



Memorandum

TO: PUBLIC SAFETY, FINANCE
AND STRATEGIC SUPPORT
COMMITTEE

FROM: Jon Cicirelli

**SUBJECT: PARK RANGER PROGRAM
ANNUAL REPORT**

DATE: September 28, 2020

Approved

Date

10-6-20

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the Annual Report on the Park Ranger Program for 2019-2020.

OUTCOME

This report will provide the Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee with an update on the Park Ranger Program's 2019-2020 highlights and challenges, and the Park Ranger Program's 2020-2021 Work Plan.

BACKGROUND

The City of San José's Park Ranger Program is an integral part of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (the Department). 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. This mission supports ActivateSJ, the Department's 20-year strategic plan accepted by the City Council in December 2019, which defines the Department's vision, mission and guiding principles of Stewardship, Nature, Equity & Access, Identity, and Public Life.

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. The City convened a community task force to identify strategies to address crime issues at Alum Rock Park and other neighborhood parks, which resulted in the recommendation of creating the Park Ranger Program.

Over the course of the program's 48-year history, San José Park Rangers have worked to ensure a safe and enjoyable atmosphere in City parks. Park Rangers assist park users by providing information on appropriate park use and educate visitors on park rules and procedures. As peace officers, Park Rangers also render emergency medical care, conduct search and rescue operations, perform wildland fire prevention patrols, as well as provide initial attack 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

The Park Ranger Program has been a staple unit of the Department for almost five decades. Over that time, there have been many changes that have influenced the day-to-day operations. This past year, the program confronted many hurdles amid its continuing transition, but still produced important results and highlights and also adapted its service model to the COVID-19 pandemic and State and County Health Orders.

Program Service Delivery Changes and Highlights

Over the past three years, the Department has undertaken a series of Park Ranger Program service delivery changes. The Department created a full Park Ranger classification series and chain of command; transitioned to a central staff deployment model with the exception of Alum Rock Park, due to its unique, isolated and rugged nature; and convened a Park Ranger Working Group that led to a joint patrol model with the Police Department for watershed protection and continuing discussions with Park Rangers to address areas identified by the Working Group.

As with many City services, some program improvement efforts were paused as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; nonetheless, progress continued in 2019-2020:

- **Park Ranger Duty Manual:** ActivateSJ's foundational guiding principle of Stewardship includes a benchmark for the completion and implementation of the Park Ranger Duty Manual as part of a focus on the safety of parks and facilities. The original manual was created in 1980 and was last updated in the mid-1990s. With the evolution of the position and duties the Park Rangers have today, the Department has contracted with Lexipol, a nationally recognized risk management firm that specializes in preparing operation manuals for public safety agencies, to help revamp this tool. By contracting with Lexipol, the new manual will remain current, with policies being revised and updated by the vendor as case law, regulations and best practices evolve. As of September 2020, the draft manual has been reviewed by the City Attorney's Office. The Administration is reviewing the draft with a goal of releasing by Spring 2021 a modern, up-to-date manual that addresses items raised by the City Council such as prohibitions on the use of the carotid restraint and chokehold as well as policies concerning handcuffing juveniles.

- **Body Worn Cameras:** To protect both residents and Park Rangers, and promote transparency, the Department has taken steps towards implementing a Body Worn Camera program, including contracting with a vendor for hardware, software and video storage. The Administration is reviewing a draft Body Worn Camera policy for Park Rangers, and the Department is coordinating with the Information Technology Department on information security. While there is no set implementation date for this program, the Department is actively working to resolve any outstanding implementation issues and would like to begin the implementation of this program in early 2021.

Challenges continue to confront the program. As reported in the City of San José Stormwater Management Annual Report 2019-2020, the Park Ranger Program and San José Police Department conducted two joint patrols along creeks and adjacent lands during 2019-2020.¹ The low number of patrols can be attributed to the Park Ranger Program's continued staffing challenges as five of the 12 full-time Park Ranger positions were vacant the entire year; its other competing service priorities including patrolling neighborhood park hot spots; and COVID-19 response. The Department expects to resume joint patrols when COVID-19 service modifications are, eventually, lifted and for the number of patrols to increase when Park Ranger staffing levels improve in the future.

In March 2020, joint patrols were paused as the Park Ranger Program began shifting priorities to support the City's response to COVID-19. Part of this response included Park Rangers responding to calls for service across the park system to educate park users about the changes required by State and Santa Clara County Health Orders. Park Rangers were provided with personal protective equipment and coordinated with park maintenance staff to ensure that closed amenities remained signed and physical barriers remained in place. Table 1 summarizes the results of Park Ranger contacts with the community from mid-April through June 2020.

Table 1- COVID-19 Health and Safety Compliance Contacts from Mid-April through June

3-1-1 Call Responses	Self-Initiated Contacts	Warnings	Ejections	Citations*
40	3,008	1,884	1,161	3

* Park Rangers issued citations for on-view violations of park rules related to park and amenity closures; they did not issue citations for violations of the Health Orders.

