



MEMORANDUM

TO: Monica Conrad, Director
Division of Parks & Recreation

FROM: Patrick R. Johnston, Director 
Division of Risk Management

CC: Geoffrey Reed -
Acting Chief of Staff and Commissioner of General Services
Sally Hamilton - Chief Administrative Officer
Glenn Brown - Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: April 11, 2016

SUBJECT: Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
March 19, 2016 – Death Incident
Risk Management Review

The purpose of this communication is to provide you with an overview of the Risk Management findings from the March 19, 2016 Death at Raven Run Sanctuary. I do not plan on restating summaries or findings of other investigative agencies. I will address the following in this document:

1. Accident Causation
2. Accident Prevention
3. Incident Notification
4. Incident Response
5. Recommendations



ACCIDENT CAUSATION

The death of Mary Katharine Stewart, 22, of Kenton County, Kentucky while hiking in Raven Run Nature Sanctuary on March 19, 2016 has been classified as accidental by the coroner's office. Risk Management made an on-site visit the day after the accident. Written summaries of the accident were provided by Parks Staff that were on duty at the time of the accident. The summaries provided additional insight of events before and after the accident. Also, formal debriefing was conducted on March 29, 2016 with the Raven Run Staff that were on duty the day of the incident further providing clarification on the location of the accident. Public safety response documentation was reviewed. Gary Ginn, Fayette County Coroner provided his findings of the accident. Public Safety and several Parks staff also had communications with the individual and his son who discovered the young lady who fell.

Miss Stewart apparently lost her footing while attempting to gain a better view of some coyotes feeding on a dead deer at the bottom of the Chandler Creek Ravine (See Photo #1). There was no visible evidence of a slide or loose rock near the edges of paths that surround the ledges of the various viewing points in to the ravine. The coroner did not find any evidence of foul play. Based on interviews with Raven Run staff, it is possible that she may have entered the creek and fell from this area (See Photo #2)

PHOTO #1

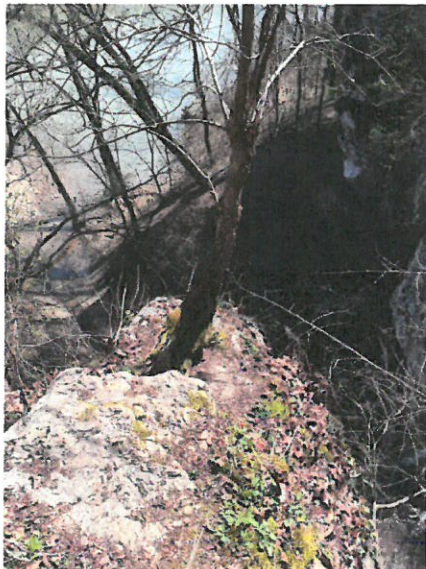


PHOTO #2



Raven Run Nature Sanctuary has signs and brochures at the parking area and nature center that provide all hikers with safety precautions including a precaution not to hike off trails. All trails are clearly marked and identified. The trail leading to the area where this accident occurred was not marked for hiking on park brochures. This area was also posted with a sign that read, "Park Border – Do Not Cross." (Photo #3)

PHOTO #3



ACCIDENT PREVENTION

Trail safety is an important element for all visitors that enter Raven Run Nature Sanctuary. Prevention of accidents is primary so that every visitor will leave having a positive experience. Signs and brochures are conspicuously posted and available as you enter the park. The trails are clearly marked with varying colors.

Notwithstanding the many efforts at accident prevention, many facets of outdoor recreation feature risk as a vital and important element of the recreation experience. Mountain climbing, skydiving, skiing, scuba diving, whitewater rafting, theme park thrill rides, and many other recreation pursuits have elements of risk. Risk is the spice that makes some aspects of recreation so pleasurable and life itself more meaningful. While the risk factors are very evident in many outdoor activities as it was in this case, they are being managed by providing the necessary precautions, signs and well maintained trails.

