



Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks News Release

For Immediate Release: June 29, 2011

Contact: Dana M. Dierkes

Phone Number: (559) 565-3131 (desk) or 559-679-2866 (cell)

Sequoia National Park's River Rovers Volunteer Program Saves Lives, Wins National Award, and Needs More Help

Three Rivers, CA – The River Rovers, volunteers who patrol the river in Sequoia National Park and educate park visitors about river hazards and safe enjoyment of the area, recently won the Andrew Clark Hecht Memorial Public Safety Achievement Award for their efforts to prevent serious injuries or fatalities to the public. The achievement: a creative, cost-effective, and successful way to significantly reduce drowning, the leading cause of unintentional visitor deaths at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Since its inception in 2006, this program has helped reduce the average number of drownings at the parks from four per year (prior to 2005) to a total of two deaths (from 2006-present). Anecdotally, park managers and volunteers have noted that one-on-one contact has helped change visitors behavior, i.e., visitors don't go into the river as far, they avoid areas with stronger currents, and they supervise children more closely. This award is presented to 16 current and past volunteers. In addition, several current and past park staff, were recognized for their management of the program including Erik Oberg (who created the program), Tim Barrett, Stephanie Sutton, and Nikki Hinds.

Due to the success of the program, which has been modeled by other parks, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks would like to recruit more River Rover volunteers. River Rovers also:

- Initiate contact with park visitors to share safety information and answer questions.
- Provide information to visitors about recreational and educational opportunities in the park.
- Count visitor contacts, and inform supervisor of patterns of visitor use or any unusual conditions.
- Notify park dispatch immediately by radio in case of an emergency or if illegal/improper activity is observed.
- Staff information booths, as assigned.

- page 1 of 2 -

To apply, visit www.volunteer.gov. Call 559-565-4212 for more information about the program. River Rovers are provided with uniforms, first-aid kits, two-way radios, and are trained to educate visitors along busy river corridors, promote river safety, and alert rangers of crises that require immediate attention. Foreign language abilities are desired, but not a requirement. River rovers receive orientation and training in river safety, radio communication, park history and operations, job safety, and communicating effectively with the public.

For more information about Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, visit www.nps.gov/seki or call 559-565-3341.

-NPS-

BACKGROUND - Andrew Clark Hecht Memorial Public Safety Achievement Award:

In June 1970, Dr. James and Dr. Amy Hecht were vacationing in Yellowstone National Park with their three young children. On the afternoon of June 28th, as they were walking along the boardwalk near Crested Pool in the Old Faithful area, their youngest child, Andy, was engulfed in steam and did not see a right angle turn in the boardwalk. He stepped at the edge of the boardwalk, which had no guardrail, and stumbled into a 200-degree thermal pool scalding him to death before their eyes. Jim and Amy Hecht believed the death of their nine year old son could have been prevented and they embarked on a personal campaign for safety in national parks. Since 1998, through a small family foundation, they have funded the Andrew Clark Hecht Memorial Public Safety Achievement Award.

ABOUT SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, which lie side-by-side in the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains in central California, serve as a prime example of nature's size, beauty, and diversity. With the world's largest trees (by volume), grand mountains, rugged foothills, deep canyons, vast caverns, and the highest point in the lower 48 states, it is a place that attracts 1.6 million visitors a year from across the U.S. and the world. Visitor activities vary by season and elevation.