Other program highlights from 2019-2020 include:

- **Naloxone:** The Program applied for and received a grant from the State of California's Department of Health Care Services to resupply naloxone at no cost to the City. Naloxone is an opiate reversal agent that works by reversing the effects of opioids on the

¹ The Police Department's Street Crimes Unit and Stream Stewardship Law Enforcement pilot program targeted criminal activity at Coyote Creek and Guadalupe River ranging from felonies and misdemeanors to warrants, and had 261 total activities. The Stream Stewardship Law Enforcement pilot program's efforts along waterways were suspended in March, 2020, due to COVID-19 and County Health Orders.

central nervous system and the respiratory system. This grant provided the Park Ranger Program with 36 doses, which has an estimated value of \$4,500. Park Rangers are often the first responders for emergencies in City parks and trails, and to provide more tools to assist residents, they carry a full range of emergency medical equipment including oxygen, intranasal naloxone, and automated external defibrillators (AEDs) to provide rapid emergency medical care to ill or injured park visitors.

- **Training:** All peace officer Park Rangers completed the Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Principled Policing and Implicit Bias training course, which is mandated by State and City policy. Park Rangers are also required to complete the San José Police Department 40-hour POST-certified Crisis Intervention Training within 12 months of completing academy. The Park Ranger Program has been proactive in seeking out programs that address bias, and crisis and de-escalation training, in alignment with the Department's guiding principle of equity and access.

Recruitment and Staff Retention

The Park Ranger program has experienced difficulties with hiring and retaining staff, something that has been experienced by other jurisdictions in the region such as the County of Santa Clara, City of Palo Alto, and Midpeninsula Regional Open Space. Currently the program is funded for 23.59 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions as portrayed in Table 2. Since the last annual report in October 2019, the Department had four full-time Park Rangers complete the academy and field training and they are now on solo patrol. A Senior Park Ranger retired and a Supervising Park Ranger, who had previously retired from another agency, returned to retirement.

Table 2 – Budgeted Positions for Park Ranger Program

Benefited Park Ranger Positions				
Classification	Budgeted FTE	Filled FTE	Vacant FTE	Notes
Supervising Park Rangers	2.00	1.00	1.00	Recruitment to be started soon
Senior Park Rangers	4.00	3.00	1.00	Recruitment currently open
Park Rangers Full-Time	12.00	7.00	5.00	One candidate in final stage of vetting; another recruitment will open soon
Park Rangers Part-Time Benefited	2.25	1.50	0.75	
All Benefited Rangers	20.25	12.50	7.75	
Unbenefited Park Ranger Positions				
Classification	Budgeted Hours	Worked Hours		Notes
Park Rangers Part-Time Unbenefited	6,947 (3.34 FTE)	7,126		10 part-time unbenefited Park Rangers worked in 2019-2020.

Total Budgeted FTE 23.59

To address the challenges with recruitment, the Department is continuing its efforts to develop a Park Ranger Apprenticeship Program, in cooperation with West Valley College. This collaborative program will provide opportunities for candidates, who have little or no experience, to develop into qualified candidates at the Park Ranger level through the college's training program. As of March 2020, the program has been suspended due to COVID-19. The Department is hopeful that, once in-person training can resume, this program will be a great asset to recruitment efforts.

Additionally, effective July 2, 2019, Park Rangers were granted formal recognition as a separate bargaining unit representing 12 full-time Park Rangers and four Senior Park Rangers. The Peace Officer Park Ranger Association (POPRA) continues to be affiliated with Operating Engineers, Local 3 (OE#3). City-POPRA negotiations concluded with a Hiring Incentive and Referral Bonus Pilot Program and a contract through June 30, 2023, that includes a Crisis Intervention Training premium pay. The hiring incentive/referral program and the Crisis Intervention Training premium pay are expected to attract more qualified candidates in the recruitment process and support employee retention.

Public Safety

San José Park Rangers often provide the initial response to emergencies in their assigned area of responsibility. This can include medical emergencies, injuries, search and rescue events (SAR) and wildland fire. Park Rangers receive training in Emergency Medical Response, Wildland Fire Suppression, and how to conduct search events. As shown in Table 3, in 2019-2020, fire responses increased significantly, largely due to fires along Coyote Creek and in and around Kelley Park. Conversely, medical events and search and rescue/missing person responses decreased, partly due to Alum Rock Park's closure from March 27 to June 11, 2020 and the closure of Happy Hollow Park & Zoo and the Lake Cunningham Action Sports Park due to COVID-19.

Table 3 – Public Safety Responses

Type of Response	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Fire Responses	50	30	33	78
Medical Events	139	104	84	71
Search and Rescue/Missing Person	14	22	12	5
Total	203	156	129	154

Park Rangers are also responsible for the protection of park resources and visitors. As peace officers, Park Rangers patrol park facilities and enforce applicable State and local laws. While it is the Department's philosophy to use the lowest level of enforcement for violations, Park Rangers can issue citations, conduct investigations, collect and process evidence, and make arrests. Park Rangers work closely with the City Attorney's Office and the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office to prosecute serious or chronic violators. Park Rangers also work cooperatively with the San José Police Department for felony or violent crimes.

