



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:
10.C (2460)

Memorandum

To: Regional Directors
(Attn: Superintendents and Chief Rangers)

From: Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection

Re: Changes to the NPS Investigative Services Branch Program

Shortly after the inception of the General Authorities Act in 1976, the National Park Service identified a clear need for, and has relied upon, GS-1811 Criminal Investigators (Special Agents) to lead complex criminal investigations occurring within parks. From the late 1970s to present day, the program has undergone several different models and iterations. The most significant changes occurred in 2003 when Special Agents were transitioned to a line authority structure consistent with the Secretarial Law Enforcement Reforms issued in 2002. Since that time, the Investigative Services Branch (ISB) has functioned as a national program residing within the Visitor and Resource Protection directorate. Beginning in 2009, ISB developed an organizational mission statement which included a commitment to providing investigative support servicewide. This current ISB model has resulted in many positive benefits to the Service including: a) expanding the overall reach and impact of these specialized resources in a shift away from their traditional park footprints, b) leveraging the newly established national program to collaborate with and support the broader NPS, and c) a stronger and more unified organization with greater consistency in mission, investigative processes, and as a partner within the NPS law enforcement program.

Like many programs across the Service, ISB has experienced nearly flat budgets during recent years. The result has been a steady decrease in the number of agents as static purchasing power is unable to absorb many unfunded program expenses such as cost of living increases and the agency's contributions to FERS. Amplifying the effects from budget and staffing has been the transition of agents away from an individual park employee/resource to a servicewide asset as a corollary outcome of the line authority directive. Some of the most significant impacts from these changes include:

Staffing Levels

- In 2003, the organization was staffed by 55 agents
- In 2014, four ISB agent positions and the accompanying funding were redirected to create the Office of Professional Responsibility
- Today, that number hovers at just 30 agents (this represents a 45% decrease in staffing)

Area of Responsibility

- Prior to 2009, the organization's primary focus was in support of 25 distinct park units, each regional office, and the headquarters function [historic area of responsibility is demonstrated in Attachment A]
- Today, agents are available and called upon to support 200 + parks with an NPS law enforcement program, and all 424 park units for certain investigation types (this represents an expansion of 1,692% from its original intent)
- During calendar years 2015-2020, agents led investigations in 151 different park units [the location and frequency of those cases is demonstrated in Attachment B]

When overlaying the 45% reduction in staffing levels with an area of responsibility that has grown exponentially at 1,692% beyond its original intent, the current situation requires attention. The Service has a responsibility to manage risk and operational tempo appropriately and within levels that support employee safety, health and wellness. These core principles are paramount to the long-term sustainability of the workforce as well as the ISB program as a whole.

Over the past several months this office has explored various options and alternatives to arrive at a "service model" that continues to provide investigative support and expertise to as much of the Service as possible without solely limiting case intake to parks vested with exclusive legislative jurisdiction. In support of a model that is realistic, sustainable, and maintains a servicewide reach for those investigations with the highest priority for the organization, ISB will be undergoing several organizational and structural changes in the coming months. The most significant change is a decrease in the types of cases ISB will assume a lead investigative role. Moving forward these will be limited to:

- Significant Crimes Against People (crimes of violence)
- Complex, Felony Resource Investigations
- NPS Investigative Lead for Criminal Investigations Involving Significant Use of Force or Officer-Involved Shooting

This represents a departure from previous support which also included felony investigations of property crimes, and crimes against society such as serious drug related offenses. The intent of this more streamlined service model is to ensure that the most egregious crimes against persons on NPS lands are investigated appropriately, while simultaneously prioritizing the protection of park resources given the importance and nexus to the agency's mission. Supporting this service model will be the creation of a new Resource Crime Unit led by a supervisory special agent and dedicated field agents who are committed to the investigation of complex, felony resource crimes. The balance of the organization will continue to operate under our four geographic field offices: a) Atlantic, b) North Central, c) Southwest, and d) Pacific. All changes are expected to be fully implemented by early August 2022. ISB will work collaboratively through the National Ranger Council to provide more detailed information and guidance as well as new designated points of contact for each regional office and chief ranger.

We realize that these changes do not come without an impact to your park law enforcement program. In continued support of every park, ISB will maintain the National Duty Agent Hotline for remote assistance and consultation available 24/7, leverage the ISB Tip-Line platform for parks upon request, begin to roll out new investigative tools to assist rangers, and look for opportunities to expand enhanced training to increase the capacity of the uniformed workforce to conduct complex investigations for those instances

where ISB agents are not able to lead the effort. In addition to these efforts, in the coming months this office will establish a formal task force to evaluate the responsibility, authority, management and oversight of complex, criminal investigations. The task force will take shape as an interdisciplinary team and review the history and evolution of the special agent program, as well as explore answers to many foundational questions which need definition and clarity to effectively inform and guide strategic decision making for the NPS law enforcement program in the years to come.

In closing, we are very thankful for the support the ISB Team receives from the parks and regions, and we could not be successful without you. We continue to be very proud of this team's incredible dedication, skill and professionalism as they investigate some of the most challenging and horrific crimes that unfortunately occur on NPS lands. We are confident these changes represent the best path forward to ensure that their work is aligned with the mission of the NPS and that justice is served, victims are heard, and resources are protected for future generations.

cc: Regional Chief Rangers
National Ranger Council



