

First Quarter, 2020

THE SIGNPOST



Dear Members and Supporters of the Park Rangers Association of California,

Please enjoy this issue of *The Signpost*. Use the hyperlinks below to jump to a specific article, or scroll through and read the whole newsletter whenever and wherever is convenient for you.

In This Issue:

[It's Almost Time... The 2020 PRAC Conference!](#)

[Under the Flat Hat](#)

[Becoming of a Park Ranger Peace Officer](#)

[Improvisation Can Nest with Interpretation](#)

[The California Hiking and Riding Trail](#)

2020 PRAC Conference Update

March 2 -5, Whitney Peak Hotel, Reno, by Andy Brown, Region 5 Director



Greetings from the home of the PRAC 2020 California Parks Training Conference! We're less than two months away from the conference, and I have some exciting developments to share regarding the training schedule, as well as info about the activity planned for Thursday, March 5!

As the conference nears, here are a few important dates to know about:

- February 3 is the last day to receive a free 2020 PRAC Conference t-shirt with your paid early registration. Why wait? Click [here](#) to register or visit <http://calranger.org/2020-conference.html>
- February 7 is the last day to take advantage of the special PRAC rate at the Whitney Peak Hotel! Click [here](#) to book at the special rate: \$103 a night... that's ranger affordable!

Are you up for an adventure? Register by February 7 to reserve your place on the bus for the Monday field trip to [Mormon Station State Historic Park](#) and a historic tour of Virginia City! This will include an underground tour of the [Chollar Mine](#), as well as tours of the neighboring [Comstock Gold Mill](#) and [Fourth Ward School](#). The cost is \$60, which includes a box lunch, or \$40 without (but who'd really want to explore Virginia City on an empty stomach?). Our lunch stop, the historic [Gold Hill Hotel](#), Nevada's oldest hotel, is also part of the tour. The bus will depart from the Whitney Peak Hotel at 9:00 a.m. and return by 4:00 p.m. Winter attire is advised. There is a limit of 56 attendees for the field trip, so register soon!

Here is a preview of the trainings that will be offered at this year's conference:

- Ranger Safety with Paul Berkowitz, NPS Agent (RET) and author
- Weed management through Soil Chemistry
- Use of Interpreters with Park Ranger Management
- Cultural Diversity in Enforcement and Contacts
- Avalanche Forecasting and How to Effectively Garner Public Involvement to Disseminate Current Conditions
- Narcan/Naloxone and Drug Identification Overview
- Ask a Podcast
- Carson City Rifle and Pistol Range: Challenges Faced with Reducing Hours at a Public Range
- Advanced Trail Building and Demands on Public Lands
- The Power of Social Media
- Creating Exhibits to Showcase and Archive Park History and Document Changes in Use and Demographics
- Fire and Fuel Management through Drone Mapped Mastication and Mulching
- Initial Search and Rescue Operations for All Terrains
- Creating and Using Short Films to Document Park History and Provide Interpretation
- Mine Safety for First Responders
- Multi-Specialist Park Ranger Model
- Libraries and Parks
- And much, MUCH more! Look for the full training schedule on the [2020 conference page](#)

But wait, that's not all! On Thursday, March 5th from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., join us for 21st Century Trails: An introduction to design and construction of environmentally and socially sustainable trails, presented by Kevin Joell, owner of Sierra Trail Works and member of the Eastern Sierra Trails Coalition. This course will consist of 90 minutes of classroom instruction, followed by 90 minutes of hands-on trail evaluation along the scenic trails of historic Bartley Ranch Regional Park, located at 6000 Bartley Ranch Road in Reno, a short drive from downtown. There is no additional cost to attend, but transportation will not be provided. Pre-registration is encouraged, but not required.

Lastly, please bring agency patches to trade! PRAC Member Jeff Ohlfs will have international patches available, fresh from the World Ranger Conference in Nepal!

Looking for more information? Please feel free to reach out to Matt and I via email at region5@calranger.org or CPTC@calranger.org for more information.

