

Annual Report 2024

# 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.



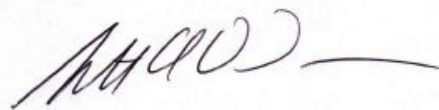
## Message From the Chief

It is with great pride that I present the 2024 Annual Report for the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff. This report highlights the accomplishments, specialized activities and statistical information of Virginia's Law Enforcement Rangers as they continued to provide a safe and secure recreational environment to the almost 8 million guests that visited Virginia's state parks and natural area preserves, enjoying the best in resources, programs, camping and other amenities. Throughout the year, these rangers responded to calls providing aid, assisting those in need, and protecting the people and resources of the commonwealth.

Our Law Enforcement Rangers are dedicated, highly trained and caring professionals, who come from diverse backgrounds and knowledge base and strongly believe in what they do every day. During 2024, we continued to implement technology designed to enhance our abilities to respond and assist. Investing in technology and resources improves the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff's ability 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 for today and generations to come. Further, 2024 saw the development and implementation of a Career Pathing and Career Path Optimization Plan for the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff. While this effort will take time for full implementation, it will enhance the roles of our rangers, improving employment and career opportunities, address response and stewardship needs, and open opportunities for many career paths across Virginia State Parks. None of this would have been possible without the supportive leadership within DCR, the Division of State Parks and the Division of Natural Heritage.

I remain committed to staying ahead of emerging challenges and exploring new ways to improve public safety and law enforcement operations. This report summarizes the hard work, long hours and often late nights and holiday efforts of the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff. I am honored to share it with you 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.

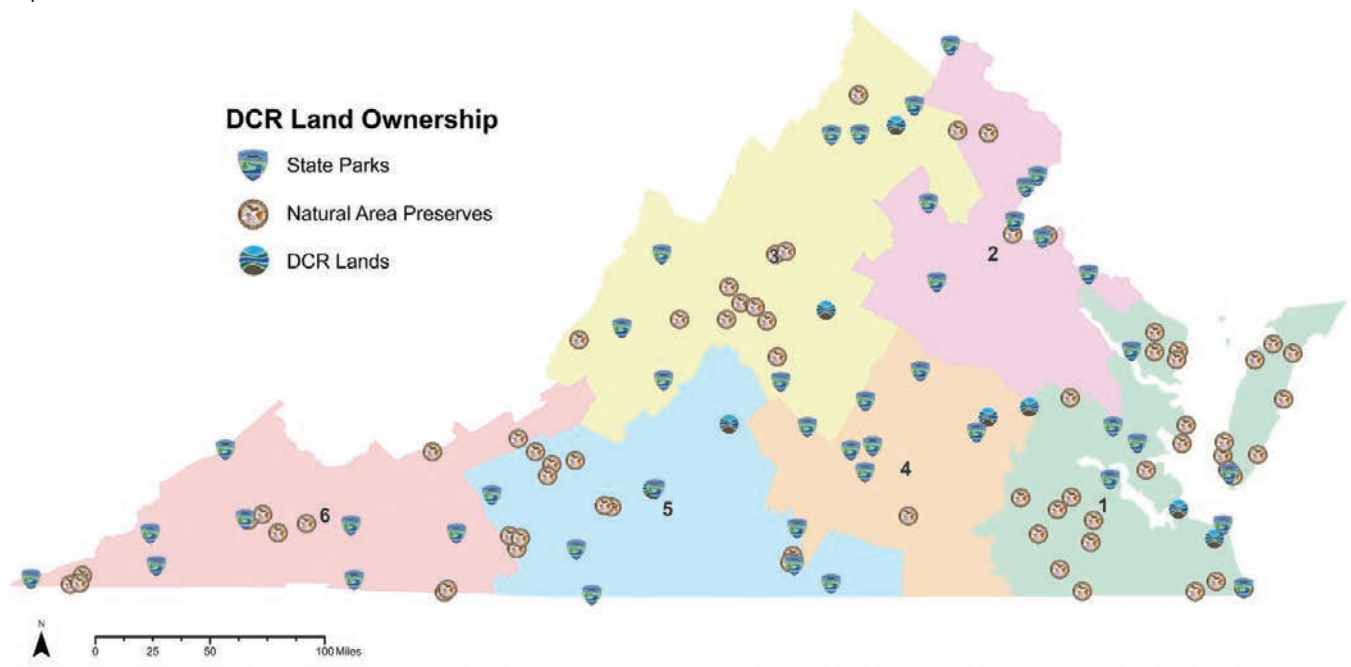


# Our Sacred Trust

## 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 almost 8 million guests annually<sup>1</sup> as well as the over 1,200 full-time, hourly, and seasonal staff, and over 8,000 volunteers<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 2023 report estimated that Virginia's State Parks have an impact of over \$400 million a year while generating an estimated \$35.7 million in state and local tax revenues during 2023<sup>3</sup>.

