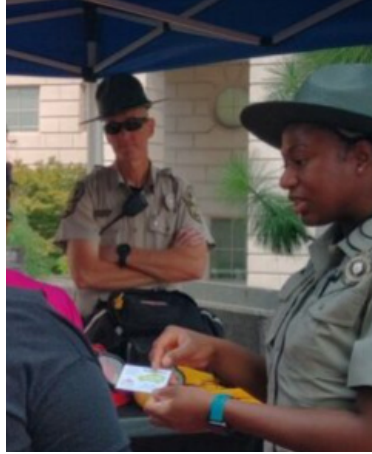


Annual Report 2023

# Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation  
Division of State Parks | Division of Natural Heritage





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## OUR PURPOSE

Through an educational law enforcement approach, to protect the lives and property of our employees, visitors and the greater community to which we belong; to preserve the natural and cultural resources of the Commonwealth; while performing these responsibilities entrusted to us with honesty, integrity and professionalism.

## OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Preserving the Past – Protecting the Future

## AGENCY ROLE

The role of the employees with the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff requires versatility, compatibility and professionalism, combined with a dedication for protecting natural resources and ensuring access to all.

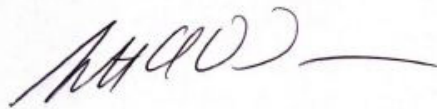
## Message From the Chief

On behalf of the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff, I am pleased to present the 2023 Annual Report highlighting the accomplishments, specialized activities, and statistical information of Virginia's Law Enforcement Rangers. 2023 continued to highlight that people enjoy visiting Virginia's State Parks with over 8 million visitors enjoying the amazing scenic views, programs, and amenities in a safe environment. From the beaches of the coastline to the mountains towering above, Virginia's Law Enforcement Rangers responded to calls providing aid, assisting those in need, and protecting the people and resources of the commonwealth.

During 2023, we worked to implement and upgrade technology designed to enhance our abilities to respond to challenges and communicate across the state, with one another, and our peer law enforcement agencies and public safety professionals, furthering the services and protection provided. I believe in investing in technology and resources that allow the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff to focus on and succeed in our core mission of protecting the employees and guests while preserving the past and protecting the future of our state's natural, cultural, and historic resources today and for generations to come. Additionally, with support from the Department's Public Communication and Marketing Office, we updated our [website landing page](#), providing increased transparency and improving the availability of information available to the public.

In accomplishing this, we combine the educational mission of our organization with professionalism and excellence, allowing our public interactions and community policing approach to support outstanding visitor experiences while ensuring the safety and well-being of everyone enjoying Virginia's State Parks. Our Law Enforcement Rangers are dedicated, highly trained and caring professionals who come from diverse backgrounds and strongly believe in what they do, every day. I am honored to work with them and hope you find this report valuable and informative.

Respectfully,



Scott A. Vantrease, Chief  
Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff



# Core Values

## VERSATILITY

Sworn and Non-Sworn employees with the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff are responsible for much more than enforcing the law; they are protectors and educators of the public and guardians of the resources. They must possess the ability to perform the other challenges of their position and aid others with theirs. They must be adept in the facets of visitor services and resource protection required by their assignment. Their ability to adapt and overcome challenges while remaining true to accreditation standards, while believing in community policing not as a program but as a way of operating, ensures the safety of the staff, guests and resources, and is a testament to their adaptability and value.

## COMPATIBILITY

The role of the law enforcement officer is just one of several roles required of the employees in the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff. Each member must understand the purpose and function of these other roles while integrating them into pursuing our common goal

## PROFESSIONALISM

Sworn and Non-Sworn employees with the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff serve with professionalism. Each member strives to achieve professional accountability at the highest level. The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff was the first conservation and recreation law enforcement agency in the commonwealth to gain accreditation from the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission (VLEPSC). With initial accreditation in 2010, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff has maintained accreditation illustrating the organization's commitment to safety, professionalism and the protection of resources and the people of Virginia.

## DEDICATION

Each member of the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff must show dedication for protecting the employees, guests and natural resources while ensuring access to all.