Under the Flat Hat

By Matt Cerkel

In late October I attended Clemson University's inaugural Ron Walker Leadership Program with ten other park professionals from around the country, including two current state park directors, two National Park Service superintendents and various other managers, supervisors and park leaders. To be honest I almost felt out of place at first. The program emphasized the role of science, research and academia can play in helping park leadership and managers in making sound, informed and defensible decisions, which is especially important with the myriad of issues facing parks today. The sessions and discussions with park leaders from across the country focused on the importance of leadership, the rewards, and often, the consequences. Other sessions and discussions were with leaders in park science and research. Lecturers included a retired state park director, a former director of the National Park Service, the current Acting Director of the National Park Service and a retired State Supreme Court Justice.



An emphasis was placed on looking at the following factors:

- The Application of Science and Research – Technology, connectivity and a complex collection of complicated issues require effective leaders to have access to the latest data and research to make informed educated decisions. Interpretation, utilization and awareness of the science and research enables leaders to make decisions grounded in science and becomes a fundamental and foundational tool in the management of public lands. Engaging and stimulating discussion: Can you solve a value issue with data? Can cost analysis, risk management and science complement the decision-making process?
- Innovation, trends and reality - A perspective that is focused on the field operations and decision-making. A thorough analysis of innovations, trends and how they are impacting management and leadership decisions.

The first lecturer, Gary Machlis, was one of my professors when I attended the University of Idaho in the early 1990s. Machlis was the Science Advisor to the Director of National Park Service until 2016 and is currently a professor of environmental sustainability at Clemson University. He laid the foundation for

the week when he presented his Framework for Decision Making in Park Management.

He talked about the range of decisions parks must make (illustrated by Figure 1) and a frame for decision-making (illustrated by Figure 2).

Figure 1. A Range of Decisions

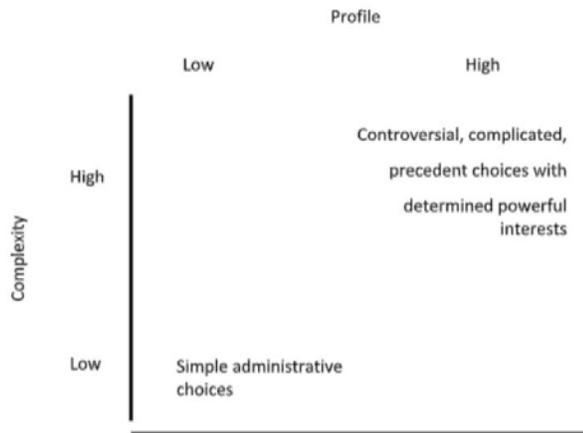
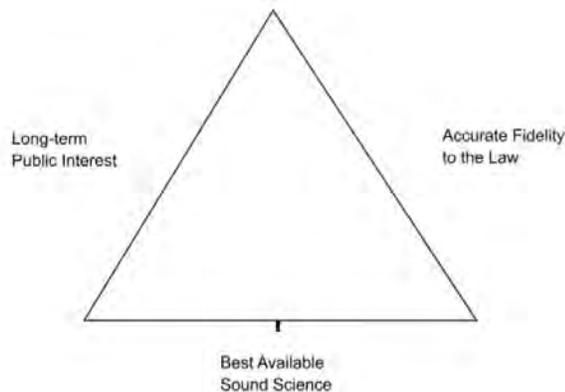


Figure 2. A Framework for Decision-making



This frame makes a lot of sense to me and could help agencies and individuals avoid pitfalls in decision-making. It can also be used to point out where more information and research is needed, such as staffing levels needed in parks.

Another presenter was Steve Shackleton, of UC Merced where he currently serves as the Executive Director of the Sierra Nevada Research Institute. Prior to UC Merced he served over three decades in the National Park Service, including as Chief Ranger at Yosemite and Associate Director of the National Park Service for Visitor and Resource Protection. He reinforced the idea for the Framework for Decision-making by discussing how decision making is a three-

legged stool, which is based on the law, science and fair defensible policy.

