

# RANGER

The Journal of the Association of National Park Rangers

Stewards for parks, visitors & each other

Vol. 36, No. 4 | Fall 2020

## Operational Leadership and the parks



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**ON THE COVER:** Participants at the May 2019 NPS OL Facilitator Train the Trainer. See page 10 for full story.

## Hats off ANPR and Ranger magazine



I have been working on *Ranger* magazine since January 2015. I’m sad to say that this is my last issue as editor and publisher. I never imagined that nearly six years would be so fulfilling and go by so quickly.

I still love *Ranger* and have the deepest respect for everyone at the Association of National Park Rangers. I simply needed a sabbatical and thought it best to let ANPR know. I’ve always understood the inevitability of change, and planned change is easiest for all, so I notified ANPR of my decision this past January. I’ve now completed the issues for 2020 and ANPR has had the time it needs for a smooth transition.

Whenever I pick up a *Ranger* issue, I instantly recall working with all the magazine contributors, ANPR leaders and uber creative designer Sherry Albrecht on each piece of content. It’s impossible to thank everyone who comes to mind, because so many people are responsible for your ANPR member magazine.

Looking back to 2015, I’ll call out the more frequent contributors who have helped make the magazine so brilliant: Paul Anderson, Tom Banks, Cadence Cook, Colleen Derber, Butch Farabee, Brian Forist, Elsa Hansen, Rebecca Harriett, LuAnn Jones, Erika Jostad, Lauren Kopplin, Bob Krumenaker, PT Lathrop, Jan Lemons, Brenna Lissoway, Kevin Moses, Jeff Ohlfs, Liz Roberts, Connie Rudd, Jonathan Shafer, Tony Sisto, Rick Smith, Alan Spears, Alison Steiner, Reghan Tank, Kendell Thompson, Michelle Torok, Ahmad Toure, JT Townsend, Randy Turner, Bill Wade, Ben Walsh and many more.

Let’s not forget our longstanding advertisers, Creative Services of New England and RJ Thomas Manufacturing (Pilot Rock). Please use their products. Recommend new advertisers and ANPR sponsors to the Board of Directors to help sustain *Ranger* and ANPR. Thank you also to *Ranger* printing company Sutherland Press.

The steadfast Professional Ranger columns, the long-running Oral History series, World Ranger Congress coverage, the search and rescue series, the learning and development issue, this Operational Leadership issue, and shutdown and pandemic “breaking” news are just some of the highlights from recent years.

I’m also reminded that we have made the magazine more inclusive by providing *Ranger* readers with more content about urban, cultural and historical park units and their issues, and news and accounts about LGBTQ issues and colleagues as well as international friends.

I will never forget being your correspondent at World Ranger Congress in Colorado and four Ranger Rendezvous conferences. What an outstanding opportunity to meet so many stellar ANPR members and leaders, National Park Service leaders and world rangers. These events also proved instrumental for learning about emerging issues, gathering story ideas, recruiting contributors and taking lots of photos of ANPR members.

I can’t thank Erika and Kendell enough. Erika and the Board hired me and she contributed much outstanding leadership content to the magazine. Kendell was instrumental in planning, orchestrating and wrangling amazing feature articles and photos for many years.

Sherry, Kevin and Alan, thank you again for coming through in every issue. When I spoke with Kevin about my decision to step away from *Ranger*, he joked that he might stop writing the Protection column. Don’t let him! His *Ranger* columns should be compiled in a book. He represents this entire enterprise and everything it stands for.

Everyone at ANPR deserves recognition for all you do. If you ever need an editor in the future, I’m all in.

— Ann Dee Allen  
*Ranger* editor

# RANGER

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In meeting these purposes, the Association provides education and other training to develop and/or improve the knowledge and skills of park professionals and those interested in the stewardship of national parks; provides a forum for discussion of common concerns of all employees; and provides information to the public.

The membership of ANPR is comprised of individuals who are entrusted with and committed to the care, study, explanation and/or protection of those natural, cultural and recreational resources included in the National Park System, and persons who support these efforts.

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## FINAL DEADLINES

Spring issue .....	Jan. 31
Summer issue .....	April 30
Fall issue .....	June 30
Winter issue .....	Nov. 15



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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Paul Anderson, President ANPR



# The spirit of NPS, ANPR and Ranger Rendezvous are thriving despite the pandemic

**W**hew! What a summer, eh? Openings, closings, masses of visitors overwhelming NPS facilities, social distancing, masks, no masks... and still National Park Service employees have persevered with tact, enthusiasm, professionalism and skill!

Congratulations on jobs well done throughout this long and stressful pandemic. I couldn't be prouder of the ways in which our Association of National Park Rangers members have handled themselves in carrying out the NPS mission.

Unfortunately, the pandemic isn't over, and we don't know how long it will last, nor how many lives it will ultimately take. With this foremost in our minds, the ANPR Board of Directors regretfully cancelled this year's Ranger Rendezvous in Florida, for everyone's safety.

We will greatly miss the opportunity to gather in person, but the well-being of our members is our highest priority. Thank you to the Ranger Rendezvous 43 committee, and to all of the speakers and trainers who have already volunteered. We hope you will be there next year for a great Rendezvous. The Rendezvous committee is now working on a virtual Rendezvous for October 2020. Check the ANPR website for details.

Great news! President Trump recently signed the Great American Outdoors Act into law. The Act provides full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund in perpetuity, something that many of us have fought for over many years. It also provides at least \$6.5 billion to fund NPS deferred maintenance projects over the next five years. Thanks to everyone who has worked toward passage of this landmark conservation bill.

This is Ann Dee Allen's last issue as editor of *Ranger* magazine. Our graphic designer, Sherry Albrecht, will be leaving as well. Thank you both for your dedicated service to ANPR, and your excellence in designing and publishing our flagship journal. We will miss you, and we wish you the very best in your future endeavors.

We welcome our new *Ranger* magazine editor, Melissa DeVaughn. She brings many years of experience as an Alaskan journalist, editor, graphic designer and outdoors woman.

This issue of *Ranger* magazine is focused on Operational Leadership, a topic with which ANPR members are familiar to varying degrees. The effort to build a safety culture in the National Park Service has been long, and sometimes frustrating, but it has never been more important than it is today. We are making huge progress with Operational Leadership principles as the basis for this culture change, but we still have more work to do.

Enjoy the articles in this issue, take their messages to heart, and practice the Operational Leadership principles for your own health and safety. Many thanks to Mark Herberger for coordinating the articles for this issue, and to the contributors, as well.

I wish you all the very best during these difficult times. Look out for yourselves and for each other. Remember, we are all in this together, and together we can make a positive difference.

Stay safe. Stay well!

— Paul Anderson  
*ANPR President*

# NPS 101

## Operational Leadership

By Mark Herberger, Office of Risk Management

**M**ost organizations, including public agencies, have safety programs. If you ask what these programs include, you might learn safety committees, rules and regulations, JHAs, safety walk-arounds, command and control, tailgate sessions, SOPs, training classes, plans and incentives, accident investigations, OSHA audits and collateral-duty safety officers.

Traditional safety programs are designed to help organizations provide employees with a safe work environment by mitigating or preventing physical threats and hazards in the workplace. They are a legal necessity and the right thing to do for employees.

Despite its history of traditional safety programs, the National Park Service experiences high injury, accident and fatality rates when compared with other federal agencies. Threats and hazards are only half the equation regarding these high rates, however. The NPS's record is less than stellar when it comes to preventing or mitigating the second half of the equation: errors.

Human error is one of the leading causes of workplace incidents and near misses, and continues to be a significant cause of accidents in the NPS. Three leading factors contribute to errors: poor judgment, inattention and ineffective supervision. Like threats and hazards, errors are part of everyday life – people sometimes make mistakes.

We don't have to be indifferent or resigned to human error. Mechanisms exist to turn the tables on errors, to learn about them and from them. We have opportunities to prevent and mitigate errors to shift the odds in our favor.

### ENTER OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Operational Leadership (OL) principles identify key risk factors, human factors, that affect individual and team performance. They provide a standardized

“Transforming safety from a discrete program to a leadership practice”

– Mission statement for NPS Operational Leadership

approach to assist employees in assessing and managing risk. NPS OL does not replace traditional safety programs, it is one of many components – the long-missing behavioral component – in our Safety, Health and Wellness Management System.

