



THE SIGNPOST

Fourth Quarter 2024

President's Message:

2024 is quickly winding down and it's time to look forward to 2025. In the coming weeks, regular members of PRAC will receive their electronic ballots for the upcoming election of our vice president and regional directors of Nevada and one of the two directors for Northern and Southern California for their 2025-2027 terms.

PRAC has also updated the Natural Resource portion of our Professional Ranger certification program by adding UC ANR's California Naturalist certification as one way to meet the Natural Resource requirements of the Ranger Certification Program.

https://www.calranger.org/download/2024_25certification.pdf. Visit UC Environment Stewards to learn more about the certified California Naturalist Program.

<https://calnat.ucanr.edu/> There will also be a session on the California Naturalist program at our 2025 conference.

We are about three and a half months from our 2025 conference at the Whitney Peak Hotel in Reno. When you read this, registration should be available on our website's conference page.

<https://www.calranger.org/2025conf.html>

We have many good speakers and sessions scheduled, including our keynote speaker, Donald Forgione, the retired director of the Florida State Park System. We also have Police Captain



Dan Willis (ret), the author of Bulletproof Spirit, scheduled as a speaker. Here's the link to the conference draft schedule for more information.

<https://www.calranger.org/download/2025conf11.18v.pdf>

Here's a link to room reservations.

<https://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/rnomtup-pra25-69f6e610-7f95-4650-8b17-14bf122c0552/>

It will be a great conference, and I hope to see many of you there. Happy holidays, and we will see you in the New Year.

President,
Matt Cerkel

Farewell to Monica Edwards, a wonderful artist, and friend **By Candi Hubert, PRAC Vice President**



I met Monica Edwards 17 years ago, while we were both working at OC Parks. I remember seeing an incredible logo that she had created for the OC Parks academy. I immediately wanted to get in touch with the artist who created the logo. I found Monica who was very gracious and offered to create logos for the annual PRAC Conference and found a t-shirt vendor who I have used for many years now for our conferences.

Monica was 62 years old when she passed away after a 3-year battle with cancer. She was not only a graphic design artist but an active plein air artist. What was important to her



as an artist was to let the audience finish the picture. Her goal was to leave enough out of the painting, so the viewer was an active participant.

Her work has been featured at the Hilbert Museum in Orange, at a traveling exhibition in Sorrento Italy, and at the Laguna Beach Festival of Arts for many years. Of her art, she said “It takes everything I love about life and puts it into one experience, which is sitting still in nature, seeing deeply the colors around you, and listening to everything around you”.

Monica will be missed greatly by her family, friends, plein air artists, and OC Parks colleagues. I will miss her friendship, conversations and collaborating over all these years.

Remembering Park Ranger Kat Pringle From Sonoma County Regional Parks



Honoring the life of

KAT PRINGLE

Park Ranger

It is with deep sadness that we share news of the sudden, devastating loss of our colleague, Ranger Katranne "Kat" Pringle.



Kat was a dedicated and knowledgeable ranger who brought passion and warmth to everything she did. We will remember her for her absolute professionalism and commitment to serving her parks, her community and her co-workers. Fearless yet compassionate and fun yet focused, Kat was well-liked by all and a role model for many, especially younger team members who emulated her dependability and attention to detail. At 38, her life and career were cut far too short, but she leaves a legacy of service and care that will not be forgotten at Sonoma County Regional Parks.

Kat attended the National Park Service Academy and joined us as a park aide in 2017 and was promoted to ranger in 2018. She worked in parks throughout the county, taking each assignment with enthusiasm and curiousness. She also was an EMT and a P.O.S.T-certified defensive tactics instructor. She embraced opportunities to learn new skills and encouraged her co-workers to do the same.

Tragically, Kat was killed while off-duty last week in what the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office reports as an apparent homicide-suicide involving a former colleague who shot her and then shot himself.

She leaves behind her son, family, friends and co-workers who will miss her immensely. To assist with funeral costs and offer her loved ones some financial relief, two accounts have been created to help during this difficult time:

porac.org/fundraiser/sonomaco-kpringle/

www.gofundme.com/f/support-for-pringle-family

Molossia National Parks

By Jeff Ohlfs, Retired NPS Chief Ranger, PRAC Honorary Lifetime Member

Have you ever heard of a micronation or even visited one? Did you know that there is one in Nevada?



“Micronations, microstates, imaginary countries, counter countries, unrecognized nations, or ephemeral states, are all terms for countries which have been declared independent by (usually eccentric) individuals or small groups, but unlike other such attempts, fail to achieve widespread diplomatic recognition. Many have only one inhabitant; others are larger. Most seem to consist of a single Grand Poobah, with or without a coterie of petits Poobahs.