The resources protected by Virginia's Law Enforcement Rangers include 43 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 protecting some of the rarest natural communities and rare species habitats in Virginia), around 2,100 conservation sites<sup>4</sup>, over 700 miles of trails, over 1600 campsites, 300 cabins, four National Landmarks, three museums, and 33 sites on the National Register of Historic Places. 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.

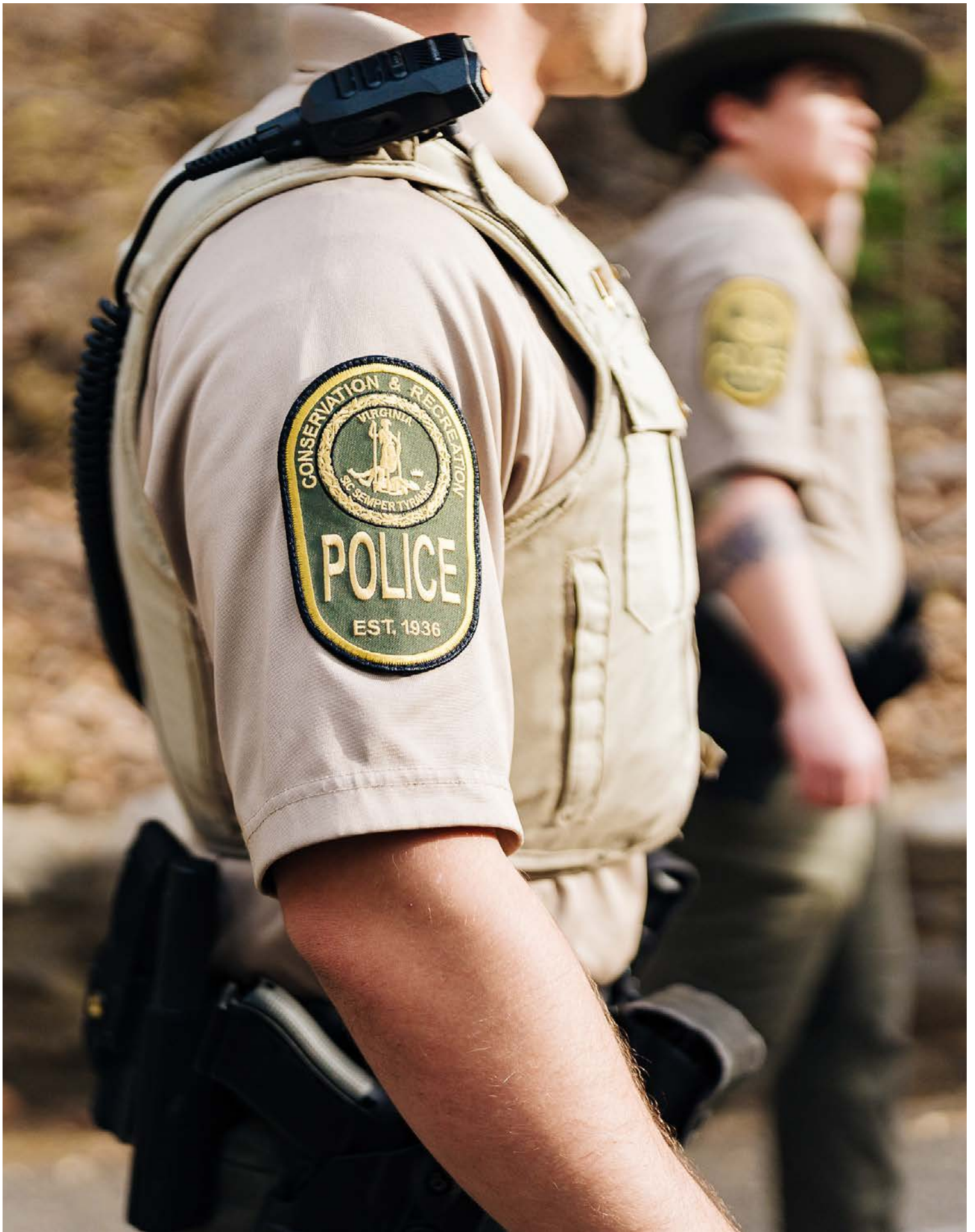


<sup>1</sup> Data from DCR internal sources as of 02/14/2025.