NPS OL focusses on reducing the behavioral factors that lead to poor judgment, inattention and ineffective supervision. It is not intended to tell people what to do. Instead, it is a personal invitation to help

employees increase their awareness of risk and safety in day-to-day situations. It helps us understand why we make mistakes in facing threats and hazards. When we are aware of our limitations, the elements of traditional safety programs make more sense.

Designated and functional NPS leaders have sought to make sense of the NPS safety program in the recent past. In July 2007, then NPS Director Mary A. Bomar sent a memo to all NPS employees about safety within the agency. “Safety must be integrated as a leadership practice and become part of our culture, and not viewed as an isolated program or initiative,” she observed. “A culture change of this magnitude demands vision and credibility.”

Bomar related the level of severity and frequency of serious accidents among the NPS workforce and stated that the National Leadership Council (NLC) chartered a Safety Leadership Council to “help the NLC create, deliver and sustain an effective safety strategy for the Service.”

### LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Earlier, a fledging operational leadership program had been introduced in a limited number of NPS units. In 2004, NPS rangers began searching for mechanisms to address behaviors associated with serious injuries and deaths of employees engaged in law enforcement and emergency response.

Formally known as Team Coordination Training by the U.S. Coast Guard, the training program was introduced to the NPS by Pacific West Regional Chief Ranger Scott Wanek. The grassroots program was met with enthusiasm from field participants. It steadily grew, was revised to reflect the NPS workforce, and was exported to other park areas under the guidance of Wanek, David Horne and Mary Hinson. Most important, the new behavior-based program was not a top-down initiative but originated in the field.

The Coast Guard program was evaluated and selected as the best mechanism for NPS adaption of risk management principles and tools for the field. While other military operational risk management adaptations existed, the USCG version provided a curriculum and tools most closely identified with NPS ranger needs and best suited for NPS application.

At least 21 training courses were piloted to NPS managers and work groups, including regional directorates, to audition the merits of Team Coordination Training. Support from senior staff provided validation that Team Coordination Training was the best risk management course to satisfy ranger workforce needs.

In 2007, the approach became known as Operational Leadership. Staff at Lake Mead National Recreation Area in Nevada began to produce an NPS student manual and convert the USCG PowerPoint presentations to NPS content.

At the first Senior Leadership Council meeting in November 2007, members participated in a briefing on the renamed Operational Leadership program. The Council began the mechanisms to fully establish Operational Leadership as a significant program within the NPS and adopted it as one of four action items to better integrate safety into the NPS mission, work ethic and behavior. Interim program coordinators continued with initial program planning through FY 2009.

NPS OL was not taken off the shelf. In addition to the SLC, NPS Learning & Development was also on board with guidance about the teaching model for a new behavior-based training course. A comprehensive, new-science approach for behavior-based risk management was being developed. The curriculum was designed to be participatory and was facilitated using the Experiential Adult Learning method.



Fire crew members at Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks take part in refresher training learning about emergency rescue techniques. Photo: NPS.gov

Accomplishing the NPS mission has become increasingly complex, necessitating a high level of individual and team decision making and coordination. As intended, NPS OL is an opportunity to instill behavior change in NPS employees, helping us make better decisions in the here and now.

Combined with elements of traditional NPS safety programs, NPS OL is a multi-pronged approach to tackling threats and hazards as well as human error. As the behavioral component to our Safety, Health and Wellness Management System, NPS OL is about enhancing our safety culture in terms of how we look at ourselves, jobs, teams and organization so that we can all go home safely at the end of the day.

*Mark Herberger has been the Operational Leadership program manager in the National Park Service's Office of Risk Management in Washington, D.C. for 11 years. He has served NPS in a variety of positions and parks for 32 years and was the first superintendent at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site in South Dakota. He has been a Life Member of ANPR since 1989.*



Mark Herberger (second row, 4th from the left) pictured with the 24th Rangering Skills class in 1987, Albright Training Center, Grand Canyon National Park. Photo: NPS.gov

# HINTS AT SUCCESS

## Discerning the large-scale effects of Operational Leadership

By Jim Nepstad, Effigy Mounds

I am a numbers guy. I have a degree in math, and came into the agency doing geeky computer stuff for cave parks – turning thousands of individual measurements into nifty three-dimensional maps. If I want to make sense of something happening around me, I go straight to the data.

In the late 1990s, I served as a management assistant at a National Park Service unit. Among the many hats I wore was that of collateral duty safety officer. In order to take my responsibility seriously, I dove into statistics for my park and the NPS.

What I found surprised me.

During the 1990s, more than 900 employees a year were getting injured seriously enough to miss work. There were also two to four national park fatalities – year after year.

I never forgot this.

I was skeptical when the NPS rolled out Operational Leadership (OL) in the mid-2000s, but also paid attention to the numbers of employees being trained over the years. By the time I came on board in my current position, it was hard to deny that OL was a force to be recognized, so I signed up my park to receive the training. Once I went through it myself, I recognized that it had some compelling strengths.

As the years rolled by, I wondered how effective OL was on the broadest of scales – that of the entire NPS. All of us can remember trainings that covered the fad of the moment. More often than not, the fads faded away because they didn't live up to their initial promises and didn't really change anything.

I kept seeing reports on the number of employees trained in OL but for a long time did not notice anything that indicated a measurable change had resulted from all the training. At the end of a slow day a couple of years ago, I decided to dive into the agency's data.

### DATA SHOWS THE DETAILS

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) publishes a ton of online data, so that's where I went. I started downloading annual summaries for federal agencies, going back to 2000 to chart several years of data for years prior to the OL rollout.

OSHA's annual reports contain data for the number of lost-time accidents in a given year as well as the lost-time accident rate (number of such accidents per 100 employees). The lost-time accident rate is important because it makes the year-to-year numbers comparable, despite fluctuating numbers of overall employees.

As I remembered, the decade started with lost-time accident rates perpetually stuck in the four to five accidents per 100 employees range. Imagine working for an agency where every year you had a 1-in-20 chance of being injured severely enough to miss work. Sadly, we did work for such an agency.

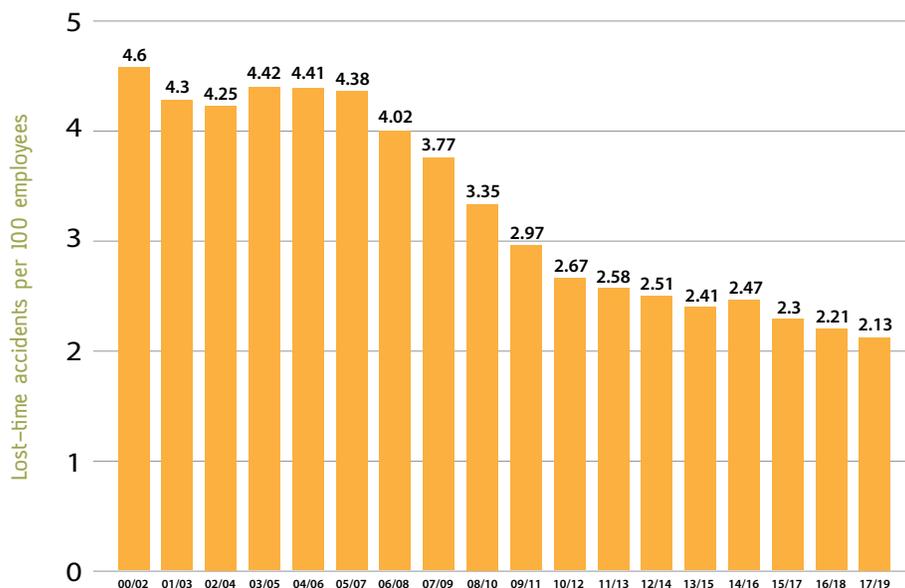
Encouragingly, as you'll see in the accompanying graph, shortly after the middle of the 2000s – closely corresponding with the initial rollout of OL – the NPS lost-time accident rate began to steadily retreat. By 2019, the rate had been cut in half.

Can this be attributed entirely to OL? Maybe, maybe not. As any statistics professor will tell you, correlation is not causation. Just because two things are changing at the same time doesn't necessarily mean one is causing the other. Perhaps our success can be attributed to something else, or can only be partly explained by OL's ascendancy within the agency.