The statistics in Table 4 show the different enforcement activities the Park Ranger Program undertook in 2019-2020, which includes the COVID-19 education and compliance efforts counted in Table 1. Overall, 97 percent of all law enforcement contacts were closed out with warnings and/or education on park rules. The number of arrests declined, alongside the decline in joint patrols along creeks and adjacent lands. During the 2019-2020 reporting period, there were two use of force incidents involving Park Rangers. Both incidents involved Park Rangers utilizing control holds in assistance to San José Police Officers conducting arrests.

Table 4 – Enforcement Activities

Enforcement Activity	2016	2017	2018-2019	2019-2020
Warnings	6,169	9,057	4,265	7,744
Criminal Citations	601	211	110	109
Crime Reports	276	230	80	120
Arrests	65	33	48	14
Total	7,111	9,531	4,503	7,987

Volunteer Activities

The Department remains committed to supporting community volunteers. Park Rangers continue to work closely with the community and educational institutions to make park and resource improvements within San José's parks and open spaces. Recent volunteer activities include trail improvements at Alum Rock Park, receiving and constructing benches and fencing, as well as trail brushing and removal of invasive non-native vegetation. The decrease in the program's volunteer statistics since 2016-2017, shown in Table 5, is due to the Park Rangers' ongoing efforts to coordinate partnership opportunities with the Department's Volunteer Management Unit, which has had corresponding increase in volunteer activities (not reported here). Generally, volunteer activities in parks were suspended in mid-March and resumed, in limited numbers and with social distance protocols and precautions, in mid-May, with the first small-scale group activity at the end of June 2020.

Table 5 – Volunteer Activities

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Number of Volunteers	2,359	593	437	129
Number of Hours	12,796	1,858	1,608	382
Value*	\$364,174	\$54,035	\$48,160	\$12,036

* In 2019, value is calculated at \$31.51 per hour by the Independent Sector, a national non-profit policy and advocacy organization for volunteer activities

Interpretive Programming

Park Rangers have typically included interpretation programming as a part of their duties, but staffing challenges have limited the amount of time staff has to spend on developing and delivering programs and services. During the spring and summer of 2019, Park Rangers provided 29 programs with 1,896 participants, from campfires and stargazing, to classroom programs teaching elementary aged students how to protect our watersheds by reducing nonpoint source water pollution. Park Rangers were supported in their programs by the San José Astronomical Association and Happy Hollow Park & Zoo. Due to COVID-19, Park Rangers were unable to offer programming to the public in the spring and summer of 2020.

The Department, recognizing the importance of quality interpretive services, has begun the development of a program-wide interpretive plan with a training program for all Park Rangers. The Interpretive Plan will define how Park Ranger interpretive programming supports the Department's vision, mission and guiding principles, and provide direction and procedures to ensure Park Rangers create equitable access to interpretive programs for all San José youth and families, especially in underserved communities, as well as special needs populations. The Interpretive Plan and training is planned for the spring of 2021, with programming scheduled for late spring and into the summer if or as allowed by State and County Health Orders.

Park Ranger 2020-2021 Work Plan (Next Steps)

As reflected above, although COVID-19 service modifications remain in effect at the time of this report, in 2020-2021 the Department will continue to work towards the completion and implementation of the Park Ranger Duty Manual; recruitment and retention of Park Rangers; implementation of a Body Worn Camera program; and continuation of discussions with Park Rangers on their research and suggested solutions to address areas identified during the Park Ranger Working Group. When COVID-19 service modifications are lifted, the Department will coordinate with the Police Department to resume joint patrols along creeks and adjacent lands.

Additionally, the Department will review, update and align the Park Ranger Field Training Manual to the Park Ranger Duty Manual to ensure that all recruits are familiar with the new manual and the field training program reflects the Department's vision, mission and guiding principles in ActivateSJ.

Looking farther ahead, the Department is also beginning preparations for 2022, when the City will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the San José Park Ranger Program and the 150th anniversary of the establishment of Alum Rock Park.

CONCLUSION

For almost 50 years, the Park Ranger Program has provided a wide range of services to the community. From public safety responses and outdoor education programming, to resource management and protection, the Program has been adaptable and responsive to the needs of the community. As the program moves forward, foundational building blocks are being set in place,

such as the Park Ranger Duty Manual and Interpretive Plan, to provide direction and up-to-date standards for staff. Recruitment and retention continue to be a challenge, and the Department remains committed to hiring and retaining the highest quality workforce representing the diverse community the program serves.

COORDINATION

This memorandum was coordinated with the City Attorney's Office, San José Police Department, and the City Manager's Budget Office.

/s/

JON CICIRELLI

Director of Parks, Recreation
and Neighborhood Services

For questions, please contact Avi Yotam, Acting Deputy Director, at (408) 535-3573.