



THE SIGNPOST

Second Quarter 2024

President's Message:

I am pleased to say that our 2024 conference held in Ventura County was a huge success. I want to thank all the attendees, speakers, and the 2024 conference committee for their dedication and hard work that made the event successful. I am happy to report that the conference made a profit of over \$2000 for PRAC's conference account.

I am also excited to announce our 2025 conference, which will be held at the Whitney Peak Hotel in Reno from Sunday, March 16, to Thursday, March 20, 2025. If you have ideas for training sessions or would like to present during the conference, please contact us. The conference committee members are Matt Cerkel, Andy Brown, Mike Warner, and Kyle Roberson. You can get in touch with them by sending an email to matt@calrange.org; andy@calranger.org; mike@calranger.org; and kyle@calranger.org. We will make additional announcements about the 2025 conference in the coming months.

I also wanted to update our members on the ongoing efforts in Sacramento to amend Labor Code Section 4850. Section 4850 provides first responders



and public safety officers with up to one year (52 weeks) of their full salary when they are injured on the job and placed on temporary disability. Currently, Park Ranger peace officers are not covered by 4850.

Senate Bill (SB) 1058 proposes to change that by adding a new subject of 4850 to cover "Peace officers under section 830.31 and 830.34 of the Penal Code who are park rangers employed on a regular, full-time basis by a county, city, or local agency." PRAC supports SB 1058 and has sent in a letter of support.

PRAC Director Kyle Roberson is leading PRAC's efforts on this important legislation. If you or your POA (peace officer association/union) support this effort, contact Kyle at kyle@calranger.org. Kyle can direct you where to send letters of support.

President,
Matt Cerkel





Multi-Agency Search and Rescue Training at Foothills Nature Preserve

Mike Warner, Northern California Regional Director 2



Figure 1: Jackie Tubis of Santa Clara SAR Teaching About Santa Clara Search and Rescue Capabilities.

At Foothills Nature Preserve, Palo Alto Open Space hosted a multi-agency Search and Rescue training on April 3rd, 2024. Nineteen Park Professionals from San Jose, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Marin Municipal Water District, and the City of Palo Alto attended the event. The lead instructor for the course was Michael St. John of Marin County Search and Rescue, in conjunction with assistant presenters Lisa Harris of San Mateo County Search and Rescue, Jackie Tubis of Santa Clara County Search and Rescue, and Nathan Rainey of Palo Alto Office of Emergency Services.



Figure 2: Michael Warner, Palo Alto Open Space, shows a Search Map to a San Jose Park Ranger.

The class was an awareness course for first responders and touched on important topics such as searchers' safety/risk assessment, pre-plan creation and use, search tactics and planning, lost person behavior, linear feature theory, and utilizing Caltopo as a planning and operations tool. The course also stressed the importance of getting to know and work with your local sheriff's Search and Rescue teams.



Figure 3: San Jose Park Ranger Brandon Slaton and Park Ranger Assistant Jordan Snelgrove along Los Trancos Trail

An essential aspect of training like this is building interpersonal relationships among Rangers and other park staff and facilitating relationships and knowledge with other non-park agencies. This was highlighted during the final part of the class, which culminated with an hour and half mock search



for two missing hikers within the Foothills and Arastradero Nature Preserves. Teams were mixed up so that most of the teams were not made up of all of one agency. Vehicle, Bike, and Ground teams were deployed throughout the area and collectively checked approximately 32 miles of roads, trails, and recreation areas in an hour and a half. The two missing subjects were eventually located, medically assessed, and returned by UTV to the command post.



Figure 4: MROSD Ranger Lindsay Contreras and Palo Alto OES Coordinator Nathan Rainey coordinate the mock search from the Palo Alto OES Command Vehicle.

The motto of the Park Rangers Association of California is “Professionalism Through Unity.” Projects like this are a great example of how we can unite to sharpen our skills, learn, build community amongst our agencies, and partner with community members.

PRAC’s Board of Directors supports these types of projects and wishes to let all members know that we would like to support more group training events. These types of events also help provide opportunities for members to collect certifications towards [PRAC’s Generalist Ranger Certification](#)



Program. This training exceeds the minimum requirement of four hours of Search and Rescue Awareness Training. In the future, this training will be refined based on feedback from this event and may be offered as an option at the 2025 Conference in Reno, Nevada, or a future training in the Bay Area.



