

Summary 2012

The year of 2012 was a difficult one for the entire park staff. On January 1st, 2012, ranger Margaret Anderson was shot and killed by Benjamin Barnes during a traffic stop. Mr. Barnes was then found dead about 24 hours later after a massive man-hunt by NPS, state, and federal law enforcement officers. Margaret was one of ten law enforcement rangers who work side by side at the park, and naturally impacted this ranger staff very deeply. But most of all, Margaret was a wife and a dedicated, loving mother of two girls, both under four at the time. The sadness of this tragedy set the tone for the rest of the year.

The impact of this event set all ranger operations behind schedule. What resources and energy we had went into grieving, planning funerals and memorials, and figuring how to cover and backfill Margaret's void. Margaret supervised the winter snowplay rangers and was also the EMS coordinator. This work was spread out among already stretched-thin rangers.

Two climbing ranger supervisory staff entered on duty in March and the rest of the seasonal staff began working April 17. Rangers train 40 hours per week for a little over a month. Most of the climbing ranger staff is seasonal, which means they work less than six months (average 4 ½ to 5 months and go back to their 'real' lives in the fall as carpenters, teachers, ski patrollers, etc...). Seasonal rangers make approximately 15-19 dollars per hour, do not get any federal benefits, health coverage, or retirement.

The field season was underway by the last week of May. Upper mountain rescues typically peak in late June. On June 21st, while receiving a litter via hoist from a hovering US Army Reserve Chinook CH-47 Chinook helicopter, ranger Nick Hall, a four-year lead seasonal climbing ranger, was knocked off balance and slid 2,500 to his death on the Winthrop Glacier. Nick's tragedy blew our summer climbing ranger operation into smithereens. Nick was of strong character and all the climbing rangers respected Nick's attitude, presence, and skill.

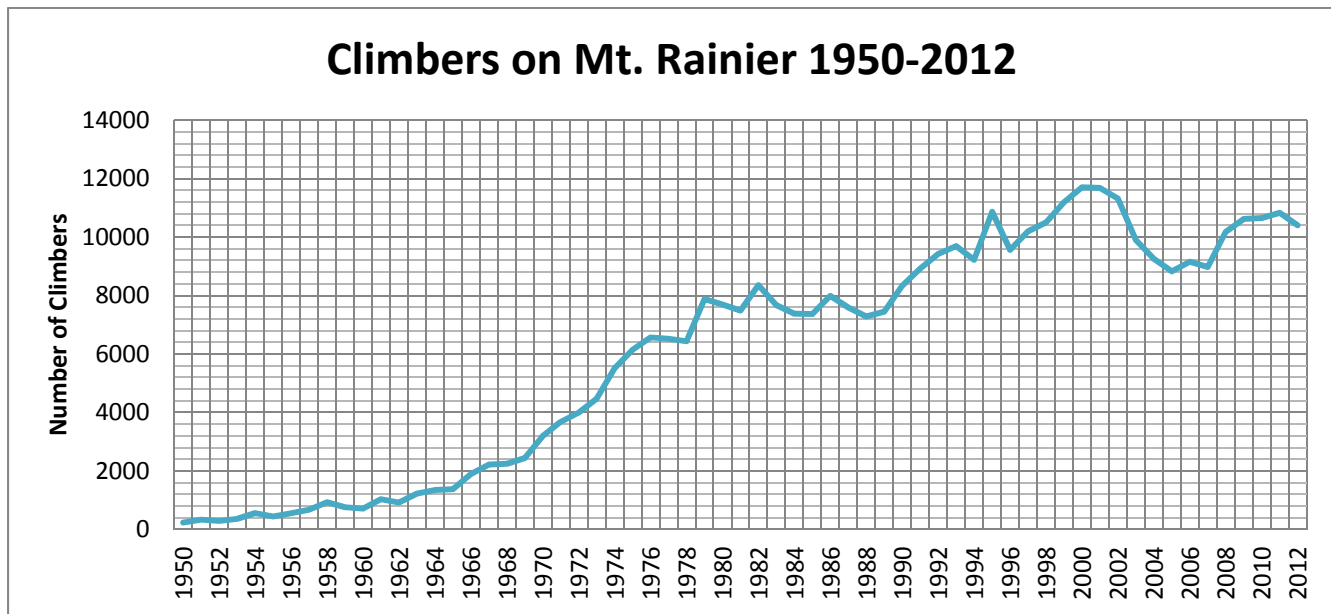
Once again, much of our energy and resources went into dealing with the fallout of this incident for the rest of July – and still we went on staffing our high camps and rescuing thanks to backfill coverage from rangers from Denali National Park, Grand Teton National Park, Yosemite National Park, and Rocky Mountain National Park.

