

Can PRNL Officials regain trust from gateway communities?

Relationships of cooperation and trust between small communities and government agencies take years to build but can be destroyed in a day. For Grand Marais and Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, this day was July 25th.

On that day, the GM community assembled to hear Superintendent Horne and Chief Ranger Hughes explain their position on Park employees serving as EMTs on community ambulance services during their off-duty hours. For over an hour, these officials described the federal restriction, why park employees were forced to resign from local EMS agencies, and an appeal process for getting an exemption. They spoke emphatically that they both would support the federal ethics office decision IF an exemption was granted.

When Horne and Hughes were asked directly if they would advocate FOR an exemption, they avoided answering the question. GM residents left the meeting feeling uncertain at best and distrustful of the officials at worst. Residents sensed they were being duped and these officials were misleading them but were hopeful an exemption might be granted.

From park officials' own documents, it is now clear and undisputed that these officials said one thing while doing another. These officials actually *supported* the federal restrictions to keep PRNL EMTs from serving on local ambulance corps. These officials signed paperwork designed to keep the restriction in place. These officials told one story at a public meeting while taking actions completely different from their statements.

Mr Horne's recent letter to the *Grand Marais Pilot*, attempting to explain why Chief Hughes "recommended disapproval" of the exemption has only deepened the distrust. The explanation of "was his only choice based on written guidance" is a lame copout. The entire purpose of the exemption process is to challenge the appropriateness of existing rules. An NPS official can certainly state challenges to flawed rules IF they have the fortitude and desire to show how current rules harm NPS operations. It was a mistake for PRNL officials to disapprove of the exemption application. Reducing local EMS services will have a negative impact on PRNL visitor safety. PRNL does not have its own ambulance; ambulance services are only provided by the gateway communities. Should these officials maintain their position, it's clear they value flawed rules over quality EMS resources.

The GM community prospers because its several hundred residents participate in over 20 different volunteer organizations that support the community, including EMS and fire. In such a small town, your word means everything to your character. Right now, we prefer the PRNL administration get on board and champion the effort to correct the flawed NPS rules.

Should the park officials want to regain the trust of the Grand Marais community, it will require serious efforts by the officials. A good start at repairing the damage would be the following immediate actions:

1. Meet with Burt Township and Alger County EMS officials to gain a thorough understanding of how they are required to operate, including the current credential, licensing and medical authority rules and regulations. You will find that park employees will benefit all parties by serving on local emergency services.
2. Acknowledge that PRNL success is dependent on the cooperation and support of the gateway communities.
3. Put in writing your support for allowing park employees to serve on local emergency services.
4. Send letters of request to Matt Davis and Shaun Hughes asking them to initiate another application for exemption to the ethics office and guide that process towards prompt and favorable action.
5. Be transparent by promptly publishing ALL your communications about your discussions and actions taken on this issue.
6. Recruit additional support for an exemption from other NPS administrators nationwide who may face similar EMS resource challenges.
7. Provide the Ethics Office with examples of the many benefits to the park and communities of lifting these restrictions.
8. Accept GM's assistance with preparing information for items #1 and #7

Without the officials taking corrective actions, PRNL may not regain the trust of the Grand Marais community.

Mr. Horne and Mr. Hughes, the strong consensus from GM residents after the July 25th meeting is your actions don't demonstrate a serious intention to secure an exemption. While you verbally assured us that you would support an exemption, your actions ensured the exemption would be denied.

We are requesting a serious effort on your part to correct this problem. It will take a lot of work on your part, no doubt.

This is an opportunity for you to challenge your own system to correct a serious flaw and misapplication of an irrelevant rule. This will improve the NPS access to quality EMS resources, and most important long term, rebuild a trusting partnership with gateway communities.

Bill Egerer

Grand Marais resident and Burt Township Ambulance Corps member

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This is the person who signed the "Disapproval" of PRNL Rangers, Shaun Hughes and Matt Davis from serving, in their off hours, on the Burt Township Ambulance Corps as well as many other life-saving volunteer positions in Alger County.

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David Vela

(as of updating this list on 8/2/19) the NPS website is "off line, check back later"

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