



Investigative Report Concerning the Purchase of Fully Automatic Rifles and Flash-Bang Distraction Devices by NPS Park Rangers

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This is a version of the report prepared for public release.

SYNOPSIS

We initiated an investigation in June 2014 based on allegations from the National Park Service (NPS) that fully automatic rifles and “flash-bang” distraction devices had been obtained by law enforcement rangers at the Mojave National Preserve (MNP), in violation of NPS policy.

Our investigation revealed that a supervisory park ranger arranged for the purchase of Colt M-4 fully automatic rifles from Colt’s Manufacturing Company, LLC. Between 2008 and 2010, MNP placed three orders, for a total of nine rifles. The purchase of these rifles violated NPS policy. During our interview with the supervisory park ranger, he admitted that he and a park ranger selected the Colt M-4 Model R0977 fully automatic rifle after researching different rifle models made by Colt and other manufacturers. The supervisory park ranger also admitted that once the rifles were delivered, he allowed MNP park rangers to carry them on duty for 3 years, another violation of NPS policy. In our interviews, the park rangers confirmed that they carried these weapons in fully automatic mode while on duty. In late 2013, a new chief ranger directed that the rifles be converted to operate as semi-automatic to comply with NPS policy.

We also found that the supervisory park ranger purchased 24 flash-bang distraction devices with his U.S. Government-issued purchase card. These devices were not issued to or carried on duty by the park rangers. Although NPS policy does not specifically mention such devices, it does require prior approval to purchase “Intermediate Defensive Equipment.” Our investigation determined that the supervisory park ranger did not secure the required approvals for the purchase.

During our investigation, the supervisory park ranger admitted to purchasing and distributing the automatic weapons despite knowing that they violated NPS policy; admitted telling rangers who received the automatic rifles not to display them to others; and admitted to, at a minimum, not making it clear to his supervisors that the automatic weapons needed to be converted to semi-automatics. We developed evidence that he made false statements or provided misleading information to his supervisors, his subordinates, and other NPS personnel about the acquisition and use of the rifles. He also provided inconsistent and implausible statements in his responses to our questions and caused us to doubt his overall truthfulness and candor.

In addition to this report, we issued a management advisory to the NPS Director asking NPS to put in place policy and procedures for control and oversight of the purchase of tactical law enforcement equipment. NPS responded that it generally agrees with our recommendations and has taken action to strengthen policies and controls governing equipment purchases.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 30, “Firearms,” of the National Park Service (NPS) Law Enforcement Reference Manual (RM-9) requires that firearms requisitions and purchases be coordinated through the Division of Law Enforcement, Security, and Emergency Services (LESES) at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC). It states: “Only NPS-issued or NPS-approved firearms will be carried or worn while working under the authority of the Service.” It identifies the rifles approved for use as: “M-16 series or AR-15/M-4 type .223 caliber, semi-automatic carbines identical in operator function, made by manufacturers that meet current military specifications.”

RM-9 indicates that all rifles must be semi-automatic, but allows Special Event and Tactical Teams to carry a modification of the M-16 or AR-15/M-4 type rifles that fires a “three-shot burst,” provided the teams have proper authorization and fulfill requirements for training and qualification. The manual also states: “In general, modifications will not be made to agency owned weapons.”

RM-9 does not directly address “flash-bang” distraction devices. Relevant policy in Chapter 31, “Intermediate Defensive Equipment,” states: “The Service recognizes the benefits of emerging technologies in defensive equipment. Prior to purchase or use, requests must be submitted to the DCOP [Deputy Chief, Operations and Policy] for evaluation, approval, and development of applicable policies prior to any issuance. The DCOP will consult with the Superintendent, NPS-LETC [Law Enforcement Training Center], as part of the review process.”

DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION

We initiated our investigation on June 25, 2014, into allegations from NPS that fully automatic rifles and flash-bang distraction devices had been obtained by law enforcement rangers at the Mojave National Preserve (MNP) in Southern California, in violation of NPS policy.

We found violations of NPS policy in the purchase of both the fully automatic rifles and the flash-bang distraction devices. Also, throughout our investigation, the supervisory park ranger who made the purchases provided inconsistent statements during his interviews.