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

<sup>3</sup> 2023 Longwood University, College of Business and Economics Study "THE ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACTS OF VIRGINIA'S STATE PARKS: 2023"

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/>; <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/document/napbook4web.pdf>; and <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/>





## Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff Overview

The approximately 100 sworn and commissioned conservation officers<sup>5</sup> within DCR, more commonly known as Law Enforcement Rangers, are highly educated and trained individuals responsible for protecting the resources DCR oversees. 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 of the Code of Virginia. Additionally, Law Enforcement Rangers receive commissioning as Conservation Officers under § 10.1-115 of the Code of Virginia holding 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 provides the Department with full-service public safety and law enforcement services, performing general law enforcement, criminal investigations and traffic enforcement<sup>6</sup> and responding 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 officers, DCR's Law Enforcement Rangers have access to essential and modern law enforcement equipment, operate marked and unmarked patrol units and have statewide communications.

Each Law Enforcement Ranger develops significant and personal knowledge of their park and surrounding community over extended periods while also performing stewardship tasks and resource and boundary management, enhancing the protection of the employees, guests and resources of Virginia State Parks and Natural Heritage Areas.

The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff is divided into three sections based on the type of activity undertaken. The sections are the Office of the Chief, Patrol Operations, and Investigations and Professional Standards.

<sup>5</sup> Actual staffing ranges between 95-110

<sup>6</sup> VLEPSC 2022 Accreditation Report



# IMMEDIATE 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 A. Conner** is the current Deputy Chief of Public Safety and Law Enforcement and was promoted to Deputy Chief in 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.

## 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, consult and advice, and assistance from across DCR as well as internal and external stakeholders as appropriate. Starting in 2024, the Law Enforcement Ranger Working Group was identified as needing to be renewed and refocused. The new group being developed in 2025 will serve as an advisory committee, 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.



## 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 operations 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 recordkeeping in a building, a vehicle, or in the field. During 2024, the Joint Communications Center handled 10,817 calls related to DCR and 66,527 overall.



 CENTRALSQUARE



# 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.

## 2024 Statistics and Information

The following data reflects the information compiled for the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff for the calendar year 2024. The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff continually works 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 2024, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff recorded 9,592 calls for service, including traditional law enforcement, a 6% increase over 2023:



#### 3,339 Community Policing Efforts (To Deter Illegal Activity and Protect Resources)

- 2,458 Foot Patrol Assignments
- 388 Special Assignment Patrols
- 200 Park Specific Patrols
- 100 ATV Patrol Assignments
- 93 Public Outreach Events

#### 2,578 Violations of DCR Rules (e.g., Noise, Dumping, Trespassing or COV 10.1-200.3)

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

- 1 Drowning

#### 1,419 Traffic Stops (Vehicle/ATV Violations)

#### 413 Suspicious Vehicles/Persons/Activity

#### 91 Drug or Alcohol Violations

#### 34 Stolen Property/Larceny/Fraud Complaints

#### 5 Assault Calls

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

- 4 on Water
- 67 on Land

#### 87 Robbery/Burglary Alarm Responses

#### 11 Service of Warrants

#### 369 Assist to Motorists/Public

#### 267 Assists to Other Agencies

#### 34 Complaints on State Property/Personnel

#### 26 Domestic Disturbance Calls

#### 147 Vehicle/Property Collisions

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

### 69 Boating/Boater Violations

- 2 Careless/Reckless Operation
- 20 General Watercraft Violations
- 24 Distressed Boater Assists
- 9 Boats Found Adrift/abandoned
- 9 Boating Accidents
- 4 Watercraft Patrols
- 1 Watercraft Checkpoints

### 147 Wildlife Related Matters

- 5 Injured Protected Species
- 74 Injured/Deceased Wildlife
- 3 Nuisance Wildlife (4 Involving Bears)
- 49 Dog Complaints (Injured/Off-Leash)

- 5 General/Misc. Wildlife Calls
- 1 Wildlife/Human Interactions with Injury

### 214 Hunting/Fishing Related Matters

- 62 Hunting Checkpoints/Special Patrols
- 56 Hunting/Fishing Violations (e.g., Illegal Hunting/Trespass to Hunt//Spotlighting/Decoy Hunting on DCR Property)
- 1 Felon Hunting/Using Firearm to Hunt
- 95 Hunting/Fishing/Game 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 educational interactions, warnings (verbal or written) and advice given, 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 2024, based upon community policing and agency data, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff:

