

14. Who works in national parks?

Aim

This activity familiarises students with the work of Park Rangers via responses to interview questions. Students can compare management tasks in different national parks.

This can be organised as a role-play with two students reading out the interview responses, OR the teacher may provide copies of Resource sheet 14 to small groups.

Materials

- Resource sheet 14: An interview with a Ranger.
- Workbook and pen, or computer.

Activities

1. Read or listen to Resource sheet 14: An interview with a Ranger.

2. Using Parks Victoria's website, find out about the parks at which the interviewed Ranger has been and is currently located. What are some of the main differences between these metropolitan parks and parks such as Grampians National Park, Wilsons Promontory National Park or Alpine National Park? Refer to the Parknotes for the above parks. Suggest how these differences might affect a Ranger's work?

3. Write your own imaginary day in the life of a Ranger. Include at least five tasks and explain briefly why they were necessary. Include a paragraph describing the job you like best and why, and the job you like least and why.

4. Imagine you are a Ranger in a national park. Your task is to write a reply to one of the inquiries listed below. In groups of four, first discuss what the "official" policy would most likely be on each issue and why. Then allocate one inquiry to each member of your group and write a reply. Include the reasons why you are recommending a particular action. Check each other's draft letters before writing/typing a final draft. Remember to format your letter correctly.

Mrs S. Cayne of Moonee Ponds.

She has written to ask if she can take her dog when she goes on visit to the park. She knows dogs are not allowed in national parks but says her dog is very obedient and wouldn't hurt a fly.

Mr. G. Kenny of Noble Park.

He is a keen hang glider and wants to use a site in your park to "hang around". He will bring all his own gear and take responsibility for his own safety.

Ms N. Clipp of Hot Adverts Film Studio.

She wants to film part of an advertisement for a new model car in the park. You ask the Director of Parks Victoria and he gives permission so long as the film crew do what the Ranger says and cause no damage to the park. She must pay a deposit that will be returned if these conditions are met.

Mr A. Study of the University of Melbourne.

He wants to bring a group of biology students into the park to observe, trap and record data on the habitat of the One-eared Bandicoot. He claims he is very responsible and would be careful when walking off the track.

14. An interview with a ranger

Introduction

Brendan Sullivan began working with Parks Victoria in 1995. He has worked in metropolitan Melbourne at Braeside Park and acted as Ranger-in-Charge at Warrandyte State Park. He is currently an Environmental Ranger at Plenty Gorge Parklands.

A

1. What are the duties of a Ranger?

A Ranger's role is diverse and challenging. Rangers have to be a "jack of all trades" as everyday issues pop up within the park that need resolution. In general terms, a Ranger is responsible for helping the Ranger-in-Charge manage the park. Some Rangers specialise in environmental management and are responsible for the management of flora and fauna species. These Rangers work on projects that help protect and maintain the natural values of a park. Examples of these projects include pest plant and animal control, revegetation, monitoring of the environmental values within a park and intensive management of threatened species. Other Rangers are involved with visitor services. Some examples of their duties include managing visitor facilities and amenities, interpreting the park to the public and ensuring that the designated recreational areas within parks meet Parks Victoria's standards. Rangers also respond to emergency situations within their park and some are involved in fire fighting across the state.

2. What are the duties of a Ranger-in-Charge?

The Ranger-in-Charge of a park is accountable for the daily management of the park's assets, budget and staff. Duties range from managing people resources, liaising with neighbours on issues that affect the park, ensuring that visitor facilities are safe and meet the appropriate standards, ensuring that projects are

started when scheduled and that Parks Victoria policy and procedures are adhered to, preparing the park's budget, and preparing reports on various issues to senior management. The Ranger-in-Charge reports directly to the District Chief Ranger.

3. How many Rangers work in your park?

Currently there are seven Rangers and of course just one Ranger-in-Charge.

4. What are the main tasks you are doing at the moment?

This time of the year, May, is always very busy for Rangers. We are preparing the park's budget for the next financial year. This involves developing detailed project plans with timelines and budgets and determining the total number of hours each Ranger will spend on each project. We are also completing our fox and rabbit control program as well as preparing a number of sites for revegetation in the next few weeks.

5. What sort of qualifications and abilities do Rangers need?

Presently, when Parks Victoria employs a new Ranger the person must have a tertiary qualification in natural resource management. There are a number of universities and TAFE's that offer these courses. Needless to say, a tertiary qualification doesn't necessarily make a good Ranger. Experience in the position is very important and there are many Rangers within Parks Victoria who are very good at what they do because they have extensive experience in park management.

Rangers need to have the ability be able to resolve park management issues in a practical and cost effective manner. They

also need to be able to communicate well with other staff members, park neighbours and a wide variety of interest groups. They also need to have an excellent understanding of Parks Victoria's policies and procedures as these are used on a daily basis.