In the meantime, in June, another long-time ranger who has worked at Camp Muir for over 10 years, Ted Cox was diagnosed with stage four cancer. Ted died on August 5, 2012, with great sadness. Once again, his absence left the ranger staff reeling, trying to figure out how to cover the work that he was doing.

The Schurman season was wrapped up by the last week of August, due to the deteriorating climbing conditions on that side of the mountain. Camp Muir was staffed, usually two rangers per night until the end of September, when subsequently, the climbing season came to an end.

Two new permanent employees were added to our staff this summer. Thomas Payne, who had worked a total of nine years in the climbing program became one of three GS-9 supervisors. Armando Purganan was hired as our first permanent administrative support assistant and comes to us as a great relief!

Overall Climbing Statistics and Route Use



There were roughly 10403 climbers in 2012, roughly 4% less than in 2011. It is difficult to explain the decline in climbing numbers this year. For a short period, after fatalities, I have seen climbing numbers drop. This may account for some of the decrease. Also, the Schurman route became more circuitous and difficult than usual and by August was a challenging climb. This also deterred climbers from climbing.

Throughout history, during periods of recession, climbing numbers on Mt. Rainier have also decreased, but during our last stock market crash in 2009, climbing numbers increased dramatically (by nearly 5% that year). Alpine climbing is a relatively expensive endeavor; the gear costs a lot of money. It was interesting that climbing continued to grow as the economy has fluttered.