**Recorded providing the public with advice 408 times on DCR related matters**

**Recorded 1,254 verbal or written warnings**

**Issued 2,212 DCR citations for violations including:**

- 1,402 Failure to Pay Fees
- 642 Parking in a Prohibited Area
- 25 Parking in a Handicapped Zone
- 143 other DCR violations

### Traditional Law Enforcement Activities

While the philosophy within the Public Safety & Law Enforcement Staff is educational enforcement, traditional enforcement methods are also utilized when 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 2024, the Public Safety & Law Enforcement Staff:

- Issued 1,535 Summons
- Made 46 Custodial / On-View Arrests



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

One area where criminals have targeted is thefts 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 in 2023. Continuing and adding public spaces for the Division of Natural Heritage in 2024, this program is a campaign designed to educate employees and visitors and remind them to take basic precautions to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim.

Our goal remains education. While the consequences of failing to lock your vehicle or hide valuables may result in theft, our sincere hope is to work together to send the message to criminals and reduce crime.



## Crime Prevention Activities and Programs

Efforts undertaken by the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff in 2024 included a review of agency crime prevention activities and programs. A special balance exists in this, as some traditional approaches and public awareness strategies do not fit the environment staff works so diligently to maintain.

### Recruiting and Public Education

Efforts undertaken in recruiting and educating the public and potential employees regarding the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff in 2024 included the publication of a new recruiting and outreach flyer.



## 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 include many acts of kindness and true community policing, including responding to those in crisis. During 2024, Law Enforcement Rangers responded to numerous instances of people in crisis. The quick thinking and strategic steps an arriving Law Enforcement Ranger takes matter.

- In July 2024, Law Enforcement Rangers on patrol noticed a subject in the water. Additional evaluation of the scene identified that the subject was bleeding from a laceration of their neck. Law Enforcement Rangers contacted the Department of Wildlife Resources for assistance and worked to access the person who had wedged themselves into a rock formation. After reaching the person, the person made it clear that they wanted to end their life and had intentionally injured themselves. Law Enforcement Rangers and Conservation Police Officers were able to rescue the person from the rock formation, stabilize the injury and pass them to emergency medical services, saving their life.
- In September 2024, Law Enforcement Rangers responded to an individual in a river, crying out for help. Upon arrival, they located the party in the water and in distress. After a brief extraction process, the party was removed from the water, and it became evident that they were experiencing a mental health crisis and trying to end their life at the same location that had claimed a family member's life in 2006. Upon arriving to work the next day, a letter (pictured at right) was awaiting the rangers involved.

Law Enforcement Rangers are trained and issued Narcan for use in lifesaving efforts. This ongoing ability to deploy a lifesaving tool resulted in several lifesaving instances.

- In March 2024, a Law Enforcement Ranger was alerted by park staff to a vehicle in a wooded area. Upon arrival, the Law Enforcement Ranger found the driver unresponsive and the vehicle running. The Law Enforcement Ranger made entry into the locked vehicle, completed an assessment of the occupant, and subsequently administered naloxone and continued with medical care until EMS personnel arrived on scene and took over. This Law Enforcement Ranger's efforts were recognized by The Jeff Katz Show, bestowing an honor upon him and recognizing his efforts.
- In July 2024, a Law Enforcement Ranger checked on an illegally parked vehicle and observed a subject in the front driver seat slumped forward and unresponsive, holding an opened bottle of prescription medication. Entering the vehicle and finding the subject unresponsive, Law Enforcement Rangers administered naloxone, resulting in the subject becoming alert. Once stable, the subject was transported by rescue and received care for their overdose. DCR was subsequently contacted by the family, who advised that the subject was receiving treatment and that they believed that the actions of the Law Enforcement Ranger not only revived the person but also saved their life.

I Just want to say Thank you for all you did for me last night night 9/1/24. You guys was amazing & have no idea how much your support meant and how you improved a absolutely horrible night for me. State Park will always hold a special place in my heart, & continue to be my favorite place to clear my head & unload life. But now it holds a new reason to love it. I know spending her out there with me, making sure I was safe, & where I needed to be wasn't in the plans last night, But you guys NEVER made me feel that way, as usual I felt I was in the presence of family. Again I just wanna say THANK YOU!!! I'll see you soon!!!!