In most cases, Micronation founders have declared dominion over land that exists. Like other countries, some of these nations have proclaimed declarations of independence, adopted constitutions, sought diplomatic recognition, sent out envoys extraordinary and ministers plenipotentiary, displayed coats-of-arms, and issued stamps, passports, and currency” as defined by one Micronation: The Kingdom of Talossa.

I count about 58 in the world. I’ve been to three: Conch Republic (Key West), Slowjamastan (Anza Borrego Desert), and Redonda (a protected area of Antigua and Barbuda). PRAC Region 5 might be surprised to learn they have one, the Republic of Molossia.

In 1998, The Republic of Molossia was founded by his Excellency Kevin Baugh, President of Molossia. Molossia claims sovereignty over 11.3 acres of land near Dayton, Nevada.

Okay Jeff, why is this important to PRAC? Well, in May, I visited the Molossian National Park Service (MNPS) which “preserves the natural and cultural resources of our nation for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. We work tirelessly to conserve the scenery, natural and historic objects and the wildlife of Molossia.”

Molossia has three units in its national park system. The first is Heliotrope Falls National Park established in 2000. “The park includes a portion of Sutro Creek, where it forms a cascade through a narrow canyon. This cascade, named Heliotrope Falls, is the centerpiece of the park, which is in fact very small. The park is frequented by wild horses, coyotes, hawks and many other desert animals.” (MNPS)



Heliotrope Falls National Park (photo courtesy of Molossian National Park Service)

The second is Back Forty National Park established in 2003. This “park includes over half of the Molossian Home Territory, an area of boulders, washes and the Lone Tree, as well as the Molossia National Cemetery. The park is set aside as a natural area within our nation for the purpose of preserving the natural ecosystem of the high desert and maintaining a viable habitat for the many animals and plants that call Molossia home. It is toured via the Trans-Molossia Interpretive Trail.” (MNPS)



Back Forty National Park



Trans-Molossia Interpretive Trail

And finally, the third is Mustachistan War National Battlefields Park established in 2006. This park preserves “the peaceful desert area where two battles were fought, the Battle of Black Lizard Canyon and the Battle of Rattlesnake Rift in 2006. (MNPS)



Mustachistan War National Battlefields Park (photo courtesy of Molossian National Park Service)



Molossian Desert Spiny Lizard in Back Forty National Park

I made an unsuccessful attempt to visit Heliotrope Falls National Park and Mustachistan War National Battlefields Park. I could not find a Molossian National Park ranger to guide me. Warning: don't try visiting these two parks without a ranger. The desert is vast and there are no landmarks.

Like any visit to a micronation, it's a good-natured slam at our geopolitical system.

My visit to Molossia was a pleasant morning guided by its President Kevin Baugh and exploring the Nevada high desert. Consider a stop the next time you travel near Carson City and bring your expired passport to get it stamped.





Please check their website for “visiting hours,” customs, and passport formalities;
<https://www.molossia.org/>.

Coincidentally, the Republic of Molossia has a province 16 miles from my home called the “Molossia Desert Homestead” in Joshua Tree.

My next Micronation visit will be following the World Ranger Congress to the Principality of Seborga, Italy.

Under the Flat Hat

By Matt Cerkel, President



2024 has not been a good year for park law enforcement agencies in California. As I’ve previously discussed, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved the Sonoma County Regional Park’s plan to strip their 20-plus rangers of their peace officer powers and institute a less effective and more expensive contract with the Sonoma County Sheriff’s Office to provide four deputies and a sergeant to provide peace officer services in their parks. Now, the Fulton-El Camino Regional Park District’s board of directors voted to



disband their park police department under dubious circumstances.

The Fulton-El Camino Recreation and Park District (FEC) is in Sacramento County. The current police department evolved from a reserve park ranger program started in the 1960s, which developed into an armed ranger program around 2000, followed by the creation of an officer position in 2012. The department has ten part-time police officers and park rangers. Typically, one or two officers are on duty daily for approximately six hours.

ABC10 in Sacramento reports, "Park Police staff said their agency eases the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office's workload and often responds faster, as the sheriff's office is tied up with high priority calls countywide.

Sacramento Sheriff's dispatch records show since September 2023, FEC Park Police have responded to around 130 calls involving assault, trespassing, child abuse, animal abuse, vandalism, and more.

However, employees emphasized that their primary role is maintaining a presence in the parks, which makes a big difference to residents."

FEC has reported that the cost of the park police program has increased from \$570,000 in the 2021-22 budget to \$811,000 last year. Consultant have also noted deficiencies in the training and equipment in the program, and FEC claims it could cost more than a million dollars to bring the program up to date. To help correct it, FEC brought in an interim police chief. From professional and personal experience, the cost estimate seem grossly inflated and it is likely the consultants had predetermined "facts" to support the agency's position.

