

Ryan Braaten (July - December 2016).

Being selected as the NRM CAP has been the highlight of my career thus far. I was hesitant to apply since I had just recently become a GS-09, but many encouraged me and said they had always regretted not putting in for it themselves. No regrets, so I applied and got selected for the second half of 2016. Starting off my journey to D.C. I was able to take a few days of leave and do a cross-country road trip with my wife starting in Oregon. We stopped at many National Parks along the way which helped me realize I would be representing rangers from around the country while at HQ and not just those at my dam.

We arrived in D.C. Fourth of July Weekend which in itself was an amazing experience despite not being able to see the fireworks due to a heavy thunderstorm. Being able to see our country's history and work at the hub of all federal agencies was surreal. All the historical stories you were told in grade school come to life, things you've only seen on TV and in the movies become real and you get to understand the word humidity. I had the metro system down pat and my wife was able to get a job at the Inventor's Hall of Fame in the US Patent Office just two blocks from our apartment in Alexandria, VA.

If I had to boil my whole experience down to one word, it would be "involved." I was involved in all sorts of aspects of NRM and USACE that I never new occurred. My first week I was pulled into a conference call with a US Representative wanted the Corps' help with dredging. I served on several multi-federal agency teams that discussed how to move recreation forward as a whole.

The highlight of my experience was being able to attend a Federal Recreation Council (FRC) meeting in the Penthouse of the Department of Interior Building. The room itself was amazingly decorated with historical murals but attending the meeting were all the heads of the federal agencies. Director of the National Park Service Jon Jarvis and Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell were in attendance to name a few. Only 12 people attended the meeting and that included little Oregon park ranger ME!

For USACE, I was involved in drafting and editing a dozen or so memorandums including one for the Director of Civil Works to sign. I did a water safety program outside the Chief's Office, Bobber and I made an appearance at the children's day care and I was able to go on a canoe trip with some urban kids with Wilderness Inquiry's Canoemobile program. I helped rangers get conference approval to attend the National Association for Interpretation's National Conference, I received numerous phone calls about parks around the country as well as the pipeline controversy and worked on several of the NRM Awards. I was able to sit in on the Park Ranger Advisory Committee and got to meet a lot of great people that have continued to advise and mentor me through my career. The CAP is able to gain HQ perspectives while giving field perspectives which is invaluable to both. Know that every HQ memo you see, a CAP was involved.

The "CA" of CAP means Career Advancement and I wasn't sure where this opportunity would lead me but it sure did open doors to places I never thought I'd go. While in the CAP, I was recruited for a position in California which helped me get some more well-rounded



experiences. I am a more effective ranger because of my experience because I know what's being expected from the top. My skills and understanding of HQ have led to me obtaining my dream job of managing a Corps Class A visitor center, the Dewey Short Visitor Center at Table Rock Lake where I am now the Lead Park Ranger. I continue to share with others that which I've learned in to spread help their careers and hope that they too someday take advantage of this great opportunity with the Corps.

I'm not sure if there's any more advancing I need to do at this point. Now I try to focus on helping others obtain their goals but who knows what the future has in store for me. No regrets, seize your moment! Essayons.

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