Another thing that stood out to me is David Vela, the Acting Director of the National Park Service, who stated by 2040 it is predicted that 500 million people a year will be visiting our National Parks. Which means the demand on local, county, regional and state parks will also continue to see huge increases in visitation. Which in turn makes me ask, what are agencies doing now to plan for that?

We were also introduced to The Interagency Visitor Use Management Council's new Visitor Use Management Framework. The framework was developed to provide cohesive guidance for managing visitor use on federally managed lands and waters. The framework is a planning process for visitor use management and can be incorporated into existing agency planning and decision-making processes. It is applicable to virtually all visitor use management situations and conditions on federally managed lands and waters. The framework is applicable across a wide spectrum of situations that vary in spatial extent and complexity from site-specific decisions to large-scale, comprehensive management plans. It would be easily adapted to local, regional and state agencies too. With increasing demand and use, properly managing visitors is vital in all our parks. We Rangers would benefit by identifying desired conditions for resources, visitor experiences, facilities and services. Implementing the planning process would involve gaining an understanding of how visitor use influences achievement of those goals and committing to active/adaptive management and monitoring of visitor use

Link to more information:

<https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/VUM/Framework>

At the end of the program we identified the issues and challenges parks face and recommended further discussion or research into them. These issues included the following:

1. Increasing use and capacity of parks
2. Creating a diverse workforce and visitor base
3. The polarized political environment and how that affects parks and issues that impact parks like climate change
4. Challenge of continued expansion to the park systems
5. Workforce development and management, including employee wellness and optimal staffing levels for providing a required services and positive visitor experience
6. Changing technology – disruptive innovation – staying relevant

7. How do we take a risk in a risk-averse world?

8. How to help people understand how much work it is to run a park in the terms they could understand

What do you think are the top issues for park management? Feel free to send me an email at matt@calranger.org. I will list them in my next article.

The Becoming of a Park Ranger Peace Officer

By Clayton Strahan, Chief Park Ranger



Like many agencies that employ Park Rangers, United Water Conservation District has struggled in recent years with the idea of granting limited and or full peace officer authority to its Park Rangers. Prior to 2005, Park Rangers at the District's Lake Piru Recreation Area were full peace officers as regulations were different, and the agency was operating on assumptions and outdated references to the California Penal Code and California Water code. Additionally, as a small local government entity, the District lacked the expertise and formal process necessary to grant such authority. As a result, the District revoked its Rangers of peace officer powers, designated them as public officers and withdrew the many tools used by Rangers in the enforcement of their duties, including the use of handcuffs, pepper spray and batons. The intent was to reduce the risk of liability, protect employees and ensure compliance with state statutes. However, what was not realized was that in removing the powers granted to personnel (as well as the tools used in executing their duties), the District unintentionally created a greater risk of exposure to personnel. By

limiting Rangers' ability to enforce the rules and regulations the District had adopted to protect its visitors, the District had also limited its ability to arrest or detain individuals as well as issue citations, which resulted in exposing employees to risky situations in which they were asked to enforce rules but with little, if any, formal training or safeguards.

Fastforward to 2013, when the District embarked on efforts to re-establish its Ranger program in an effort to ensure both its employees and visitors were properly protected. In order to do this, the District underwent an extensive evaluation of all aspects associated with its Ranger program.

The evaluation was a lengthy process which began with a determination of whether or not the District met the criteria for a Local agency as defined in the California Penal Code. Upon legal review, it was determined that the District was in fact a local agency with the authority to adopt rules and regulations and to appoint personnel to enforce those regulations.

The second step in the process was to hire an independent consultant to evaluate the District's risk exposure and to determine if staff had qualified immunity in executing enforcement duties without peace officer powers as well as evaluate current staff. This process revealed that staff did not have qualified immunity, which resulted in the ---- development and drafting of revised job descriptions and duties based on the actual needs of the organization. This including prioritizing duties, outlining training requirements, and so on.

