

BLM LE History Part 5.4

In 1992, the National Chief Rangers Duty Station was moved from Washington D.C. to the national Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho in order to keep the National Law Enforcement Office closely connected with field operations. That same year, BLM law enforcement officers were issued Ruger Mini-14 rifles to complement the standard issued Sig Sauer semiautomatic handgun and Remington Pump shotgun. BLM's fourth official canine position was also established later that year in the Richfield District in Utah. Felicia Probert, who had replaced McLane as the California Desert District Ranger when McLane assumed the chief ranger position, was hired as the first staff ranger in Boise. Probert was hired specifically to develop LawNet, a centralized electronic reporting database. To Probert's credit, BLM had become the first federal agency to comply with the national incident-based reporting system requirements when LawNet went operational in 1998. Chief Ranger McLane's efforts to standardize and professionalize the bureau's law enforcement program came to fruition in 1994 with the issuance of the Law Enforcement General Orders. The General Orders superseded the old 9260 Programatic Handbook that an earlier OIG audit viewed primarily as guidelines. The General Orders established finding law enforcement policy on all law enforcement operations to include the supervision of law enforcement by non-law enforcement managers. With the General Orders came standard position descriptions for rangers, which included mandatory physical fitness, drug testing, and maximum age limitation requirements. The new position description recognized rangers as law enforcement officers engaged in the investigation of criminal activity and the

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apprehension of violators. These new standards also provided BLM rangers with the same special law enforcement retirement coverage already available to federal criminal investigators. In the mid 1990s, BLM attempted to move the prohibited acts attached to the programmatic regulations scattered throughout Title 43, Code of Federal Regulations and compile all prohibited acts in one location within the CFR. The idea was simple. Make it easy to find what acts BLM prohibits on the public lands for both law enforcement and the general public alike. At the same time, BLM also was attempting to replace aging Mini-14 rifles with Colt AR-15 rifles. BLM's timing could not have been worse. As what was alternatively dubbed the Own Rule Movement, or the County Supremacy Movement, or the Second Sage Brush Rebellion was in full rhetoric. Several western states and counties viewed federal actions such as this and the creation of BLM's first national monument, Grand Staircase Escalante, as just another federal land grab and a means of controlling western economics and freedoms. Westerners could not understand why federal rangers needed to be equipped with military assault rifles. Political pressure was such that it forced BLM to scrap plans to consolidate its regulations and replace aging equipment and prompted BLM to issue all employees written guidance in the event they were arrested by local law enforcement during the performance of their official duties. In spite of the antifederal rhetoric, BLM revised and updated its law enforcement program manual in 1996 to include a clear and firm objective for its law enforcement program. In contrast to the law enforcement program objective of 1984, BLM's 1996 law enforcement program objective made it clear. The bureau law

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enforcement program is responsible for implementing the protection aspects of the bureau mission. Protection is accomplished through the enforcement of all federal laws and regulations related to the use, management, and development of the public lands and their resources including activities related to the administration of the public lands. This was a bold statement given the political climate of the times, but perhaps necessitated by the rhetoric that radical law enforcement officials could threaten to arrest BLM employees and law enforcement officers actually engaged in the performance of their official duties. In spite of this bold mission statement, many rangers felt confused and dissatisfied with BLM's response to the antigovernment rhetoric. Once again, timing is everything. Many rangers were in the process of removing light bars from marked law enforcement vehicles in order to catch more criminals in the act. California State Director Ed Hasty addressed both issues head on in a written statement to all California managers and law enforcement personnel in 1997. Hasty admitted the fallout of the recent regulatory effort further complicated the mixed message problem. Specifically addressing rangers Hasty stated, "Rangers should be first and foremost BLM's most visible ambassadors to the public land users, there to educate, assist, and protect. They should exercise their law enforcement authority only when necessary to protect public safety or public land resources." Specifically addressing the issue of light bar removal from marked law enforcement vehicles, Hasty noted a California ranger had done so in order to be able to sneak up on people better. Hasty's response was, "If the light bar does detur people from doing bad things on public lands then they're

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working.” In closing Hasty said, “The focus of our job shouldn’t be to make users fearful of BLM rangers sneaking up on them, emphasizing search and seizures without a warrant, or pulling motorists off a highway for speeding. Those jobs sometimes need to be done, but those areas are more under the purview of county sheriffs or city police. Our rangers are a different breed of law enforcement officer, and it is a noble calling. I believe our rangers understand that and love their work.”

The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area, more commonly known as Glamis, has been a haven for off-road enthusiasts for many years. Over the years, BLM responded to the growing popularity of the sport and the increase in visitation to the dunes in the old-fashion manner of seeking voluntary compliance.

Understaffed for years, BLM law enforcement did little more than oversee an increasingly chaotic environment. While off-road vehicle use predominated the daylight hours, night brought a whole new experience to Glamis. Alcohol and drugs fueled a predominantly young crowd of spectators into stunts that were soon out of control. Unsuspecting motorists would become trapped in ditches of fire, dragged from their vehicles and beaten, while strippers performed under the light of huge palate-fueled bonfires and fireworks displays. Urban crime had come to the public lands. Fights, rapes, stabbings, and shootings were becoming commonplace at Glamis. Property and vehicles were vandalized and stolen. Roving bands of criminals harassed visitors while felony film crews encouraged this lawless behavior in order to sell Glamis reality videos. As the

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Thanksgiving holiday weekend of 1999 approached, BLM and other federal, state, and local law enforcement officers prepared for a record number of visitors to the dunes. As law enforcement attempted to gain control over the increasingly chaotic weekend by aggressively enforcing the law, a largely unruly and lawless crowd became defiant towards law enforcement and violent protest erupted.

Thanksgiving weekend 1999 markedly changed the way BLM managed intensive recreation events. Imperial County stepped in and closed Competition Hill, the site of lawless nighttime behavior, and began aggressively breaking up large gatherings of people in the dunes, declaring such gatherings as an unlawful assembly. BLM responded by adding riot control and pepper ball rifle training to the law enforcement in-service training, issuing riot batons to every officer and compiling a cache of riot helmets and pepper ball rifles in strategic locations throughout the western states. BLM also began utilizing the incident command system during high-use weekends at Glamis and for other major events. The addition of these tools coupled with the proactive training developed as a result of the Graham Supreme Court decision of 1989, have markedly improved BLM law enforcement's ability to respond and manage events such as Glamis, Burning Man, and various recurring events throughout the west.