

# Launch 'Em! Embarking on Our Third Year as National Park Volunteers

A good friend recently asked how we felt about “getting back in the saddle” as we begin our third year as volunteers at Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. So many thoughts came up I felt tongue tied! After our first afternoon working Dave and I laughed to think how very much returning here felt like the first day of high school, but this time as a junior! Seniors seem ready to move on to the next thing, but juniors have that heady mix of confidence born of familiarity and anticipation for the new things to still to learn.

Definitely feeling like juniors – we already know where our locker (I mean campsite) is and have a number of favorite haunts to revisit as time allows. We'll see what is the same and what has changed. Observing the mountains and lakes here never gets old. Likewise we are familiar with the big picture of how the park operates and our place within that framework.



Cascade Canyon dramatically highlighted by an approaching snow storm

We know we have great teachers this year – an amazing boss and colleagues that are generous with their knowledge and sharing their experiences with us.

But best of all is the overwhelming fun of reuniting with friends we haven't seen in seven months! Hugs are optional but often welcome. There is news of promotions (Alex got his dream job of roads supervisor!), folks transferring to other departments in the park, people moving on to other parks, and even some retirements.

While dropping off some paperwork up in Colter Bay, park staff in the hallway stopped to say hello and introduce themselves. Elizabeth has moved up from the southern end of the district and Thomas is her new deputy. Elizabeth thought our names were familiar. Two years ago working in Lost & Found, we used a data base shared by other park employees to track missing

items, and I certainly recognized Elizabeth from many of those entries. Today we finally met in person!

We scan the radio call number sheets to see if our favorite Law Enforcement (LE) Ranger has returned for another year, and start learning the names of the phenomenal talents that will be backing us up on the roads out there. Who has the same shift schedule as you ...

And of course, the Principal, or rather the Park Superintendent, hosts a Welcome To the Park presentation in the auditorium for new and returning employees & volunteers. We hear about the plans for the summer, new construction, road closure impacts, upcoming training sessions, and the like. And just like the children-at-heart that we are, we depart the lecture hall to resume sharing news and upcoming campfire plans with our friends.

Right now, not all of the campgrounds are open, and those that are, are not full. Hotels in town have vacancies. In general between the park and town, the place feels like we are still in homeroom. Visitors are trickling in. Park staff is arriving. Many restaurants have one week left on their recover-from-ski-season hiatus. You can find parking downtown for the first time in two years, so the roads don't have the bustle of a school day in session.



hardy souls on the first day Colter Bay RV campground opened. The rangers are hustling to get all the seasonal staff and volunteers through the “on-boarding” process as quickly as possible. Facilities is completing the shift from winter activities in the park such as roads groomed for skiing rather than vehicles to a warm weather footing. Turning water back on, opening roads when enough snow has melted, rehangng signs, accepting delivery of everything from pallets of new bear boxes to crates of map handouts visitors receive at the gates. The Visitor Centers are getting aired out, vacuuming carpets, and restocking souvenirs. The Permit Office has its shingle out.

Park concessionaire vehicles fly up and down the roads. Pickup trucks with trailers of mattresses park outside the housekeeping cabins just having the protective plywood pried off the windows. “Welcome staff” and “now hiring” signs line the entrances.

A fun, optimistic, even eager and anticipatory kind of energy permeates the park right now. Every one of the rangers we have encountered since arriving eight days ago has been warmly welcoming and anxious to make sure that we feel supported and have everything we need for the season ahead – be it uniform pieces, safety gear, or information resources. I am not sure I ever started a new job feeling half this well prepared and backed up.

And I suppose, we bring our own energy to the mix. Dave has been chomping at the bit all winter to get back to the park to play his role in helping visitors have a great experience while they are here. I am very excited to be officially joining this well respected [wildlife brigade](#), and confess to a bit of nervousness about living up to the high professional bar that has been set.

The building energy makes it feel like we are watching the minute hand on the homeroom clock slowly tick its way through an arc, waiting for the bell to ring when we will leap from our seats and join the fray in the halls, scurrying to our assigned spots to begin the 2022 season.

Truth is, we already worked three days last week – and each day was a day-long moveable bear-jam that went up one side of the road and down the other. For the staff working with the animals, the bell has already rung! But more about our time with the bears soon. ☐



one of our smaller bear jams this week