# INVESTIGATIONS AND ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONS

During 2024, Law Enforcement Rangers conducted investigations involving various criminal activity including:

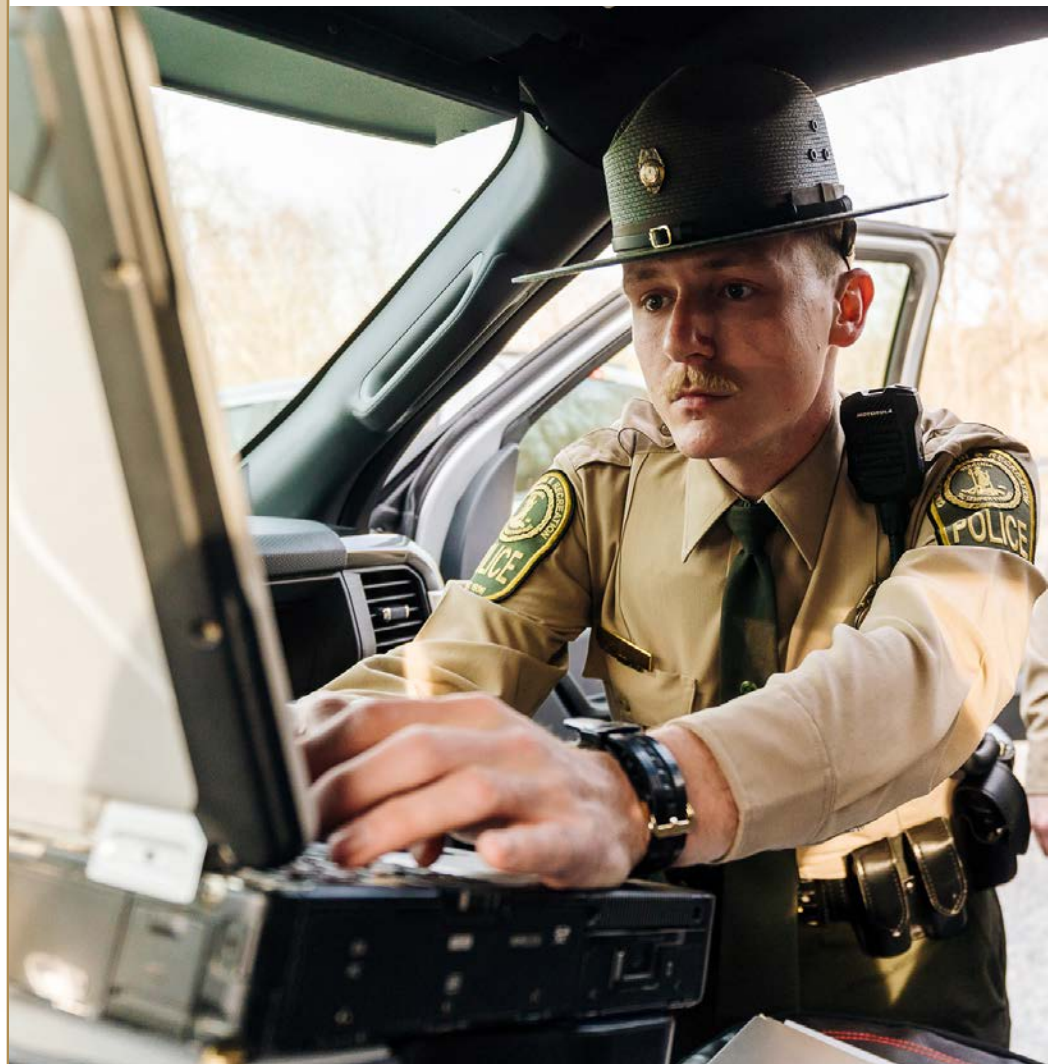
- Larceny
- Robbery
- Destruction of Property
- Embezzlement
- Unattended Deaths
- Fraud
- Threats
- Forgery
- Counterfeit Funds
- Sexual Assault
- Assault on a Law Enforcement Officer

Investigations and Administrative Operations is responsible for criminal investigations, administrative investigations (commonly Background and Internal Affairs Matters), training and accreditation and compliance 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 death investigations and use the full range of resources available.

In 2024, investigators with the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff undertook 54 criminal investigations.





## 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, internal investigations, and employee and volunteer background checks.

### Agency Training/Training Cadre

Training is vital to any agency providing public safety and law enforcement services, ensuring a professional and accountable organization. In support of this, the Training Cadre consists of teams that ensure this mission, such as the certified staff within the Firearms and Defensive Tactics Team, as well as general instructors, 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.

In 2024, all members of the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff met the training standards and requirements set 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 and Compliance

During 2024, 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 increase professionalism and integrity.