2012 Route Use Compared to 7-year Average

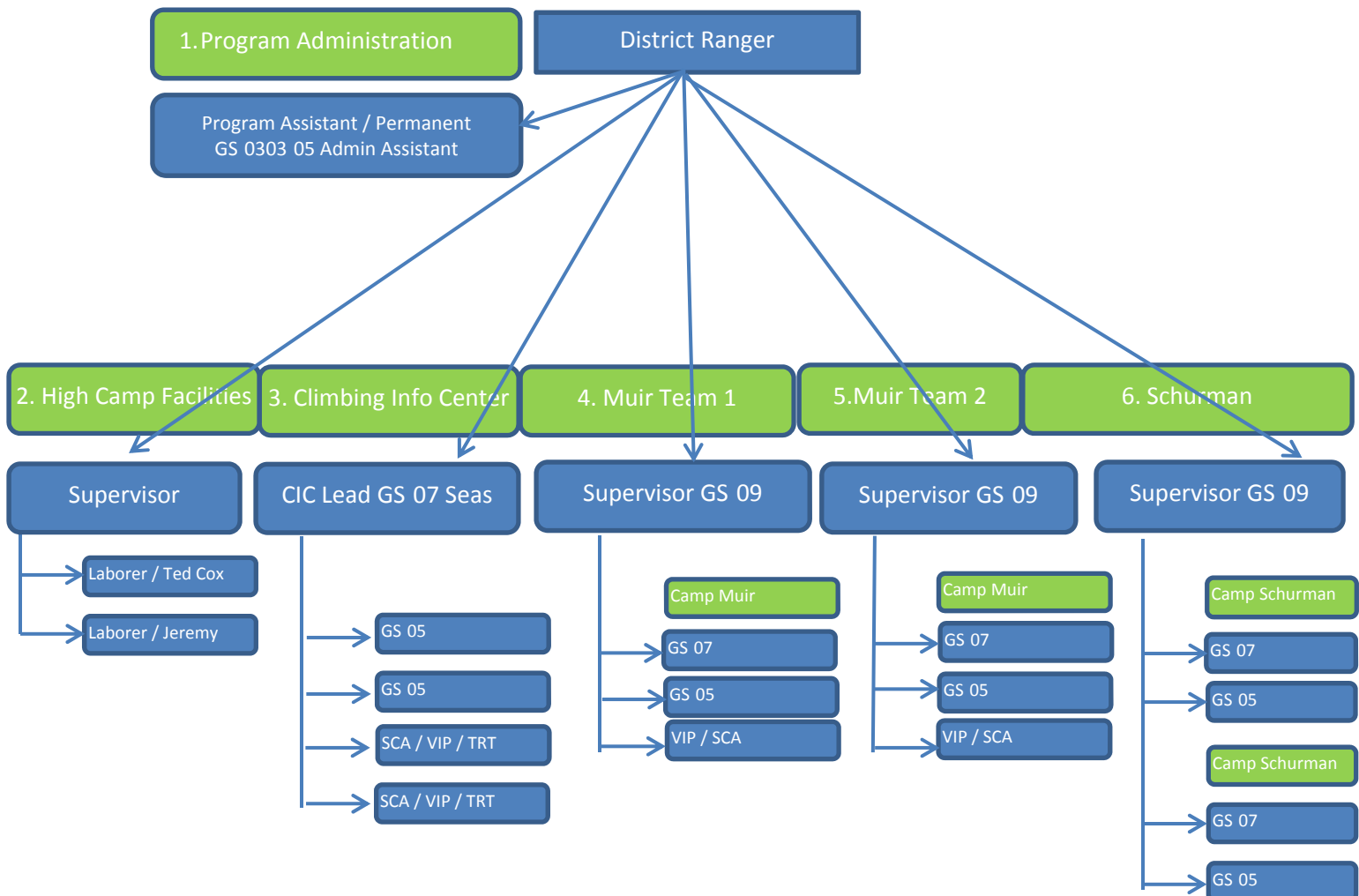
Route	Total 2012	2012 % of Avg	06-12 Total	7-year avg
Disappointment Cleaver	7315	70.32%	45533	64.40%
Emmons-Winthrop	1469	14.12%	11992	17.00%
Ingraham Direct	330	3.17%	4631	6.50%
Kautz Glacier	388	3.73%	2847	4.00%
Gibraltar Ledges	102	0.98%	843	1.20%
Fuhrer Finger	130	1.25%	980	1.40%
Little Tahoma	130	1.25%	894	1.30%
Liberty Ridge	161	1.55%	956	1.40%
glacier only - no summit attempt	87	0.84%	148	0.20%
Ptarmigan Ridge	9	0.09%	164	0.20%
Tahoma Glacier	21	0.20%	249	0.40%
Kautz Cleaver	14	0.13%	368	0.50%
Success Cleaver	14	0.13%	114	0.20%

Wilson Headwall	13	0.12%	68	0.10%
Nisqually Cleaver	3	0.03%	20	0.00%
Nisqually Glacier	11	0.11%	57	0.10%
Sunset Ridge	4	0.04%	29	0.00%
Mowich Face	16	0.15%	41	0.10%
Gibraltar Chute	11	0.11%	67	0.1%
Nisqually Ice Cliff	8	0.08%	47	0.10%
Sunset Amphitheater	2	0.02%	16	0.00%
Unspecified	164	1.58%	181	0.30%

Climbing Program Operations

The climbing ranger program was organized in this way.

