier fuels will give problems with complete suppression; fires thought to be out may carry over underground and resurface later. The experience of the 1976-1977 season, during which winds and ignitions coincided to create high intensity forest fires, could recur this year.

The best course is to keep our heads up and carefully monitor the weather and fire danger. Responses to fires need to be prompter than normal if excessive

impacts to park resources are to be avoided. Another bad fire year will further stress our ability to manage the parks and their visitors, but the alternative - severe, long-term impacts to park resources - is unacceptable. We'll just have to plan for the worst and hope for the best.

- Dave Butts, Chief, Branch of Fire Management

Fire Forecast: May 6 - June 6

The following is a brief summary of the NIFCC fire forecast through early June:

- Northern - Drought conditions through most of area. Low values for thousand-hour time lag fuels. Herbaceous fuels green. Activity should not be significant until later in the season. P (potential) = L to M.
- Rocky Mountain - Above average spring temps with below average precip. Green-up below 6000'. Season about one month ahead of normal. P = L to M.
- Southwest - Temps have been near to above normal, precip near normal. Herbaceous fuels cured at lower elevations. P = M to H.
- Great Basin - Potential worse in higher elevations than lower ones. Extreme drought in central Idaho. Early fire activity possible. P = L to H.
- California - Winter precip below normal; five to seven inches needed to end existing drought conditions. Forecasts are for warmer and drier weather in Southern Cal, thereby leading to early fire season. P = L to H.
- Northwest - Drought conditions, particularly in eastern Oregon. High potential exists for a repeat of 1986 fire activity. P = L to H.
- Southern - Green-up has occurred through most of region, but high winds are keeping fuels drier than normal. High to very high conditions will prevail until precip and high humidity arrive. P = M to H.
- Northeast - Lake states are in drought, and 30-day forecast calls for above normal temps and below normal precip. Potential for serious fire problems spreading to other lake states and into summer is high. P = M to H.
- Alaska - Snow depths 40 to 70 percent below average in Upper Yukon and Tanana Basins. Fire activity should be high in eastern parts of state later in the season. P = L to M.

Annual SAR Summary

The search and rescue statistics for 1986 have been compiled. Overall, there were 3,389 reported incidents - a considerable increase from the 2,675 reported in 1985. There were 192 fatalities and 1,982 injured or ill persons involved in these incidents (up, respectively, from 191 and 1,186 in 1985). Total personnel hours dropped from 77,300 to 49,000; total costs declined sharply from \$1,648,000 to \$1,170,000. The new report also produced some interesting figures in areas not explicitly covered in previous summaries. There were, for example, seven SCUBA fatalities in 26 incidents, 31 boating fatalities in 970 incidents, and 69 aircraft accidents (54 fixed wing and 15 helicopter) with 69 injuries and 47 fatalities. The parks reported just over 1700 hours of aircraft use on SAR incidents for a total cost of \$827,000. The full report was sent to the regions in late May for distribution to parks with considerable SAR activity.

36 CFR Part 4

Copies of the revised 36 CFR Part 4 were sent to all the regions in April for distribution to the parks, and you should have received your copies by now. It's important that rangers become thoroughly familiar with these regs and hold

onto that special printing, as no other copies are available and no Servicewide training on the regulations will be conducted. The analysis of comments and section-by-section analysis of the rulemaking are purposely lengthy in order to provide clear indications of NPS intent and detailed information pertaining to the major elements of each regulation, unless they were obvious. These regs use the same definitions, permit authority and superintendents' discretionary authority that are found in the 1984 revisions to 36 CFR Parts 1 - 3. The regulatory text is new, but the philosophy, strategy and procedures are not. Call Andy Ringgold at FTS 343-1360 if you have any further questions.

Uniform Ordering and Exchanges

As some of you have discovered, R & R Uniforms has a new address. All correspondence with the company should now be addressed to them at Box 290037, Nashville, TN 37229. Merchandise (i.e. uniform exchanges, etc.) should, however, go directly to their office at 2508 Perimeter Place, Nashville, TN 37214. Telephone orders by authorized persons only should be made to 615-885-4154 between 8:30 and 4:30 Central Daylight Time, and non-order phone calls should go to 615-889-0994.