Next, the District had to evaluate financial implications of the change to its program, including evaluating the cost of contracting with local law enforcement and the potential costs associated with impacts to CalPERS. In its evaluation, it was determined that contracting local law enforcement on a day to day basis would be substantially more expensive than the cost of empowering Rangers. In its consultation with CalPERS, the District learned that, based on the revised job descriptions and the duties of Ranger personnel, there were no additional costs associated with CalPERS. Fortunately, the duties associated with Rangers' enforcement duties would not require the District to change employees' classification from the standing "miscellaneous" category to Safety employees, another plus in support of the change.

The final step in the process was to require all personnel to undergo Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST), as well as approved background checks, fingerprinting, psychological evaluations, complete PC-832 arrest and control training and complete a physical battery exam with the local Sheriff's Department. It was decided that regardless of whether the District granted limited peace officer authority to its personnel, undergoing these measures

reduced the District's exposure, ensured that staff were equipped with the knowledge needed to avoid unwarranted exposure to safety and liability issues.

Now that all the pieces were in place, the District had to develop an employee manual and policies that would clearly define and reinforce the roles and responsibilities of the newly christened Peace Officers. The District contracted Lexipol, a leader in public safety policy development and risk management, and compiled all of the previously referenced materials into a complete package which it then presented to its Board of Directors for review and approval.

Lastly, the District developed a revised set of ordinances (Rules) and bail schedule and submitted those documents to the County Superior Court and District Attorney's Office for review. This submission also included the revised job descriptions, policy manual and a resolution from the District's Board of Directors redefining its Park Rangers as limited Peace Officers pursuant to Penal Code section 830.31(b). At the District's May 23, 2019 Board of Directors meeting, the entire packet was approved and adopted, granting limited Peace Officer authority to its Park Rangers, including the administration of Peace Officer oaths of office to its three newly named Peace Officers.

Upon reflection of this lengthy process, I believe it is important to share with others a few of the findings discovered throughout the process. First and foremost, for our organization, firearms were never an option and it was instrumental that in our messaging we highlighted that the term "Peace Officer" did not mean firearms and that firearms were a secondary option to consider as part of the tools that MAY be available to personnel. A second take away would be to ensure you have evaluated all possible negative impacts to your organization, including consideration of the exposures inherent with NOT having such authority. In doing so, you are empowering your elected officials to evaluate the pros and cons as well as presenting them with several options and alternates. The one misstep made during the District's process was that we initially only offered one option for our officials to evaluate. When it was presented as a complete package with various options, it provided the Board with the opportunity to review the process from several angles. Ultimately, every organization is somewhat different but by empowering employees with the ability to do their jobs as effectively and efficiently as possible, you are also providing the greatest protections to your Park's visitors.

Improvisation Can Nest Respectively and Effectively with Interpretation

By Aleta Walther

This article first appeared in the July/August 2019 edition of Legacy, the membership magazine of the National Association of Interpretation. It is reprinted here with permission.



Alaskans affectionately and proudly refer to their state as the “Last Frontier,” and rightfully so. Alaska is one-fifth the size of the lower 48 states combined, but its population hovers only around 750,000. It offers more than 3,000 rivers, three million lakes, about 27,000 glaciers or 34,000 square miles of ice, 70 potentially active

volcanoes, and Denali, the highest mountain in North America. We cannot overlook Southeast Alaska’s notable icefields and mystical rainforest rich with flora and fauna, including black bears, eagles, mountain goats, five species of salmon, more than 350 bird species, myriad mushrooms, lavish lichen species, and much more.

In short, Alaska is a nature interpreter’s dream. Its vibrant landscape, meandering waterways, and spine-tingling wildlife encounters are beyond “Wow!”

I work as an interpretive guide for Gastineau Guiding Company located in the capital city of Juneau. I lead multi-hour interpretive town tours, whale-watching excursions, mountain hikes, and glacier-viewing walks. Gastineau Guiding’s excursions trek through the emerald-hued Tongass National Forest. With this in mind, Gastineau Guiding’s management trains its staff as certified Alaska Tour Guides (ATG) so they may inspire guests to appreciate, respect, and protect Alaska’s natural, historical, and recreational resources. Developed by the Alaska Department of Commerce, the ATG curriculum is similar to NAI’s Certified Interpretive Guide training. In fact, my CIG credential spurred Gastineau Guiding’s management to grant me a job interview after I applied through NAI’s Career Center.

