Chief Ranger's Comments

We've been distracted over the last few months by events in Yellowstone and subsequent efforts to sort through all the things that didn't get done while the fires were burning. Just about every NPS area was affected in some way. Everyone's help during this trying, exciting, historic time in the Service's history was appreciated.

It's not over yet. The individual fire reviews for the Clover-Mist, North Fork, Huck-Mink and Storm Creek-Hell Roaring fires have been reported to the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee and released to the world. I think what you'll find overall is that the decisions were made on the various fires were basically solid, and that they reflected good fire-fighting strategy and tactics with consideration for wilderness and park values.

A joint Department of Agriculture - Department of Interior group has reviewed fire management policies in wilderness areas and national parks to see if policy applications needs refining. A summary of their findings appears in this issue. The complete report and its recommendations have been made available to the public for sixty days, ending on February 21st. Public meetings will be held in a number of locations during this period.

Pending completion of this policy review process, prescribed natural fires will be treated as wildfires. Park fire management plans will each have to be reviewed prior to the next fire season to insure that the plans conform to policy. The Branch of Fire Management is preparing a plan to accomplish this review. Consistency among adjacent land management units will be particularly important.

The Service has identified its wildland fire needs in the budget process through a document called Fire-Pro III. This package identifies the personnel and funds needed to meet our needs for permanent fire staffing, initial attack capability, cyclic hazard fuel reduction, training, equipment replacement, and interagency coordination and support.

In order to better coordinate NPS fire management, the branch chief's position is being physically reassigned to Washington, effective January 22nd. This will make it possible for the Service to coordinate its fire program with other agencies on a national level. Both BLM and the Forest Service have their chiefs of fire management here, but we have not had regular contact at this level with them or with other offices for many years. It is critical that we represent Service fire interests with the Department, Congress and various budget entities on a regular basis, and I look forward to having the position in Washington so that we can work together more closely to bring the fire management program to the level necessary to meet the needs of the agency.
Field Incidents

Horseshoe Bend: On October 19th at about 5 am, Alabama State Patrol officers came upon the wreckage of a car against a tree just off Alabama Route 22 outside of the town of New Site. The driver, ranger Nancy V. Grissom, 35, of Horseshoe Bend, was found within, and had apparently been killed instantly in the accident. There were no skid marks or any indications of excessive speed, and evidence indicates that Grissom may have fallen asleep at the wheel. The accident is thought to have occurred late on the evening of the 18th, as Grissom was returning to the park from a class in Montgomery.

Blue Ridge Parkway: On the evening of October 17th, an anonymous caller reported that he'd heard a woman calling for help below the parkway's Chestoa View Overlook. Rangers and rescue personnel responded, began a search, and soon found the bodies of Susan Haire, 32, and Helen Gibbs, 30; later in the night, they found James Gibbs, 37, who was suffering from cuts and back injuries which he said he'd received during a fall which occurred while he was attempting to rescue the two women. According to Gibbs, the three had stopped at the overlook to view the sunset, and the two women fell after engaging in horseplay as they sat on the wall of the overlook. Investigators soon found, however, that Gibbs had recently taken out a $100,000 insurance policy on his wife's life, and that he had previously made threats on her life to others. It was also learned that Helen Gibbs had recently been reinstated as an officer in the Army Nurse Corps and that her husband would be eligible to receive all her military benefits in the event of her death. Evidence indicated that Haire was travelling with the couple because Helen Gibbs feared for her life. James Gibbs was subsequently indicted on two counts of first degree murder.

Lake Mead: On the afternoon of November 1st, ranger Mike Rondas responded to a domestic dispute involving a concession employee and his wife at their trailer in the concessioner employees' housing area at Overton Beach. Rondas was able to calm both parties down, but told the pair that he would have to take further official action if the dispute erupted again. The husband, 40-year-old Terry Maines, threatened Rondas with harm if he returned. Later that day, Maines' wife came to the Rondas trailer nearby; she said that she wanted to leave her trailer, but that her husband would not let her go and refused to give her the keys to the family car. Rondas, along with a Clark County police officer as backup, returned to the trailer and attempted to convince Terry Maines to give the keys to his wife. When the Metro Officer entered the trailer to get the keys, Maines placed the infant who was in his arms on the kitchen table, picked up a 350 magnum rifle and aimed it at Rondas, who took his revolver out of his holster and confronted Maines. The Metro Officer jumped on Maines, and he and Rondas then disarmed and handcuffed him. The rifle had a full magazine with one cartridge in the chamber with the safety in the off position. Maines also had at his disposal a 12 gauge shotgun, which was loaded and chambered, a .22 caliber magnum rifle, which was loaded and chambered, a loaded 9 mm pistol, and an unloaded single-shot 12 gauge shotgun. Two of the weapons in Maines' possession were later found to be stolen. The suspect was charged with the following State of Nevada charges - two counts of attempted murder of a police officer, domestic violence, resisting arrest and possession of stolen firearms. In addition, he was charged in federal court with armed assault on a federal officer.
Olympic: On November 9th, a park ranger on hunting patrol in the Quinault area of Olympic confronted five Cambodian nationals with an elk in their possession. Two of the subjects were armed with semi-automatic AK 47 rifles with six, 30-round clips. The other three carried a variety of weapons, including .22 caliber rifles, a .25 caliber automatic pistol, a bayonet and a meat cleaver. All five subjects were arrested and charged with hunting and killing wildlife under Title 16 USC, Section 256b. Two of the subjects were also wanted on warrants by local jurisdictions.