### ENCOURAGING NEWS

The data provides no guarantees. It is nonetheless heartening to note that our agency's rapidly shrinking lost-time accident rate began its decline precisely when OL was introduced, and the decline accelerated as the NPS began to make this

Average NPS lost-time accidents over 20 years



Three-year periods measured for days away, restricted or transferred (DART)

training a priority. Maybe all those reports on the number of employees trained were more valuable than I imagined at the time.

The numbers indicate something has been taking place. Big changes in accident rates like those NPS has experienced are often the result of big efforts. The scale of both the training efforts and the reduction in accident rates makes me ponder whether the two are indeed linked.

Regardless of what is behind it all, it is extremely heartening to note that far fewer employees are going home injured than in the past. During 2003-2005, an average of 951 employee lost-time accidents occurred every year. During 2017-2019, the annual average had fallen to 439.

Even when adjusting for a smaller NPS workforce, the difference is huge. If OL played even a partial role in this improvement – and I suspect it did – it should be viewed as an extraordinary success.

*Jim Nepstad is superintendent at Effigy Mounds National Monument in Iowa.*

# Unprecedented

## Application of the principles of Operational Leadership at Rocky Mountain during uncertain times

*By Stacey Sigler, Rocky Mountain*

I was introduced to Operational Leadership (OL) years ago as a participant in the 16-hour OL training session. The program was in its early years. At the time, I remember thinking that the tools appeared to be elegantly simple to use for most situations.

Fast forward, I had the opportunity to become an OL facilitator while stepping into the role of full-time safety manager. As I dug into the content of each OL module and spent time talking with colleagues about their real life OL cases, I became confident that the common language of the program was a vehicle for culture change.

It took time, it took patience, it took individual actions and commitments to focus conversations on keeping employees safe, but we got there. We got to a place where a once-obscure program was transformed into a leadership practice.

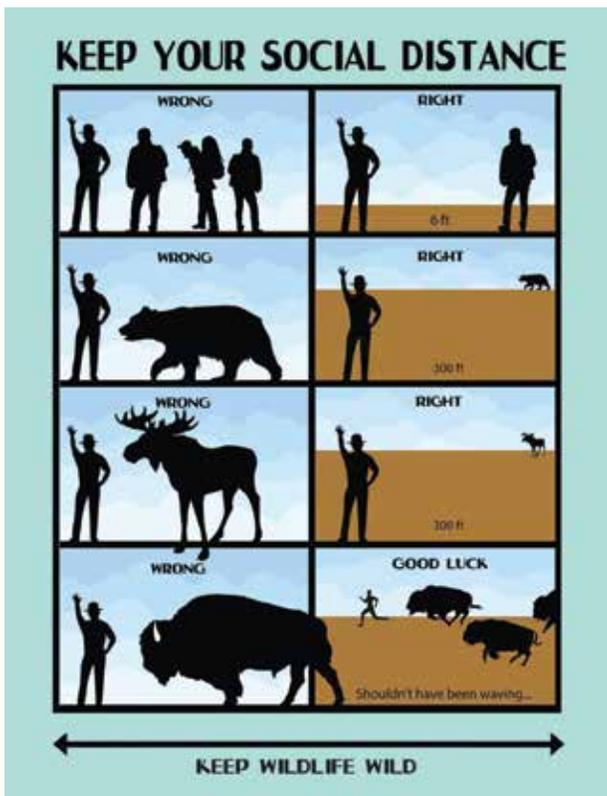
Of course the work is never done.

Enter 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic. I initiated my move to Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado at a time when U.S. states were beginning to go into lockdown. I knew I had my work cut out as the newly minted safety officer for the third most visited park in the National Park System.

In March, Rocky Mountain leadership closed park operations to enhance the safety of local residents and employees during the first wave of the pandemic. Almost immediately, we began planning what it would look like to eventually resume operations. We knew summer operations would not be normal. We tried to envision our path forward amid great uncertainty.

In conversation with Superintendent Darla Sidles, the park's leadership team discussed various tactics to plan for the safest park re-opening possible (OL Principle: Reduce risk to as low as reasonably practical, otherwise known as ALRP). We decided to take a proactive approach using a tool every staff member already had in their repertoire: the green, amber, red GAR risk assessment system.

Over several weeks and 40 hours of discussion, more than 20 GAR discussions were conducted with work groups in all divisions (OL Principle: Mission analysis – analyze, assess, mitigate, plan, act). The benefits of these facilitated discussions were twofold: to identify specific needs for modifications to work plans in the context of COVID-19 and to identify common themes and needs for greater information sharing among park leadership and incident management teams.



Poster to promote social distancing to reduce the spread of diseases in parks and also for best practices for watching wildlife from a safe distance. Photo: NPS.gov/ Matt Turner

Employees leaned in and shared their wisdom in every aspect of the phased re-opening plan (OL Principle: Effective communication and assertiveness – each employee is responsible for speaking up about potential hazards).

Based on these discussions, we shared clear leadership intent for:

- Prioritizing employee safety over task accomplishment for summer operations, continuing to focus on mental health and resilience messages, understanding that the marathon is far from over and employees are already feeling weary (OL Principle: Stress and performance – continually monitor the situation and be flexible to changing conditions)
- Changing the work practices of employees in all divisions to show our intent to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 (OL Principle: Leadership – demonstrated individual and team leadership creates a safer environment)

- Illustrating care for one another through crafting and sharing accountability messages for all staff, affirming the ability for any employee to stop work should they feel uncomfortable or unsafe in any operation, and providing assertive messages for employees to promote positive visitor contacts.

In mid-June, we were in phase two of three re-opening phases. Our approach had so far provided a foundation for success. But we are far from done.

In the same manner that the national Operational Leadership program requires constant care and feeding to remain at the forefront of our minds, so does the planning and monitoring to continually address the challenges of the pandemic (OL Principle: Situational awareness – constant awareness of our surroundings to recognize potential hazards).

While great uncertainty remains, I take comfort in knowing we have the tools to

have frank and fruitful conversations and make decisions that enhance the safety and wellness of our dedicated employees (OL Principle: Decision making – fortitude to make decisions and to stand behind those who make them).

I believe the widespread use of Operational Leadership across the National Park Service is the most compelling example of culture change in the history of our agency. No doubt we have other culture change initiatives that require our attention. Let us harness the success of OL to bolster our efforts as we look to the future. The success of Operational Leadership lights our path as we proactively face the challenges ahead.

*Stacey Sigler is the safety, health and wellness program manager at Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. He is active in the NPS culture change initiatives Workforce Ambassadors and Bystander Intervention and the NPS Safety Leadership Council.*

“Operational Leadership is alive. We have employee leaders stepping up, management reaching out, and I don't feel alone in any of these efforts.”

– Golden Gate National Recreation Area, California

# WAY BEYOND SAFETY

## Operational Leadership at Grand Canyon interpretation

By AJ Lapré, Grand Canyon

**G**rand Canyon National Park is a wonderful place to work. I have specialized in interpretation at the park for 11 years.

In that time, I have seen a lot of change. I've worked for seven superintendents, seven deputy superintendents and four division chiefs.

Fluctuations in leadership and strategic plans – all with the best of intentions – make it hard for staff to settle in, work toward leaders' intentions and develop new sets of norms to strengthen culture. Add in multiple government shutdowns, sequestration, damaging concessionaire contracts,

flat or diminished budgets, visitation issues, and systemic harassment and bullying problems, and there are enough hurdles to make any park culture dysfunctional, possibly even toxic.

Through all the change, turmoil and uncertainty we have found ways to help staff weather the issues and become stronger and more resilient. One thing has remained consistent in the Division of Interpretation and Resource Education: Operational Leadership (OL).

The division embraced OL in spring 2011. We considered it to be a behavior-based program that could support us

as we navigated changes and unknowns. We could immediately see that many OL concepts would be beneficial to building an empowered team under any leader and situation. We keyed in on several OL areas we felt would have the greatest impact.

One of the first OL concepts we adopted was the idea that people do better when they understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. This seems basic but sometimes in a hierarchal system, explaining the reason for doing something is left out. A common expectation is that leadership knows best and questioning authority is not welcomed.

The division saw that defining the steps and desired outcomes provides a greater level of accountability and empowers people to act and get the job done. The simple step of clearly defining short- and long-term goals helps keep the entire division working toward our goals and allows for some latitude and creativity in how we reach those goals. Understanding this led to people feeling they are valued for what they bring to the work environment.

How did we move into a less hierarchal system and begin to appreciate everyone's contributions? By helping staff understand their role in leadership and recognizing the two types of leaders: designated and functional.