Colt M-4 Model R0977 Fully Automatic Rifles

A review of documents provided by Colt’s Manufacturing Company, LLC, indicated that between 2008 and 2010, MNP made three separate purchases of Colt M-4 Model R0977 fully automatic rifles, for a total of nine rifles.

On June 26 and 27, 2014, we inventoried and inspected the nine rifles. We determined that all of the rifles had been converted to fire only in semi-automatic mode in accordance with NPS policy.

The MNP chief ranger told us that soon after his arrival at MNP in October 2013, he was informed by the MNP superintendent that the park rangers had M-4 rifles that were capable of fully automatic fire. The chief ranger reviewed the firearms inventory records and discovered that nine fully automatic rifles had been purchased between 2008 and 2010. He determined that although some of the rifles had been converted to semi-automatic, there were a “handful” that were still capable of fully automatic fire. He told us that he communicated with FLETC and determined that MNP did not have any waivers or authorizations for use of fully automatic rifles.

The chief ranger said that he told the supervisory park ranger to convert the rifles to semi-automatic, to comply with NPS policy; and that by December 2013, the supervisory park ranger reported to him that all of the rifles had been converted.

The MNP superintendent told us that she heard in approximately August or September 2013 that the MNP park rangers were carrying fully automatic rifles. She believed that the supervisory park ranger was the acting chief ranger at the time. She did not address the issue with him because she did not trust him to correct the policy violation. She said that she reported the matter to the chief ranger as soon as he came on board in October 2013.

Rifle Selection and Purchase

During our first interview with the supervisory park ranger, he told us that around 2008 or 2009, MNP rangers were using “Vietnam era” M-16 rifles that were malfunctioning and dangerous to use, so he decided to request the purchase of new rifles to replace them. He said that he thought the former chief ranger at MNP (from December 2007 to May 2010) received approval from someone at FLETC to purchase the new rifles locally through the MNP contracting officer.

The supervisory park ranger told us that a park ranger recommended to him that MNP purchase the Colt M-4 Model R0977 fully automatic rifle because it met the military specification (mil-spec) requirements in NPS policy. The supervisory park ranger said that he passed on this recommendation to the then-chief ranger and that the contracting officer processed the rifles’ procurement.

According to the supervisory park ranger, he was aware that NPS policy prohibited the use of fully automatic rifles by park rangers. He said that it was not his intent to violate NPS policy, and he assumed that his NPS supervisors had approved the purchase of the rifles.

During our interview with the former chief ranger, he told us that when he arrived at MNP, the supervisory park ranger was considered the primary property officer for the preserve and was responsible for managing and purchasing property, and upgrading equipment. The former chief ranger said that shortly after his arrival there were discussions about purchasing new rifles to replace the old Vietnam-era M-16s that park rangers were carrying on patrol. He asked the supervisory park ranger to provide a recommendation regarding which make and model rifle to purchase.

The park ranger named by the supervisory park ranger is a collateral duty armorer at MNP, and he told us that in 2008 he recommended the Model R0977 because it was the most economical choice and the only rifle that met the mil-spec requirements and the 14.5-inch barrel length criteria in NPS policy. He acknowledged that when he made the recommendation, he knew that NPS policy did not permit park rangers to carry fully automatic rifles. He also said that when he recommended the rifle, he told the supervisory park ranger that it would need to be converted to fire only in semi-automatic mode. The park ranger/armorer explained that changing the rifles’ selector switches (the mechanism that permits firing either full- or semi-automatic) would make them semi-automatic. He also said that the supervisory park ranger knew that the Model R0977 was a fully automatic rifle, but the park ranger/armorer did not remember telling the former chief ranger or anyone else of that fact.

The former chief ranger (who was chief ranger when the purchase was made) said that he did not know how the Model R0977 was selected, and he did not know that it was a fully automatic rifle.

He noted that in hindsight, he relied too much on the supervisory park ranger, assuming that he would make the right decision about what model rifle to purchase. The former chief ranger recalled that the Model R0977 was on a “wish list” that the supervisory park ranger gave him in 2008, but he did not conduct any research to ensure the purchase was appropriate and adhered to NPS policy. The former chief ranger said that he would not be surprised to learn that the supervisory park ranger ordered the Model R0977 knowing it was a fully automatic rifle. He said that no one at MNP headquarters knew that the rifles violated NPS policy. The former chief ranger said that if he had known the Model R0977 was a fully automatic rifle, he would not have approved the purchase.