Every three years the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff undergoes a review of its use, security and operation of its access to the Virginia Criminal Information Network (VCIN). Membership in the VCIN system is regulated by law, Title 52, Chapter 2 of the Code of Virginia. This audit includes submission of required documentation for security and compliance with the US Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information System, and an on-site review by a representative of the Virginia State Police VCIN Staff. In November 2024, this audit was completed with the department receiving a notice of compliance.



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





### **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 the integrity and assure public trust. Complaints investigated through the Internal Affairs process may result in disciplinary actions subject to appeal and grievance procedures.

In 2024, 15 internal affairs/citizen complaint matters were reviewed, with eight resulting in the initiation of an internal affairs investigation. Of the internal affairs investigations, none were sustained; therefore, no action was taken involving an employee or policy.

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 26 background investigations to support the hiring of law enforcement staff.

### **Employee and Volunteer Background Checks**

The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff regularly supports the Department, overseeing and coordinating the background checks of employees and volunteers to ensure the safety of employees and guests. During 2024, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff oversaw the conducting of 2,375 background checks. While often the outcome can be a disqualifier, in one instance in 2024, the outcome was identifying an unknown victim of identity theft.

- While conducting a background check for a state park applicant, the results of the name search revealed an extensive criminal record in another state. Research by the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff identified conflicting information involving dates of birth and Social Security numbers. To resolve these discrepancies, contact was made with the involved probation office and after a comparison of the photo, it was verified that the person with the criminal history was not the applicant. Additional efforts confirmed that the applicant had no criminal history, but instead identified that the applicant's identity had been stolen/compromised at some point in time. The applicant was able to serve as a volunteer, and able to file a police report for their stolen identity, for which they were previously unaware.

## SPECIALIZED RESOURCES

The dedication of those within the department allows for specialized resources. While involvement with these responsibilities is ancillary and often an 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:

### Field Training Cadre

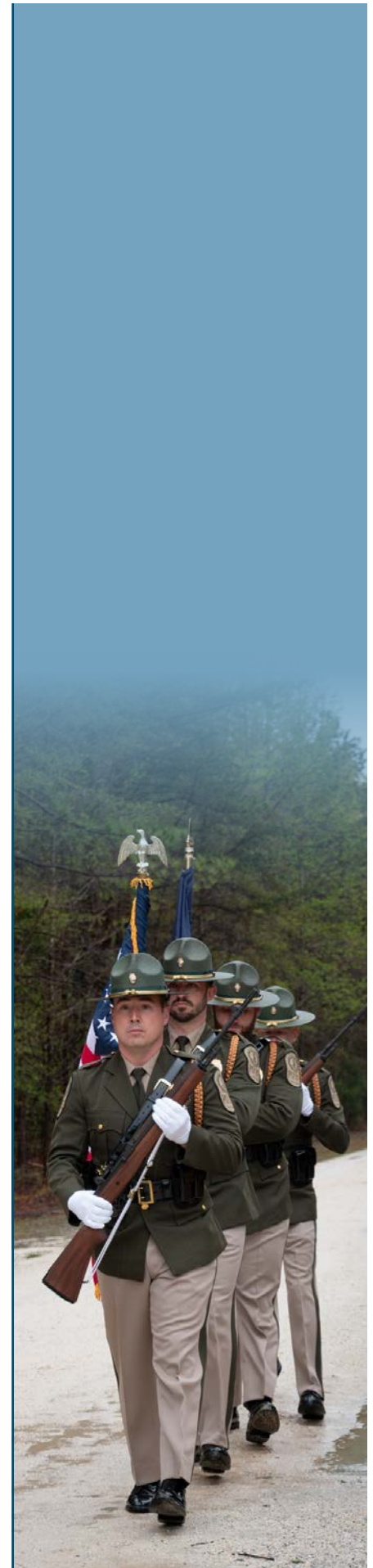
Those who serve as part of the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff have one of the most diverse responsibilities of any such organization. Being involved in outreach, education, safety and interacting on violations with those who have come to enjoy the commonwealth's natural and recreational resources 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 the Department of Criminal Justice Services requirements but also our internal standards.

### Bike Patrol Cadre

The Virginia State Park Bike Patrol Cadre is a highly trained team of Law Enforcement Rangers that provide specialized patrols and services for special events. During 2024, the Bike Patrol Cadre added new members who underwent training through Cardinal Criminal Justice Academy and started working in their new roles.

### 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 3 events, including the opening of Culpeper Battlefields State Park and the 250th Anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's purchase of the Natural Bridge from King George at 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.



