

Problem Solving

The August 16, 2012 meeting was to discuss the staffing of State Parks. Alternative models were presented by East Bay Regional Parks and the National Park Service. Most of the discussion from the various Peace Officer associations present, however, seemed to focus on justifying the generalist ranger concept.

I see State Parks at a cross roads moment in time. We have a choice of continuing on in the same organizational structure that we currently have, with all its attached cultural norms, specialized costs, expectations, and limitations or we can make adjustments and point ourselves in another direction that improves the ability of State Parks to manage its many properties and meet its obligations to the public.

I want to discuss three things with the Committee:

- Uniformity
- Diversity
- Transparency

Uniformity

The National Park Service model, as presented, would be a good model for State Parks to emulate. It is very close to what we presently have and could be implemented without undue reorganization. The key would be that every District would need to be uniformly staffed to ensure that all core functions were covered at the local level. Please note that I am asking for uniform staffing at the District level – not the Park unit level which is the model given us by NPS! This is, therefore, a modest proposal, but will still respond to, and alleviate, very real deficiencies in core program areas. With all core program areas equally represented at the District level, with dedicated positions for subject matter specialists, particular needs within individual parks can be better addressed and more efficiently responded to.

Diversity

People with knowledge of sound environmental practice would agree that a mono-culture in any environment is not as robust as an environment that fosters and supports diversity. An organization with broad responsibilities and duties across disciplines that don't have the same professional duties and goals, educational requirements, or skill sets needs to have that diversity reflected in its organizational structure, and more importantly in its management structure.

In the last 20-30 years less and less diversity within the management of State Parks has led to a situation where law enforcement personnel dominate all levels of management, from the Sector Superintendent to the Deputy Director. This situation has come about because of a dedication to 'the generalist ranger' despite the fact that such a concept is, by necessity, obsolete in this age of technical and professional specialization. Additionally, clinging to this

self-imposed title has encouraged a belief that 'we can do anything' – a sentiment that was stridently pushed during the last public meeting. In 2007 there was a Generalist Ranger Taskforce that examined the viability of the 'generalist model'. In the course of this study, it is noted: "Many State Park classifications have unique abilities and knowledge that could be used to greater benefit (page 17)."

During the August 16th meeting the training that rangers receive was emphasized numerous times. In the "Final Report of the Generalist Ranger and Lifeguard Task Force" the committee cited statistics on the training that a ranger receives (page 22):

"In 1985 Ranger and Lifeguard Cadets spent just under 200 hours on park training and 400 hours on POST training. In 2007, Ranger and Lifeguard Cadets still spend under 200 hours on park training and almost 900 hours on POST training. The emphasis on law enforcement training versus other Department training has significantly changed during that period.

In addition, POST-required training after the academy has proportionally increased while other core area training requirements has not, leaving less time devoted to the type of training that assists in developing the knowledge base that leads to a proficient generalist Ranger or Lifeguard."

These are the words of the Task Force, but then the Task Force clearly goes on to state, in spite of these admitted limitations, "that the generalist model continues to be a viable solution for the statewide delivery of Visitor Services core program responsibilities (page 2)."

I have been involved in key positions for training out of my Division since 2005. We do instruction for classes that address the widest level of classifications (i.e., Introduction to State Parks) where we have one hour to explain the professional practice of historic preservation. We also provide instruction on cultural resources to the Cadets during their less than 200 hours in park training....cultural resources is allotted eight (8) hours and museum collections is allotted four (4) hours. There is also a 36 hour course, Resource Management, that I facilitate that is directed at management personnel. This class is intended for Superintendent and Maintenance Chief level personnel, and we have trouble filling the class with 20-25 students. Today, about 50% of personnel that are required to complete this class have not done so. During this class, approximately 12 hours each is devoted strictly to cultural or natural resource management – with the remaining time covering topics that relate to both types of resources (i.e., CEQA review processes).

The take-away from this discussion is this: law enforcement personnel receive approximately 48 hours of instruction on, for example, cultural resource management – delivered at the broadest levels, with the intent that law enforcement personnel, who are the managers, at least have an understanding of what their specialists need to do in the course of their jobs. None of the training that I impart to our law enforcement personnel could justify a statement that they can do cultural resource management or even make informed decisions about the protection or preservation of cultural resources without professional input from a State Archaeologist or

State Historian. Yet, that is what the mind-set of a 'generalist ranger' perpetuates – "I can do it all".

State Parks law enforcement personnel have what appears to me to be excellent training in one thing, law enforcement. I would not take that away from them or belittle it – but they do not appear to have the experience or expertise to assume duties in other core areas – duties that can be better understood, considered, and applied in a diversified atmosphere within the Department.

I have worked for the Department for almost 20 years and have a Master's level education in the field of archaeology and cultural resource management, many of my colleagues have the same or possess Ph.D degrees. However, we are locked out of management positions at the Sector or Superintendent levels because we aren't law enforcement certified. It was stated in the public meeting that being law enforcement certified wasn't necessarily a qualification to achieve one of these positions, but I think that an examination of who does hold these positions within the Department will reveal that, with only a few exceptions, non-law enforcement personnel do not appear in any major management positions. Therefore, diversity in management is very low, and often only on a 'limited-term' basis.