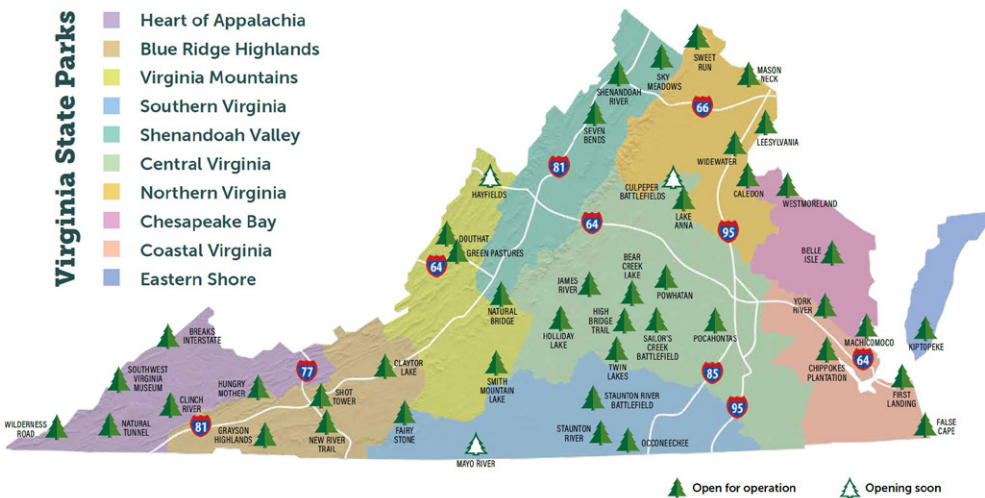


# Our Sacred Trust

## WHO AND WHAT WE PRESERVE AND PROTECT

The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff have a sacred trust, to preserve the past and protect the future. Law Enforcement Rangers work to protect the over 8 million guests annually<sup>1</sup> as well as the over 1600 full-time, hourly, seasonal, host and volunteer staff<sup>2</sup> that work to allow the State Parks and Natural Heritage areas to remain available for use. Further, the Law Enforcement Rangers preserve resources (historical, natural, cultural and heritage) for generations to come while working to make them available for appropriate use by all. These resources provide a positive economic impact for Virginia. A 2022 report estimated that Virginia’s State Parks have an impact over \$364 million a year<sup>3</sup> while generating an estimated \$25.6 million in tax revenue.

The resources protected by Virginia’s Law Enforcement Rangers include 42 state parks opened to the public and additional land-banked park sites (exceeding 76,000 acres), over 66 Natural Heritage Preserves and Areas (exceeding 61,000 acres), over 700 miles of trails, three marinas, a commercial fishing pier, three sewage treatment plants, 30 amphitheatres, over 1,600 campsites, 300 cabins, four National Landmarks, three museums, 33 sites on the National Register of Historic Places, 36 lakes and ponds and miles of coastal shoreline. Combined the law enforcement responsibilities for Law Enforcement Rangers include infrastructure and equipment which includes over 1,427 buildings and improvements with a replacement value of over \$1.246 billion.



<sup>1</sup> Data from DCR Publications “Virginia State Parks by the numbers” 2022 Pamphlet and [www.virginiastateparks.gov](http://www.virginiastateparks.gov)

<sup>2</sup> Information from DCR internal sources as of 07/08/2021.

<sup>3</sup> 2022 Virginia Tech Study

The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff is divided into three sections based on the type of activity undertaken. The sections are:

Office of the Chief

Patrol Operations Section

Investigations and Professional Standards Section



## Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff Overview

The approximately 100 sworn and commissioned conservation officers<sup>4</sup> within DCR, more commonly known as Law Enforcement Rangers, are highly educated and trained individuals responsible for protecting the resources DCR manages. Law Enforcement Rangers receive training in search and rescue; wildfire management; and are certified as law enforcement officers by the Department of Criminal Justice Services under § 9.1-102. Additionally, Law Enforcement Rangers receive commissioning as Conservation Officers under § 10.1-115 of the Code of Virginia and, where appropriate, hold the same authority and power as sheriffs throughout the commonwealth to enforce the laws of the commonwealth with a focus on DCR matters. Further, Chapter 4 of the Virginia Administrative Code (Chapter 30-90) makes it unlawful to disobey a lawful order of the Law Enforcement Rangers.

DCR's Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff serves as a full-service program, with DCR's Law Enforcement Rangers responsible for performing general law enforcement, criminal investigations and traffic enforcement<sup>5</sup> and are available and responds to matters 24 hours a day. With the guest resources and overnight facilities under the responsibility of DCR, Law Enforcement Rangers often respond to traditional calls for service, including domestic assaults, thefts, alcohol and drug violations, mental health challenges, welfare checks and traffic-related violations (speeding, driving under the influence and crashes). Additionally, Law Enforcement Rangers respond to non-traditional incidents, including conservation issues (e.g., hunting and fishing violations and aggressive or injured wildlife) and resource issues (e.g., wildfire response and theft or destruction of historic resources under DCR control).

Aligned with many other law enforcement agencies, DCR's Law Enforcement Rangers have access to essential and modern law enforcement equipment including shotguns, patrol rifles, radar units and portable breath units. These law enforcement professionals operate marked and unmarked patrol units fully equipped with the latest technology including Computer Aided Dispatch and statewide communications. Additional law enforcement related services and programs include a Bicycle Patrol Team, Search and Rescue Team, Training Cadre, Honor Guard and Peer Support Team.

Each Law Enforcement Ranger develops significant and personal knowledge of their park and surrounding community while supporting all facets of operations. Each Law Enforcement Ranger undertakes and performs their public safety and law enforcement duties, often miles from other law enforcement support, while also performing other tasks. These additional assignments include operation management (e.g., staff hiring and development and park administration); facility maintenance (e.g., sanitation, repair, and construction), resource and boundary management (e.g., trail maintenance, prescribed burns, and boundary identification and marking), and educational and interpretive programs. This approach allows the Law Enforcement Rangers to have unique, park-specific knowledge and familiarity, enhancing the protection of the employees, guests and resources of Virginia State Parks and Natural Heritage Areas.

<sup>4</sup> Actual staffing ranges between 95-110

<sup>5</sup> VLEPSC 2022 Accreditation Report



# Office of the Chief

The Office of the Chief consists of the senior leadership and administration within the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff and the Joint Communications Center.

## Immediate Office of the Chief



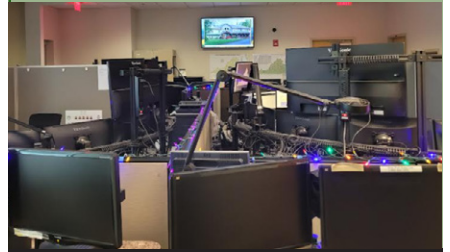
### Chief of Public Safety and Law Enforcement

**Scott A. Vantrease** is the current Chief of Public Safety and Law Enforcement and was sworn in as chief in April 2021. Chief Vantrease has been in law enforcement for over 30 years, holding positions in various traditional and non-traditional law enforcement agencies.



