



RANGER ACTIVITIES INFORMATION EXCHANGE



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Chief Ranger's Comments

Much of my time since arriving in Washington has been dedicated to working on a task group appointed by the Director to review the comparability of jobs typically performed by 025 rangers with those performed by their peers in other federal agencies. That project is evolving into something broader, and, I think, eventually more beneficial than initially planned in that it will more clearly identify possible career paths for employees in "park ranger" positions. "Park ranger" should be considered an organizational title, with the classification series varying depending on the job that needs to be done. For example: If an historical park needs a park ranger/interpreter who will be deeply involved in research, program development and so forth, then the person should be classified in the 170 historian series but still be a "park ranger".

This gives management the option of requiring a positive education (in this case history) and structuring the position, if desired, as a GS-170-5/7/9, with the 5 and 7 levels serving as training levels and the 9 as the full-performance level. This same approach would be used in writing any position description where the emphasis of the particular job would naturally classify the position in another series. This would mean that "park rangers" could be classified in the 025 ranger, 400 biological, 460 forester or other series. For a series to be defined as "professional" in the FPM system, it must have a specific degree, "positive education" requirement. The 025 series is a "non-professional" (i.e., no positive education requirement) series, and it simply cannot do all things for us.

There would be nothing precluding a "park ranger" classified in a professional series from being an EMT, performing law enforcement duties, being involved in search and rescue, or carrying out any of the myriad other duties of a traditional ranger. If 51% or more of a ranger's duties involve a particular type of "professional" level work, then that position may best be classified in the appropriate professional series. The "park ranger" might then work in a variety of series throughout his or her career.

You are about to get the opportunity to contribute to a very important project in this "park ranger" review. A survey will be sent to the regional offices in June which will ask rangers to identify the types of criminal investigations and other investigations being performed in the field. Please take it seriously and give us your best effort in response. We need to identify the extent of investigative work being conducted in such areas as ARPA violations, wildlife law (Lacey Act, etc.), arson, drug violations and other criminal areas. Request a copy of this survey, entitled "Grade Comparability Task Force Survey", from your regional office and complete it promptly. Be sure to include narrative comments to clarify tasks performed wherever appropriate.

This project has only just begun, and is still in the discussion stage. From my brief time here and efforts expended on the project, it appears that many of our frustrations are caused by a lack of knowledge of how to use the system as it currently exists and manage our positions accordingly. The product of the task group's efforts will probably be a package which will show us how we can manage

our positions to accomplish the tasks that need to be done. A "park ranger" is a person who is responsible for interpretation, resource management and protection. Depending on the duties and qualifications required, that person may or may not be best classified as an 025.

Members of this task group include Laurie Coughlan (Gettysburg/Eisenhower), Bill Supernaugh (MARO), Mario Fraire (WASO), Ken Shaffer (MWRO), Mike Smith (MARO), Len Emerson (WASO), Tom Hobbs (Isle Royale) and myself. Any of the members of this group will be glad to talk to you about this project.

Moving on to other subjects, I need to mention that a memo clarifying the criteria for emergency law and order funding requests is forthcoming. These funds will only be available for either true emergencies or unforeseen increases in activities that pose serious threats to safety or park resources and are clearly beyond the capabilities of park staffs. Public Law 92-76 has been in effect since 1972. It has been reaffirmed in every appropriations legislation since then, and allows the Service to use funds allocated to other programs to fund law enforcement and search and rescue emergencies. We take from other programs every time we use this authority.

We have been advised by GAO and Congress that this authority has been abused in the past, most typically in the funding of recurring or anticipated events. We can no longer fund this type of request in the future. To do so would almost certainly result in the loss of this authority.

I view Ranger Activities, WASO, as the representative entity at Park Service headquarters for ranger concerns from the field on any aspect of ranger work and involvement. Keep us informed of concerns, problems and solutions. We can't solve everything but we can improve some things. Write your concerns down and send them along. The phone is generally the least successful medium to use here, but employ it if the problem is pressing. We'll stay up on things if you keep us informed.

- Walt Dabney
Chief, Ranger Activities

Emergency Reporting

A memorandum is currently in the works which will establish a simplified, round-the-clock reporting system for major incidents and emergencies. You will only need to make one call to Washington instead of the past arrangement where multiple calls were required in order to inform concerned parties in WASO. Except for extraordinary circumstances, reports will go to regional offices and thence to Ranger Activities. Ranger Activities will take such calls during normal working hours. On nights, weekends and holidays, the Park Police dispatchers will take an initial report, then either hold it until the beginning of the next working day or - if the situation is critical - call a duty person who will be available at all times. In either case, the duty person will call back the region or park for further info.

