



RANGER ACTIVITIES INFORMATION EXCHANGE



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Chief Ranger's Comments

National Park Service personnel have again done an outstanding job in fire mobilization, as has been recorded in the article below. One specific area of confusion arose with requests for NPS commissioned personnel to be dispatched to USFS fires for the purpose of providing security (including law and regulation enforcement) on proprietary jurisdiction lands belonging to the Forest Service.

USFS district and regional personnel first requested rangers to perform these duties during the 1986 fire season. WASO Ranger Activities and the Solicitor's Office reviewed 16 USC Section 559 (last sentence) at that time, and agreed that the NPS could offer such assistance in emergency situations under 16 USC Section 1b(1). A memo to that effect was sent to the field, but some field solicitors and the USFS law enforcement office subsequently argued that this authority does not in fact exist. In early May, a meeting was held with law enforcement personnel from the Forest Service's main office. It was agreed that USFS would prepare an agreement between the two agencies describing the situations in which NPS personnel might be used to fulfill law enforcement and security roles on a very temporary basis; if determined to be legal, the NPS would then help when and where possible.

We have heard nothing officially since that meeting. We know that such requests were made from fire incident commanders as resource orders, and that some personnel were dispatched in good faith to fill them. We put out instructions to all regional fire coordinators to decline these requests, however, because there is no such thing as implied legal authority - we either have it or we don't. The authority is apparently unclear in this case, and we did not want anyone put into a situation where they might possibly be performing duties outside of their authority and might be personally liable. We will be clarifying this situation with the USFS one way or another before the next season. Sorry for the confusion.

The significant incident reporting system is working extremely well in bringing important issues of every type to the immediate attention of those who need to have the information. I have, for instance, an almost weekly need to have the latest information on significant drug cases in parks in order to update the Secretary's Office as the agency representative on the Department's drug enforcement coordinating group. Drug cases continue to hold a high degree of interest for the Secretary.

Fire Callout

The intense lightning-caused wildfire activity which began in California and Oregon on August 30th led to a rapid national mobilization of personnel and resources, including the highest number of National Park Service firefighters and overhead - over 1100 people - committed at a single time in recent memory. The maximum numbers deployed in each category by region were as follows (firefighters/overhead): Alaska - 2/1; Mid-Atlantic - 75/4; Midwest - 114/0;

North Atlantic - 28/0; National Capital - 30/0; Pacific Northwest - 128/17; Rocky Mountain - 221/45; Southeast - 95/52; Southwest - 84/6; West - 143/32; Boise - 40/1. These figures do not include the large number of personnel working on fire suppression in their home parks. By contrast, a total of 528 NPS employees were in the field at the height of the callout in August of 1986.

Although most of the fires were on lands administered by other agencies, there was considerable activity in and around a number of parks:

- Yosemite - The Paper Complex in the Stanislaus National Forest spread into the northwestern section of the park, threatening Hodgden Meadows, Crane Flat, El Portal, and the Merced and Tuolumne Groves of giant sequoias. Evacuation plans were developed for El Portal, but were not implemented as the flank of the fire bordering Highway 140 was eventually controlled. The roads and campgrounds at Crane Flat were closed, and some park employees were evacuated from the Hodgden Meadows area. Most of the park remained open for visitation, and large Labor Day weekend crowds were accommodated. Late in September, the Jarrel Fire near Hetch-Hetchy burned about 1000 acres of the park before being brought under control.
- Sequoia/Kings Canyon - The Coffee Fire, which burned on park land east of Three Rivers, was contained at 250 acres. This fire was adjacent to the larger Case Fire which burned on BLM and CDF (California Department of Forestry) lands outside the park. Mineral King road in Sequoia was closed, but holiday crowds were otherwise accommodated. Although numerous smaller fires occurred in the park, they were contained without difficulty.
- Joshua Tree - The 1400-acre Paul Fire and 250-acre Blackbrush Fire burned in 105 degree heat and low humidity. The first NPS use of a single-engined aircraft as a retardant tanker occurred on the Paul Fire. Both were controlled by September 5th.
- Lassen - Seventeen lightning-caused fires joined to form the Snag Complex, which burned 830 acres. Spotting occurred in lodgepole pine stands up to a mile and a quarter from the main fire.
- Oregon Caves - Evacuation plans were developed due to concerns that the park might be isolated by fires in the Siskiyou National Forest, but the situation stabilized and made that option unnecessary.

Although not part of the general callout in the west, there was also action elsewhere in the NPS. The Uila Fire in Hawaii Volcanoes, which was probably caused by a catalytic converter on a government vehicle, consumed 12,000 acres of grassland and 2,000 acres of hardwoods before being controlled. And suppression action was initiated on a 67-acre section of the 1600-acre Adam Hill Fire at Grand Teton when that fire exceeded its prescription.

