



# Memorandum

**TO:** PUBLIC SAFETY, FINANCE  
& STRATEGIC SUPPORT  
COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Angel Rios, Jr.

**SUBJECT:** PARK RANGER PROGRAM  
ANNUAL REPORT

**DATE:** March 2, 2018

Approved

Date

3-7-18

## RECOMMENDATION

Accept the 2017 Annual Report on the Park Ranger Program.

## OUTCOME

To provide the Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support (PSFSS) Committee with an update on the Park Ranger Program's 2017 highlights, watershed protection team activities, St. James Park patrols, staffing and resource successes and remaining challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

## BACKGROUND

The City of San José's Park Ranger Program is an integral part of the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department (PRNS). The program's mission is to provide a safe, enjoyable park experience by protecting and educating the public, providing recreational opportunities, and protecting, preserving, and enhancing the natural and cultural resources of the City's parks, trails, and open spaces.

The Park Ranger Program has its roots in resource and visitor protection. The City established the Park Ranger Unit in 1972 after a period in the 1960s and early 1970s when San José's park system expanded rapidly and crime and vandalism were deterring residents from using parks. A community task force convened to address crime issues at Alum Rock Park and other neighborhood parks, which resulted in the recommendation of adding Park Rangers.

Over the course of the program's 46-year history, San José Park Rangers have worked to ensure a safe and enjoyable atmosphere in City parks. Park Rangers assist park users, provide information on appropriate park use, and educate visitors on park rules and procedures. As public safety officers, Park Rangers also render emergency medical care, conduct search and rescue operations, and perform wildland fire prevention patrols as well as provide initial wildland fire suppression. As stewards of the City's natural and cultural resources, Park Rangers

work to protect and monitor park lands, restore native vegetation, maintain rustic hiking trails, and educate the public on the cultural and natural history of San José. Park Rangers also maintain safety and security in our neighborhood parks and along trails.

## **ANALYSIS**

PRNS is dedicated to building the Park Ranger Program forward. From the recession driven staffing reductions of 2010-2011, to today's growing program, PRNS is working to provide safe parks that are enjoyed daily by our residents. The City's regional parks are growing in popularity, new neighborhood parks are being added, and the trail network is in the process of expansion from the current nearly 60 miles of trail to a total of 100 miles. This creates both opportunities to further expand Park Ranger presence and services to the community as well as challenges by stretching the program further with existing limited resources. Over the long-term, PRNS will continue to explore public and private partnership opportunities in an effort to generate funds that can be used to expand the Park Ranger Program and more importantly, to ensure the City's urban park and trail systems are safe and enjoyable. As an example of private-public partnerships, the PRNS has forged a successful partnership with the Santa Clara Valley Water District (Water District) to create a Watershed Protection Team through the Park Ranger Program.

### **2017 Program Highlights**

Park Rangers play a number of roles while stewarding the City's natural resources, and educating and protecting visitors. One role is coordinating volunteers, community groups, and educational institutions who donate their time to improve the park system, including conducting trail work at Alum Rock Park, providing interpretive programs and docent services, building and donating benches and fences, and maintaining a native plant garden for the Alum Rock Visitor Center and Lake Cunningham Regional Park. Unique projects that Park Rangers developed and coordinated in 2017 included coordinating an archeological survey of the remains of a historic structure uncovered by the Lariat Fire in Alum Rock Park, and removing numerous downed trees by West Valley College Archeology and Park Management students, respectively. Table 1 (below) summarizes volunteer activities coordinated by Park Rangers in the 2017 calendar year as compared with the prior year.

**Table 1: Volunteer Activities Coordinated by Park Rangers**

Park	Volunteers		Hours		Value*	
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
Almaden Lake Park	25	59	300	309	\$8,277	\$8,794
Alum Rock Park	193	250	5,230	2,500	\$144,296	\$71,150
Kelley Park	13	58	39	537	\$1,076	\$15,283
Lake Cunningham	110	43	330	814	\$9,105	\$23,166
Overfelt Gardens	308	228	924	2,625	\$25,493	\$74,708
Watershed Protection**	687	1,721	2,796	6,011	\$77,142	\$171,073
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,336</b>	<b>2,359</b>	<b>9,619</b>	<b>12,796</b>	<b>\$265,389</b>	<b>\$364,174</b>

\* The value of these volunteer hours is calculated at \$27.59 per hour for 2016 and \$28.46 per hour for 2017, by the Independent Sector, a national non-profit policy and advocacy organization for volunteer activities.

\*\* Includes volunteer activity related to flood clean-up activities by Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful and Downtown Core projects.



