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The Role of Rangers in Yosemite Park

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I was taken aback by the Dec. 13 article, "Breaking Law Is No Walk in Park," which suggested that Yosemite National Park rangers were overzealous in enforcing rules. I am sorry that some visitors to Yosemite have had negative experiences with park rangers and glad that the instances are being investigated. However, I feel strongly that the article misrepresents the behavior of Yosemite's rangers as a whole.

For more than three years I worked in Yosemite National Park as an interpretive ranger. Although my main job was to teach about the park, I often worked with or around law enforcement officers.

Continually, I was struck by how much law enforcement they did through education. I saw them in the backcountry, explaining how to camp with the least impact to the resource, and in the "frontcountry," explaining how to keep black bears wild. I even saw them on the road, explaining how a speed limit is there for both public safety and for wildlife. The law enforcement rangers did this constantly despite having to deal with the full spectrum of urban crime, despite being overworked and understaffed, and even though it was supposed to be their weekend. In short, they were dedicated to educating the public.

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As an former park employee, I applaud this article on the "overzealous policing" by the National Park Service law enforcement. I lived in the park for four years, maintaining an excellent work status with not a spot on my criminal record. That was until I was arrested for walking home under the influence of alcohol. My frustration isn't only centered on the rangers, but also on the federal prosecutors who vehemently push decent people into criminal status. Given a zero tolerance probation, I found myself being harassed at work and in my residence. Rangers would even patrol outside my window.

Are these "their daily unheralded efforts to save lives and keep the park and visitors safe" that Yosemite Supt. Mike Tollefson speaks of?

The collusion between rangers and prosecutors turn any minute infraction into a criminal situation, which the average employee can't fight in court. I encourage everyone who has been railroaded by rangers and prosecutors to write to Tollefson and help him see what's really going on.

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