Now, the FEC board of directors voted 4-1 to disband the department, despite community criticism of how the district runs its department. Community members say these issues could have been addressed them years ago, and voiced concern over the disbandment of the department as well as the meeting's short notice.

According to ABC10 and current and former members of the FEC park police, there were irregularities in the hiring of the interim chief. ABC10 reports that "There was no job



description or posting for the FEC Police Chief position, and both the police chief and the General Manager of FEC declined interview requests.

Per ABC10, “In an email, the district said Johnson never had to apply since her position was “contracted.” However, when ABC10 filed a public records request for that contract, the district produced no responsive records.”

Members of the FEC park police also claim the interim police chief was not sworn in, and the required background check, psychological evaluation, and medical assessment were not completed.

“When ABC10 asked if a swearing-in ceremony and the legally required checks were done for Johnson, the district did not answer.”

In addition, “records show Johnson wasn’t reported to California’s Commission on Police Officer Standards and Training (POST), a requirement when any peace officer joins a new department. POST told ABC10 they’re in talks with the park police about this.”

ABC10 also stated that the interim police chief “earns around \$16,800 a month – over \$220,000 annually – for a part-time role, making them the highest paid person in the history of FEC.” Strange, considering FEC is claiming concerns about the park police program's cost.

It should be noted that the interim police chief resigned after only 11 months as a police chief in Marin County and was given a \$57,000 severance package. The reason given for the resignation was “to spend more time with their family.”

Now, with the disbandment of the FEC park police, ABC10 reports, “The Sacramento County Sheriff’s Office will still oversee the areas...and...advocates for the park police are concerned as the sheriff’s office is currently short-staffed and responsible for overseeing the entire county. They worry park calls won’t be a priority, leading to an increase in crime.”

Read more:



- <https://www.abc10.com/article/news/investigations/local-park-police-face-uncertain-future-leadership-rakes-high-salaries/103-12c85923-eeaf-4cca-b325-b3c855641c90>
- <https://www.abc10.com/article/news/local/fulton-el-camino-park-police-department-disbanded/103-d79f18fc-52c1-4f2a-8d50-b3f2ad4eb0aa>

This story is all too familiar to me: high-level park managers with an agenda and, in some cases, biases against park law enforcement, who then ram through ill-conceived plans with little or no concerns for facts and future impacts.

The damage these types of managers inflict can take decades to undo. They show little regard for the employees or the public. It is disappointing that elected officials seem willing to go along with these plans despite often overwhelming evidence and public sentiment that it's not in the public (or the park's) long-term best interests.

I have also come to realize that these bad managers often take advantage of the fact that legal or labor issues can be discussed with elected officials behind closed doors, and this often leads to decisions being made based on false or misleading information. I believe this happened in Sonoma County and now at FEC.

We might add a session at the 2025 conference to discuss strategies to deal with these types of issues.





From the Signpost Archive

When to Wear the Hat

by Lee Hickenbotham Jr.



What distinguishes a park ranger from any other park professional? Is it the uniform? No, maintenance, naturalists and interpreters all wear tan and green. Is it the truck? Not really, we all drive cool green or white trucks. So, you are probably wondering “what is it?” It’s the hat!

The hat I am referring to is not just any old hat. It’s not a ball cap, cowboy hat or hard hat. This hat is very unique and has many names. It has been called a flat hat, campaign hat, Stetson, Stratton, drill instructor hat, Canadian Mounty hat but the most famous name is the “Smokey the Bear” hat.

The true origin of “the hat” is unknown. However, according to information I ascertained from the CSPRA webpage, the potential originator was a fellow named John B. Stetson. Stetson was a hat maker from Philadelphia. One evening while sitting around a campfire with some fellow men, Stetson made his first genuine felt hat. It had a four-inch brim, four-inch crown and a strap for a hatband. (Sound familiar?) This hat evolved into what we as park rangers wear today.



So, when do we wear the hat? Well, whenever you are involved in a park related event, anytime you are doing an interagency program and doesn't a law enforcement contact go smoother when you have on "the hat?"

It's a symbol of what a park ranger is and stands for. If you ask me when you should wear "the hat," I will tell you; "anytime you are in uniform, on duty and representing your agency and profession."

Be proud of what you do and wear the hat.

<https://npshistory.com/newsletters/prac/signpost/2004-6.pdf>

"Park rangers are protectors, explainers, hosts, caretakers, people who are expected to be knowledgeable, helpful, courteous and professional: people who find you when you're lost, help you when you're hurt, rescue you when you're stuck, and enforce the law when you or others can't abide by it."





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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*.