Mount Rainier National Park Mountaineering District - 2012



The downsides to this is that the rangers who issue the permits are less familiar with the current conditions and providing the CIC its own staff is a little more expensive.

The rangers who work at the CIC also have the collateral duty of preventative search and rescue. It is part of their work to travel between Paradise and Camp Muir and contact day and overnight hikers and climbers and make sure they are permitted, equipped and informed about the conditions and weather.

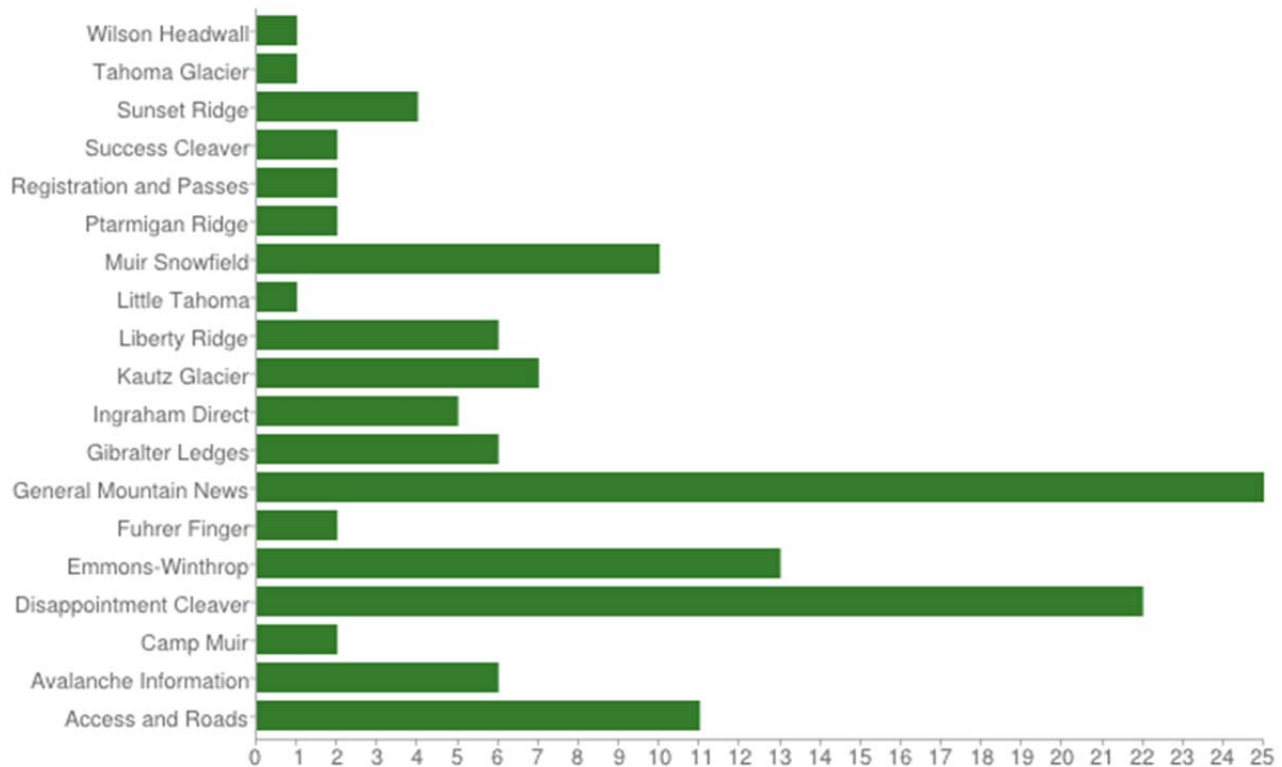
The White River WIC is staffed by the Camp Schurman rangers on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings. The rangers then climb to Camp Schurman on Saturday afternoon. The east district backcountry staff registers all other climbers from Sunday to Thursday. A big thanks to them!