## 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>7</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 protects 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>8</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 June 2024, members of DCR's Peer Support Team, in coordination with VALEAP, supported a VALEAP effort in support of the one-year anniversary of the death of a Wintergreen police officer. Available to the Police Department staff, Wintergreen Fire/EMS, and Nelson County Sheriff's Office/Nelson E911, members of DCR's team made themselves available to provide peer support providers on-site during this event.

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission – Promoting Professionalism in Law Enforcement Since 1996 (vlepsc.org)

<sup>8</sup> Ratified by the IACP Psychological Services Section (Accessed 2/29/2024)



## Virginia Emergency Support Team

Under the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, 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 the Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST). Additionally, it is the primary contact for any Emergency Support Function (ESF) matters that involve DCR law enforcement response/personnel. DCR is involved in seven 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 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).

Additionally, the DCR SAR Team undertakes ongoing trainings to ensure their skills. During September 2024, this practice continued, ensuring the team's skills are prepared to respond and assist all in need.



**During 2024, the DCR Search and Rescue Team responded to 25 VDEM activations involving 312 search hours.**



# 2024 GOALS AND STRATEGIES

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

**GOAL 2:** Improve Resources for Mental Health Issues.

**GOAL 3:** Improve Technology Use in Calls for Service and 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. What is needed is the development of operational support to address the following challenges:

- The increasing accreditation and administrative requirements involved, and the additional burden being faced by existing staff already with numerous responsibilities.
- The need to develop an investigative core to address investigative needs within the parks, including complex crimes, general crimes, suicides, Internal Affairs matters and background investigations.
- A need to address 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.
- The increasing operation requirements of a statewide law enforcement agency responsible for ensuring the security of employees and guests annually; and
- There is an increasing need for additional 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. Many of these challenges will be addressed through the implementation of the Career Specialization and Career Path Optimization Plan implemented in the fall of 2024.

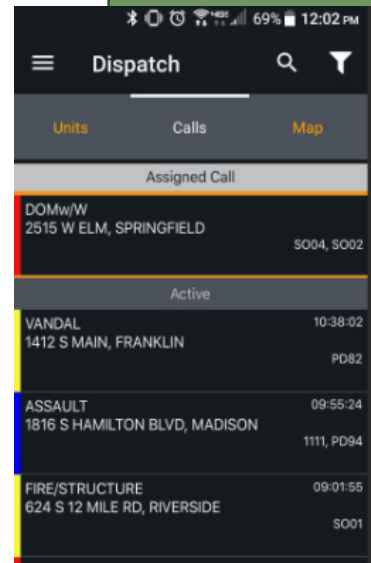
## Improve Resources for Mental Health Issues

The Law Enforcement Rangers within the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff have steadily seen increasing mental health issues on calls for service in alignment with the implementation of Marcus Alert, a statewide framework intended to improve the response to mental and behavioral health crises in Virginia. The governor signed the legislation to begin to put the framework in place 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 increase interactions 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 requires phased planning and ongoing implementation across multiple agencies. Identification and implementation of strategies and approaches remain part of this initial phase.

### **Improve Technology Use in Calls for Service and Develop Resources to Improve Response Capabilities**

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. During 2024, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff Leadership, with the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff, completed the full installation and implementation of a mobile application for all Law Enforcement Rangers. This user-friendly application uses real-time information from CAD and securely allows the use of the Law Enforcement Rangers state-issued mobile devices to enhance their work and remain connected outside their cars, such as when they are on foot patrol. This application will increase safety by allowing Law Enforcement Rangers access to criminal history and wanted person information while on an active call, without having to return to their vehicle. It will save time, allowing Law Enforcement Rangers to capture images needed in case files for reports and allowing the images to be directly uploaded to a call for service within the application.



# 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 are also furthering 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, and furthering 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 2024, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff recorded 193 public outreach events, interacting with over 32,000 people.

### National Night Out

In August 2024, 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.



Photo: Chief Scott Vantrese of [Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation](#) with [Louisa County Fair Miss Louisa County Fair Pageant's](#) Little Miss (Kynleigh) and Tiny Miss (Daney) with sister Leighann. All enjoying the [Louisa Arts Center Art Bus!](#)





## 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 PS and LE Staff conducts outreach whenever possible to broaden recruiting from various and diverse backgrounds. In building a workforce, PS and LE 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.

During 2024, this included events such as Special Olympics polar plunges, career days, appreciation and public outreach events, natural resource conferences, outdoor sport expositions, Kids Fishing Days, county festivals, “Touch-A-Truck” events, Shop with a Cop, holiday parades, and other area events.