Park Rangers also have a key role in emergency response within the park system; they provide medical aid, suppress wildland fires, and respond to search and rescue events. These events can vary from a missing child at Kelley Park to overdue hikers in the back country of Alum Rock Park. The Park Ranger Program operates four Type 6 Wildland Engines for initial response to suppress wildland fires in their incipient stage to prevent these fires from becoming major events. All full-time sworn (peace officer) Park Rangers are required to complete a National Wildfire Coordinating Group-approved training program for wildland fire suppression. Many of the seasonal Park Rangers also complete this specialized training.

Park Rangers faced a number of challenging events in the parks during 2017. This included assisting in evacuations during the Lariat Fire and working with the San José Fire Department and California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention (Cal Fire) as the fire extended into Alum Rock Park. There were numerous issues with mountain lion activity at Alum Rock Park and several search and rescue events within the park system. Rangers also responded to numerous events related to the February 2017 Coyote Creek flood, including assisting the San José Fire Department with evacuations of mobile home parks, levee assessments, and working with other park staff to protect park infrastructure in the flood areas along Coyote Creek. Table 2 (below) summarizes the Park Rangers' emergency response in 2017 compared with 2016.

**Table 2: Park Ranger Emergency Response**

Park	Fire Responses		Medical Events		Search/Missing Person	
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
Almaden Lake	2	2	6	11	1	1
Alum Rock	5	4	30	29	1	5
Emma Prusch Farm / Overfelt Gardens	2	3	2	7	0	0
Guadalupe River / Downtown Core	0	1	8	1	0	1
Kelley Park	14	38	62	66	2	4
Lake Cunningham	1	2	14	25	1	3
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>

Another key role of Park Rangers is to ensure a safe and enjoyable park system through education and enforcement, which is summarized in Table 3 for 2017 as compared with the prior year. As these statistics indicate, the City's watersheds have received an enhanced level of enforcement because of the unique challenges they have presented. Although enforcement actions (citations, reports, and arrests) in the watershed areas are higher than at parks, there was a decrease for these activities in 2017. This decrease resulted from PRNS directing Park Rangers not to enter unsafe areas of the watershed due to safety concerns.

**Table 3: Park Ranger Enforcement Activities**

Park	Warnings		Parking Citations		Criminal Citations		Crime Reports		Arrests	
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
Almaden Lake	751	373	20	15	0	0	1	2	0	0
Alum Rock	816	894	117	40	10	1	13	11	1	3
Guadalupe River / Downtown Core	524	288	0	1	98	16	10	7	12	0
Emma Prusch Farm / Overfelt Gardens	588	119	13	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
Kelley Park	1,403	4,519	412	868	27	82	24	88	3	7
Lake Cunningham	1,554	2,315	327	123	0	2	1	0	3	0
Watershed Protection Team	533	549	0	4	466	110	226	122	46	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,169</b>	<b>9,057</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>1,053</b>	<b>601</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>33</b>

During the last year, the Park Ranger Program has achieved the following:

- Promoted 4 Park Rangers to Senior Park Ranger positions, and reclassified one Senior Park Ranger to a Supervising Park Ranger.
- Recruited and in the process of hiring a second Supervising Park Ranger who will come with vast experiences and training in park operations, park safety, and leadership.
- Continued active recruitment for Park Ranger vacancies with the recruiting unit targeting college job fairs and statewide professional associations.
- Park Rangers hosted multiple special events for the community, including Japanese Friendship Garden walks and night photography, Junior Ranger programs, guided hikes, and a holiday campfire.
- Park Ranger Mike Peasland received a Council Commendation for his rescue response at a structure fire adjacent to Alum Rock Park.

#### Watershed Protection Team Activities

In recognition of the unique challenges watersheds have presented, in 2013, the City entered into a funding partnership with the Water District. The partnership is for five years with a one-year option for renewal, dependent upon the Water District and City budget approvals and the success of the Watershed Protection Team, to patrol and enforce regulations in targeted watersheds along the Guadalupe River, Los Gatos and Coyote Creeks. PRNS intends to engage the Water District on a long-term extension of this partnership.

The Watershed Protection Team is a specialized unit of four Park Rangers, who work with multiple agencies, including the City's Housing and Environmental Services departments and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, to prevent the return of homeless encampments in designated areas, and to remove trash and other debris from City watersheds and public lands. Under the multiyear agreement, the Water District provides funding for two limit-dated Park Rangers, and the City funds two additional Park Ranger positions and one Senior Park Ranger.



The funding agreement between the City and Water District put in place performance measures for the Watershed Protection Team program, with a focus on litter clean-up and the removal and prevention of homeless encampments along the shared waterways in San José. Clean-up activities are typically conducted weekly, with an expectation that the Water District and the City will conduct a minimum of 48 clean-ups per year. Duties for the team include:

1. Patrol and enforce rules and regulations along the watersheds;
2. Post 72-hour notification in advance of encampment clean-ups;
3. Conduct clean-up of posted encampments;
4. Patrol creek areas to suppress encampments, dumping, and prevention of re-encampment;
5. Prepare daily reports;
6. Issue citations or arrest and prosecute repeat offenders;
7. Provide referrals for supportive services to vulnerable individuals to non-profit partner agencies; and
8. Attempt to identify the highly vulnerable populations, including veterans, youth, and chronically homeless individuals, and work with partner agencies to place clients into shelter or housing.