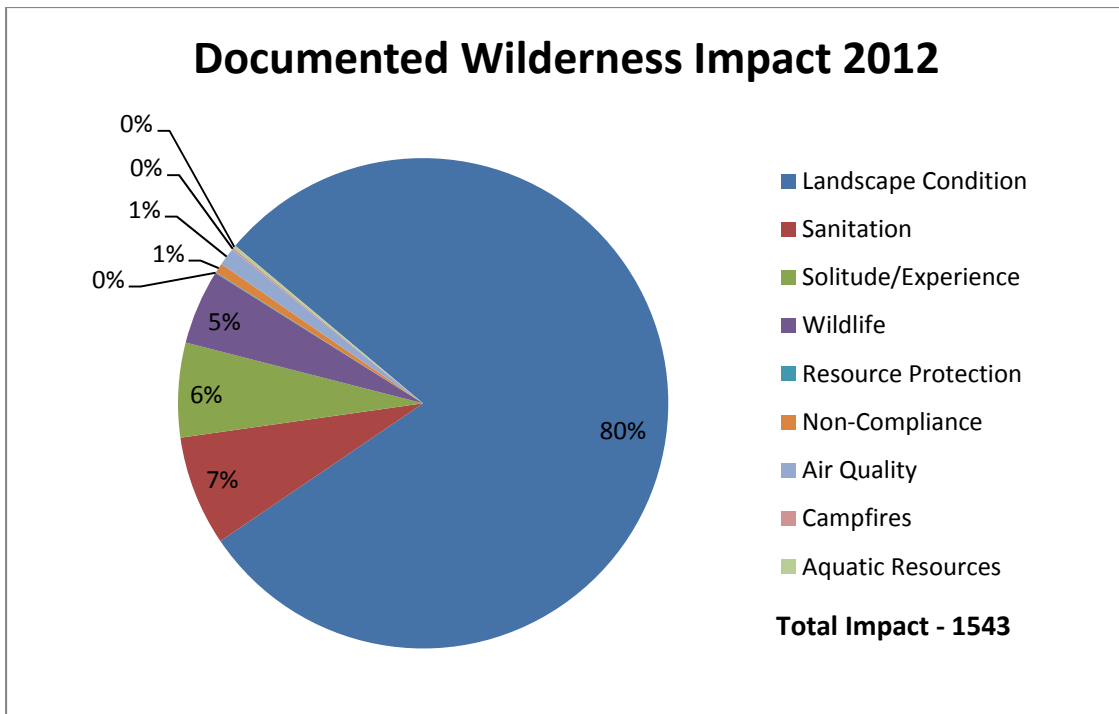
Mountrainierclimbing.blogspot.com

The climbing blog has been the best way the climbing rangers have been able to get updated route conditions out to the public in a timely way. The blog is immensely popular and takes hits from all over the world. In the past several years, there have been many hundreds of thousands of hits. We actually receive requests to advertise on it from large corporations.