### Deputy Chief of Public Safety and Law Enforcement

**Charles Conner** is the current Deputy Chief of Public Safety and Law Enforcement and was promoted to Deputy Chief May 2022. Deputy Chief Conner has been in law enforcement for over 18 years, and with Virginia State Parks for over 32 years starting his career at Douthat as a seasonal employee in June of 1990 between his junior and senior year of high school.



 CENTRALSQUARE

## Joint Communications Center

Wherever possible, DCR has leveraged joint resources in fulfilling its public safety and law enforcement mission while ensuring fiscal responsibility for the commonwealth. No better example exists than the joint communications center shared with the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR). Started in 2018 to improve officer safety while improving the efficiency and functionality of their communications, records, and mapping processes, this communications center covers and operates 24/7 across the commonwealth for both agencies sharing a unified Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system and Report Management System (RMS). This system allows Law Enforcement Rangers to contribute data or access related files on all types of information, including warrants, case files, calls for service data and past summons and warning history, even though officers may work miles apart.



With peak operations addressing the communications and safety of over 300 law enforcement professionals and utilizing the required STARS radio network overseen by the Virginia State Police, the center provides the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff with state-of-the-art communications and record keeping in a building, a vehicle, or in the field.



## Patrol Operations

Patrol Operations is responsible for the daily public safety and law enforcement activities under the Division of State Parks and the Division of Natural Heritage. The actions of these Law Enforcement Rangers include patrol, community interactions, responding to calls for service and preliminary investigative activity. The focus of enforcement undertaken by the Patrol Operations Section is “educational” enforcement, meaning that the main goal of law enforcement is to help the violator understand the improper action and its impacts on the safety and well-being of employees, guests and resources.

### 2023 Statistics and Information

The following data reflects the information compiled for the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff for the calendar year 2023. The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff continually strives to enhance and improve its data collection and reporting. Crime information is reported monthly to the Virginia State Police through a uniform system adopted by local, state and federal agencies under the Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR), established by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

#### Calls for Service

Calls for service reflect incoming emergency and non-emergency requests for service and proactive patrols undertaken by law enforcement and received by the CAD system. In 2023, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff recorded **9,014 Calls for Service**, including traditional law enforcement:

#### 2,773 Community Policing Efforts (To Deter Illegal Activity and Protect Resources)

- 2,140 Foot Patrol Assignments
- 464 Special Assignment Patrols
- 89 ATV Patrol Assignments
- 80 Public Outreach Events

#### 2,181 Violations of DCR Rules (e.g., Noise, Dumping, Trespassing or COV 10.1-200.3)

#### 276 Medical Calls for Assistance (Traditional and Mental Health including Suicide)

- 3 Drownings

#### 1,142 Traffic Stops (Vehicle/ATV Violations)

#### 401 Suspicious Vehicles/Persons/Activity

#### 102 Vehicle/Property Accidents

#### 72 Drug or Alcohol Violations

#### 57 Stolen Property/Larceny

#### 15 Assault Calls

#### 91 Calls for Missing Persons/Search and Rescue

- 14 on Water
- 77 on Land

#### 62 Robbery/Burglary Alarm Responses

#### 14 Service of Warrants

#### 343 Assist to Motorists/Public

#### 523 Targeted Law Enforcement Patrols

#### 271 Assists to Other Agencies

#### 70 Complaints on State Property/Personnel

#### 54 Domestic Disturbance Calls

Additionally, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff address resource and conservation issues, including:

#### **45 Boating/Boater Violations**

- 3 Careless/Reckless Operation
- 18 General Watercraft Violations
- 14 Distressed Boater Assists
- 3 Boats Found Adrift
- 7 Boating Accidents

#### **102 Wildlife Related Calls**

- 3 Injured Protected Species
- 54 Injured/Deceased Wildlife
- 16 Nuisance Wildlife (8 Involving Bears)
- 27 Dog Complaints (Injured/Off-Leash)
- 2 General/Misc. Wildlife Calls

#### **182 Hunting/Fishing Related Calls**

- 77 Hunting Checkpoints
- 16 Hunting/Fishing Violations (e.g., Illegal Hunting/Trespass to Hunt//Spotlighting/Decoy Hunting on DCR Property)
- 29 Fishing Violations
- 60 Hunting/Fishing License Checks

#### **Virginia Data Collection and Reporting**

To view Virginia Crime Statistics, visit:  
<https://www.vsp.virginia.gov/?s=Crime+Statistics>

#### **Educational Law Enforcement Activities**

The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff prioritizes educational law enforcement when interacting with violations and the public. Such actions can include constructive interactions, warnings (verbal or written), or diversionary actions, such as issuing DCR Citations which do not require the person to enter the judiciary/court system in exchange for a civil fine unless appealed. During 2023, based upon community policing and agency data, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff:

##### **Issued 355 Warnings (Verbal or Written)**

##### **Issued 2,005 DCR Citations, for violations including:**

- 1,196 Failure to Pay Fees
- 752 Parking in a Prohibited Area
- 24 Parking in a Handicapped Zone
- 33 Other DCR Violations

#### **Traditional Law Enforcement Activities**

While the philosophy within the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff is educational enforcement, traditional enforcement methods are also utilized when the situations require. Custodial Arrests result in the individual making an appearance and entering the court system. Summons are issued and require entry into the courts. During 2023, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff:

- Issued 792 Summons
- Made 68 Custodial Arrests / On-View Arrests

### Suicide and Crisis Awareness and Assistance Program

DCR continued its efforts to raise awareness of the 988 line for mental health assistance. With calls for mental health and suicide-related needs occurring regularly, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff continued its rollout of signage for areas of a park to encourage those struggling or considering suicide to seek help.

