

THE SIGNPOST

Fourth Quarter 2025

President's Message:

This is my final President's Message, and I would like to thank all the PRAC officers and officials I have served with, as well as all the PRAC members who allowed me to serve in this important role. In mid-December, if you are a regular voting member of PRAC, you should receive an electronic ballot.

PRAC also hosted our first Virtual General Membership Meeting just before Thanksgiving. This meeting will become an annual event. The most important message from this meeting is the need for PRAC to have more frequent regional training for its members. In 2026, PRAC will host regional training sessions on Basic Search and Rescue Operations, and Basic Wildland Fire Pump Operation. Look for additional information on PRACnet and in future issues of *The Signpost*. If your agency is interested in hosting ranger-related training or has a training opportunity opening to outside agencies, let PRAC know.

Even though I will no longer be President, I will continue to assist PRAC as needed and to contribute my "Under the Flat Hat" articles to *The Signpost*. I will be the keynote speaker at our upcoming 2026 conference in San Diego, where I will discuss what led me to become a Park Ranger, as well as sharing stories of what I've learned from my 30-plus-year career in the profession.

Registration is open. Visit the conference page to learn more and sign up. <https://www.calranger.org/2026conf.html>

I hope to see many of you in San Diego.

Matt Cerkel, President
Park Rangers Association of California

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This Issue's Articles



President's Message



2026 CPTC



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From the Signpost
Archive

2026 California Parks Training Conference
By Candi Hubert, Vice President and Conference Committee Chairperson



As we get closer to the PRAC Conference in March, I am reminded why I love attending these conferences all these years. The conferences give us a chance to network with colleagues we only see once a year from all over California and Nevada. When I think back

on the last 18 years, I remember a lot of great places we have gone to such as Hearst Castle, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Yosemite, Cabrillo National Monument and many other places. We are lucky to live in California where we have everything from the mountains to the sea.

I'm also reminded of meeting many great colleagues along the way and having training opportunities and experiences we may not have otherwise. Some of my colleagues have told me this is their favorite conference, and I've seen many of the same park professionals returning for many years. It's also great to see many new faces at the conferences.

This year is our 50th Anniversary of the PRAC Conferences. This will be my 18th conference and my 5th time as co-chair. We want this to be a special conference where park professionals can meet new people, make new friends and take back valuable training with them. So, I look forward to another successful conference and seeing everyone soon in San Diego.

<https://www.calranger.org/2026conf.html>

Save the Dates

By Jeff Ohlfs, NPS Chief Ranger (retired)



World Ranger Congress

The 11th International Ranger Federation World Ranger Congress will take place in Puerto Iguazú, Argentina, from April 19-23, 2027. In partnership with the Syndicate of National Rangers of Argentina Republic (SIGUNARA), this prestigious event will bring together over 500 rangers, conservation professionals, and industry experts from around the world. The congress will provide a platform for sharing knowledge, best practices, and innovative solutions to common challenges. Through keynote presentations, workshops, and networking opportunities, attendees will have the chance to engage with peers, exchange ideas, and advance their professional

development. Mark your calendars.

World Parks Congress

The World Protected and Conserved Areas Congress (AKA World Parks Congress) is the premier global forum for setting the agenda for protected and conserved areas. The 7th Congress (generally every ten years) will be September 2027, in Panama. More specifics to follow. The Congress is the premier global forum for setting the agenda for protected and conserved areas. It brings together leaders and experts from governments, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, academia and the private sector to develop and advance solutions for nature conservation involving effective area-based conservation.

Basic Pump Operations Training at Foothills Nature Preserve: Rangers Gain Hands-On Experience in Wildland Fire Pump Operations

By Michael Warner, Northern California Director 2



On October 8th, 2025, Foothills Nature Preserve in Palo Alto served as the scenic backdrop for a specialized training in basic pumper operations. This course, designed to enhance wildland pump management skills, is based on the S-211 course standards outline by the National Wildfire Coordination Group

The training was led by Matt Cerkel, Senior Ranger with the Marin Municipal Water District, who has over 30 years of expertise in wildland firefighting. Rangers from Marin Municipal Water District, City of Palo Alto, City of San Jose, Marin County Parks, and Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District attended the session.