The team's desired outcomes are to:

1. Address public safety and criminal activity along the watersheds;
2. Reduce and suppress encampments, dumping, and prevent re-encampment;
3. Reduce stream pollution and litter in the riparian corridor; and
4. Protect water quality, fish, and wildlife and provide flood protection along the watersheds.

The Watershed Protection Team's daily patrols and enforcement have mitigated unwanted behaviors and helped to restore natural resources to their native condition in the designated areas. In 2017, the team made 262 encampment deterrence patrols, with most in Coyote Creek (144) and Guadalupe River (57). Park Ranger efforts led to the removal of an estimated 529 cubic yards of trash from the watersheds, with the vast majority (417 cubic yards) again coming from Coyote Creek.

Additionally, the Watershed Protection Team works with the City Attorney's Office to prosecute resource violators, most of whom have been chronic violators. The City Attorney's Office has also taken a strong role in working with the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office to assure that cases submitted by the Watershed Protection Team are moved forward.

In addition to the trash and debris removed by Park Ranger clean-ups, the Watershed Protection Team partners with numerous volunteer groups such as Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful, Friends of Los Gatos Creek, and the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy to conduct extensive volunteer clean-ups targeting legacy trash and illegal dumping, as well as other volunteer clean-up events. As noted above, in 2017, Watershed Protection Team Park Rangers supported 1,721 volunteers who donated 6,011 hours of service valued at \$171,073, while removing 24 tons of trash from the Coyote Creek.



### St. James Park Patrols

The downtown core patrol area, which includes the Guadalupe River Park, Plaza de Cesar Chavez, St. James Park, and Ryland Park is budgeted for and staffed with one Park Ranger. Due to the limited staffing, and in response to a growing number of issues involving recreation and maintenance staff safety at St. James Park, PRNS implemented a new plan to staff St. James Park with Park Rangers on overtime during activation events and during early morning hours when complex park maintenance occurs. Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) trained Park Rangers, working in pairs, make contact with local transients in the park, establishing expectations for behavior and monitoring activity to allow PRNS staff to complete their work safely. The Park Rangers also work closely with the Housing Department and People Assisting The Homeless (PATH), the assigned outreach provider, to continue to try and refer homeless individuals to appropriate services.

### Staffing and Resource Successes and Remaining Challenges

The Park Ranger Program includes 24.59 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions.<sup>1</sup> Park Rangers are responsible for patrolling the parks in the Downtown Core (including Guadalupe River Park, St. James Park, and the Plaza de Cesar Chavez) and watersheds along the Guadalupe River, Los Gatos Creek, and Coyote Creek. Park Rangers are also responsible for the City's major regional parks including Almaden Lake Park, Alum Rock Park, Emma Prusch Farm Park, Kelley Park, Lake Cunningham Regional Park, and Overfelt Gardens.

In recent years, the Park Ranger Program, like other City programs, has seen its success tempered by ongoing staffing challenges. At this time, there is a 26 percent vacancy rate (5 of 19) in the sworn full-time Park Ranger positions, which have Peace Officer status. PRNS has been in an aggressive recruitment cycle for the last five years, working to attract quality candidates. Following an extensive review, on August 22, 2017 the City Council approved a 9.13% pay increase for Park Rangers, and implemented a full Park Ranger series that includes four Senior Park Rangers and two Supervising Park Rangers<sup>2</sup>. These recent changes are expected to improve our ability to recruit and, more importantly, retain quality park ranger candidates as PRNS continues to aggressively recruit Park Rangers and now can offer candidates a salary set to approximately 100 percent of the market average.

As the Department works to fully implement the new staffing model, staffing in the regional parks remains below pre-recession levels. As a result, there are fewer rangers available to respond to public safety needs, or to fully address threats to wildlife and their habitat at these major facilities. To improve coverage at the regional parks, PRNS plans to shift sworn full-time Park Rangers from being assigned to fixed posts to using a fluid staffing model, under which full-time sworn Park Rangers rotate between the regional parks according to needs. Part-time Park Rangers (non-sworn) will remain in the fixed-post model to provide support to Regional Parks. Even with these changes, staffing has been insufficient to ensure coverage seven days per week during all regional park operating hours.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2017-2018 Adopted Operating Budget included 26.59 FTE, which was reduced by 2.0 FTE on August 22, 2017 as part of the program restructure.