Field Incidents

Blue Ridge: The body of Shenandoah seasonal ranger Mark Noepel was found by two visitors in a deep ravine in Blue Ridge on August 30th. Although positive identification has been made, the coroner has not yet been able to determine either time or cause of death. A major search had been initiated for him on August 8th when he failed to show up for work at Shenandoah's Loft Mountain Campground.

Olympic: A non-commissioned fire control aide who'd stopped to assist a visitor whose vehicle had a flat tire noticed that the driver and his passenger appeared to be intoxicated. When the FCA called for assistance, they fled in their vehicle. A patrol ranger pursued them until they were forced to stop because they had only an axle hub left where the wheel had been. The driver refused to leave his vehicle, saying he had a bomb which he'd detonate if forced to get out. The highway was closed off, and a police dog was brought to the scene. When the dog entered the vehicle, the driver exited (the passenger had already surrendered). No bomb was found. The vehicle had been stolen from the Tacoma area.

Baltimore - Washington Parkway: US Park Police Officer Patrick Gavin was shot in the temple during a traffic stop on August 21st. Although wounded, he returned fire and hit two of his three assailants. Both of the wounded men were caught on the same day during an intense manhunt; the third, who allegedly was the man who shot Gavin, was arrested without incident in Baltimore ten days later. Officer Gavin was hospitalized, but has since been released.

Cape Cod: On the night of August 23rd, the SS Canada Star passed off the outer shore of Cape Cod. The following morning, rangers discovered hundreds of bags of trash on park beaches from Race Point to Wellfleet. Investigation revealed that they had in fact been dumped by the ship, but the US Attorney has so far been unable to identify a statue which they violated since they were outside the territorial waters of the United States. A second dumping incident occurred on September 25th, but this time rangers were able to trace the medical supplies found along eight miles of beach to the US Navy. Investigators are currently trying to determine what ship dumped them.

Death Valley: A fire was ignited by a welding torch in a small building containing a number of chemicals on September 26th. Although the fire was quickly suppressed, 29 people in three downwind buildings were evacuated due to the involvement of several toxic chemicals in the fire. EPA responded and assisted in checking the site. The area involved was determined to be clean.

Fees

On September 23rd, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee reported out their version of HR 1230, the House bill establishing the Service's fee program over the coming years. The bill will probably be voted on in the near future as part of the deficit reduction bill, then will go to a joint House - Senate conference for resolution of the considerable differences between the two versions. The bill which comes out of that meeting will again be voted on by each chamber; if it passes, it will go to the President for signature. It's expected that this will not occur until early November. In the meanwhile, the Service has been authorized to collect fees until November 10th by the continuing resolution which went into effect on October 1st.

Regional fee coordinators will be meeting in Washington in late October to discuss the impending legislation, accountability and misuse of funds, the annual fee collection report, problems the regions have had in implementing the fee program and related subjects. A training course for regional fee training teams will be conducted once the fees legislation passes and funding is therefore available. Eventually, these trainers will be instructing park staffs on fee collection procedures and principals.

The NPS Air Force

Here for your information is the first listing every compiled (as far as we know) of the aircraft owned by the National Park Service:

- Alaska Regional Office - Beech E55, Grumman G-21A, DeHavilland DHC-2
- Gates of the Arctic - Piper PA-18, Cessna 185
- Northwest Areas - Cessna 185, Arctic Tern
- Wrangell-St. Elias - Arctic Tern, Cessna 185F
- Lake Clark - Cessna 185, Piper PA-18
- Katmai - Cessna U206
- Denali - Piper PA-18
- US Park Police, NCR - Bell 206-1, Bell 206L-3
- Southeast Regional Office - Cessna 340A
- Cape Hatteras - Cessna U206G
- Glen Canyon - Cessna U206G, Grumman G-21A
- Lake Mead - Cessna U206

Uniform Returns

A number of cases have been reported to this office in which employees have returned items to the uniform contractor that R & R has no record of ever having received or which have arrived with incomplete paperwork. Employees must fully fill out an exchange form with each return, and should send their packages by insured or certified mail so that they can be tracked if lost. NPS-43, the uniform guideline, states that the value of packages sent by the contractor but not received by the park are to be absorbed by the contractor, and that the value of packages sent by the park or employee but not received by R & R will be absorbed by the park or employee (Chapter 2, page 30).

R & R has also had a serious problem with employees returning felt and straw hats which have been improperly packed and have therefore been damaged en route, making them unusable. Although the contractor has no responsibility to replace hats that have been so damaged, they have replaced all of them to date. Both felt and straw hats must be double-boxed before they are returned. If employees save the boxes in which their hats have been shipped to them and then use them for returns, the problem with hat crushing will be minimized.

Briefly...

- Due to the extensive discussion about this year's revisions to NPS-9, a decision has been made to hold and combine them with revisions for CY 1988 (the comment period closed on October 15th) for release next spring.
- Candidates headed for FLETC are reminded that the successful completion of the PEB (physical efficiency battery) is currently a requirement for graduation. There have been instances in which employees have not been prepared for this test and have had difficulties in completing the program.

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