The signs display the “988” number for calling or texting, chat access through 988lifeline.org, and a scannable QR code. The belief is that if even one person is helped, the program will be a success.



## Crime Prevention Activities and Programs

Efforts undertaken by the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff in 2023 included a review of agency crime prevention activities and programs. A special balance exists in this as traditional approaches and public awareness strategies do not fit the environment staff works so diligently to maintain.

### Take It; Hide It; Lock It; or Lose It

One area where criminals have targeted is theft from vehicles. Visitors often leave a package, purse, cash, or electronic devices in an unattended (and sometimes unlocked) vehicle. The outcome can be a disappointing visit. Utilizing a crime prevention program consistent with others used across North America to address thefts from vehicles, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff initiated a Take It; Hide It; Lock It or Lose It program. This campaign aims to educate employees and visitors and remind them to take basic precautions to reduce their likelihood of becoming a victim.



**Take It** - Items left in plain sight within your vehicle are enticing to criminals. If the item is something that can be taken with you, consider doing so.

**Hide It** - If you must keep valuables in your vehicle, take steps to hide them:

- Never leave your purse, cell phone or other valuables in plain sight.
- Secure valuables in the trunk of the vehicle.
- Consider hiding power cords for phones, GPS units and bags.

**Lock It** - While this sounds simple enough, you might be amazed to discover that in many instances where items are stolen from vehicles, the vehicle is left unlocked. Even leaving your vehicle unlocked for a moment while you run into a store is enough time for a criminal to enter and remove your personal possessions from the car.

- Always Lock Your Car: even if you are just gone for a moment.

**Or Lose It** - Our goal is to educate. While the consequences of failing to lock your vehicle or hiding your valuables may result in theft, our sincere hope is to work together to deter criminals and reduce crime.



## 866-PARKS911

Virginia's State Parks and Natural Heritage Areas stretch across vast areas of land through multiple jurisdictions. In furtherance of the efforts to continually enhance the responsiveness and availability of access to the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff, DCR developed a toll-free number for direct access to the Joint Communication Center to aid in contacting a Law Enforcement Ranger. The number is designed to be easy to recall and displayed on signs, fliers and wherever appropriate.

## Highlights and Impact

The day-to-day operations of our Law Enforcement Rangers resulted in responding to emergency and non-emergency calls for service. Making a difference in people's lives is an essential part of why the Law Enforcement Rangers within the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff take on such challenging roles. In certain instances, staff within the Patrol Operations Section demonstrate efforts beyond providing a high level of law enforcement service. Such examples of this dedication during 2023 included many acts of kindness and true community policing. Some examples include:

### Plane Crash Response

In December 2023, Law Enforcement Rangers with the Division of Natural Heritage responded to a report of a plane crash on Wreck Island in Northhampton County, Virginia. Upon arrival at this remote access location and protected environment it was determined that the plane had not crashed but performed an emergency landing as the result of an engine failure. With a significant coastal storm forecasted to arrive within hours, there was great concern that the plane may move, get washed out into the Atlantic coastal ecosystems, or tip over, causing more significant environmental damage to the area. Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff worked with the Virginia Marine Resources Commission Police, Virginia State Police, National Transportation and Safety Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, and the owner to safely remove the aircraft via helicopter and minimize potential environmental damage.

### Use of Narcan by Law Enforcement Ranger Saves a Life

In May 2023, a Law Enforcement Ranger was working a search and rescue operation when the subject was found on a trail exhibiting signs of a possible overdose, with dilated pupils and shallow breathing. In this condition, the subject had difficulty responding to questions. Another law enforcement officer advised that a plastic bag containing white powder substance and a cut straw had been found near the subject's belongings. As part of the preliminary medical response, the Law Enforcement Ranger administered his issued Naloxone, and the subject began to stabilize. Once stable, members of the search and rescue team placed the individual into a rescue basket and transitioned them up the ridge to a waiting medic unit.



## Investigations and Professional Standards

Investigations and Professional Standards is responsible for criminal investigations, administrative investigations (commonly Background and Internal Affairs Matters), training and accreditation activity for the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff. The Investigations and Professional Standards Section is currently allocated four part-time staff supported by secondary responsibilities from the Patrol Operations Section staff.

### Criminal Investigations

Criminal Investigators undertake a thorough and comprehensive investigation of alleged criminal matters impacting the Department. Such investigations may range from criminal and conservation matters to suspicious death investigations and leverage all available resources.

In 2023, investigators with the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff undertook **49 criminal investigations**. The following is an example of such an investigation having impacts to DCR and surrounding community:

#### Joint Investigative Effort Leads to Arrest of Repeat Criminal

Law Enforcement Rangers and officers from Clarksville Police Department worked together to make an arrest that closed four cases involving DCR and one case for Clarksville Police Department. The two agencies partnered to compare evidence, collect video footage and conduct proactive patrol activities that resulted in the arrest of a suspect and the service of 20 warrants for larceny and related crimes. The suspect, a person on probation, is alleged to be responsible for breaking into coin-based devices within the town of Clarksville and the Honor Payment safe at a Virginia State Park.