## Community Support

Law Enforcement Rangers regularly provide support to our law enforcement peers. From assisting with traffic stops and emergency calls to searches for fugitives, in many instances, Law Enforcement Rangers provide support when others may not be available, ensuring the safety and well-being of communities, citizens and peers. During 2024, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff provided 267 instances of assistance and support to multiple agencies at crash scenes, at crime scenes, and when our Law Enforcement Rangers were the lifeline that state and municipal agencies needed most.

During 2024, 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 and responding to assist others addressing disasters.



## Service to the Commonwealth

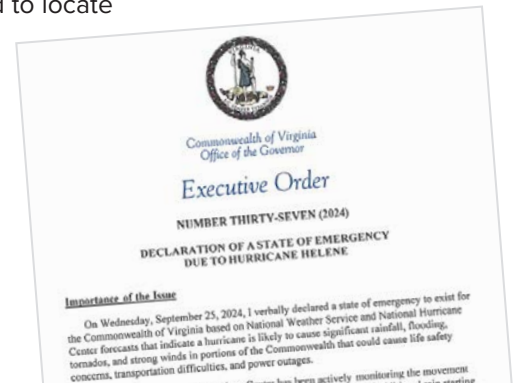
Part of being good stewards and peers is sharing and supporting the commonwealth. To that end, as part of our community policing and partnership efforts, the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff routinely interacts and provides support to improve governmental operations and further intergovernmental cooperation and information sharing.

### Intergovernmental Cooperation - Hurricane Helene Response

In September 2024, Governor Youngkin declared a State of Emergency as the result of Hurricane Helene's impact across multiple areas of the commonwealth. Initially making landfall in the Florida Gulf Coast as a Category 4 storm, Helene's largest impacts were across the southern Appalachians where widespread severe and unprecedented flooding occurred with hundreds of fatalities and billions in property damage.<sup>1</sup>

As part of DCR's greater response involving significant staff hours and resources in response and recovery efforts from across the commonwealth, DCR's Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff worked with other federal, state and local agencies to undertake emergency response, working to save the lives of citizens and the natural resources of the commonwealth.

As the full impacts of the disaster expanded, in October 2024, Law Enforcement Rangers deployed in support of the Virginia Department of Emergency Management as they assisted North Carolina in response to the Hurricane Helene disaster. The assigned team responded to Asheville, North Carolina, and worked to locate human remains in the devastated areas around Asheville, where thousands were unaccounted for at the time the team deployed.



<sup>1</sup> Tropical Storm Helene: September 26-27, 2024



## 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.

- In August 2024, Law Enforcement Rangers Kenneth Ashdown and Nathan Clark attended the launch of the Virginia campaign against drunken driving. Governor Glenn Youngkin spoke publicly about the tragedy of intoxicated driving and launched the 2024 campaign under the theme “What’s the Damage: Drinking and driving costs MORE than your drinks.”



Media attention:

Virginia issues a stern warning on drunken driving ([richmond.com](http://richmond.com))

During 2024, Virginia State Parks, through coordination and support with the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff, assisted numerous agencies in coordinating their abilities to undertake trainings within a Virginia State Park.

This included over 31 events addressing the following types of training:

- Dignitary Security
- Law Enforcement Bike Training
- Search and Rescue Training
- K-9 Training
- Academy Trainings
- Tactical Trainings
- Tracking Programs



## WELCOME NEW LAW ENFORCEMENT RANGERS

New staff with the Public Safety and Law Enforcement Staff, who require training as outlined by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, attend our home academy – the Cardinal Criminal Justice Academy. Here they work with peers from over 30 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.



### 82<sup>nd</sup> Basic Law Enforcement Academy

*In May 2024, we welcomed Alexis Brink, Conner Given and Zachary Kane from Cardinal's 82<sup>nd</sup> Basic Law Enforcement Class.*



### 83<sup>rd</sup> Basic Law Enforcement Academy

*In August 2024, we welcomed Amanda Bishop from Cardinal's 83<sup>rd</sup> Basic Law Enforcement Class.*



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

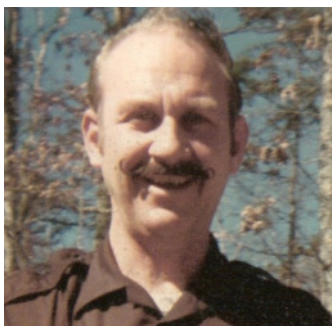
*In November 2024, we welcomed Thomas Vasquez from Cardinal's 84<sup>th</sup> Basic Law Enforcement Class.*

## 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>9</sup>



<sup>9</sup> Park Ranger Paul Herbert Salyer, Breaks Interstate Park Police Department, Virginia (odmp.org)

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