Designated leaders have formal leadership position responsibilities and titles. Functional leaders have skill sets, expertise, qualifications, work experience or other attributes that make them suited for a task.

Not all designated leaders are the best at, or know the most about, all aspects of the job. Taking a step back and allowing an individual on the team with more experience, better training, or who works more directly with the subject, to be the functional leader can lead to greater success.

OL breaks down the concept that the designated leader must always lead the group. It removes the hierarchal, command and control leadership model. It encourages team members to voice opinions, provide information and take the lead if necessary. When teams embrace this model, it enhances teamwork, provides for diversity in leadership, allows all members to give input, and even provides room for less experienced team members to gain increased responsibility.



AJ Lapré facilitating an Albright Training Center class at Grand Canyon. NPS photo

## COMMUNICATION USING OL

To guarantee that all members of the division would be prepared for success, we had to ensure that staff communications would be respected and valued. We wanted to develop a speak-up culture that showed all members that they can add value and do so effectively. To do this, we enthusiastically adopted OL concepts, including assertive communication and openness to receiving feedback.

Assertive communication works like this: State a specific concern, voice the problem using a personal perspective, provide a solution or encourage discussion of solutions, and then request feedback. This model of communicating is proactive and inclusive and leads to problem solving. It ensures that individuals are heard and discussion is focused on the activity and its success.

To gain greater successes in utilizing assertive communication, you must also foster a work force that is open to feedback and welcomes it. You must provide time for feedback and build it into the system.

There are several ways to foster speak-up culture. You can provide for preoperational briefings or tailgate sessions, check-ins or situational reports, and debriefings or after-actions reviews. These are all structured work scenarios that encourage feedback.

We also fostered a culture in which staff felt they could speak up any time it was warranted. Having a voice when it is both expected and appreciated helps reinforce trust and teamwork.

The OL concepts outlined above are not generally written into a SOP, JHA, work plan or policy. They are behaviors that became how we do our jobs in Grand Canyon Interpretation.

Once these concepts were adopted, encouraged, exhibited and recognized, things began to change in our division. We were no longer beset by paralyzing outside factors. We could continue to work toward the larger goals of the NPS despite change.

We do not need to attempt to change how we work based on new leadership. Yes, some goals and aspirations will change, but how we get our jobs done within the team remains the same.

We helped foster value for everyone on the team no matter their individual work experience, tenure or background. We no longer need to convince people of their value. We now show respect for one another no matter what.

*AJ Lapré is the branch chief of interpretation at Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona. He has been an Operational Leadership facilitator since 2011, and assisted in developing and implementing the eight-hour Supervisor Course. He has been a leader on the Grand Canyon's Employee Safety Committee for seven years and is active in the NPS culture change initiatives Allies for Inclusions, Interpretive Peer Collaboration Community, Workforce Ambassadors, Bystander Intervention and the NPS Safety Leadership Council.*



Yosemite National Park helitack training safety check. Photo: NPS.gov

## A look at the past and a

# *glimpse of the future*

By Craig E. Geis

**I**n the 40 years that I have been involved in behavioral based safety management, I have seen far more failures than successes.

My first introduction to safety came when I was a Cobra gunship pilot in Vietnam. We were told to be safe, do this, do not do that, follow the rules and regulations, and most of all, learn the limits of our aircraft to return to base safely. We received flight school training about aircraft limits but nothing about our personal limits – the human factors in safety.

Five of our 12 Cobra aircraft were lost during my tour of duty. All of the losses

were the result of human error and were recorded as non-combat losses. Every pilot in those crashes thought the decisions he made were the right ones.

In the decades that followed I found traditional approaches to safety lacking. I surmised that it was impractical to legislate and regulate human behavior in many situations.

History tells us that behavior is a function of consequences. Most of us operate in a forgiving environment where mistakes have no serious consequences. We continue to do what we have always done based on our success.

Soon, we become comfortable taking shortcuts and accepting higher levels of risk. If the environment changes slightly and we fail to reassess risk, however, routine behavior can have deadly consequences. Looking back, I reflected that human factors of inattention, poor judgment and ineffective supervision played a critical role in the Cobra crashes.

In 2018, Brig. Gen. Frank Tate reported that Army Aircrew Coordination Training (ACT) helped lead to a reduction in accident rates year after year over the previous 10 years. Although I developed ACT in 1989, it was not fully accepted by leadership until 2005. How many additional lives and resources were lost during 16 years of inaction?

In developing the National Park Service Operational Leadership program I was determined not to repeat the history and characteristics of failed programs. They include:

- 1. Want vs. need.** Leadership usually determines the need for change and implements programs they think will work. People in the field are not included in program development and do not fully understand the purpose of the changes. Therefore, they do not want or support the changes. This results in programs that become flavors of the month.
- 2. Failure to conduct the proper needs assessment to fully identify the problem.** This results in a shotgun approach that misses the main target.
- 3. Failure to use the organization's personnel and subject matter expertise in developing training materials.** This results in a lack of support by line personnel and fails to ensure buy-in or behavior change.
- 4. Failure to thoroughly plan for implementation. Most failed programs are top down vs. bottom up.** Leadership says, "I know what you need, now do it." How a program is implemented will determine whether people accept the changes.
- 5. Failure to adequately support the effort with the required resources.** This includes financial resources, people, time and leadership support.
- 6. Failure to continue the effort.** Many organizations begin to see benefits, declare everything fixed and move on to other problems. The initial effort is intensive but there is no recurrent refresher training.

## 7. Ineffective delivery method.

**Successful programs are interactive and participatory.** Lectures and PowerPoint slides are not effective. Group discussions, critical thinking, problem solving and applications for real life situations work best.

Summarizing OL successes in the same way that Brig. Gen. Tate reported on the success of ACT, I can safely say that the National Park Service has seen a relatively consistent reduction in accident rates year after year for the last 10 years. Several large safety and risk management strategies have been implemented, the major change being Operational Leadership.

OL addresses behavior and culture change. It allows every employee to codify risk mitigation into mission planning and participate in the decision-making process. We can see the difference in the DART days away, restricted or transferred rate, which decreased from 3.84 in 2008 to 2.13 in 2019.

As retired NPS ranger Scott Wanek, who introduced behavioral based training to the NPS, said at the OL Summit's 10th Anniversary in 2018: "Thanks for keeping this train rolling. I would like to think that there are people walking around healthy and happy in the NPS and in their outside lives because of this program. I know I am."

*Craig E. Geis is director of training and co-founder of the Human Performance Training Institute, Inc., formerly known as the California Training Institute. He developed the U.S. Army's Human Factors Crew Resource Management program, which was adopted by other branches of the military. When he retired from the military, he was the Army's lead safety specialist in Aviation Human Factors. He is a former U.S. Military Academy at West Point and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University instructor.*

## Operational Leadership

- Even in large bureaucracy, individual actions and influence matter.
- If you are passionate about something, act on it.
- Work within your sphere of influence to create momentum.
- Expand your sphere of influence incrementally to rule the world.
- Focus on the vision of the finished product and don't get discouraged or distracted by the difficulty or messiness of the process. See the sausage, not the meat grinder.



Participants at the May 2019 NPS OL Facilitator Train the Trainer class at the Southeast Regional Office.

Craig Geis has taught all of the 49 National Park Service trainer classes held to date.

**Front row left to right:** Lauren Bly (FOSU), Christy Nagle (NATR), Violet Hayward (GUCO), Billy Tyler (CHCH)

**Middle row left to right:** Matt Sharp (LIRI), John Castaldo (VICK), Leslie Wells (JELA), Brett Koch (DRTO), Byron Hill (SERO), Gary Cruz (BISO), Tim Warner (GRSM), Pete Walker (NATR)

**Back row left to right:** Eric Tidwell (Fairbanks), Corinne Fenner (TIMU), Craig Geis (instructor CTI), Daniel Jackson (BUFF), Michael Payne (SERO), Jose Gonzalez (SAJU), David Slay (NATC), William Platt (CALO)

# A perspective on OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

By Jeff West, Cape Lookout

The Donza Lee ferry leaves North Core Banks island at Cape Lookout National Seashore in North Carolina. NPS.gov/Jeff West



I still can't believe it. The National Park Service made me a superintendent.

I thought I'd end my career as a field ranger. I love the national parks, the visitors, the resources, my fellow employees, and I love being out there in it. Most of y'all know exactly what I mean.