During 2023, Law Enforcement Rangers conducted **49 investigations** involving various criminal activity including:

- Stolen Property/Larceny
- Unattended Deaths
- Fraud
- Threats
- Bank Note Forgery
- Impersonation of a Law Enforcement Officer



## Professional Standards

Professional Standards include all aspects of ensuring the integrity of the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff. Their responsibilities include agency training, accreditation and internal investigations.

### Agency Training

In 2023, no member of the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff failed to meet the training standards and requirements mandated by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services or the Department. This included attending the Basic Law Enforcement Academy, annual law enforcement training and developmental and advanced training, such as obtaining certification as a Field Training Officer or Instructor.

### Agency Accreditation

During 2023, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff continued maintaining its fourth accreditation certificate from the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission. This is reflective of the professionalism and dedication of the staff, which is one of the longest standing state level accredited law enforcement agencies in Virginia. Accreditation has allowed the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff to strengthen their professionalism and integrity.

### Internal Affairs

The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff will effectively process and conduct thorough and appropriate investigations of all complaints against the department or its personnel to maintain integrity and assure public trust. Complaints investigated through the Internal Affairs process may result in disciplinary actions subject to appeal and grievance procedures.

Internal Affairs inquiries and investigations can be initiated when a complaint is filed; or as a result of an employee acting, or failing to act, within the scope of general orders which direct DCR's Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff operations. With approximately 100 Law Enforcement Rangers involved in over 9000 calls for service and thousands more interactions with guests during 2023, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff initiated 13 inquiries and investigations. Of these, three (3) were sustained with action taken involving the employee, (1) resulted in the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff updating a general order, one (1) was forwarded to another agency as it did not involve a DCR employee, seven (7) were investigated and determined to be unsubstantiated, and one (1) remained under investigation.

Of vital importance to any law enforcement organization is the initial background investigation for potential new law enforcement staff. In 2023, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff investigators undertook 15 background investigations to support hiring of law enforcement staff





## Specialized Resources

The existence of specialized resources used across the organization is based on the dedication to mission held by the Law Enforcement Rangers and staff. While involvement with these responsibilities is ancillary and often additional voluntary commitment, they maximize the department's fiscal responsibility to the citizens of the commonwealth. The following specialized resources are available through the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff:

### Law Enforcement Ranger Working Group

The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff protects the lives and property of our employees, visitors and the community at large. It protects the natural and cultural resources of the commonwealth with a focus on State Parks and Natural Area Preserves. Undertaking such a responsibility with professionalism and empathy requires insight, consultation and advice, and assistance from across DCR and internal and external stakeholders as appropriate. The Law Enforcement Ranger Working Group is a chartered resource providing insight, consultation, advice and assistance to the Chief of Public Safety and Law Enforcement, aiding in identifying best practices and potential resources for the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff.





## Training Cadre

Training is vital to any agency providing public safety and law enforcement services to ensure the organization upholds professionalism and accountability. In support of this, the Training Cadre consists of cadres including certified staff within the Firearms Cadre, Defensive Tactics Cadre, General Instructors Cadre and others with specialized skills. Training the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff and supporting the training staff of our home academy, these individuals ensure safe and professional training, both mandated and non-mandated

## Field Training Cadre

Those who serve as part of Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff have one of the most diverse responsibilities of any such organization. Being involved in outreach, education, safety and interacting on violations with those who have come to enjoy the commonwealth's natural and recreation resources is not something that any certified law enforcement officer can do. The Field Training Cadre works to uphold the organization's educational and community policing approach. They ensure that staff undertaking this responsibility (transferring from other agencies or graduating from the academy) do so while meeting not only Department of Criminal Justice Services requirements but our internal standards.

## Honor Guard Cadre

Founded in 2011, the Virginia State Park Honor Guard is a highly complimented cadre that provides honor guard services for special events. During 2024, this included three events, including the opening of Sweet Run State Park and the transition of ownership for Natural Bridge State Park. In addition, a highly regarded honor of the cadre is to represent the agency at funerals of law enforcement officers who passed in the line of duty or notable officials with impact to the organization, presenting flags to families in memoriam and appreciation of their loved one's service to the commonwealth and country.



Department of Conservation and Recreation

Chief Scott A Vantrease

Accredited: Mar 2010

Accreditation Manager: Inv. Gary Brumfield

Status Reaccredited - 4th Award

Next Assessment : by March 2026



## Accreditation Team

The Accreditation Team ensures compliance with the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission (VLEPSC) standards. It illustrates the organization's commitment to professionalism and the protection of resources and the people of Virginia. The Accreditation Team undertakes the ongoing monitoring and assurance of requirements to maintain VLEPSC accreditation.<sup>6</sup>

In 2010, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff was the first conservation and recreation law enforcement agency in the commonwealth to achieve accreditation from VLEPSC. Accreditation provides a valuable framework to ensure accountability by the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff and protect the Law Enforcement Rangers by reducing liability. Accreditation enhances our staff's ability to prevent and reduce crime through effective and efficient delivery of services to the commonwealth. The accreditation process has also sculpted General Orders and procedures that will best serve the staff, which serves the people of the commonwealth and those who choose to visit.