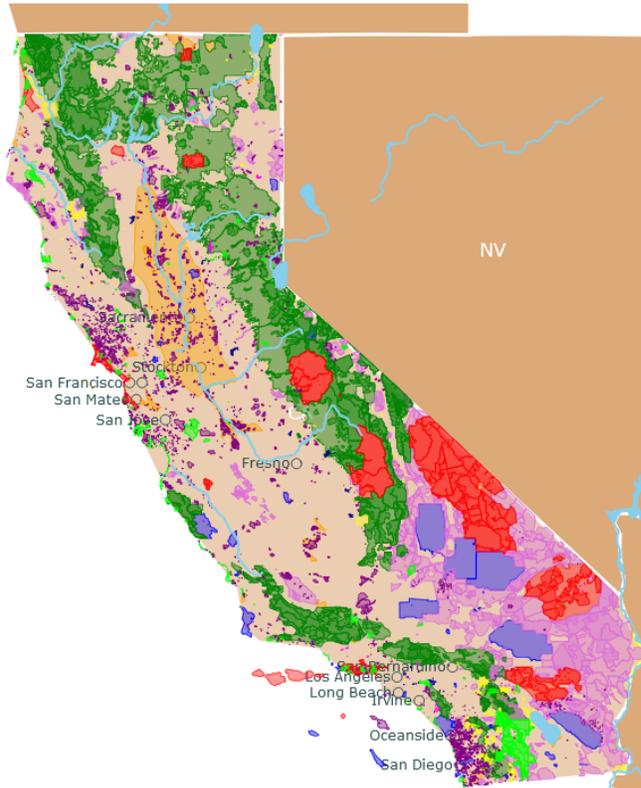
Figure 5: Rangers from multiple agencies coordinate a hasty search plan.





California Protected Areas: The Numbers and Historical Summary

By Jeff Ohlfs, NPS Chief Ranger (Ret.), PRAC Honorary Lifetime Member



Key	
	Lake or River
	City
Manager	
	National Park Service
	California Dept. of Parks and Recreation
	U.S. Forest Service
	Fish and Wildlife Service
	Tribal Lands
	Bureau of Land Management
	Department of Defense
	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
	Other

Map of California's Protected Areas

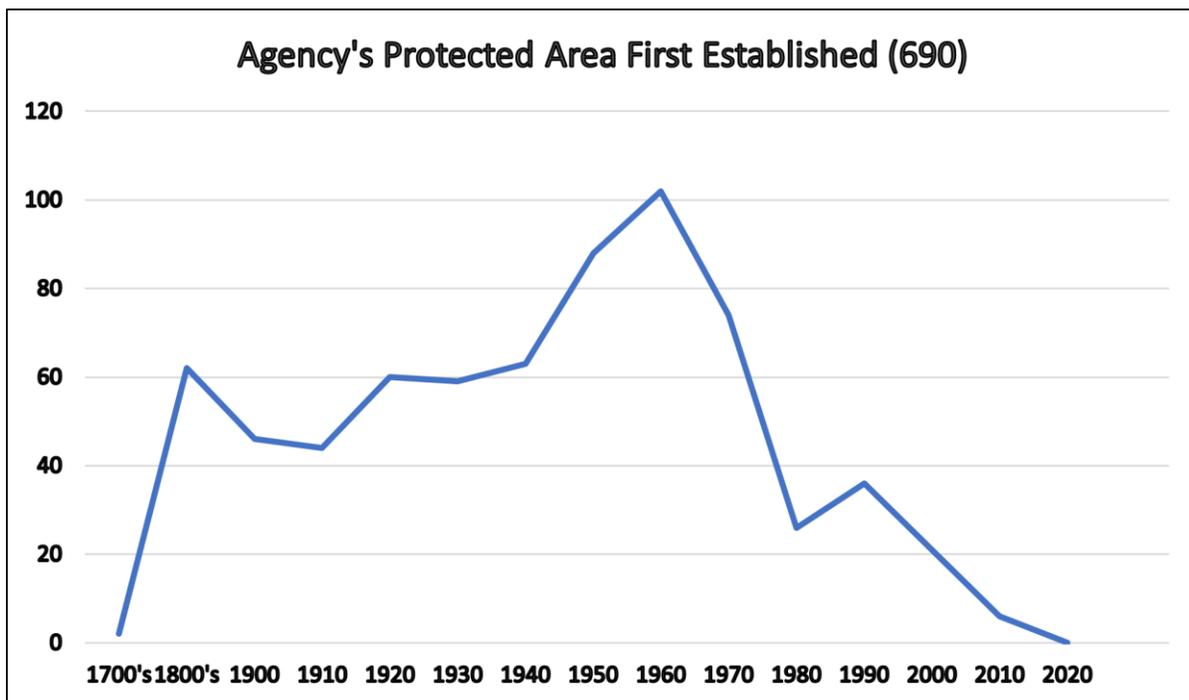
For over ten years, I've been working on compiling information on our state's protected areas. As of March 2024, 767 agencies (government, NGOs, private, etc.) manage approximately 15,248 protected areas covering 54,687,759 acres or 53% of California. Here's a summary breakdown.