But here I am. Responsible for the whole place and thousands of details that make up managing a public resource.

I still love it.

Being the superintendent at Cape Lookout National Seashore in North Carolina has offered me the opportunity to support the field staff, administrative and overhead staff, visitors, local communities and a variety of stakeholders. It also gives me a perspective I did not have before.

## SAFETY THEN

Throughout my career with the NPS, safety has fluctuated as a priority issue in the Park Service. I remember at least four major safety initiatives, most pushed down from above. We often ignored them, reasoning they were not founded on what we needed to accomplish or how things worked in the field. Or, we just did not buy into them.

It did not matter what the reason was, safety programs did not seem to have much

effect on the people I knew early in my career.

Most of the folks I worked with came from farms, ranches or the military, or they were looking for adventure and fun in the great outdoors. Most of us accepted that we were going to get hurt or might even get killed in the outdoors because that was part of life. We brought these attitudes with us into the culture of the NPS. We are a can-do, mission-oriented bunch.

Guess what, we got hurt, and some people also died.

When I worked with other rangers on search and rescue missions at Canyonlands National Park in Utah, we often estimated a free transverse of heinous terrain by deciding whether someone would incur a minor injury or major injury if they failed to make it out unscathed. We had some safety protocols, but we were *on a mission*.

I have been on hundreds of missions in many parks on which rangers had that attitude. I can track the number of emergency rooms I have visited.

Then came the NPS rollout of Operational Leadership (OL). I remember thinking, "Great, here comes another one." But I went through the training and was mildly hooked when I heard it was based on the U.S. Coast Guard Safety Program. I had



NPS representatives participate in the eight-hour Operational Leadership Supervisor class at Cape Lookout National Seashore.

worked with the Coast Guard at several parks, and thought they were squared away and professional in how they did things. Plus, I never visited one coastly in the ER or hospital.

## SAFETY NOW

As I reviewed the OL program, I realized it had many of the elements we look at when we take on an incident or event as a management team. As a member of management, I viewed safety from a different perspective than when I was a field ranger. I had responsibility for my operational personnel.

Hope was not a plan. We looked at the mission, variables, team members, assignments, environment, support system, and we developed contingency plans for the variables. We looked for flaws and loopholes and tried to engineer solutions ahead of time.

We briefed everyone on what we were doing, why we were doing it, and what our options were, should bad things happen. It was a team effort, with lots of input from the folks doing the job.

OL principles reflect what we do and how we plan search and rescue missions. Realizing this, it occurred to me that I should put the same effort into the field and my work in the parks.

Then I thought about my work as a commissioned ranger. Officer safety, situational awareness and tactical operations were part of my life. As a field training ranger and field training lead, I was teaching principles of operational leadership without knowing it!

The OL principles and methodology fit with wildland firefighting, search and rescue, and emergency medical services. We were already doing OL, just not spelling it out. I also saw OL applications for the maintenance, administrative and interpretive divisions.

There is still some difficult terrain to get through with OL. Not everyone sees it as a great tool. Some employees view it as an obstacle or another bunch of paperwork we must do. Supervisors do not all buy into the program, the “just do it” attitude is still out there.

I do not see OL that way.

## SAFETY TOGETHER

I look at OL as an opportunity to bring folks together – whether for a complex mission or a simple task. It provides an opportunity to build a better team; makes the mission or job jointly owned; allows a lot of eyes with different perspectives to look at a task, project or mission; and it empowers everyone because they all have a say.

There are unpleasant tasks we must perform, but if we fail to examine those tasks – especially by the people who perform them – we are doomed to repeat errors. I say this because I got lucky more than once. If I got lucky, I was likely to do a task the same way, or worse, encourage someone else to do it “that way.” Luck, like hope, is not a plan.

As a superintendent, I have been able to provide two employees with OL instructor training, hold numerous OL training sessions for employees and supervisors, and incorporate OL principles into daily operations.

Seasonal employees, interns and volunteers are all exposed to Operational Leadership. We do an annual employee survey to identify any weak points in training, attitudes or implementation.

Immersion in OL principles, familiarity and demonstrations are the keys to re-inforcing the goal of safely accomplishing our many and varied missions. It makes sense, and in time it becomes an ingrained habit.

*Jeff West's career includes positions in interpretation, maintenance, forestry, visitor and resource protection, and management. He has worked at Fort Union National Monument in New Mexico, Boston National Historical Park in Massachusetts, Canyonlands National Park in Utah, Everglades National Park in Florida, Buffalo National River in Arkansas, New River Gorge National River in West Virginia, and Cape Lookout National Seashore in North Carolina. He also served on the Midwest Region Incident Management Team and the Eastern Incident Management Team in roles that included plans section chief, operations section chief and deputy incident commander.*

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# Ranger Rendezvous update

## JOIN US IN 2021

**T**he ANPR Board of Directors voted on June 22 to cancel Ranger Rendezvous 43, which had been planned for October in Florida. We monitored the COVID-19 cases in Jacksonville and considered feedback from ANPR members, many of whom made it clear that they would not travel to the conference due to the pandemic. When it appeared that ANPR would not be able to meet its contractual obligations for the venue, we cancelled the event before the hotel's deadline, avoiding a financial penalty.

ANPR members will learn about this year's plans in the membership e-newsletter. Board members will review a new contract provided by the same hotel, now named the Southbank Hotel at Jacksonville Riverwalk, for the October 2021 Rendezvous. We do plan to carry over the celebration of the Harry Yount Award from 2020 to 2021.

— Bill Wade  
*Ranger Rendezvous Manager*

## ANPR'S ANNUAL 2020 photo contest

Visit [ANPR.org](http://ANPR.org) to learn about entering the 2020 Photo Contest. Photo categories are national park landscapes, wildlife, historical & cultural resources, people in the parks, it's in the details, and park skies.

# Rendezvous Exhibitors

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# COVID-19 gets personal for some NPS seasonals – and ANPR responds

By Reghan Tank

These are just a few of the comments the Association of National Park Rangers has received from members whose seasonal positions were delayed or cancelled because of COVID-19.

With help from anonymous donors, ANPR has been able to give free one-year memberships to more than 90 people who have experienced the effects of COVID-19 firsthand. Representing 44 National Park Service units, these new ANPR members were forced to drastically change their summer plans. Some moved in with family, some filed for unemployment benefits. Some were in limbo for months, wondering whether they would get to go back to their previous parks or start jobs at different units this year.

## Goals deferred

Seasonal employees rely on work at NPS units to make ends meet, enhance professional skills, prepare for future NPS employment opportunities and build relationships with similarly minded people.

Owen Ellis was going to start work as a GS-7 interpreter at Voyageurs National Park in Minnesota this summer – until his start date got delayed twice and his position ultimately cancelled.

“It really seems like the NPS dropped the ball on an agency level and either wasn’t able to or just didn’t do anything to help seasonal staff out,” Ellis said. “This was the first summer in 10 years that I wasn’t working in a park in some capacity. It definitely gave me a minor existential crisis.”

“Gained and lost four different positions.”

“Have been delayed several times since original April 12 start date.”

“My start was delayed and the entire scope of my position changed.”

“Considering this was to be my first season in green and gray, losing this job and the opportunity to begin my career has been difficult to reckon with.”

Eventually, Ellis was able to use his rehire status to get a three-month GS-5 park ranger position at Big Hole National Battlefield in Montana, where there are no formal interpretive programs. He is working in the visitor center, roving and participating in digital interpretation. He said he is missing the long-term planning and coaching he would have received as a seasonal lead.

“It’s great to be working, obviously, but after this many years and a master’s degree I was really ready to take any kind of step in my career,” Ellis said.

Like Ellis, some rangers who were already in the system found NPS jobs through rehire eligibility. Others haven’t been as fortunate. AJ Miller was supposed to start her first season working for the NPS. Her job offer as a park guide at Badlands National Park in South Dakota was rescinded.

“I was offered a job a couple weeks before lockdowns began,” Miller said. “Then it was up in the air for a while, and the offer wasn’t officially rescinded until a week after the start date.”

Although Miller has volunteered at Walnut Canyon National Monument in Arizona, Montezuma Castle National Monument in Arizona and Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, she was eagerly anticipating her first experience in green and gray.

“I was really looking forward to officially starting my career, especially at such an awesome park,” Miller said. “I was super excited to learn about fossils and dinosaurs as well, since that’s big at Badlands.”