Update on Rees Legislation

Hearings have been scheduled to review and evaluate S.2204, the proposed National Park System Entrance Fee Act of 1986. They will be held on June 12th before Sen. Wallop's Subcommittee on Public Lands, Reserved Water and Resource Conservation, and the Service will recommend that the bill be passed. Although it is not yet possible to predict what action the Senate will take, it seems certain that the Service will at least have a clear indication of Congressional directions concerning fees once the hearings are over.

Death of Ranger at Sandy Hook

Ranger Glenn Mulcahey, who'd worked as both a temporary and permanent employee

at Gateway's Sandy Hook unit for the last six years, fatally shot himself while in his quarters in the park the morning of May 23rd. No reason was given for his action. The Monmouth County prosecutor's office is investigating the incident. Exchange will report on any further findings and developments.

Status of Guidelines

Here's a brief rundown of several guidelines that are (more or less) in the works: NPS-53 (Special Park Uses) - Currently in the final round of revisions, with the time of arrival in the field contingent on printing arrangements; NPS-57 (Health and Fitness) - On temporary hold due to time demands on principal authors, with no projected release date; NPS-4 (Diving Management) - The draft is complete and is being circulated to interested parties for comments and revisions; NPS-58 (Structural Firefighting) - A draft has been completed and is currently under review in the regions; NPS-56 (Search and Rescue), NPS-59 (NIIMS), and NPS-60 (Aviation Management) - All are currently on hold due to time demands on the principal authors.

Fire Season Summary

The fire year began with unusually dry conditions in the East and Midwest, which resulted in some sizable fires. The Southeast was so dry that, according to regional wildfire coordinator Ken Hulick, moisture levels in heavy fuels dropped to the 10-15% range - "absolutely unprecedented for the Southern Appalachians." Here's a summary of the year's major activities, listed by fire name:

Big Run: Shenandoah had a 4,500-acre fire that began the evening of May 3rd when a backpacker, frustrated by his inability to start a portable stove, tried to get it going by lighting a piece of paper. The paper slipped away into the underbrush, and the fire took off burning upslope in mountain laurel and small pine. Due to high winds and very dry conditions, the fire took the efforts of about 500 firefighters the better part of three days to get a 15 mile line around it. Over 100 Park Service firefighters from five regions assisted Forest Service and other teams in suppressing this blaze - said to be one of the worst in Virginia in decades.

Eliocharis/Austin 1: A pair of fires burning more or less simultaneously in Everglades and Big Cypress in early May consumed about 37,000 acres. Eliocharis in Everglades was lightning-caused and burned mostly in sawgrass and related grasses. No more than 20 firefighters worked it, and their main efforts went toward keeping it out of hardwood hammocks and adjacent Big Cypress, where Austin 1 burned 10,000 acres of mixed pine, grass and cypress. Although the fire was "environmentally acceptable", it was suppressed because of the private inholdings and camps that were at risk within the preserve.

Peachtree/Hickory: Great Smokies had a pair of 700-acre fires in April, both man-caused and apparently the work of one or more arsonists. Peachtree started first on the south side of the park and for a time threatened the watershed around Bryson City. Just as the 180 or so firefighters got it under control, the Hickory fire got rolling near Cades Cove, so the entire operation just changed fires. Cades Cove, a popular visitation area, had to be closed for a couple of days due to staging for the fire. Ken Hulick reports that the regional mobilization for the fires worked well, as did the use of an ICS unified command with the state of North Carolina.

Poor Valley: Cumberland Gap also had a 700-acre fire at about the same time as those in the Smokies. The park handled it with the help of about 100 firefighters. Poor Valley proved a tough fire to fight because it worked from valley to ridge top on a steep, rocky slope with duff underneath.

Ogden Dunes/Track/Tolleston/EE: Between March 23rd and 26th, Indiana Dunes had four fires which burned a total of about 1700 acres of park land, mostly in flashy grass,

marsh and savannah fuels. All were human-caused, and were aggravated by early spring drying prior to green-up. The biggest of the fires - Ogden Dunes - was also pushed by winds that gusted to over 30 m.p.h.

Position Opening in Ranger Activities

The Ranger Activities Office will be advertising a GS-4 clerk-typist position which will be opening in mid-June. The incumbent will be involved with a number of office activities, including correspondence, answering and screening phone calls, and related duties. There will also be opportunities for involvement in special projects, and the person selected will have an excellent opportunity to become familiar with both ranger operations throughout the Service and the workings of the Washington office. We would be very interested in any qualified candidates who also possess field knowledge or skills in protection. If you are not already a clerk-typist, you must secure a Notice of Rating from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The Washington OPM will accept such notices from any other OPM office nationwide. If you'd like further information, call Bill Halainen at 343-4874.

National Capital Region Ranger Activities Directory

In the interest of improving communications among rangers, the Exchange offers the following diagram of the organization and duties of staffers in the National Capital Region's Division of Resource Management and Visitor Protection. All persons in this office can be reached at PFS 472-7996 or (202) 472-7996.