6. Does a Ranger need any specialised training once at the park?

Parks Victoria provides opportunities for Rangers to further develop and enhance their skills and abilities. As Rangers, we are constantly learning more about our park and often require new skills to effectively manage them. For example, I have completed short courses in chainsaw handling, chemical handling, legal systems and computer mapping, to name just a few. A new Ranger to a park will receive an induction course which includes a tour of the park and a detailed outline of how the park is managed.

7. What advice would you give to a student who wants to become a Ranger?

I would tell them that they should firstly try and undertake some work experience at one of their local Parks Victoria parks. This would give them an insight into the actual role of a Ranger. Many people think we work outside most of the time but in reality we spend lots of time at our desks preparing projects and reports and monitoring budget expenditure.

I would also suggest that if a student wants to become a Ranger, he/she should carefully think about the course they would like to pursue after secondary college. There are not too many jobs available for Rangers and there is lots of competition for those jobs. When I was at university, I set up my course so that I would obtain the necessary qualifications to become a Ranger but also studied other subjects so that if I wasn't successful in becoming a Ranger, my skills and abilities would still allow me to obtain a good job in an interesting field.

B

1. What are the distinctive features of your park?

At Plenty Gorge Parklands, there are two distinctive categories: cultural values and natural values. The cultural values include the LePage Homestead that was built in the 1850's, relics of the area's gold mining past, ruins of old flour mills along the Plenty River and Yan Yean Reservoir, (Melbourne's first water storage). There is also substantial evidence of Aboriginal artefacts throughout the parklands. Natural values include the Plenty River and the gorge it has created, unique geological formations as a result larva flows thousands and thousands of years ago and a unique collection of flora and fauna, many of them threatened in Victoria.

2. What major problems do you have to keep the environment as natural as possible?

Urbanisation is a huge threat to Plenty Gorge Parklands. Housing development close to the park boundary has a significant impact on the park values. Storm water runoff, rubbish dumping, domestic animals and garden escapees affect the park's environment. We try to reduce these impacts by putting conditions on such developments. Pest animals and weeds are also of concern and control works are carried out on a regular basis.

3. Do management activities vary depending on the season?

Visitor numbers to the park increase during the warmer months so a lot of our time is spent on visitor related issues. The warmer months also bring with them conditions suitable for controlling rabbits, various weeds and building tracks and new park facilities. It's fair to say that summer is very hectic with a number of projects starting, visitor numbers increasing and the associated risk of fire. During the colder months Rangers have more time to plan upcoming projects so that they are ready to implement them during the warmer period.

C**1. What activities do most visitors involve themselves in at your park?**

Most visitors to Plenty Gorge Parklands use the park for picnics and BBQs. Some of the visitors are interested in the natural environment and go bushwalking, bird watching and undertake other nature-based activities. As Plenty Gorge Parklands becomes better known, we are seeing more visitors using the park for nature-based activities. Plenty Gorge Parklands also has Nioka Bushcamp which is used by people almost every weekend.

2. Which activities most affect the natural environment?

Illegal riding of both mountain and motorbikes causes the most damage to the environment within Plenty Gorge Parklands. Damage caused by these activities includes erosion and loss of topsoil, trampling of native plant species, introduction of weed species into the park and the creation of new tracks into areas where we don't want people to go. Because houses are so close to the park rubbish dumping is a problem - people actually throw their rubbish over their fences into the park! This makes the park look dirty as well potentially injuring wildlife.

3. Which activities involve the most work for rangers?

Project planning takes a lot of our time. We want to make sure that the project will meet its objectives and have a successful outcome. All Rangers work on a number of different projects at the same time so it takes time to ensure that all the projects are running smoothly, on time and within budget. We also have to check on people doing work for us.

4. What rule or park guideline is the most difficult to explain to visitors?

People letting their dogs off leads is the most common problem we have to deal with. People like taking their dog for a walk in a natural setting or park and don't fully understand the impact their dog can have on the environment. Dogs off leads also impact on other visitors to the park. Not everyone likes dogs and some people are actually scared of them.

D**1. What do you see as the greatest challenge for your park in the future?**

The greatest challenge for Plenty Gorge Parklands in the future is finding the appropriate balance between recreation and conservation. At the moment, areas of the park are locked away from the public because of their sensitivity and risks. People naturally want to see these areas and put pressure on Parks Victoria to gain access. The challenge we face is to allow people access to these areas while minimising the human impacts on the environment.

2. What do you think about the future of our national parks system?

National parks exist to preserve natural values for people to enjoy forever. Our awareness of the natural environment is increasing constantly and we are learning new ways to better manage the environment. As a result, we are getting better at managing Victoria's natural resources. With growths in human population, the threats of global warming and of the extinction of many native species, national parks are more important than they have ever been.