Since there are fewer jobs and more rangers without work, Miller said NPS employment seems to be more competitive in 2020 than in a normal year. Even so, she is hopeful she will get a position.

“I am still applying for jobs as I see them, but I’m not seeing a lot,” Miller said. “I’m waiting for some winter positions and haven’t seen anything yet. Fingers crossed.”

Although ANPR was able to reach more than 90 “displaced” seasonals, we know many more are in similar situations. If you are establishing your career with the NPS, please know that ANPR is here to support you and help you achieve your aspirations.

*Reghan Tank is a member of the Board of Directors. She represents Membership Services for ANPR members.*

## PROTECTION

# The comedy of it all



A visitor's vehicle after an attempt to "ford" the river at Buffalo National River in Arkansas. Photo courtesy of Kevin Moses

**W**e are living in heavy times. We cannot turn on the news without hearing about a serious incident here or tragic event there, oftentimes the result of human action. Everywhere I look, people are harming people. Mixed among those stories is the never-ending bombardment of political rhetoric and generally negative news. We've all seen police institutions across this great land come under strong criticism.

It would be easy to succumb to the harmful momentum created in the wake of all these depressing stimuli and jump on the bad news bandwagon. But I don't want to do that. Instead, in times like these I try to remind myself of the comedy of it all. I mean the day-to-day funny, frequently hilarious, anecdotes we see play out while executing our duties as national park rangers.

Think about it – park visitors do and say some comical things.

One of my favorites occurred while I was a field ranger at Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee. I had affected a traffic stop on a driver whose license had been revoked, and asked dispatch to summon his buddy to fetch him and ensure he brought a second licensed driver to drive the car. When the two men arrived on scene, one man's license was suspended. As I handed the second driver in the group his violation notice, he claimed entrapment, saying "I wouldn't be here at all had you not called me to the scene!" The memory of that encounter still makes me giggle to this day, and it was 20 years ago.

More recently, I was on a remote, late-night rescue on the banks of the Buffalo National River in Arkansas. We needed to load a snakebite victim into a canoe and float him to an ambulance nine miles

downstream. We detected alcohol and asked the visitor if it had been a contributing factor in his injury. He assured us that it had not been a factor; he had only consumed "a six-pack, some whisky with my old man, a little of my uncle's homemade moonshine, a couple vodka drinks of some sort, and a bottle of Boone's Farm strawberry wine." His girlfriend added that he'd shared several "tropical-flavored coolers with coconut," to which he responded, "Oh yeah, I did have a few of those too."

One time I encountered a fellow riding his horse bareback on the Saddle Trail in Shenandoah National Park in Virginia – a hiking-only trail. The visitor asked why on earth the trail was called the Saddle Trail if it was closed to livestock. I said he had a point but he didn't have a saddle.

Another chap in Shenandoah called 911 and reported that his family was lost on No Fires Trail. Pouring over topo maps, the dispatcher and I had no clue about a trail by that name, but we narrowed the search area based on the group's starting point. I located the man and his family where the trail joined an old fire road. Stenciled on the Stony Mountain Trail signpost were the words "NO FIRES," just as they appear on the side of every other trail signpost in Shenandoah.

At the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area in Tennessee, I arrested two brothers who had been driving donuts around a river access area while huffing spray paint, smoking marijuana and taking meth. The driver was intoxicated, his driver's license was revoked and he was legally blind. In court, when the magistrate inquired about the driver's ability to safely drive a vehicle, his brother said he could "usually see most things some of the time."

These statements are 100 percent original. There's no way I could make them up.

I've been doing this rangers racket for over a quarter century, so I thought I'd heard it all, especially when it comes to the stammering of suspects caught smoking weed. But just this past year I was surprised when a young man assured me the marijuana "couldn't possibly be mine, ranger, I'm allergic to the stuff." I almost laughed out loud at that one, barely managing to maintain my professional composure.

I haven't even scratched the surface. "Hunters" caught shooting our decoy deer are worthy of stand-up comedy. Any ranger who's done this job for more than a year can relate – visitors say the darndest things.

Of course I haven't begun to touch on the things rangers do. I recall one ranger who managed to lock himself in the prisoner cage of his patrol vehicle and needed the local jailer to come set him free. Suffice it to say our own follies just might rival those of our silliest visitors.

The bottom line is that although ranger work certainly exposes us to some stressful situations, there is also a copious amount of humor to be appreciated amidst it all. If you find that the serious side of our work is bringing you down or the burden on your shoulders is becoming too much, try to think of the comedy of it all.

It works for me, lightening my mood and even making me crack a smile. Time and again, if I look hard enough for humor in my daily work, I can usually see most things some of the time.

— Kevin Moses  
Central District Ranger  
Shenandoah National Park,  
Virginia

## WELCOME TO THE ANPR FAMILY

Here are the newest members of the Association of National Park Rangers (updated 7/7/20)

- Bryce Carpenter, Greenbelt, MD
- David Finland, Arlington, VA
- Kevin Gillis, Brockton, MA
- Stefanie Haire, Soddy Daisy, TN
- Paul Mangolds, Jackson, WY
- Tyler McKenzie, Colorado Springs, CO
- Marybeth McFarland, Mill Valley, CA
- Anthony Munoz, Santa Barbara, CA
- Alison Steiner, Davis, CA
- AJ Lapre, Grand Canyon Village, AZ
- Brandon Voorhees, Leavenworth, KS
- Jennifer Mummart, Washington, DC
- Annie Gilliland, Kelso, CA
- Connie Vogel-Brown, Woodstock, GA
- Robert & John Weinzettle, Encinitas, CA
- Stephanie Palmer, Bayfield, WI
- Devon Dunajski, Moab, UT
- Bridget Byrne, Howell, MI
- Christopher Symons, Grand Rapids, MI
- Lauren Rice, Manorville, PA
- William Fee, Holbrook, AZ
- James Blakely, Graham, WA
- Nick Freedman, Guffey, CO
- Kim Girard, Sedona, AZ
- Margaret Zarlengo, Exeter, RI
- Brendan Chittick, Baltimore, MD
- Damian Popovic, Chino, CA
- Taylor Hartman, Estes Park, CO
- Tharon Snuggs, Quinalt, WA
- Jeremy Buck, Sullivan, WI
- Katherine Vanderpool, Norfolk, VA
- Jonathan Tracey, Voorbees, NJ
- Justin Jones, Texarkana, TX
- Kate Zylland, Coupeville, WA
- Chandler Shepherd, Richmond Hill, GA
- Kelly Krechmer, Culpeper, VA
- Yeva Cifor, Hubbard Lake, MI
- James Walters, Topeka, KS
- Terrell Sheridan, Corte Madera, CA
- Bob & Jodi Carr Davis
- Josh Smith



Life members who contribute \$125 to ANPR are recognized in the Second Century Club. Once you are a Second Century Club member, each additional \$250 donation will increase your life level by one century. If you are a life member, please consider raising your contribution to the next level!

(updated 7/7/20)

### 2nd Century Club

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- Bill Wade

# Kudos List

These people have either given someone a gift membership to ANPR or recruited a new member. Thanks for your help and support!

(updated 7/7/20)

- Elsa Hansen
- Rebecca Harriett
- Mark Herberger
- Jan Lemons
- Melinda Moses
- Jamie Richards
- Jonathan Shafer
- John Townsend

## GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

# Hatch Act dos and don'ts

In an effort to maintain a professional nonpartisan public service workforce, the Hatch Act, 5 U.S.C. Sec. 7321-7326, restricts federal employee partisan political activities. Partisan political activity is any activity directed toward the success or failure of a partisan candidate, political party or partisan political group. Violation of the Hatch Act may result in disciplinary action including possible removal from federal employment.

While there are three different classes of employees under the Hatch Act, the majority of federal employees fall under the less restricted groups of general schedule (GS), wage grade (WG), and scientific or professional (ST). Most National Park Service employees are in these groups. General rules for them follow.