Great Smokies: On the afternoon of November 18th, rangers Dave Little and Rick Yates investigated a report of poaching in the Chilhowee area in the southwest corner of the park. Two individuals with rifles and packs were spotted; one was captured, but the other dropped his pack and escaped. Both packs contained deer quarters. In an attempt to intercept the second man, the rangers headed to a spot just outside the park known as Top of the World. Shortly after arriving there, a pickup truck with three men appeared. The men got out of the vehicle and began verbally abusing Little and Yates; when Little pulled out his radio to request assistance, one of the men knocked it from his hand. The same man then pulled a knife. When the rangers drew their weapons and told him to put it down, the man went to the truck, pulled out a rifle with a scope on it, aimed it at Yates and told him to put his revolver down. As this was going on, more vehicles arrived, and several other men, apparently armed, joined the men from the pickup in surrounding the rangers. The three men finally jumped into their truck and left. When Yates and Little attempted to pursue them, a white van blocked the way and slowed their pursuit enough to allow the pickup to escape. The FBI and US Attorney’s office are working on the case. Several good suspects have been identified.

Ranger Activities Telecommunications Network

As most of you know, Ranger Activities has established a communications network on CompuServe which has linked this office with Boise, FLETC, all ten regional ranger activities offices, about 100 park chief rangers (either regularly or intermittently), and scores of other offices Systemwide. Ranger Activities now employs this system to transmit, among other things, informational messages, advance copies of signed memoranda, and a morning report which goes out to the field each day before 9 a.m. Eastern time. This report summarizes all incident reports received within the past 24 hours, updates on the fire situation, program notes, a calendar of upcoming events, and advance notification of the transmittal of important memoranda to the field. This system has proven highly useful on a number of occasions, but never more so than during the past summer’s fires in Yellowstone. Chief rangers who were on line received daily briefings (the same ones which were prepared for the Secretary) on the status of the fires in the Greater Yellowstone Area, same day notifications of call outs and background information on the causes of the fires.

We strongly encourage you to join this network. If you have the necessary equipment (a PC with a modem and communications software) and would like information on CompuServe, please send a note to Bill Halainen in Ranger Activities.
Fire Policy Review

As we went to press, the joint Department of Agriculture - Department of Interior Fire Management Policy Review Team had just released its report to the Secretaries of those two departments. The team was established on September 28th "to review national policies and their application for fire management in national parks and wilderness and to recommend actions to address the problems experienced during the 1988 fire season." Due to the importance of the report, the summary of its findings and recommendations are reported in full:

"The Fire Management Policy Review Team finds that:

- The objectives of policies governing prescribed natural fire programs in national parks and wildernesses are sound, but the policies themselves need to be refined, strengthened, and reaffirmed. These policies permit fires to burn under predetermined conditions.

- Many current fire management plans do not meet current policies; the prescriptions in them are inadequate; and decision-making needs to be tightened.

- There are risks inherent in trying to manage fire, but they can be reduced by careful planning and preparation. Use of planned burning and other efforts to reduce hazard fuels near high value structures and to create fire breaks along boundaries help to reduce risks from both prescribed natural fires and wildfires.

- The ecological effects of prescribed natural fire support resource objectives in parks and wilderness, but in some cases the social and economic effects may be unacceptable. Prescribed natural fires may affect permitted uses of parks and wilderness, such as recreation, and impact outside areas through such phenomena as smoke and stream sedimentation.

- Dissemination of information before and during prescribed natural fires needs to be improved. There needs to be greater public participation in the development of fire management plans.

- Internal management processes, such as training more personnel, developing uniform terminology, and utilizing similar budget structures, would significantly improve fire management.

