

Public Safety: Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District Ranger Program

Summary

During a protocol briefing on the operations of Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District (District) at the headquarters in Simi Valley, the 2006-2007 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) was presented with information relating to the law enforcement aspects of its Ranger Program. Concerns resulting from that briefing led to an investigation into the level of service and information provided to the public by the Ranger Program. An additional concern was the District's lack of formalized working agreements with the Simi Valley Police Department (SVPD) and the Ventura County Sheriff's Department (VCSD).

The Grand Jury concluded that the District needs to better inform the public about the mission, duties, and responsibilities of the Ranger Program. The Grand Jury further concluded that the District does not have an accurate accounting of crimes and incidents occurring within its boundaries.

The Grand Jury recommends that the District develop a more formalized relationship with the SVPD and VCSD, especially in the area of collecting data regarding crimes occurring on District property. Additionally, the Grand Jury recommends that the District review the number of daily hours that its Ranger Program is in operation.

Background

The District is an independent special district governed by an elected Board of Directors. It currently owns 5,394 acres, which are located within the 113 square miles of its territory and include 48 parks with 80 miles of hiking trails. The District serves a population of approximately 141,000 residents, mainly those in the City of Simi Valley, as well as the community of Oak Park and other unincorporated County territory. Approximately two-thirds of the District lies within the city limits of Simi Valley, while the remainder of the District is in unincorporated areas of Ventura County.

The District has employed Rangers since September of 1986. According to the *Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District Ranger Program* manual, "The primary focus of the ranger program is to educate the public regarding maintaining safe parks for the enjoyment of all."

Rangers are duly sworn peace officers in the State of California pursuant to California Penal Code §830.31. They wear distinctive uniforms and have been authorized by the Board of Directors to carry firearms since 1995. The arming of the Rangers resulted from a gang shooting incident to which the Rangers responded. This incident occurred on the periphery of District park property within the City of Simi Valley.

Methodology

The Grand Jury received a briefing from District management. There were also follow-up telephone interviews with the SVPD and the VCSD regarding their operational working relationships with the District Ranger Program.

Findings

- F-01.** District Ordinance No. 2 [Ref-01] is an ordinance passed by the District Board of Directors. It establishes rules and conditions governing the use of District parks and facilities and participation in District programs.
- F-02.** Enforcement of Ordinance No. 2 is the responsibility of the Ranger Program.
- F-03.** The District Ranger Program currently has three full-time, five part-time, and three special-event rangers to patrol the properties within the District.
- F-04.** Rangers are on patrol seven days a week from 10:00 a.m. to midnight.
- F-05.** The Ranger Program compiles monthly statistics of their calls for service and ranger-initiated activities and incidents.
- F-06.** The Ranger Program does not provide periodic safety reports of any kind to the District Board of Directors.
- F-07.** The District and the Ranger Program do not provide information regarding District safety statistics to the public.
- F-08.** The District Board of Directors does not require that an annual report from the Ranger Program be compiled, presented and made available to the general public.
- F-09.** The current Web site of the District has limited information about the Ranger Program.
- F-10.** Loitering by homeless persons and gang activity on District property is increasing and frequently requires assistance from either SVPD or VCSD.
- F-11.** The SVPD is the primary law enforcement agency providing police services to District properties within city boundaries. (See Attachment 1.)
- F-12.** The VCSD is the primary law enforcement agency providing police services to District properties within unincorporated areas of the County.
- F-13.** No formalized agreements exist requiring the SVPD or VCSD to provide additional patrol and enforcement on properties owned by the District.
- F-14.** No formalized agreements exist with the SVPD or VCSD setting forth operational procedures and liability issues within the Ranger Program.
- F-15.** The District has no formalized tracking system for noting responses by the SVPD or VCSD to incidents occurring on District property.
- F-16.** The District has had difficulty convincing the Ventura County District Attorney's Office (VCDA) to prosecute citations written by the Rangers.

F-17. The District has plans in place to expand its property holdings and facilities.

Conclusions

- C-01.** The District does not adequately inform the general public of the mission, duties, and responsibilities of the Ranger Program. (F-06 through F-09)
- C-02.** A lack of awareness of the mission, duties, enforcement authority, and responsibilities of the Ranger Program has resulted in the District having difficulty obtaining criminal prosecution through the VCDA. (F-02, F-16)
- C-03.** The District Ranger Program is not staffed to carry out patrol duties on a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week basis, thus leaving the property and facilities vulnerable to criminal acts during the ten hours a day that rangers are not on patrol. Since the District has plans for expansion, additional Ranger staff may be required. (F-01 through F-04, F-13, F-17)
- C-04.** Without formalized agreements with city and county law enforcement, there is a likelihood that confusion and misunderstandings could result regarding jurisdictional responsibilities and expectations in the event of a significant incident occurring on District property. (F-02, F-11 through F-14)
- C-05.** The District and the general public does not have an accurate overall picture of crimes and incidents occurring on its properties. (F-07 through F-10, F-15)