Transparency

Are budget cuts over many years the sole reason that State Parks is failing to maintain its infrastructure, protect and preserve its natural and cultural resources, and while doing some wonderful things, limited in its ability to provide world-class interpretation and education? State Parks is currently supporting the second largest law enforcement organization in the State of California. It is only exceeded by the California Highway Patrol. As we saw earlier, the demands just for training this exclusive group of professionals, has more than doubled in the last 25 years. With all the specialized equipment, personal body armor, vehicles, K-9 officers, and communications equipment that has been added, and continues to be upgraded....what is the true cost to the Department to support such a battalion? I use the military term here because many cadets and rangers that I have spoken with over the last 10 years self-identify State Parks as a 'para-military' organization. That fits. A battalion is a headquarters unit plus two or more companies that range from 80-225 personnel. HQ and the Northern and Southern Division. These divisions are further broken down into the individual districts within each of those.

I think that a comparison of the personnel costs for going to a fully 'civilian' park staffing would show that hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars could be redirected toward professional stewardship of the responsibilities that have been entrusted to State Parks by the original founders and visionaries as well as the citizens of California. Such a system would allow broader diversity in focus, intent, and career opportunity.

Potential Solution

It does no good to grouse if you cannot offer a solution, or at least a road toward a solution to a problem. I would like to do that now.

I believe that the only salvation for State Parks, as it was intended to be by the early visionaries and founders, is to totally remove the law-enforcement element from the State Parks oversight and budget. The need for law-enforcement within our parks is clearly evident, the parks are part of a larger society and visitors need to feel safe. The modern world, however, demands more and more specialized skills in every profession, including law enforcement. However, the original and present allocations from the Legislature were not and are not intended to absorb the escalating costs for this one classification. I would like to point out that all other professionals within State Parks either come to the organization trained, or can be adequately trained or maintained with yearly refreshers and on-the-job instruction by supervisors.

I would suggest that State Park law-enforcement, en total, be removed to the California Highway Patrol, be under their jurisdiction, and have all costs associated with training and maintaining them funded out of that Department's budget – which, of course, would have to be augmented to sustain the current number of peace officers within State Parks. The efficiencies that would be gained from this incorporation of like needs could be substantial – and since State Parks peace officers are currently equipped and motorized, would appear to require minimal additional equipment costs. I think it would be the salvation of State Parks and more importantly return the emphasis within State Parks to the resources and interaction with the public to educate and away from an all-consuming focus on public safety.

How would public safety be handled within the Parks? When the need arose, they would be called in to handle problems.

An argument might be presented that without a peace officer presence within the parks crime rates would escalate.

I would counter that with the fact that peace officers aren't visible in many of the parks now. A friend was just at MacKerricher State Park for a week camping and she didn't see a ranger the entire time. There was barely maintenance coverage. I can relate that I have traveled throughout the park system and with only one exception, Pt. Lobos State Reserve, I usually never saw a ranger or a patrol car the entire time I was in a park – and at times I was there for several days.

I would further counter with the statement that eliminating the costs of supporting this police force will free up funding to backfill many of our critically needed positions that are the backbone of the park system. Park aids to work the kiosks, park maintenance workers to clean the parks and maintain the infrastructure, State Park Interpreters to run the programs, and resource personnel to perform the stewardship tasks that are necessary for the continuance of our natural, cultural and collections resources. I believe that the greater visibility of these park workers in the parks would help to discourage criminal activity like vandalism, theft of materials, and damage to resources – irresponsible people will not take the risk of being seen trashing a restroom or rummaging in another's campsite - the key is to provide an active presence in each park by uniformed park personnel.

The more active role that people will take in the parks will rejuvenate the esprit-de-corps that is so critical to the operation of our park system. It will also allow more classifications to see a clear career ladder within the park system that encourages them to devote their lives to what is a wonderful life working, playing, and sharing the richness of California within its State Parks. The diversity within the management of State Parks would increase making for a more robust and well-rounded approach to all management challenges.

So a final question and answer. Would this necessarily mean the end to the 'generalist ranger' – a concept that is beloved by many within State Parks?

My response would be no, it would not disappear if the weight of opinion wanted to retain such a classification. I would, however, contend that changes would be necessary to retain such a position. They would no longer be law enforcement certified. The classification could allow for someone to specialize in a particular type of park work – maintenance, interpretation, or resource management – BUT – such a choice would also require them to have the full professional qualification to perform those tasks. The use of this classification, either as a paranthetical within other existing classifications or as a stand-alone classification would need to be determined and worked out.

Respectfully submitted

Kathleen Lindahl
Senior State Archaeologist (but submitting as a private citizen and personal opinion)
5310 Standish Road
Sacramento, CA 95820

916-379-9159
Kathleen4336@att.net