Some accident prevention techniques that are introduced to prevent cliff falls include railings and stone barriers. They are typically installed where overall public safety is a



concern such as where large groups gather in a small area and create a dangerous condition. Since 1995 two deaths have occurred at Raven Run Nature Sanctuary. Both deaths occurred in approximately the same area where there was no concentration of large groups that created a hazardous condition. Several falls have also occurred in other areas of the sanctuary where the injured had to be removed by stretcher. Neither one of these areas included large concentrations of people that made the area more hazardous. The majority of cliffs at Raven Run Nature Sanctuary are open and obvious. Many areas throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky such as Red River Gorge have cliffs that are open, obvious and unprotected. Large crowds gather throughout the summer on top of Natural Bridge, a high unprotected stone arch which towers more than 100 feet above the surface below (See Photo #4). Photo #5 also shows another popular area of the park with unprotected cliffs.

PHOTO #4

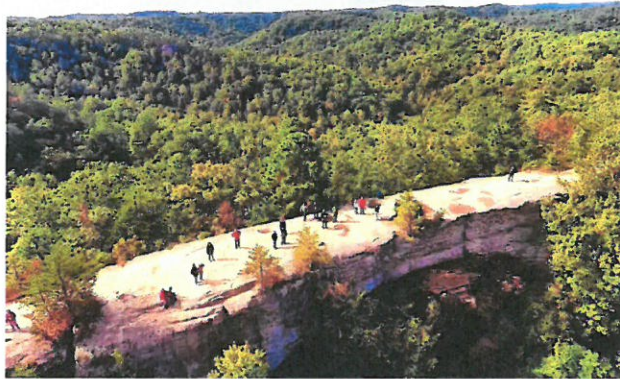


PHOTO #5



The use of railings and stone barriers characteristically decrease where the integrity of scenic vistas take precedence such as the Overlook at Raven Run. The question with this approach is that if you put up railings in one location, why would you not put them up in another location? The objective of a nature sanctuary is to provide the visitor with the most natural setting possible so that the recreation experience has some elements of risk.

The Division of Parks and Recreation has diligently pursued the safety of trails in all of its parks and sanctuaries with appropriate trail identification, precautionary statements and posting of borders.

Incident Notification

According to Chris Toutant, Acting Recreation Manager for Raven Run, the initial call for emergency help was initiated by a man (name unknown) who was hiking with his son. The man called 911 and provided dispatchers with the information for the response. However, it was not until the first emergency vehicle entered the property (approximately 12:01pm) that Parks personnel became aware of the incident thus delaying Parks personnel from having equipment (gators) ready to transport emergency personnel to the scene.

Incident Response

Upon response by Police and Fire Department Station #18, Parks personnel implemented their Emergency Response Plan. They began a series of activities to include: stationing a person at the front desk; another person was assigned to the entrance to close the park so that only essential staff and emergency personnel would be allowed to enter; assigned personnel to help police and fire gain access to the emergency site; notified chain of command; and finally closed off the area where the accident occurred.

As the chain of command was being notified, personnel assigned to shuttle Police and Fire Department personnel kept busy with this task until the emergency was terminated sometime after 5:00pm.

Some of the unique problems that arose during the response was lack of communication between Parks personnel and emergency responders. No radio



communications were available for Parks personnel. Parks personnel used their personal cell telephones. There was no notification by emergency responders that they were in route to Raven Run for an emergency. The medevac helicopter landed at the wrong landing zone possibly due to fire equipment blocking the predetermined landing zone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Parks personnel should convene a meeting with Fire Department and Police operations to review the existing emergency response plan for this location. Specifically, 911 and first responders should determine who the person in charge is so that contact can be made to advise of pending arrival and nature of the emergency.
2. The helicopter was not needed for evacuation of the injured visitor. Nonetheless, first responders should revisit their emergency response plan protocols so they do not block a predetermined landing zone.
3. Cell telephones were used for communications between Parks personnel. This should be studied to determine if this is the best tool available for this area. Radios that have emergency responder channels should be considered.
4. While the brochures and posters provided ample warning to stay on the trails, it is recommended that Parks and Recreation study their current posters and determine if they can be enhanced further with additional safety precautions.

Additional Note:

Risk Management would like to commend the staff of Raven Run for their professional response to this tragic incident. From all indications, they followed their emergency response plans to the letter and managed this event as planned.