The MNP deputy superintendent said that he was not aware that NPS policy prohibited rangers from carrying fully automatic weapons. He said that the process of purchasing new rifles began in 2008, when MNP staff were developing the budget for 2009. He recalled that the supervisory park ranger decided which rifle model to purchase. The deputy superintendent recalled a conversation with the supervisory park ranger and then-chief ranger about the purchase, but there was no discussion of whether the new rifles would be capable of firing fully automatic. The deputy superintendent said that the purchase of new rifles was part of the management team’s final discussions of the 2009 budget. He said that he made the final decision to purchase the rifles, but he did not know specifically what was being ordered. He said that after the management team provided approval, the supervisory park ranger was authorized to make the purchase through the contracting officer.

We interviewed the contracting officer about the procurement process. He told us that the purchase of the new rifles was initiated when the law enforcement staff sent him a completed form DI-1 (the requisition form for the procurement of supplies or services) that provided the specifications, dollar estimate, and justification for the purchase. According to the contracting officer, he no longer had copies of the purchase records because, in accordance with record retention policy, the documents were destroyed after 3 years. He said that he normally verified all weapons requisitions with the chief ranger to ensure the purchases were authorized. He said that he received oral approval from the then-chief ranger but did not have a written record of the approval.

According to the contracting officer, when the rifles arrived, he checked them in and logged the serial numbers. He said that no one told him that the rifles were capable of firing fully automatic, and he did not know enough about weapons to make that determination himself. He said that he should have been told that the fully automatic rifles violated NPS policy. He said that the supervisory park ranger picked up the rifles from him.

During a follow-up interview, the supervisory park ranger acknowledged that, contrary to the information he provided during his initial interview, he and the park ranger/armorer together selected the Colt M-4 Model R0977 fully automatic rifle after researching different rifle models made by Colt and other manufacturers. He said that he looked at a Colt catalog that indicated the Model R0977 was a fully automatic rifle and that he and the park ranger/armorer chose it because it was the only Colt model that met the mil-spec requirements in NPS policy. The supervisory park ranger told us that it was possible he knew the rifles would arrive at MNP

capable of fully automatic fire, with the intent to convert all of them to semi-automatic to comply with NPS policy.

Another MNP park ranger told us that he was not involved in selecting the Colt M-4 Model R0977 rifles and had no firsthand knowledge of how that model was selected. He recalled that the process for purchasing new rifles began in 2008 or 2009, when a decision was made to update the Vietnam-era M-16s that rangers were carrying on patrol. He was not sure who initiated the purchase of the new rifles, but he thought that the supervisory park ranger and the park ranger/armorer probably made the recommendation to the then-chief ranger. The park ranger believed that this particular M-4 model was selected because it met the mil-spec requirements in the NPS policy. He did not know of any other park rangers outside of MNP who had fully automatic rifles. He knew that NPS policy prohibited rangers from carrying fully automatic rifles on duty but told us that he did not speak with anyone about it other than the park ranger/armorer.

In an interview with a third park ranger, she told us that in late 2008 or early 2009 she was told by the supervisory park ranger that the park rangers at MNP would be receiving new M-4 rifles capable of firing fully automatic. She did not know who selected or ordered the rifles, or who approved their purchase, but she assumed that the supervisory park ranger was involved since he had told her about it. She knew that fully automatic rifles violated NPS policy, but the supervisory park ranger told her that MNP had received a waiver from the NPS Pacific West Region to purchase them. She said that she later questioned the existence of a waiver after the supervisory park ranger told her not to tell rangers at other parks that they had fully automatic rifles or to discuss the rifles around MNP management. She carried her rifle while on patrol at MNP until the new chief ranger arrived in October 2013 and ordered that all of the rifles be converted to semi-automatic.