Topic covered included understanding friction loss, water management and appropriate nozzle selection, portable pump set up, and drafting using traditional vacuum methods vs using ejectors.

The basic pump operations course was not only an opportunity for technical

skill development but also a chance to strengthen professional relationships among regional ranger teams. Participants appreciated the practical approach taken by instructor Matt Cerkel, whose real-world experience helped bridge theory and practice.

As the State continues to face wildland fire risks, joint training like these are essential for preparing rangers to meet future challenges.

Call for Nominations

By Michael Warner, Northern California Director 2



The Awards Committee is seeking nominations for outstanding individuals and teams who have demonstrated exceptional service, leadership, and dedication in the field of park operations and resource protection. These annual honors recognize those who have gone above and beyond in their commitment to public service, innovation, and stewardship.

Award Categories

Nominations are open for the following:

- **Medal of Valor**
To be awarded to any uniformed park professional in California or Nevada who has been killed in the line of duty, or at the risk of such nominee's own life, displays extreme courage, bravery, and devotion to duty in exposing oneself to grave danger in the face of a seemingly hopeless situation notwithstanding the officer's own imminent peril. The Medal of Valor nominee must have demonstrated that there was a conscious awareness of the imminent threat to physical safety at the time the action was performed.
- **Medal of Honor**
To be awarded to any uniformed park professional in California or Nevada who distinguishes oneself by conspicuous bravery in the performance of such nominee's sworn duties under unusual, complicated, or hazardous conditions where the nominee used excellent judgment in accomplishing an assigned mission, including sustaining human life.

- **Lifesaving Award**
To be awarded to any uniformed park professional in California or Nevada who performs an exceptional act under emergency conditions, not involving bravery, wherein a service is rendered that results directly in sustaining a human life.

To nominate a deserving colleague, team, or volunteer, please contact mike@calranger.org no later than Jan 15th, 2026.

Under the Flat Hat

By Matt Cerkel, President



This will be my last “Under the Flat” article as the president of the Park Rangers Association of California, and I hope I have served the park rangers and other uniformed park employees of our association well. This upcoming year, 2026, will mark PRAC’s 50th Anniversary as the voice of the Park Rangers in California and Nevada and the 160th Anniversary of the park ranger profession, which began here in California. California has always led the way in the Park Ranger profession. In 1866, Galen Clark became the first park ranger when he was appointed the “Guardian” of the Yosemite Grant, a state park. In 1898, the Army Superintendent of Yosemite “received authorization to appoint Forest Rangers.” In that year, an Army report to the Secretary of the Interior referred to these rangers as “Park Rangers.” In 1905, the civilian forest rangers in California’s National Parks officially became park rangers. The park ranger profession has a proud history in California, and we, as rangers and members of PRAC, represent its future.

The parks we protect, and our profession, continue to face many challenges. These issues include budget shortfalls, staffing shortages, changing demographics, an increasingly urban state, overuse, recruitment and retention, the ongoing debates over ranger law-enforcement authority, and generalists vs. specialists. As PRAC members, we have an essential role to play and through all our efforts we continue to address the challenges our chosen profession faces.

In the past 10 years, PRAC has hosted many successful and well-

attended conferences, navigated the challenges of the COVID pandemic and its significant impacts on our parks, updated The Signpost newsletter, revised and updated our Ranger Directory, participated in World Ranger Day, recognized Park Rangers for their contribution to the profession or for their life-saving efforts, and revised the Park Ranger Professional Certification program.

I wish to thank all our current and former directors for stepping forward to make PRAC happen! Finally, I want to thank Jeff Price, our webmaster; Betsy Anderson, our office manager; and Jennifer Molidor, the editor of *The Signpost*, for all their efforts in managing key aspects of PRAC.