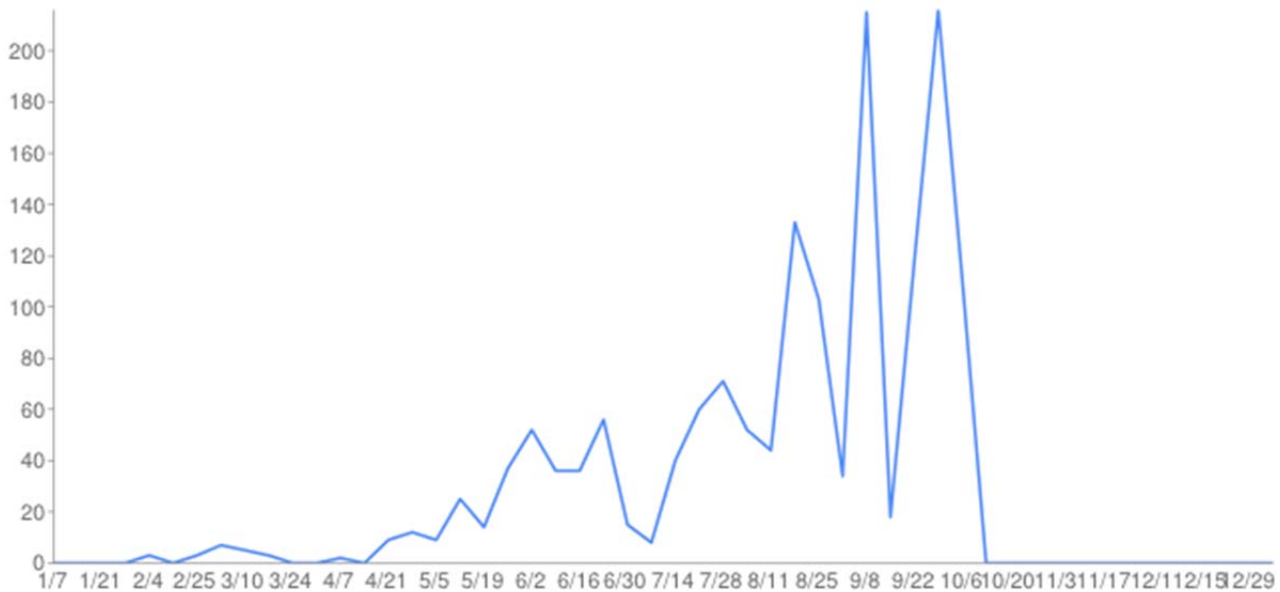
Because of the installation of the network bridge to Camp Muir in 2011, the climbing rangers now have the ability to update the blog from Camp Muir, immediately after their climb. This should increase the timeliness of their route updates, reports, and communications.

Climbing Ranger Number of Blog Update Threads 2012





Impact Observations per Week 2012



The above graph represents primarily litter and stray wands, which by the end of the summer, melt out of the snow and are just laying on bare ground. This doesn't necessarily show that more people are littering in August, but this is when we see most of the melted out litter on the ground. This figure also represents a large volume of meadow stomping, denuded vegetation, and campsite rings that develop later in the season after the snow has melted.

The data suggest several areas where we could develop strategies to lessen the impacts on the mountain and preserve the wilderness character. These include removing wands from the Muir snowfield and the climbing routes and also removing blue bags and human waste. The data we are currently collecting on commercial, single engine, and military over-flights is being used to in management plans to limit flights over the park.