### NO USE OF OFFICIAL AUTHORITY

A federal employee may not use his or her official authority to influence or affect the results of an election. Prohibited activities include, but are not limited to:

- Using his or her official title while participating in political activity
- Using his or her official title to coerce any person to participate in political activity
- Soliciting, accepting or receiving uncompensated individual volunteer services from a subordinate for any political purpose

### NO FUNDRAISING

- Regardless of being off duty, a federal employee may never solicit, accept or receive partisan political contributions
- A federal employee may personally donate to the candidate or party of their choice

### NO PARTISAN POLITICAL ACTIVITY AT WORK

A federal employee may not engage in partisan political activity while:

- On-duty, including teleworking or official time, even if using a personal device
- In a federal building, including break and conference rooms and union offices
- Wearing a government uniform, badge, or insignia
- Using a government-owned or -leased vehicle

Federal employees may communicate with their Congressional representatives as private citizens on issues of concern and, of course, vote. Employees should consult their supervisor or agency/departmental ethics office before engaging in any partisan activity.

— Rebecca Harriett  
*ANPR Government Affairs*

*Citing from the DOI Departmental Ethics Office and "A Guide to the Hatch Act for Federal Employees" published by the Office of Special Council ([osc.gov](http://osc.gov)).*

## Spring Fundraising Campaign Contributors

- Paul Anderson
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# Reflections:

## Working for the National Park Service can change views and beliefs about race relations



Randy Turner with President George Bush and then Manhattan Sites Superintendent Joseph Avery in 2001.

I was born in rural northeast Mississippi in 1954, in a very segregated South. I am white.

I remember the signs that said “colored” posted at restrooms and water fountains, and the segregated restaurants. They were typical in our area at the time.

I also remember Louvenia, a family friend who was black. She had hand-washed my father’s clothes when he moved to the area in 1936. A few times each year she would spend the day at our house, supposedly to help my mother clean, but mostly to visit.

One time as I was setting a place for Louvenia at the table I was told that she would eat later.

My family used to visit Louvenia and her husband at their home. I only knew her husband as ‘Son.’ She gave me a small jar of homemade jelly at each visit. Until she passed away in 1992, I went to see Louvenia each time I went back to Mississippi for a visit. She gave me a much treasured handsewn quilt a few years before she died.

In fall 1967, a small number of black students began to attend our all-white school. Four of the boys were in my eighth-grade class. Only one passed and was advanced to ninth grade.

In fall 1969, the local school that previously had been segregated to black students was integrated and became the elementary school. My school became the integrated junior high and high school. That year, many school boards eliminated band, prom, dances, plays, some clubs and most field trips to prevent social interactions of students from different races. Only sports were integrated.

I had black classmates but no black friends. Without really knowing or acknowledging my beliefs, I had racist views. While in college from 1972 to 1976, I interacted with few minorities in my social groups, classes or the drama club.

### NEW EXPERIENCES

My first job with the National Park Service was in summer 1973 at Natchez Trace Parkway in Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. For the first time, I had black work mates and we became friends. My co-workers were cooperative education students from Jackson State College (now a university), a historically black college.

In 1974, I remember people pointing at me and my black friend Nathaniel when we visited nearby Shiloh National Military Park in Tennessee. The same thing happened when my friend Arthur and I drove to Natchez, Mississippi.

After graduating from college I worked for the NPS and lived in rural Kentucky; Jacksonville and Pensacola, Florida; and rural Iowa. The people I knew in these places were white.

In December 1979, I moved to New York City to work at the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. For the first time, I lived and worked in an integrated city. My friends and acquaintances greatly expanded to include people who were not like me. I had friends who were Jewish, another first for me. Other friends were Latino and Asian. And, as an openly gay man, I also met fellow LGBT people. What a change from rural Mississippi.

I still know childhood friends who live only a few miles from where they grew

up in Mississippi. We have very little in common.

I credit my 35-plus years working for the National Park Service in nine states and Washington, D.C., to changing my views and beliefs on race relations. Yet, I remain troubled about how many NPS areas employ and serve white people almost exclusively.

With the exception of some urban areas, NPS staff and visitors do not seem to reflect the great diversity of America’s population. Yes, some changes have been made in workforces and visitation. And much has been said and written about this racial divide.

When I was teaching, I often used Mark Twain’s quote about travel being fatal to prejudice. Another statement I used was: “Each person can and must do something within their sphere of influence and not worry about what is not within their reach.”

I believe that one-on-one actions and small steps are better and more productive than doing nothing or just talking about important issues. Past, current and future employees and leaders of the National Park Service can all take many small steps that can lead to leaps in race relations.

*Randy W. Turner is a Life Member of ANPR. He specializes in planning, training, facilitation, evaluations and other consulting work for parks, historic sites, museums, nature centers and heritage areas. He became a consultant in 2011 after retiring from a 35-year career that included serving at 13 National Park Service units. His last NPS assignment was as superintendent of Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey.*

# Harry Yount award becomes ingrained in NPS

By JT Townsend

*This is the third part in a series about the Harry Yount National Park Ranger Award.*

*The second part appeared in the Summer 2020 issue of ANPR's Ranger magazine.*

On May 23, 1994, as the centerpiece of a White House gala to kick off the first National Parks Week, Richard T. "Rick" Gale was honored with the Harry Yount National Park Ranger Award for Lifetime Achievement in the art and science of rangers. A second reception was held the following evening at the Decatur House Museum, and Gale was again recognized. The Harry Yount award had become an integral part of the National Park Service's employee recognition program, with the support of the National Park Foundation and partners *The New York Times*, The Eureka Company and, later, Unilever.

The first Servicewide Yount award was presented to Joe Fowler at the Association of National Park Rangers' Ranger Rendezvous 18 on October 20, 1994 in Durango, Colorado. The presentation closed the circle about the award for ANPR, as an article in the Spring 1986 issue of *Ranger* had first

proposed that such an award be presented at the annual ANPR conference.

Upon review of the award we realized that more information needed to be shared about its purpose and significance. Our next undertaking was to promote the award as the peer recognition program that it is, along with the criteria for nomination.

To accomplish this, we developed a brochure and tabletop display with the help of Warren Bielenberg, the Midwest Region's chief of interpretation, and Rudy Evans, a parks volunteer and professional with Webster Design in Omaha, Nebraska. We sent brochures to every NPS unit and provided the display for use at regional chief ranger workshops.

We also sent award posters and calls for award nominations to every unit. We were aided in this effort by Connie Potratz-Watson, a graphic designer working with the regional chief of interpretation and the regional public affairs officer. Potratz-

Watson wanted to know how there could be an award "winner" when the award was peer-nominated and all rangers demonstrated rangers skills.

We made certain that the presentation booklet for the Servicewide award stated that the award was an honor rather than something to be won. As Curt Sauer, chief ranger at Olympic National Park in Washington, noted, the award recognizes "field rangers who have spent their careers in parks, doing the dirty work year after year, leading by example, and guiding new rangers into fruitful careers."

We succeeded in getting the message across. As Vice President Dick Cheney observed in April 2001:

*In presenting this award to Hunter Sharp, we do not say "Park Ranger of the Year," because it stands for much more. It represents a consistent standard of performance, year in and year out. It's not so much a prize you've won, but a duty you've done, and continue doing every single day.*

Yount award recipients have often said they are humbled that their peers thought enough of them and the work they do to nominate them for the award and say they see it as the quintessential recognition. Rangers with numerous awards, including Mike Anderson, a departmental Valor Award, Special Achievement and Quality Step recipient, said they were honored to receive the Yount award.

## ENHANCEMENTS ADDED

As the award become ingrained in the fabric of the Park Service, we turned our attention to practical considerations. With the National Park Foundation's support,

From left, Richard H. "Dick" Martin, Susanne E. Vertel and Richard T. "Rick" Gale at the Association of National Park Rangers' Ranger Rendezvous in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on December 11, 2008. Martin was presented with the Harry Yount National Park Ranger Award for Lifetime Achievement at the conference. Vertel is the sculptor of the Yount bust that is presented to award honorees. Gale received the first Yount Lifetime Achievement Award in 1994. Photo by John Townsend



we provided each regional office and the Washington Office with a plaque that would hold etched plates for each year's nominee. We also made available certificates that could be presented to nominees for the Midwest Region's Yount award. The plaques and certificates were intended to make the award more visible and inspire exemplary performance.

In 2004, the Midwest Region handed management of the Yount award program back to the Washington Office. There it was shepherded by Dennis Burnett, who relied on Jackie Henman and John Madden in the Midwest Region to handle logistical details associated with the award.

ANPR had invited many previous Yount award recipients to Ranger Rendezvous this year for a planned presentation of the Servicewide 2020 Harry Yount National Park Ranger Award. The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed this event until next year.