<sup>2</sup> [Amendments to the City Pay Plan for Ranger Series Classifications](#)



As the Department completes the hiring of the final Supervising Park Ranger position (the four new Senior Ranger positions were filled in January 2018), the deployment model will evolve from fixed-post assignments to a more fluid, centralized dispatch model. Sworn full-time Park Rangers will be assigned to patrol districts and handle calls for service within their patrol area. Non-sworn part-time Park Rangers will be deployed to the major regional parks during peak times to handle routine park operations, such as fee collection, general visitor services, and to assist with interpretive and resource management activities.

Recently, there have been concerns raised by the Operating Engineers Local No. 3 (OE#3) regarding the Park Rangers and their duties regarding the Watershed Protection Team. The City is continuing to examine the duties and expectations of Park Rangers.

To maintain proficiency in public safety, resource management, and interpretation, all Park Rangers are required to attend mandatory training cycles, which include topics such as legal updates, defensive tactics and arrest control refresher training, 4-wheel drive emergency vehicle operations, patrol and rescue boat operations, emergency medical response training, wildland fire suppression training and refreshers, hazardous materials training, as well as courses in interpretive skills and course work in current resource management topics. These trainings are provided by in-house staff, cooperative agreements with the San José Fire Department and the San José Police Department, subject matter experts under contract to PRNS, local colleges, and professional organizations.

To date, PRNS has accomplished the following steps to improve the Park Ranger Program:

- Restructured the Park Ranger Program to provide a clear chain of command and promotional opportunities for Park Ranger staff.
- Expanded mobile data terminal pilot program to facilitate documentation of enforcement related contacts and reports in the field. The Department intends to equip all new or replacement Park Ranger vehicles with mobile data terminals.
- Purchased two GPS devices to allow for improved communication and tracking for joint rescues in Alum Rock Park with the San José Fire Department Urban Search and Rescue Company.
- Approved the use of straight batons, in addition to the mandatory collapsible batons carried by Sworn Park Rangers.
- Conducted Priority Setting Session with Park Rangers to identify concerns and set priorities for improving the program. While the list was varied, it did lead to an increased replacement schedule for Park Ranger vehicles.

### Next Steps

Over the next year, the Park Ranger Program will focus on improving its service delivery, while also continuing best practices to attract, recruit, and retain qualified candidates for all vacancies and to retain existing employees. This work plan minimally includes the following:

- **Recruiting and Hiring** – PRNS will continue to prioritize the recruitment and hiring of qualified Park Ranger candidates.

- **Park Ranger Series** – Complete hiring for the new Senior and Supervising Park Ranger positions.
- **Completion of the Park Ranger Duty Manual** – The existing duty manual, which describes standard operating procedures and law enforcement protocols, was created in the 1980's and was last updated in the mid-1990's. PRNS has contracted with a recognized risk management firm to develop a modern and comprehensive manual for the program, and the draft is under final review by the City Attorney's Office.
- **Public Safety Vehicles** – Park Ranger vehicles operate under severe environmental conditions, often driving off-road and in dirty and dusty conditions, which can lead to a shorter service life than vehicles operated under normal conditions experienced by the non-public safety fleet. Enhanced vehicle upgrades and shorter replacement cycles for Park Ranger vehicles could mean less down-time.
- **Ranger Deployment** – Initiate the new City-wide Park Ranger deployment model.
- **Re-evaluating Park Ranger Service Delivery** – To ensure Park Rangers are meeting resident needs in a safe and efficient manner, PRNS will evaluate Park Ranger duties and needs to fulfill those duties.

To meet existing obligations at regional parks, the Watershed Protection Team areas, and the growing need in neighborhood parks in the year ahead, the Park Ranger Program will continue to emphasize:

- Protecting the City's watersheds and actively participating with the City's Homeless Response Team;
- Patrolling regional and neighborhood parks; and
- Maintaining and growing partnerships with stakeholders such as: the Water District, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the San José Police Department, County of Santa Clara Park Rangers, neighboring cities, and various volunteer organizations

### **EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

PRNS will submit a 2018 Park Ranger Program Annual Report to the PSFSS Committee in 2018-2019.

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

This item will be posted on the City's website for the PSFSS Committee meeting on March 15, 2018.

### **COORDINATION**

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office, City Manager's Budget Office, the Housing Department, Office of Employee Relations, and the Public Works Department.



**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION/INPUT**

Information about the Park Ranger Program was presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission on February 7, 2018. The Commission accepted the report.

**CEQA**

Not a Project, File No. PP17-0009, Staff Reports, Assessments, Annual Reports, and Informational Memos that involve no approvals of any City actions.

/s/

ANGEL RIOS, JR.

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For questions please contact Justin Long, Deputy Director, at (408) 793-5579.