Income and Funding, Expenditures, and Budget 2012

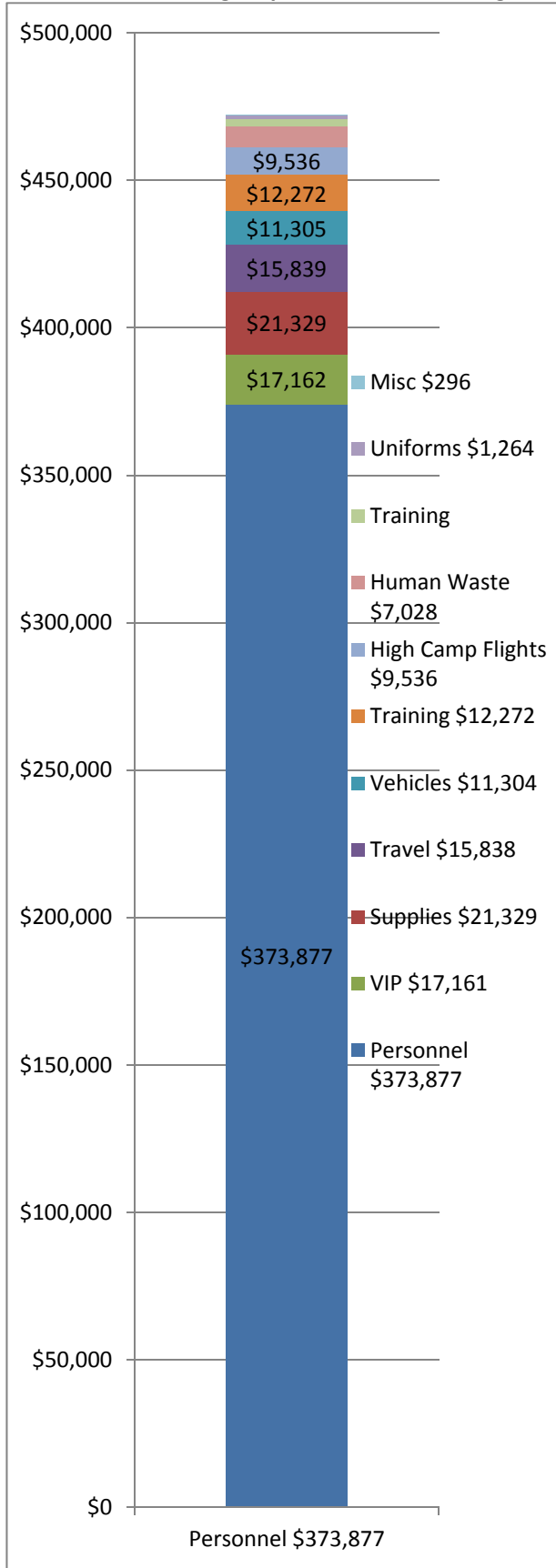


Figure 21 – Program Expenditures

The climbing program’s budget is difficult to manage. The budget cycle is by fiscal year (Oct-Sept). The planning, hiring, training, and equpage of the climbing program needs to be taken care of before the climbing season has begun, and thus before the fees have been collected! This means that we commit to spending money before we know exactly what our budget is. However much this seems like a poor business practice, we have been able to make this work since the fee’s inception in 1995. In a few years, this has resulted in some rash decisions, like laying off rangers prematurely in order to save money and make budget.

The entire climbing program’s budget in 2012 was \$474,476. This is about \$15,000 less than in 2011. The decrease is accounted for by almost 400 fewer climbers this year than in 2011. This sum does not include the climbing program manager’s salary who also has many park-wide responsibilities. This figure also does not include several hundred thousand dollars of help and assistance the climbing program gets from other divisions in the park who are just doing their job such as maintaining our radios, building and maintaining structures at high camps, and managing concessions operations.

In 2012, the climbing program consisted of 24 people. This breaks down into 1 program manager, 3 supervisors, 5 lead climbing rangers, 4 climbing rangers, 2 high camp maintenance rangers, 5 volunteers, and 1 administrative assistant.

Here are the expenditures of the climbing program roughly categorized from all funding sources combined.

Salaries of the permanent and seasonal staff account for roughly 76% of the climbing budget. These costs include regular hours, premiums such as overtime and hazard/environmental differential, background investigations, as well as other benefits such as paying into unemployment insurance.

Travel is mostly in park and reimbursed as backcountry per diem.