When this event takes place in 2021, it will be a fitting tribute to the multi-skilled, multi-talented cornerstones of every park without whom a park would not be a park and, as award presentation scripts have noted, "every superintendent has used the phrase 'have the rangers do it' thousands of times."

*JT Townsend is a 10th Century Life Member of ANPR. He retired from the National Park Service in 2004 after a 35-year career. He and his wife, Flo Six, live in Newman Lake, Washington.*

## The Yount award bust

As the Harry Yount National Park Award was moving forward in the Midwest Region, the Southwest Region's Ranger Activities Division (SWRAD) was on a parallel ranger award planning track. Bonnie Winslow, SWRAD ranger, said Bill Tanner, chief ranger for the region, had talked to her about establishing a ranger award at the regional and national levels, with a bust of Harry Yount as the award.

A local foundry recommended Santa Fe, New Mexico, artist Susanne Vertel to sculpt the bust.

"Bonnie told me she was interested in developing some kind of award to be given to [an] outstanding regional ranger every year," Vertel recalled. "We discussed various images but particularly a man named Harry Yount. In the meantime, she gave me a book which had a fairly good picture of Harry Yount in it."

Vertel sculpted a lifesize bust of Harry Yount using wax, despite the fact that there were no photos of the back of Yount's head. She was then asked to sculpt a smaller version for the final award. The bust was cast and presented as the lifetime achievement award at the White House in 1994. Vertel's work was preserved at the Ranger Museum at Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming.

Harry Yount award. Photo by Rick Mossman



Vertel's bust captures the essence of Yount, known as Yellowstone's gamekeeper and father of the ranger service."

Vertel studied sculpture at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland and the Scottsdale Artists' School in Arizona, where she met Glenna Goodacre, who created the sculpture for the Vietnam Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C., and Edward Fraughton, who sculpted "The Ancient Ones" monument now at the Mesa Verde National Park Visitor and Research Center in Colorado.

Before retiring in 2016 after a stroke, Vertel completed numerous commissioned pieces now in public, corporate and private collections.

## Custom Printed Junior Ranger Badge Stickers for Kids

Our custom printed badge stickers will bring a smile to a child's face. Our junior park ranger badge stickers are ideal for community events, school classroom visits or when children visit your battlefield, national park, heritage corridor, historic site, lakeshore, national monument, recreation area, scenic riverway, scenic trail or seashore. Badge stickers are printed on either shiny gold or silver foil. Customized for your location at no extra charge. Fast and reliable delivery.

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The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's former local headquarters in Lowndes County.

## CULTURAL RESOURCES

# The original black panther

**IN JANUARY 1965, THE 5,000 AFRICAN AMERICANS OF VOTING AGE WHO LIVED IN LOWNDES COUNTY, ALABAMA, ALL HAD ONE THING IN COMMON. NONE WAS REGISTERED TO VOTE.**

A short 10 months later, however, almost half of the population had been registered and the grassroots organizing whirlwind that had brought once-unthinkable change to the heart of Alabama's Black Belt had begun a second equally ambitious campaign. Organizers aimed to form an independent political party with the objective of running African American candidates for local and state offices.

For their symbol, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization chose a black panther.

The origins of this incredible story are found in the rich soil of south-central Alabama that gave the Black Belt its name. In the 1830s, cotton was the crop of choice for the Black Belt's white farmers and landowners. Its production was powered by thousands of enslaved African Americans whose free labor turned the region into an agricultural powerhouse that generated enormous wealth for the planter class.

Although the 13th Amendment brought a formal end to bondage for enslaved African Americans, full freedom and equality remained a dream deferred. Sharecropping and domestic work replaced slave labor, and systemic economic, social and political oppression kept black people in Lowndes County largely subservient to a system designed to ensure white racial and economic supremacy.



James Forman, executive secretary of the SNCC, speaking at a mass meeting before the final Montgomery to Selma march in 1965. Photo: Library of Congress, Glen Percy Collection.

## EMBOLDENED FOR CHANGE

In his book *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*, Hasan Kwame Jeffries writes that in the 50-year period after the end of the American Civil War “hardly any African Americans [in Lowndes County] attended school for more than a few weeks a year, most lived in abject poverty, and practically none participated in electoral politics.”

This began to change in 1964. Hundreds of volunteers from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were dispatched to the Black Belt to challenge the racial status quo. Led by talented and determined organizers like Stokely Carmichael and joined by local leaders including John Hulett and Emma and Matthew Jackson Sr., they began the slow and dangerous work of registering black sharecroppers and domestic workers to vote.

Voter registration took a significant level of courage and determination. County clerks shortened hours of operation or, at the last minute, relocated voter registration sites to frustrate black registrants. They also publicized the names of African Americans who registered to vote.

A Lowndes County election poster from 1966

Those whose names appeared on voters lists could expect “visits” from white neighbors warning about the dire consequences of their actions. Job loss, evictions and physical violence were common forms of retaliation.

The 1965 voter registration campaign was run in conjunction with efforts to desegregate the public schools in Lowndes County. The resistance of white Board of Education members to school desegregation led many African Americans to conclude that political representation was required to bring about real change.

## ORGANIZED FOR FREEDOM

The state’s Democratic Party was under the control of the segregationist Gov. George Wallace, so black activists formed the independent Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO).

In 1966, the LCFO ran a slate of black candidates for sheriff, tax assessor, coroner, tax collector and the Board of Education, hoping that the sizable base of newly registered black voters would provide their candidates with a margin of victory.

Low literacy rates in the state meant that political parties adopted symbols to help voters to differentiate the parties. Alabama Democrats had long used a white rooster. The Lowndes County Freedom Organiza-

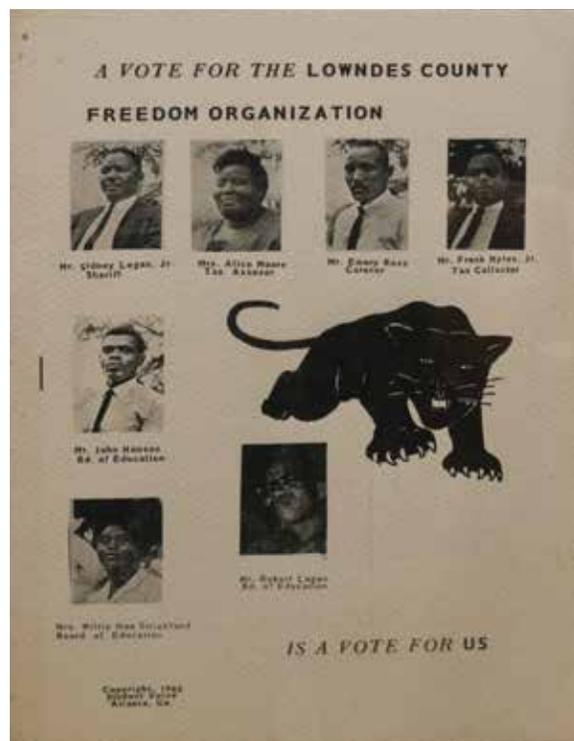
tion chose a crouching black panther, fangs bared, claws at the ready.

Not a single LCFO candidate won elected office in 1966. Still, the campaign to elect African Americans to local and state offices launched a vibrant Black Power movement in the heart of Alabama, which had a profound impact on the state and the nation.

In 1967, activists from Oakland, California, contacted LCFO leaders to request permission to adopt their symbol, the original black panther, for a new organization they were forming, which would come to be known as the Black Panther Party.

The proposed Alabama Black Belt National Heritage Area would commemorate and interpret the voting rights struggle in Lowndes County alongside other significant regional stories. The heritage area initiative is a 19-county effort that includes local communities, state agencies and nonprofit organizations. Its mission is to develop a sustainable future for the region through the preservation, interpretation and promotion of cultural, historical and natural assets in order to create a better quality of life for area residents. The National Parks Conservation Association is a proud supporter of the initiative.

— Alan Spears  
*National Parks Conservation Association*



## World Ranger Day observed

The Thin Green Line Foundation and park rangers from around the world observed World Ranger Day on July 31. A total of 137 rangers lost their lives in the line of duty over the previous 12 months. Complete information about World Ranger Day and the Foundation can be found at [thingreenline.org](http://thingreenline.org). ANPR thanks the Foundation and its supporters for continuing to create awareness about the dangers rangers face and for providing resources and information toward this end.



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