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**Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness  
Committee**

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**HB 1321**

**Brief Description:** Concerning park rangers employed by the state parks and recreation commission.

**Sponsors:** Representative Finn.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Changes the designation of the State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) from a limited authority law enforcement agency to a general authority law enforcement agency.
- Requires that all applicants for park rangers meet certain minimum requirements and that all park rangers hired after the effective date of the act complete the basic law enforcement academy course or an equivalency course.
- Excludes park rangers from membership in the Washington Law Enforcement Officers and Fire Fighters' (LEOFF) retirement system.
- Requires the Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC) to give the general authority peace officers of the Commission equal priority for enrollment in the CJTC's basic law enforcement training as any other general authority law enforcement officer.

**Hearing Date:** 2/15/11

**Staff:** Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

**Background:**

The State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) is classified by statute as a "limited authority Washington law enforcement agency. The Commission is charged, in part, with enforcing the state laws on public recreational lands. Park rangers go through a training course

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

developed by the Commission and are vested with police powers to enforce Washington laws.

Absent a special Commission, the statute does not expressly grant park rangers permission to enforce the laws of Washington outside the territory of state recreational lands. The Commission may adopt policies and enforce rules pertaining to the use, care, and administration of state parks and parkways. In January of 2005, the Commission adopted a policy that requires park rangers to engage in law enforcement only within the boundaries of state park properties except:

- when in fresh pursuit, following the commission of a felony (except such pursuit is not authorized for vehicle pursuits that involve speeds in excess of posted speed limits over significant distances); and
- where specifically authorized by the Legislature.

A "limited authority Washington law enforcement agency" means any agency or unit or division of local or state government that has, as one of its functions, the apprehension or detection of persons committing infractions or violating traffic or specific criminal laws relating to limited subject areas. Agencies so designated include, but are not limited to, the state departments of Natural Resources, Social and Health Services, Corrections, and the Gambling Commission.

A "general authority Washington law enforcement agency" is defined by statute as any agency or unit or division of local or state government that has, as one of its primary functions, the detection and apprehension of persons committing infractions or violating traffic or criminal laws in general. It also means any other unit of government expressly designated by statute as such an agency. General authority law enforcement agencies include the Washington State Patrol and the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Such law enforcement agencies may enforce any traffic or criminal law of the state throughout the territorial boundaries of the state.

#### Criminal Justice Training Commission.

The Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC) provides basic law enforcement training, corrections training, and educational programs for criminal justice personnel, including commissioned officers, corrections officers, fire marshals, and prosecuting attorneys.

Basic law enforcement officer training is generally required of all law enforcement officers, with the exception of volunteers, and reserve officers employed in Washington. The training consists of a 720-hour program covering a wide variety of subjects including: constitutional and criminal law and procedures, criminal investigation, firearms training, and communication and writing skills. All law enforcement personnel hired, transferred, or promoted, are required to complete the core training requirements within six months, unless the employee receives a waiver from the CJTC.

#### **Summary of Bill:**

The Commission is designated a general authority law enforcement agency. As such, when prescribed by the Commission, park rangers vested with police powers must have and exercise, throughout the state, such police powers and duties as are vested in sheriffs and peace officers generally.

All applicants for park ranger positions must be citizens of the United States who can read and

write the English language. All park rangers hired after the effective date of this act are deemed law enforcement personnel (peace officers) and must successfully complete the basic law enforcement academy course or the basic law enforcement equivalency certification.

The CJTC must give the general authority peace officers of the Commission equal priority for enrollment in the CJTC's basic law enforcement training as any other general authority law enforcement officer.

Park rangers are specifically excluded from membership in the Washington Law Enforcement Officers and Fire Fighters' (LEOFF) retirement system.

Liability arising out of the exercise or alleged exercise of authority by a park ranger rests with the Commission unless the park ranger acts under the direction or control of another agency, or unless the liability is assumed under an agreement between the Commission and another agency.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on February 11, 2011.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.