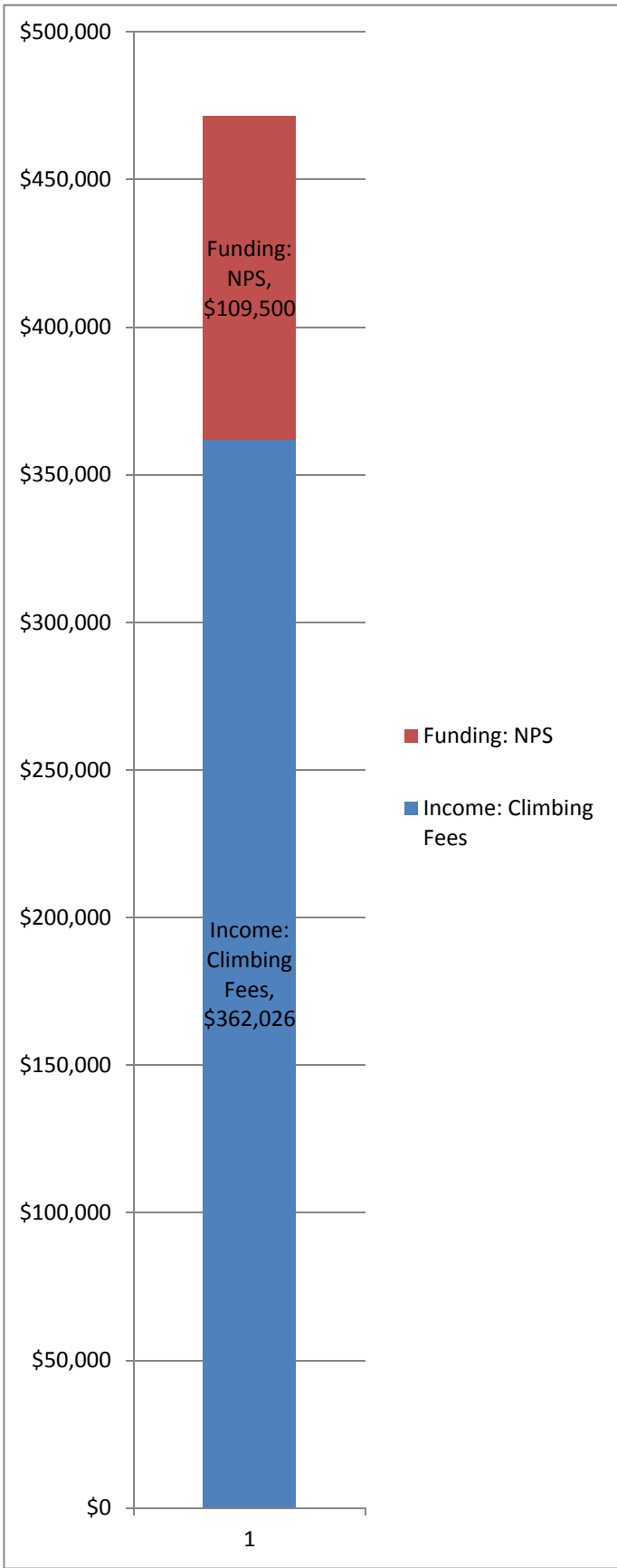
Training cost include EMT refresher training, aviation training, and technical rope rescue training.

VIP costs are all costs associated with the VIP's in the climbing program. This is their \$20/day volunteer reimbursement, a small amount of gear and equipment we buy for them, and paying for their housing.

Supplies represented here are both administrative supplies such as paper, forms, booklets, pocket guides, computers, IT equipment, as well as operation supplies like carabiners, ropes, crampons, jackets, and other equipment.

Vehicle rentals are strictly the 4 vehicles the climbing rangers rent from GSA in order to provide transportation around the park while in duty status.

The \$7,028 quoted for Human Waste is only a equipment/supply cost. The personnel staffing is bound up in the Salary Category, which would roughly equate to about \$45,000 of the large blue column. Also, not included in the \$4,978 is the cost of helicopter flights. That is also bound up in the "high camp flights" category and represents over half of that sum.



Program Income and Funding

\$362,000 were collected from the sale of climbing passes at roughly a 10% / 90% split between youth passes and adult passes (\$30 / \$43).

Roughly \$109,500 was allocated by the park to the climbing program. These funding sources included:

- \$71,000 concessions franchise fees
- \$28,000 centennial initiative
- \$3,500 glacier research/monitoring
- \$7,000 washington national parks fund grant

In fiscal year 2012, the climbing program was roughly 80% funded by climbing fees and 20% funded by Mt. Rainier National Park accounts.