In closing, I wanted to reshare these remarks from the memorial service for Jeff Christensen, NPS Park Ranger, Rocky Mountain National Park, that I first shared at the start of my first term 10 years ago.

We Are Rangers

"We are rangers. We walk the last of the wild lands, patrolling the interface between man and nature. Ours is the world of the sun and sky, cloud and storm. Ours is the world of flower and tree, rock and mountain. We rest by the waterfall and cool our feet in the deep pools of the glen. The elk and deer, the coyote and fox, our silent companions. The hawk and eagle follow us by day, the owl leads us by night.

We are rangers. We travel alone, silent caretakers of a world fast disappearing. It is not our job, rather it is our honor, to behold that which nature has bestowed upon us. It is not our job, rather it is our privilege, to play some small part in preserving this beauty for our children and their children beyond them. We travel alone, there are few of us, and the task which lays before us is enormous. Some say we face risk, even unnecessary risk, but in our hearts we know that it is nothing compared to the loss of the wilderness. It is nothing compared to the loss of the bear, the cougar, and the wolf. We risk all to protect that which endures beyond our individual selves, that which we love beyond all else.

We are rangers. We treat our fellow man with respect. We understand those who seek solitude in the wild places. We are teachers, to those who wish to tread for the first time on ground made of dirt rather than concrete. We watch in delight at the smile of the visitor who first substitutes the canyons of skyscrapers for that of massive cliffs. We feel the excitement of the family who first hears the bugle of the elk, the child who sees the bighorn ram, and the grandmother who reviews her life while sitting by the flowing stream.

We are rangers. We keep those who would harm the land as well as those who would harm their fellow man at bay. We care for the sick, search for the lost, assist those who cannot assist themselves. Sometimes we bring home those who would not otherwise return."

-- Mark Magnuson, Chief Ranger, Rocky Mountain National Park

From the Archives

The Signpost September/October 1991

<https://npshistory.com/newsletters/prac/signpost/1991-5.pdf>

From the President's Desk

"125 Years of Park Ranger Service"

By Christopher W. George

During the first week of October, I will be attending the State Parks 125th Anniversary Celebration in Sacramento. Although I am not an employee of state parks, I am a member of CSPRA and an official representative of PRAC.

On reflecting 125 years of park ranger service, I see many images. PRAC is made up of those images. We are a combination of efforts that began over 125 years with Harry Yount as Yellowstone's first "Game Keeper," and Galen Clark, Yosemite's first Guardian.

As time progressed, titles, uniforms and images started to change. Women came into the picture in 1918, when Clare Marie Hodges became the first female park ranger in California. In 1923, Herma Albertson became the first female National Park Service ranger-naturalist to be permanently hired at Yellowstone National Park.

Today's roles, image and philosophies have changed dramatically. We each see our own agencies roll a little differently, each a little more complex. However, the basic issues have always been the same not only for federal, but for state, county and city agencies as well. We still see the controversy over armed or unarmed, and the continued increased division between ranger and naturalist. Many of the issues have now been around for 125 years. Each agency has a goal and direction. Often it is looked upon as being controversial to others. This happens within PRAC since our membership is so diverse, and this distresses me. (Sure, we're different but **we are all rangers** and we should all be proud).

This year two agencies: the National Park Service and the United States Forest Service, are both celebrating anniversaries, The National Park Service's 75th, and the Forest Service's 100th. Even PRAC this year celebrated its 15th anniversary.

So, what have we learned in 125 years? Quite a bit. We have learned that being a park ranger can be one of the most fascinating and rewarding professions around (even if the pay's not so good). Being a park ranger is a proud and noble life style. I see in the eyes of many that spark that yells out; ~"Hey, I'm proud to be a park ranger! It's a hard road we choose to travel but many of us feel that it's well worth it.

During the 125th Anniversary Celebration, PRAC will be presenting the organization with a proclamation of goodwill. But as I see it, I will be wishing us all Happy Birthday!

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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*.

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