Recommendations

- R-01.** The District should consider providing 24-hour, seven-day-a-week patrol coverage of its properties and facilities so that it can better address security needs. This could be accomplished by increasing the number of rangers or contracting with the SVPD and VCSD to provide additional patrol of District properties. (C-03)
- R-02.** The District should execute formal Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement with SVPD and VCSD defining the operational and jurisdictional interface between the Ranger Program and the two agencies. (C-04)
- R-03.** The District should establish a mechanism by which SVPD and VCSD report to the Ranger Program all crimes and incidents occurring on District property. (C-05)
- R-04.** The District should update its official Web site to provide details about the mission and enforcement responsibilities of its Ranger Program. The site should also provide a statistical breakdown of crimes and incidents occurring on District property. (C-01, C-05)
- R-05.** An annual report about the Ranger Program should be prepared for the District Board of Directors. This report, as well as a brochure, should also be available to the public both on the Web site and in print. (C-01, C-05)

R-06. The District should meet regularly with the VCDA to exchange information and better educate VCDA personnel about activities of the Ranger Program. (C-02)

Responses

Responses Required From:

Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District Board of Directors (R-01 through R-05)

Simi Valley City Council (R-02, R-03)

Ventura County Board of Supervisors (R-02, R-03)

Ventura County Sheriff (R-02, R-03)

Ventura County District Attorney (R-02, R-03, R-06)

Responses Requested From:

Simi Valley Police Department (R-02, R-03)

Attachments

1. Simi Valley Police Department, General Order 0831 (Park District Rangers)

References

Ref-01. Rules and Regulations Governing Use of District Facilities (on the Web at <<http://www.rsrdp.org/public/ordinances.pdf>>)

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PARK DISTRICT RANGERS
GENERAL ORDER 0831

Date of Last Revision: January 2005

4.28.01 POLICY

- A. It is the policy of the Department to establish operational policies and procedures with regard to members of this Department who come in contact with Park Rangers of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. Department personnel are expected to provide appropriate law enforcement assistance to Park Rangers.
- B. Park Rangers of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District are peace Officers while on duty and may make arrests, conduct investigations, and complete reports involving criminal matters as necessary to protect Park District property. The Department shall retain final responsibility for all law enforcement matters occurring on Park District property within the City of Simi Valley.
- C. The primary duty of a Park Ranger is the protection of the parks and other property belonging to the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District and the preservation of the peace therein.
- D. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to relieve an Officer of this Department of his or her responsibility to take appropriate enforcement action for any violation committed in his or her presence in any park or any other location.

4.28.02 PROCEDURE

A. INVESTIGATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1. Park Rangers of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District will normally conduct and handle to conclusion all infractions they become aware of that occur on Park District property while in the scope and course of their employment.
- 2. The investigation and documentation of all misdemeanor and felony crimes are and will remain the responsibility of this Department, with the following exceptions:
 - a. Misdemeanor violations (not requiring a crime report) of state law, and city or county ordinances.

B. ARREST AND BOOKING

- 1. Except in those cases noted in Section A (2) above, Officers of this Department shall assume responsibility for the arrest and booking of suspects in all crimes requiring follow-up investigation.
- 2. Warrant arrests made by Park Rangers of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District will be handled to conclusion by the arresting Ranger. This will include the transportation and booking at a County facility.

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3. Whenever a physical arrest and booking is made of a subject that is in possession of a vehicle, the disposition of that vehicle shall be the responsibility of the agency booking the arrestee.

C. IMPROPER ARRESTS

When a member of this Department becomes aware of an arrest affected by a Park Ranger that appears to be improper, the on-duty Watch Commander shall be notified immediately. It shall be the responsibility of the Watch Commander to make the final determination whether or not to accept custody of an arrestee.

D. EVIDENCE

1. Department Officers accepting custody of an arrestee from the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District shall assume responsibility for all evidence and property associated with the arrest.
2. Evidence seized by Park Rangers will be retained by the Rancho Simi Park and Recreation Department in cases where Officers of this Department are not involved.

E. COMPLAINTS OF MISCONDUCT

1. In any case of a complaint of misconduct against a Park Ranger of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District, the complainant will be provided with the address and telephone number of the Park District Administrative Offices and advised to contact the Park District Operations Administrator. The address and phone number of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District is:

1692 Sycamore Drive
Simi Valley, California
(805) 584-4400

2. When misconduct constituting a crime is alleged against a Park Ranger, the Watch Commander shall ensure that the appropriate crime report is taken and a memorandum describing the allegation is completed. The memorandum and a copy of the crime report shall be forwarded to the Office of the Chief of Police.

F. ACCESS TO CRIMINAL HISTORY INFORMATION AND DEPARTMENT RECORDS

Park Rangers of a local agency are authorized by the California Department of Justice to receive criminal history information. Therefore, whenever a Park Ranger of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District requests information either from Department records or through the Department's CLETS terminal, that information will be provided and logged in accordance with existing Department policy.

G. RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

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Park Rangers of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District are authorized to use this Department's radio net to contact this Department when necessary. The designated call signs of the Park Rangers are: Ranger 1, Ranger 2, etc.

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