## Peer Support Team

According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Police Psychological Services Section, the goal of peer support is to provide all public safety employees in an agency the opportunity to receive emotional and tangible support through times of personal or professional crisis and to help anticipate and address potential difficulties.<sup>7</sup> The DCR Peer Support Team works with staff across DCR to address such issues — individual, family, or professional — through referral or direct contact. The Peer Support Team consists of trained volunteers who understand their responsibilities and work to assist staff in need, whether providing an ear or assisting in identifying services through EAP or professional providers, such as psychologists and therapists. Additionally, members from the DCR Peer Support Teamwork coordinate and train with members of the Virginia Law Enforcement Assistance Program (VALEAP) to further their roles and support of DCR staff and peers.

- In April 2023, members of DCR's Peer Support Team in coordination with VALEAP supported a Post Critical Incident Seminar. Twenty-five officers and dispatchers from across the state came and spoke with the Peer Team helping these individuals and enhancing the skills of the DCR Peer Support Team.



<sup>6</sup> Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission – Promoting Professionalism in Law Enforcement Since 1996 (vlepsec.org)

<sup>7</sup> Ratified by the IACP Psychological Services Section (Accessed 12/31/2021)

## Virginia Emergency Support Team

Under the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, the Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST) comprises more than 300 credentialed members; the VEST draws its staff from all executive branch state agencies, dozens of non-governmental organizations, and private sector companies such as Verizon and Dominion. Through the Office of the Chief, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff serves as the Division of State Parks Liaison for VEST. Additionally, it is the primary contact for any Emergency Support Function (ESF) matters which involve DCR law enforcement response/personnel. DCR is involved in seven (7) ESFs and is often looked to for disaster preparedness, response and recovery assistance. The Department's ESF responsibilities include ESF 3 - Public Works and Engineering; ESF 4 - Firefighting; ESF 5 - Emergency Coordination; ESF 9 - Special Operations; ESF 11 - Agriculture and Natural Resources; ESF 13 - Public Safety and Security; and ESF 15 - External Affairs.



**VEST**

## Search and Rescue Working Group

In 2015, to address the ongoing calls and growing use of the department's Search and Rescue Team for search operations, the Search and Rescue Working Group was established. With techniques, technology and processes continually evolving, ensuring professionalism is vital to saving the lives of those missing. The purpose of this chartered resource is to provide and outline best management practices, identify potential resources and improve response capabilities for the department's Search and Rescue Team. Additionally, the Search and Rescue Working Group aids in the department's coordination with organizations including the Virginia State Police, Virginia Department of Emergency Management, the Virginia Search and Rescue Council and others.

## Search and Rescue Team

Approximately 100 incidents involving "search and rescue" occur in Virginia State Parks and Natural Area Preserves each year. Additionally, search operations for missing juveniles, endangered adults and others require the quick response of trained, professional personnel. Some operations last only a fraction of an hour, others for multiple days. DCR's land holdings are a significant sampling of the commonwealth's terrain and natural resources.

Responding to such calls and utilizing their specialized knowledge of the associated challenges across the commonwealth, staff from across DCR provide unique insights to SAR operations. DCR personnel are almost always the first to respond, whether an internal operation or in response to a call for assistance from the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM).



During 2023, the DCR Search and Rescue Team responded to 26 VDEM activations involving 247 search hours.



## 2023 Goals and Strategies

**GOAL 1:** Enhance Operational Support for Law Enforcement Rangers.

**GOAL 2:** Improve Resources for Responding to and Addressing Mental Health Issues.

**GOAL 3:** Improve Technology Use in Calls for Service.

**GOAL 4:** Develop Resources to Improve Response Capabilities.

### Enhance Operational Support for Law Enforcement Rangers

The Law Enforcement Rangers within the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff are dedicated, hardworking, and highly successful in utilizing true community policing and educational approaches to their responsibilities. Currently, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff identifies and develops its investigators and specialties based upon volunteers who maintain their traditional duties and take on advanced roles, while maintaining their daily responsibilities.

Enhancement of operational support to ensure continuation of the high-level of service provided includes:

- Aligning resources to address the increasing accreditation and administrative requirements involved, and the additional burden being faced by existing staff already with numerous responsibilities.
- Continuing training of existing members of the investigative cadre, while expanding development of such staff to address investigative needs within DCR, including complex crimes, general crimes, suicides, Internal Affairs matters and background investigations.
- Addressing the growing demand for investigative intelligence cooperatively across DCR operations for awareness and insight into potential illicit or illegal activity involving or impacting park operations from illegal hunting activities to narcotics and drugs; and
- Developing training and response capabilities for the increasing need of public safety and law enforcement operational support for the State Parks and Natural Area Preserves during peak needs and special events.

This undertaking is not a short-term goal but one that requires development and planning, which assures that the thriving culture in existence is only improved upon by its success.





## **Improve Resources for Responding to and Addressing Mental Health Issues**

The Law Enforcement Rangers within the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff have progressively responded to mental health concerns on calls in alignment with the implementation of Marcus Alert, a statewide framework intended to improve the response to mental and behavioral health crises in Virginia signed into law in late 2020. To incorporate this framework into the Law Enforcement Ranger's response to a mental health crisis, leadership within the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff will work collaboratively with the Department of Criminal Justice Services, the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health, and local Community Service Boards. This increased interaction will improve communication, cooperation, and training of Law Enforcement Rangers for such matters. While this challenge faces all law enforcement in the commonwealth, the uniqueness of the public safety and law enforcement operations within the department will require phased planning and implementation across multiple agencies. Identification and implementation of strategies and approaches will be the initial phase of this goal.