Field Incidents

Bandelier: A major search was initiated in early April when a hiker failed to reappear on schedule from a trip into the backcountry. Witnesses last saw him in shorts, despite snow and low nighttime temperatures; searchers soon found wet clothes in his abandoned pack. His body was found at the base of a cliff on the sixth day of the search.

Big Bend: A woman hiking with her husband and son was attacked by a mountain lion and received a number of claw wounds. Rangers returned to the scene, and the cat began stalking one of them. When it got within 20', the ranger shot and wounded it. The cat was later found, treed and destroyed.

Big Bend: Following the receipt of a tip that a major drug dealer was in Santa Elena, just across the border from the park, Mexican Federal Judicial Police conducted a raid on the town in late April. Since there was a warrant out for the man in the U.S., an FBI SWAT team and rangers waited on the park side of the Rio Grande in case the dealer fled in that direction. The dealer was killed at the end of a 90-minute fire-fight; his body was transported to the park until it could be flown to Juarez the next day. Neither rangers nor FBI agents were directly involved in the incident.

Canyonlands: SCA's Beth Christianson and Paul Watson were killed by lightning while on their way back from a bike trip to Grand View point. The two had taken shelter under a juniper during a thunderstorm.

Glacier: A hiker who was also an avid wildlife photographer spotted a female and three yearling grizzlies on Elk Mountain. He asked his wife to return to their car while he attempted some close-up shots. When he failed to return, she alerted rangers. His body was found the next afternoon; although there were extensive injuries, there was no indication of predation.

Denali: An Army EOD team was called in by the park to destroy 60 50-pound sacks of TNT and 10,000 blasting caps found at a mining site. The detonation leveled a milling building, assay office and another small structure.

Significant Incident Reporting System

The incident summaries which appear above were selected from those reported to the Washington Office through the significant incident reporting system which was established last summer. Reports which you submit to your regional office are in turn reported to Ranger Activities, where they are summarized, put into a standard format, and distributed throughout the Directorate. Although most reports are taken during regular working hours, a system is also in place for off-hour reporting. Reports are sought on a variety of incidents; among them are ARPA cases, drug arrests and seizures, major searches and/or rescues, structural fires, aircraft accidents and natural disasters. A memorandum clarifying the criteria and SOP's for reporting went out to the regions in mid-May, and should be available to you in the near future.

Twenty Year Retirement

In the December 19, 1986, Federal Register, OPM published its proposed changes to the Civil Service Retirement System, specifically concerning changes to the special retirement program for law enforcement and firefighter personnel. Comments were received from the Washington Office and many field areas. The Service's comments, along with those from other bureaus within the Department, were forwarded by the Department to OPM on February 19th. The proposed rules included a December 31st deadline for submission to OPM (through the Service and Department) of all requests for "coverage" determinations from employees. Since these were proposed rules, that December 31st deadline does not apply. Once final rules are published (which hasn't yet happened), a new deadline will become effective. OPM's intention in the proposed rules was to allow at least one year for submission of requests. The Department commented to OPM that a period of two to three years should be allowed. Regional personnel offices will be notified once the final rules set a new deadline.

We presume that in the course of finalizing the regulations, OPM will give due consideration to two recently decided Merit Systems Protection Board decisions. These decisions advanced new criteria in determining LEO/firefighter retirement eligibility. Because of the uncertainty over the standards that OPM may currently be applying in making coverage determinations, we should caution against submitting requests at this time. Of course, employees are not precluded from making such requests, but it will be difficult for the Service and the Department to know precisely what the ground rules are.

In an effort to learn what criteria OPM is using and to ensure success with future submissions, we are sending two test ranger cases to OPM for a determination of coverage under the special retirement provisions. At this time, those cases are being prepared by employees for submission through their region to the Washington Office. Regional personnel offices will be informed of OPM's decision. Interested employees should be in contact with their regional personnel offices for periodic updates on the status of this program.

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The Ranger Activities Information Exchange is produced by the Washington Division of Ranger Activities. Address letters, comments and inquiries to: Bill Halainen, Ranger Activities (650), Stop 3310, National Park Service, Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127; FTS 343-4874 or (202) 343-4874.