- Claims were heard that some managers support 'naturalness' above all else, allowing fires to burn outside of prescription requirements without appropriate suppression actions.

The Team recommends:

- Prescribed natural fire policies in the agencies be reaffirmed and strengthened.
- Fire management plans be reviewed to assure that current policy requirements are met and expanded to include interagency planning, stronger prescriptions, and additional decision criteria.

- Line officers certify daily that adequate resources are available to ensure that prescribed fires will remain within prescription, given reasonably foreseeable weather conditions and fire behavior.

- Agencies develop regional and national contingency plans to constrain prescribed fires under extreme conditions.

- Agencies consider opportunities to use planned ignitions to complement prescribed natural fire programs and to reduce hazard fuels.

- Agencies utilize the National Environmental Policy Act requirements in fire management planning to increase opportunities for public involvement and coordination with state and local government.

- Agencies provide more and better training to assure an adequate supply of knowledgeable personnel for fire management programs.

- Agencies review funding methods for prescribed fire programs and fire suppression to improve interagency program effectiveness.

- Additional research and analysis relating to weather, fire behavior, fire history, fire information integration, and other topics be carried out so that future fire management programs can be carried out more effectively and with less risk.

- Allegations of misuse of policy be promptly investigated and acted upon as may be appropriate.

Yellowstone Update

The Greater Yellowstone Area Coordinating Committee has prepared a paper on the impacts of fire and fire suppression activities this year, entitled the "Greater Yellowstone Area Post-Fire Resource Assessment and Recovery Report", which was due out in final version in December. Stu Coleman, chief of resource management at Yellowstone, has written a summary of the report in The Buffalo Chip, the park's resource management newsletter, from which the following has been derived (along with an article on wildlife mortality by Bill Schrier):

- Acreage - According to researchers, the exterior of the fire perimeter covers 1.38 million acres, which is somewhat less than previous estimates, which ranged as high as 1.6 million acres. Approximately 10% to 20% of whitebark pine habitat was burned over, but not all whitebark trees were destroyed. An estimated 160,000 acres of ungulate winter range burned in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA), or about 11% of the total acreage. Of this, 4% is in canopy, 4% surface (ground cover only) and 3% meadowland or sagebrush communities. On the Northern Range, an estimated 30% burned, with less than 9% of meadow or sage/grassland burned. About 2% of the GYA area mapped so far falls into the category of high intensity burn.
- Timber - Approximately 64% of the gross acreage of the fires was in the park; 31% was in designated wilderness in national forests; 2% was in unsuitable timber management areas; 2% was in suitable timber.

- Facilities - A number of facilities and developmental improvements were affected by the fires, including over 200 miles of roadside (ditches, walls, curbs, etc.), 10 picnic areas, over 50 miles of frontcountry trails, 12 developed areas, electric transmission lines and facilities (valued at $1.5 million), over 600 miles of backcountry trails, 100 trail bridges, one comfort station, one backcountry cabin and 12 guest cabins.

- Suppression effort impacts - The estimated 850 miles of handline and 137 miles of bulldozer line (32 miles in the park) have the potential to cause erosion problems, alter plant growth, succession and community composition, and provide ready-made seed beds for exotic plants. About 1.4 million gallons of retardant were dropped on the park; on at least two occasions, direct hits on cutthroat trout streams killed a sizeable number of trout. An estimated 10 million gallons of water were helicopter-dropped in the park, with an unknown additional amount by truck pumpers and individuals. Streams were impounded for drafting water, some oil and gas spills occurred, and riparian vegetation was damaged. Along with the firecamps which were in every major developed area in the park, there were 51 known spike camps, 150 helispots and an uncounted number of "coyote camps" in the backcountry. About 150 acres were denuded.

- Wildlife - The park staff conducted a fairly thorough survey of the park (430 miles of ground transects and about 50 hours of aerial surveys), and had located 254 large mammal carcasses as of November 4th. Nearly all died of smoke inhalation. Most of the animals were found in groups, and the great majority are thought to have died when the North Fork and Wolf Lake Fires advanced north on September 9th. Of these, 243 were elk, about 1% of the total of 30,000 to 35,000 elk estimated in the park last summer. Monitoring of 100 collared ungulates showed that they often moved out of the path of fires, then returned to their home ranges. Grizzly bears exhibited little movement; of 36 radio-collared grizzlies, only two moved any significant distance during the fires.