- During 2023, efforts continued in furthering this effort included communications with the Department of Criminal Justice Services to understand and provide enhanced training in this area. Currently, there are several Crisis Intervention Team trained Law Enforcement Rangers on staff, with more attending training as resources allow.

## **Improve Technology Use in Calls for Service**

To improve officer safety, efficiency and records functionality, Law Enforcement Rangers began utilizing a unified Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system and Report Management System (RMS). This system allows Law Enforcement Rangers to contribute data or access related files across the state. What is needed to improve the use of technology further is to increase the system's functionality and apply upgrades that will enable Law Enforcement Rangers to complete reporting requirements, increase efficiencies, and return to serving the employees and guests more quickly. This effort will incorporate modifications to the system to aid in report writing, additional training during in-service and increased access to guides to assist Law Enforcement Rangers to identify further the resources and benefits the RMS holds.

- During 2023, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff finished the testing and development phase of implementing Central Square's Field Ops smartphone application. In coordination with the existing state-wide computer aided dispatch (CAD) system, this new tool being deployed starting in 2024. This tool will save time and provide situational awareness to Law Enforcement Rangers when they need it most, while providing secure access real-time call information.

## Develop Resources to Improve Response Capabilities

The department's Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff is part of a small and unique group of agencies that often cannot access grants and other resources provided for sheriff's offices, municipalities, and educational law enforcement. Further, as a state agency, they are not funded by resources allotted for the Virginia State Police. The leadership of the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff will undertake a review of partnerships and cooperative approaches utilizing peers and stakeholders to develop resources to improve response capabilities. This undertaking may include examining excess equipment programs from federal or state agencies, improving relationships with existing law enforcement acquisition services and better-evaluating grant opportunities when they are available.

- During 2023 the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff acquired a mobile command center trailer and UTV for use at special events, emergency and disaster scenes, and large-scale search and rescue operations. Equipped with a state-wide radio communications system and specialized gear, this unit can rapidly deploy when needed.



# Service to our Communities, the Commonwealth and the Profession

Not only do our Law Enforcement Rangers undertake outstanding efforts to serve and protect the employees and guests of Virginia’s State Parks and natural area preserves, but we also further our commitment to our communities, the commonwealth we are sworn to protect and the honorable profession we are part of. Being partners and peers within our communities and the commonwealth while promoting our profession is part of our community policing approach.

## Service to our Communities

Each of the state parks and natural area preserves is part of various communities, and we owe an obligation to each for their support and assistance. When resources allow, we participate in a wide range of service and outreach activities designed to support the communities we are part of, to say “thank you.” During 2023, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff was involved in 80 public outreach events.

### NATIONAL NIGHT OUT

In August 2023, our Law Enforcement Rangers joined their peers in various communities throughout the commonwealth at National Night Out. This event enhances the relationship between neighbors and law enforcement while bringing back a true sense of community. Furthermore, it provides a great opportunity to bring police and neighbors together under positive circumstances.



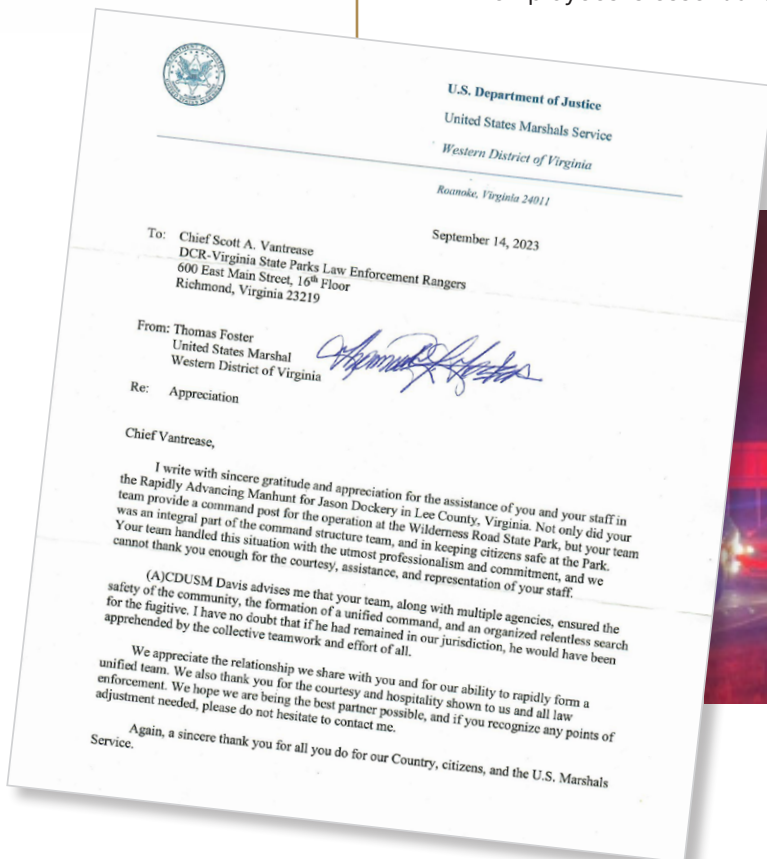
## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Law Enforcement Rangers regularly provide support to our law enforcement peers. From assisting with traffic stops and emergency calls to searching for fugitives, Law Enforcement Rangers ensure the safety and well-being of communities, citizens, and peers. During 2023, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff provided 271 instances of assistance and support to multiple agencies at crash scenes and crime scenes, providing an essential lifeline to state and municipal agencies.