According to cruisecritic.com, Alaska’s Glacier Bay National Park was the number one cruise ship destination worldwide in 2018. Therefore, more than

1.3 million cruise ship passengers are expected to visit Juneau in 2019. Consequently, I may lead as many 100 tours over the summer driving the same road, hiking the same trails, traveling the same coastal fjords day in and day out, but guiding will not be boring. This is because Mother Nature routinely presents unexpected distractions or opportunities. Bear cubs in a tree, a plodding porcupine, the shrill whistle of a varied thrush, a whale breaching, an eagle screeching—any, and all, of these wildlife encounters could be a reason a guide might veer from a program’s theme.

Whereas NAI defines unexpected turns, opportunities, or interruptions as teachable moments, I prefer to think of such moments as improvisational opportunities.

Improvisation: to compose, play, recite, or sing on the spur of the moment.

You see, I don’t always have the luxury of interpreting what is considered a teachable moment—for example, when a bear lumbers toward my guests, a tour is behind schedule, or misty precipitation turns torrential. Providing clear and concise direction, a quick fact, a snappy snippet, or a simple yes or no may take precedence over interpretation. In addition, my tours offer a cornucopia of sights, experiences, and discoveries, but guests’ interests and expectations may not fall within a particular theme’s parameters. Consequently, I often veer off theme to satisfy my guests’ curiosities or interests.

Veering off program or theme is not a bad thing, according to Kerry Plemmons, a professor at the University of Denver’s Daniels School of Business. Plemmons says interpretive programs are like his executive classes where he strives to provide “edutainment,” his catch phrase for “educating, entertaining, and inspiring students.”

“My classes never turn out exactly as planned, although we always get through the scheduled content,” Plemmons said during his keynote appearance at the **California Park Rangers Association’s** annual conference in Ventura, California, in March. “I try to interact with students when they ask questions or want to look at something differently, even when it is slightly off curriculum. Just like Tina Fey, I say ‘yes and’ to almost anything, and then work to direct the improvisation back to the subject at hand.”

Plemmons added that shifting off topic or theme, and back, takes skill.



“Improvisation is creativity,” he told more than 100 rangers in attendance. “If you talk about the same thing, the same way, in the same sequence you are going to fail. At the end of the day, I want students to understand this, or be inspired by that.... I get my message across, but if I follow a script, I have lost my students.”

I suspect many interpreters don't equate teachable moments as improvisational opportunities, but Sandy Tolzda, a California State Park interpretive ranger, does, and agrees that improvisation can add value to interpretive programming.

“The ability to improvise during programs allows interpreters the freedom to address unexpected teachable moments, like an egret scooping up a wriggling fish,” said Tolzda, who provides interpretation at parks within the San Diego Coast District, North Sector. “It can also provide new ideas for keeping a program fresh and enjoyable.”

Whereas a successful interpretive program is anchored by a primary theme that is specific and expresses a singular message or point of view, my themes are broad by necessity. I rely on secondary themes as the lynch pins for connecting the various elements of a multi-hour interpretive tour. During Gastineau Guiding's five-hour Alaska's Whales, Glaciers, & Rainforest Trails excursion, not only do we encounter whales, glaciers, and forest flora, we may chance upon bears, beavers, deer, orcas, porpoises, sea lions, seals, and throngs of birds. And that's just the wildlife! Each of these species can be a primary theme by itself. My primary themes for my programs are:

- Little details create the big picture of Alaska's history, mystery, and magnificence.
- Southeast Alaska is a land shaped and sustained by rain.
- In Southeast Alaska, the land and sea are intricately interconnected.
- Discover Juneau's 3Gs: gold, glaciers, and government.