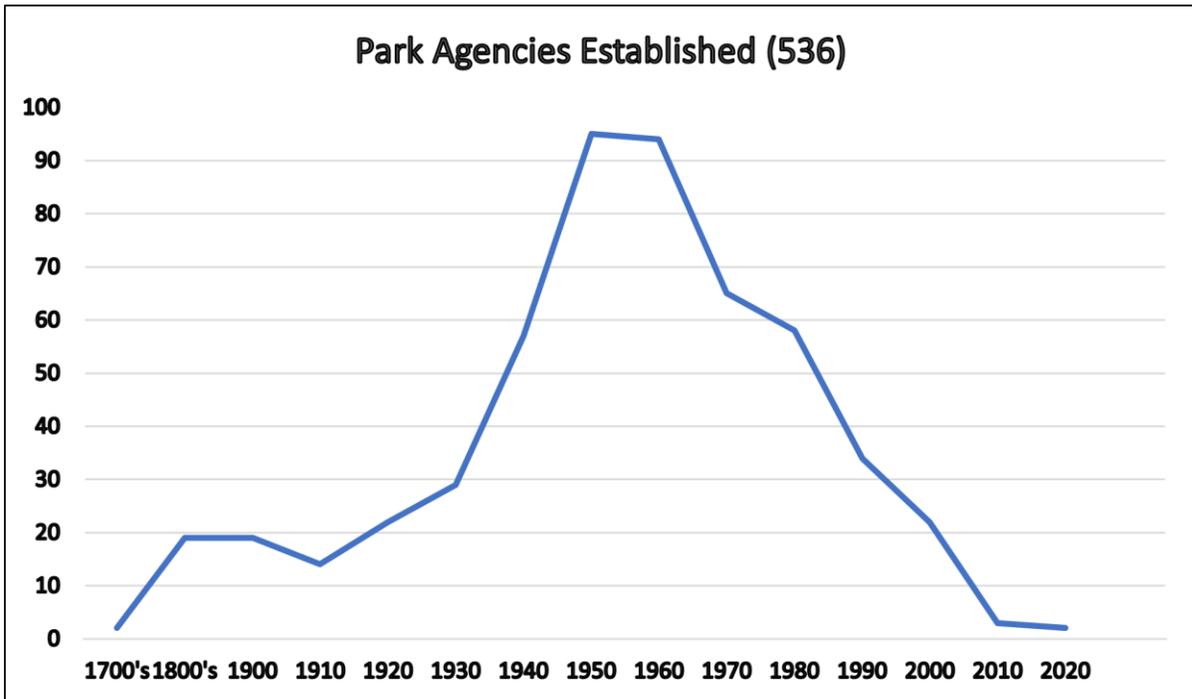
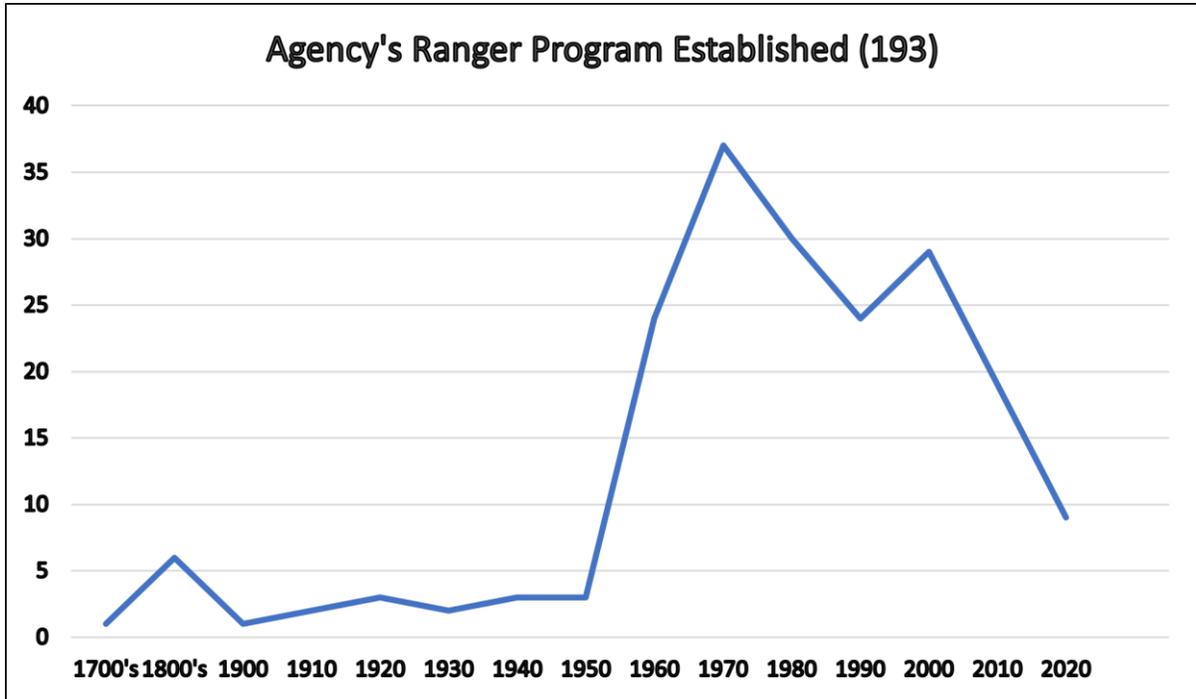
	Agency	Protected Area Units	Acres
Federal	9	142	44,316,157
Tribal	6	9	26,787
State	20	2,632	7,867,497
County	59	1,131	493,872
Rec. & Park District	96	1,200	232,368