During 2023, this included multiple instances where Law Enforcement Rangers assisted law enforcement peers from federal, state, and local agencies in protecting our communities while working to locate fugitives from justice.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Outreach and community support is important. This year it included seeking out future Law Enforcement Rangers, including at school and public events across the commonwealth. The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff conducts outreach whenever possible to broaden recruiting from various and diverse backgrounds. In building a workforce, Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff benefits from the talents, backgrounds, and ideas brought forth by a diverse applicant pool. Our ability to understand and successfully operate while meeting the needs of our stakeholders and employees is essential to meeting our mission.





## Service to the Profession

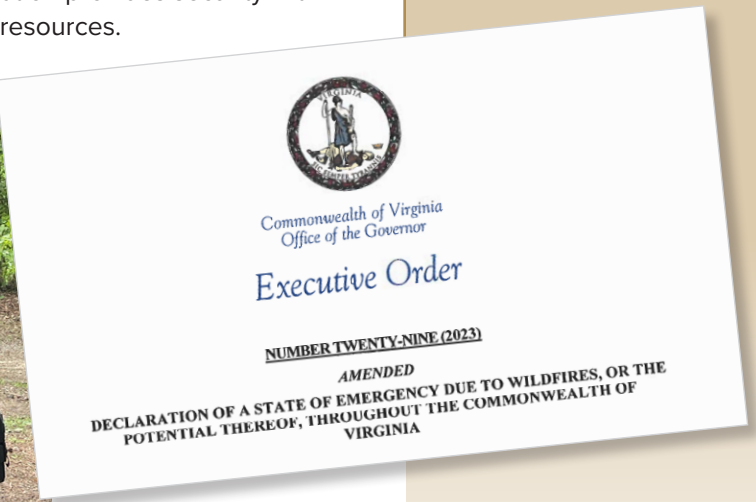
We jointly operate with and support our professional peers and partners. To that end, we attend, partner, and present at various professional trainings and support publications whenever the opportunity allows. Whether speaking to classes in schools, criminal justice academies, colleges or furthering the profession through our affiliations with professional organizations, service is part of our community policing approach.

Conducting joint training with peer agencies improves joint response and enhances skills for both agencies so, when necessary, they can respond quickly and professionally. For DCR this includes operations such as search and rescue, and in the community for such exigent situations as responding to school shootings.

### INTER-GOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

In November 2023, Governor Youngkin declared a State of Emergency as the result of wildfires that spread across multiple areas of the commonwealth. Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff, cross-trained in working with controlled burns and fire, responded and worked with other federal, state, and local agencies to undertake wildfire response, working to save the lives of citizens and the natural resources of the commonwealth.

Ensuring the protection of dignitaries, such as the Governor, when they visit Virginia State Parks. Such cross-agency collaboration provides security with minimal public impact as possible to our natural resources.



## Service to the Commonwealth

Part of being good stewards and peers is sharing and supporting the commonwealth. To that end, as part of our community policing and partnership efforts, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff routinely interacts and provides support to improve governmental operations and further inter-governmental cooperation and information sharing. Additionally, DCR supported over 40 instances of law enforcement, emergency preparedness and search and rescue trainings for all levels of agency, federal, state, and local.

## Welcome New Law Enforcement Rangers

Newly hired Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff personnel require training as outlined by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services and attend our home academy – the Cardinal Criminal Justice Academy. Here they work with peers from over thirty agencies across the area to learn valuable skills, including how to de-escalate and address many issues seen in our contacts with visitors and guests. This allows them to learn how to lessen chances for situations to become hazardous to themselves, any subject they may deal with, or the public. This includes receiving certification in Mental Health First Aid. Once each person completes the academy, they are sworn in at a ceremony at Natural Bridge State Park before beginning their field training.



### 80<sup>th</sup> Basic Law Enforcement Academy

In June 2023, we welcomed Wesley Drummonds, Trevor Johnston, Robby O'Brien, Samantha O'Donald, Paige Ragno, Russell Schmidt, Ian Smith, Collin Wilkinson and Nicolas Yates from Cardinal's 80th Basic Law Enforcement Class.



### 81<sup>st</sup> Basic Law Enforcement Academy

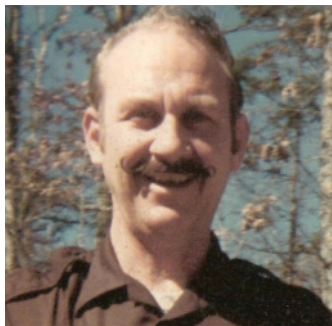
In November 2023, we welcomed Meggan Saul, Sean Tracy and Tanner Working from Cardinal's 81st Basic Law Enforcement Class.

# IN MEMORIAM

**Paul Salyer**

**Breaks Interstate Park**

**End of Watch: Thursday, Aug. 14, 1975**



Ranger Paul Salyer was shot and killed while investigating a disturbance at a campsite in Breaks Interstate Park. The campsite occupants had been involved in a domestic disturbance the previous night. Ranger Salyer was shot when he went to the campsite to check on the occupants.

Ranger Salyer was a Korean War veteran. For two years, he had served with the Breaks Interstate Park and held a commission as a part-time deputy with the Dickenson County Sheriff's Office. He was survived by his wife, mother, three brothers, and grandmother.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> Park Ranger Paul Herbert Salyer, Breaks Interstate Park Police Department, Virginia (odmp.org)



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All photos in this report were contributed by DCR staff



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