

2026 PARK RANGER INSTITUTE AGENDA

Session I

Sunday January 18

1pm – 6:30pm: **REGISTRATION & Room Assignments : A Building Across From Cafeteria**
Early arrivals can tour Linville Caverns (20 minutes away) The only public underground caverns in NC. Open until 6pm. (\$14 fee, \$13 for Seniors over 62)

SUPPER ON YOUR OWN

7pm – Until: Welcome/Opening Remarks, John Byrd – Executive Director, Board Introductions, New Agency Introductions – A Building Classroom

Social time to follow – location TBA

Monday January 19

7am – 8am: Breakfast

8:15am – 11:45am: “Knuts for Knots” (Types of Ropes & Terminology, Types of Knots & how to tie them) David Sima, Ranger Operation Assistant, Forest Preserve of DuPage County, IL – A Building

8:15am – 11:45am: “Utilizing Ambassador Animals in Programming” Michael Romano, Lakes Supervisor/Environmental Educator, Greensboro, NC – B Building Classroom

8:15pm – 11:45pm: “Introduction to Full Range Leadership” Major Steve Savidge, Delaware Natural Resources Police – B Building

12pm – 1pm: Lunch

1:15pm – 5:45pm: “Trail Design & Maintenance with a practical @ Grandfather Mountain Trails” Tim Johnson, Director of Outdoor Recreation Planning, Destination by Design, Boone, NC – A Building

1:15pm – 5:45pm: “Snakes, How Too’s & How Not Too’s” Michael Romano – B Building

1:15am – 5:45pm: "Mast General Store Trip" John Byrd & Clint Richardson – Meet in courtyard.

6pm – 7pm: Supper

7:15pm – 9:15pm: "Search and Seizure in Tents & Campers" Captain Kurt Blatner, Delaware Natural Resources Police – A Building

7:15pm – 9:15pm: "Finance/FEMA Reimbursement Information" Chasity Webb, Facility Manager, NC Forest Service – Mountain Training Center – River Cabin Conference Room

7:15pm – 9:15pm "Bird Song I.D.", Ranger Jill Lee, MNCPPC. MD – B Building

Tuesday January 20

7am – 8am: Breakfast

8:15am – 11:45am: "Birding Hike" Ranger Jill Lee – Meet in courtyard.

8:15am-11:45am: "Crisis and Deaths in the Parks" Chief John Smiddy, Lorain County Metro Park Rangers, OH, – A Building

8:15am – 11:45am "Creating Inclusion in Your Park" Sharon Williams, AIRS Coordinator – Greensboro Parks & Rec. Dept., NC – B Building

8:15pm –11:45am: "Starting an Archery Program/Day Archery Competition" Steve Shaw, Elon Pks. & Rec., NC & Dusty Cantley, Alamance County Pks. & Rec., NC – River Cabin Conference Room

12pm – 1pm: Lunch

1:15pm – 5:45pm: "Fly Fishing Techniques" Chief John Smiddy & Jeffrey Street, Park Manager, Person County, Arts, Pks. & Rec. Dept., NC – River Cabin Conference Room

1:15pm -5:45pm: "Developing Programs Around Big Foot & Other Cryptids" Michael Romano – B Building

1:15am – 5:45am: "Networking/Team Building" Clint Richardson (Retired) Greensboro Parks & Recreation, Greensboro, NC & Ranger Supervisor Brain MacKay (Retired), Ocala, FL – A Building

6pm – 7pm: Supper

7:15pm – 9:45pm: "Dealing with People in Crisis" Cpl. Kevin Dorney, Delaware Natural Resources Police – A Building

7:15pm – 9:45pm: “Capacity Issues – Are We Loving Our Parks Too Much” Major Steve Savidge, Delaware Natural Resources Police – B Building

7:15pm – 9:45pm: “Building a Constituency for Your Park System” John Byrd & Clint Richardson – River Cabin Conference Room

7:15pm – Until: “Night Archery Competition” Steve Shaw & Dusty Cantley, location same as day archery. – Same location as Day Archery

Wednesday January 21

7am – 8am: Breakfast

8:15am – 9pm: All firearms competitions will be held this time frame only. (Top Gun & Combat Course) Sgt. Robert Young (Retired), Criminal Justice Instructor Alamance County Community College, NC (Range)

8:15am – 11:45am: “Environmental Education: Our Path to Stewardship” Beau & Brie Sanders with the JES Avanti Foundation – A Building

8:15am- 11:45m: “High Adventure Programming” Jim Wall – Co-Founder of Challenge Designs Innovations – River Cabin Conference Room

12pm – 1pm: Lunch

1:15pm – 5:45pm: “Sun Valley Zip Line Tour’: Jim Wall (\$50 fee, this is half price for a 2hr. tour)

1:15pm – 5:45pm: “Grandfather Mountain Attraction Trip” John Caveny, Vice President of Conservation & Education, Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation (John is waiving the normal fee of \$22 for our group so I suggest everyone give a donation to the facility) Meet in the Courtyard.

6pm – 7pm – Supper

7:15pm. – 9:15pm: “Personal Finance” Katherine Tait – Co-Founder of Challenge Design Innovations and Jim Walls better half. – B Building

7:15pm – 9:15pm: “Customer Service” Jeffrey Street – A Building

7:15pm – 9:15pm: “Learn the Night Sky”, Ranger Jill Lee – Meet at the Mountain Cabin.

Thursday January 22

7am – 8am: Breakfast

8:15am-11:45am: “Outdoor Safety – Plants and Animals to be Aware of for Staying Safe in the Outdoors” Dick Thomas, High Point Pks. & Rec. Dept., NC - A Building

8:15am – 11:45am: “Human Trafficking” Paul “Rob” Phelan, Instructor N.C. Justice Academy - B Building

8:15am – 11:45am: “Park Ranger Division Development” Ranger Supervisor – Braden Meiter, Allegheny County, PA – River Cabin Conference Room

12pm-1pm: Lunch

1:15pm – 5:45 pm: “Dealing with Invasive Animals & Plants” Dick Thomas – A Building

1:15pm-5:45pm: “Civilian Response to an Active Shooter” Rob Phelan – B Building

1:15pm – 5:45pm: “Park Patrol Techniques for Non-Sworn Rangers”, Brian MacKay, Park Ranger Supervisor, Ocala, FL (Retired) – River Cabin Conference Room

6pm-7pm-Supper

7pm – Until: **AWARDS CEREMONY** – A Building

Guest Speaker; John Hill, Director, Recreation, Arts, and Parks, Person County, NC.

Presentation of Awards: John R. Byrd Sr. Executive Director
Door Prizes & Group Photo

Friday January 23

BREAKFAST ON YOUR OWN

Check out of rooms by 10am

2026 Session I Adjourned

Additional Information

- *****These classes are for sworn personnel only*****
- All trips and several of the classes will have signup sheets at registration. Some trips require carpooling; please bring an agency van if possible.
- All firearms participants should bring at least 150 to 200 rounds of ammunition.
- **Top Gun Award competitors must use your duty weapon (NO TRICKED OUT GUNS)**
- All shooters shoot at the discretion of the Range Master only.
- **THE ASHEVILLE AIRPORT AND THE JOHNSON CITY TENNESSEE AIRPORTS ARE BOTH A LITTLE OVER AN HOUR AWAY. NO AIRPORT PICK UP WILL BE PROVIDED FOR THIS SESSION.**