Some secondary themes I use interchangeably across different tours include:

- Little hints of history reveal Juneau's eclectic past and present.
- Little snowflakes create, shape, and sustain big glaciers.
- Devils Club is a mythical and medicinal plant revered by Native Alaskans.
- Big whales depend on little plankton to survive and thrive.
- Black bears are more afraid of us than we are of them.
- Glacial recession sprouts forest succession.

While I absolutely agree with the principles of interpretation, I find that improvisation nests respectively and effectively within an interpretive program. I also find that improvisation provides a less scripted and more authentic experience across my lengthy interpretive programs.

About the Author

Aleta Walther, CIG, ATG, CTA, is a PRAC member. She has led more than 300 interpretive tours through the wonders of Southeast Alaska and looks forward to 300 more. People ask her “What’s it like hanging out with the whales and hiking the awe-inspiring Tongass National Forest?” Find out. Check out her blog at prwriterpro.com/blog. She can be reached at aleta@prwriterpro.com.

California Riding and Hiking Trail History

By Jeff Ohlfs, US Chief Park Ranger (Ret.) / PRAC Honorary Lifetime Member



Recently an article was published that suggested the California Riding and Hiking Trail (CRHT) was established to link Native American sites and historic trails from Malibu to the Colorado River. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

Trails have been routes of travel in California since prehistoric times. Post World War II saw recreation in America increase including recreational trails. A visionary idea, the CRHT, began in 1944. The state legislature passed the CRHT Act in 1945. It was signed by Governor Earl Warren and became chapter 1460 of

Statutes of 1945. A state-wide initiative under the California Department of Parks & Recreation, it created a 3,000-mile recreational trail system.

The trail was to loop around the state by going up the Sierra, cross below the Oregon border, back down the coast, and loop back above the Mexican border. The current Pacific Crest Trail covers much of what was anticipated to be the Sierra section. The trail was supported by 29 counties of the 38 counties it passed through. In 1955, the CRHT Act was amended to provide for feeder trails which would connect with the main trail. Joshua Tree National Park was

one of the first to be a feeder trail. The JTNP feeder was dedicated by Supt. Elmer Fladmark on May 31, 1958 and cost \$8,000 to build. You can still find segments using the original name like a portion in the [East Bay Regional Park System](#) and [San Diego County](#).

The trail began from easements, gifts, purchases, and already existing public lands. Local groups and governments were directed to establish the best route. The trail width was to be 30 inches with a 20-foot right-of-way. Campsites were proposed to be constructed 15 to 20 miles apart. In 1961, 963 miles had been completed. State funds helped finance some of the construction and maintenance. The 1964 Parks for America report by the National Park Service called for completion of the trail. But sadly, the idea went by the wayside, the CRHT Act was repealed in 1974 and lost to history except to a few of us. The demise was attributed to the CRHT Act failing to provide for eminent domain for land acquisition, lack of state-wide public support, and dwindling state park resources. Today, the CRHT still remains a vision for some equestrian and hiking enthusiasts but more importantly is a historic piece of our public land history.

PRAC Officers, Directors and Staff

President: Matt Cerkel

(415) 609-3863 matt@calranger.org

Vice-President: Candi Hubert

(714) 357-7861 region4@calranger.org

Region 1 Director: Amy Wolitzer

(925) 960-2400 amy@calranger.org

Region 2 Director: Aylara Odekova

(408) 274-6121 aylara@calranger.org

Region 3 Director: Richard Weiner

(909) 952-1520 region3@calranger.org

Region 4 Director: Candi Hubert

(714) 357-7861 region4@calranger.org

Region 5 Director: Andy Brown

(775) 849-2511 region5@calranger.org

The Signpost Editor: Amy Wolitzer
newsletter@calranger.org

Executive Manager: Betsy Anderson
(707) 884-3949 office@calranger.org

Webmaster: Jeff Price
(805) 278-9201 webmaster@calranger.org

Thanks for reading! Please [let us know](#) if you have ideas for what you would like to see in future issues of *The Signpost*.



Copyright © 2018 PRAC, All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:

PRAC
P.O.Box 153
Stewarts Point, CA 95480-0153

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).