- Air quality - As measured by TSP (total suspended particulate matter - dirt, dust, smoke in the air), the combined GYA fires exceeded National Ambient Air Quality Standards under the Clean Air Act on 30 occasions. The TSP standard for initial alert to persons with respiratory ailments is 150 micrograms/cubic meter; on 8 occasions in August and September, readings exceeded 600. If the fires had not been a natural event, readings that high would have caused the Governor of Montana to require factories to close and vehicular traffic to stop. Readings of 1000 were obtained on two occasions. As a result of the monitoring, the Service's Air Quality Division has recommended that air quality be monitored on major fires in the future.
Cultural resources - Some cultural resources in the GYA were affected. One known historic site and some structures and ruins that may have been eligible were damaged. In the park, Sportsman Lake Patrol Cabin, four buildings in the West Thumb area, and three buildings in the Old Faithful Historic District were destroyed.

Visitation - Between June 1st and September 30th, total recreation visits to the park dropped 20.1% from 1987 levels. Total camper stays were down 25.7%, backcountry overnight stays were down 27.8%, and lodging stays were down 11.5%. October visitation, however, was 39% above the figures for October of 1987.

Health and Fitness

At the Rendezvous in October, approximately 60 rangers assisted Dr. Paul Davis, a leading exercise physiologist, in conducting fitness analyses in the areas of law enforcement, structural fire and wildland fire. The analyses, which together constitute one of the final "hoops" in the creation of a Servicewide fitness program, were needed in order to make a formal, scientific assessment of exactly what rangers do physically on their jobs. Almost all the participants agreed that the standards should contain some form of an aerobic test, an upper body strength test, and a requirement to be able to complete one pull-up (to simulate climbing a wall or into a window); they suggested that several other tests be recommended but not required. Dr. Davis has since prepared a written report on his findings, which is now being reviewed in Ranger Activities.

Recreation Fee Guideline Revisions

In early November, a work group met in Washington to revise NPS-22, the recreation fee guideline. Members of the group represented accounting, administration, parks with fee collection operations of varying sizes, regional and Washington fee program coordinators, and the Accounting Operations Division (AOD) in Reston. The meeting was timed so that this group could also discuss needed changes in the guideline with all ten regional fee coordinators, who were in town for their annual training session.

The main objective of the eight-member work group was to specifically revise chapters eight through eleven, which address fee collection operations, deposit and remittance procedures, audits and forms. Emphasis was placed on strengthening the procedures for collection and accounting for fee revenues. The guideline was last revised in 1987; since then, there have been a number of changes - among them, new fee legislation, new banking and Treasury requirements, and the creation of AOD - which have necessitated the implementation of new procedures and changes affecting the fee program Servicewide. Extensive revisions were also made to chapters three and five and the glossary.

The draft revision was sent to regional and park offices for review in early December. Current plans are to distribute a final version to regional fee coordinators and training personnel in time for the regional fee training courses scheduled for next spring.
As noted above, the regional fee coordinators also met in Washington in early November. The emphasis in their training session was placed on improving accountability and security for fee operations. During their four-day session, the group met with the Director, Associate Director for Operations, and Assistant Director for Legislative and Congressional Affairs and discussed the need for greater flexibility in the use of recreation fee revenues (particularly for funding collection) and for revisions to the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act to provide the Service with additional fee opportunities. As a result, the Director has asked the Associate Director for Planning and Development to produce a marketing package for entrance fee collection stations which would be similar to the package produced for the employee housing initiative.

Other subjects discussed during the training session included background checks for fee collectors, budget issues affecting the recreation fee program, Departmental IG responsibilities, AOD operations, and the prevention of employee embezzlement. The latter included a review of several case histories and the viewing of a videotape of a surveillance operation involving employee theft at an entrance station.

**Liability Bill Passes**

The "Federal Employees Liability Reform and Tort Compensation Act of 1988" was signed into law by the president on November 18th. This act amends Title 28 USC to provide for an exclusive remedy against the United States for suits based upon certain negligent or wrongful acts or omissions of federal employees committed within the scope of their employment. Under the act, the United States will be substituted as the sole defendant in cases alleging that a federal employee committed a common law tort if the employee is acting within the scope of his or her employment. The law protects the employee and provides an appropriate remedy for a victim injured due to the negligence of a federal employee. The bill was passed in response to the Supreme Court decision in Westfall vs. Ervin, which stripped federal employees of immunity from state common law tort actions and made them vulnerable to suits even when acting within the scope of employment. The bill covers Westfall-type cases, but not Bivens-type tort claims alleging violations of Constitutional rights.

**Briefly...**

- Ranger Activities is now on line with a telefax machine. If you need to get something to us, you can fax it to FTS 343-5977 (202-343-5977).

- R&R Uniform also has a telefax on line in its Nashville office and will accept faxed uniform authorizations and orders. That number is 615-885-4154.

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