Community Service Districts	34	187	3,517
Special Districts	5	36	124,224
City	482	9,528	248,550
Water & Power	35	150	920,827
NGO	12	181	452,186
Private	9	52	1,774

The following graphs give you an idea of when a park agency, an agency's first protected area, and a ranger program were established.





All information was determined from internet research and agency response.



Under the Flat Hat Matt Cerkel, President



As discussed in my last article, March 6th of this year marked my 29th year as a Park Ranger. However, the die was cast much earlier. My dream of becoming a Park Ranger dates to my childhood. As a child, I dressed up as a Park Ranger for Halloween. My father was friends with the Ranger Supervisor at Samuel P. Taylor State Park, and through that connection, I was given a state park uniform shirt and loaned a state park helmet. I kept that shirt for many years and would often “play” Park Ranger in my backyard.



Aspiring Ranger, 1977



By middle school, I developed a love for Mount Tamalpais. This love affair continues to this day. I have a deep connection with “the mountain.” By the time I was in high school, I was regularly exploring Mount Tam on my mountain bike; it was my home away from home. During this period, especially after watching the documentary “The Law of Nature: Park Rangers in Yosemite Valley” on PBS, I lost interest in becoming a Park Ranger because “I didn’t want to be a cop.” Here is a link to the video: <https://youtu.be/DpdPz0cq8jk?si=0ZrWH3KAq5ntByzl>. Only years later, after having to deal with park visitors who didn’t want to follow the rules, I changed my mind about this.

I ended up going to the University of Idaho and majoring in what was then called “wildland recreation management” at their College of Forestry (now College of Natural Resources). Because of my love for Mount Tam, I would return to Marin for my summer breaks, and given my major, I wanted to work there. I had a choice to work as a Park Aide for state parks or the Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD). I chose MMWD because it paid better and was a shorter commute.

Within a few days, I realized I wanted to become an MMWD Park Ranger. I also quickly understood the need for law enforcement powers. A longtime MMWD Park Ranger started to mentor me and began to work on the training and education I would need to achieve my goal. Over the next few years, I continued working on my degree in Wildland Recreation Management, got Advanced First Aid and later First Responder certifications completed the basic wildland firefighter training (Firefighter Type 2), became a volunteer firefighter, and joined the Park Rangers Association of California.

In the spring of 1994, I earned a bachelor’s degree and was promoted to Park Ranger Aide. That fall, while working, I attended the law enforcement ranger academy at Santa Rosa and went through the hiring process with



MMWD to become a sworn Park Ranger.

On March 6th, 1995, I was sworn in as a Park Ranger with MMWD, with the job of protecting and preserving Mount Tamalpais. I had achieved my goal; only later did I truly realize how lucky I was. On March 7th, 1994, I attended my first PRAC conference, which was held in Santa Rosa.

Early in my career as a Park Ranger, my mentor told me that if you remain a Park Ranger long enough, you'll see everything go in cycles. Looking back over the past 29 years, I now genuinely see he was correct. In my next article, I will discuss the changes I've seen in our profession and how it is often cyclical. In the meantime, I'll be on patrol, performing the best job in the world.



Veteran Ranger, 2024



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