When we interviewed the retired chief ranger who was chief ranger at MNP from January 2011 until January 2013, he told us that the Colt M-4 rifles were already in the inventory at MNP when he arrived there in 2011. He said that he was not aware that the M-4 rifles were fully automatic, and he could not remember having any discussions with anyone at MNP about the fully automatic weapons. He also did not remember shooting any of the M-4 rifles while he was chief ranger.

We interviewed an employee of Colt's Manufacturing Company, who said that between 2008 and 2010 she was the Colt representative that NPS employees contacted to purchase the M-4 rifles. She could not recall whom she had spoken with or the details of the conversation, but she did remember making sure that they understood the weapon they were purchasing was a fully automatic rifle.

Our investigation determined that in 2014, the price of a fully automatic Colt M-4 rifle is approximately \$216 more than the Colt M-4 semi-automatic rifle.

Coordination of Rifle Purchases With FLETC

Because NPS policy requires that firearms purchases be coordinated through FLETC officials, we interviewed the NPS firearms program manager who is stationed at FLETC. She told us that she does not provide oversight for NPS employees, including the park rangers at the individual parks, but that once a year she selects one large park or several smaller parks within a geographical area to conduct a “hands-on” weapons inspection. She told us that during these inspections she conducts a full inventory and reviews security measures, controls, and maintenance for weapons at the park. She said that she also looks for weapons that were not authorized in accordance with NPS policy. She said that she had not conducted an inspection at MNP since she took the program manager position at FLETC in 2006, and her records indicated that no inspections had been conducted at MNP since at least 2002.

She said that per NPS policy, parks are required to send her the specifications of any rifle or shotgun proposed for purchase, and she ensures that the weapon complies with the policy. For rifles, she ensures that the selected model is a .223 semi-automatic, gas operated instead of piston operated, with a 14.5-inch barrel. She said that once she approves the weapon, the park purchases it with its own funds and she is no longer involved in the process. She said that if a park asks to purchase a weapon that does not comply with NPS policy, such as a fully automatic rifle, the request would be sent from the chief ranger at the park through the regional chief ranger and to the DCOP for a waiver. She said that a waiver, if granted, would be in writing and would identify the specific weapon and explain why it is needed at that park. No one from MNP contacted her prior to the purchase of the Colt M-4 rifles.

She said that she first learned that the park rangers at MNP had purchased fully automatic rifles in June 2014, when the chief ranger contacted her to ask about it. She said that MNP had not requested or received a waiver to purchase the fully automatic rifles. She said that the two Colt models she routinely receives requests for are Models LE6920 and LE6940, both of which are semi-automatic rifles. She knew of no parks in NPS, other than MNP, that had purchased fully automatic rifles. She was not aware of any park within NPS that had a waiver to carry fully automatic rifles and did not believe that NPS would approve such a waiver. She said that some parks had waivers to allow patrol rangers and Special Event and Tactical Teams to carry a rifle that fired three-round bursts, but that MNP was not one of those parks.

She said that she believed that law enforcement rangers at NPS parks routinely bought new rifles and shotguns without notifying her as required in NPS policy. She said that park personnel are probably not aware of the requirement because only one sentence in the policy addresses it.

She also said that the policy does not require parks to purchase any specific brand or model of rifle; any rifle that is a .223 semi-automatic with a 14.5-inch barrel and meets the mil-spec requirements would be acceptable. She said that she does not consider the mil-spec criteria when reviewing the rifle specifications because most manufacturers do not have “mil-spec” as a part of their written specifications. She said that mil-spec is hard to define and confusing to understand and could be interpreted differently depending on the individual.

Installation of Semi-Automatic Selector Switches

During our initial interview with the supervisory park ranger, he told us that he was “shocked” when the rifles arrived at MNP capable of firing fully automatic. He explained that in his previous experience in the 1990s, when new rifles were purchased they did not arrive capable of firing fully automatic because the selector switches had been changed at the factory to place the rifles permanently in semi-automatic mode. He said that once he became aware that MNP had received fully automatic rifles and determined that NPS policy prohibited them, he informed the park ranger/armorer, the second park ranger we interviewed, and the then-chief ranger. According to the supervisory park ranger, the then-chief ranger told him to obtain the parts required to convert the new rifles to semi-automatic so they would comply with the policy. Our investigation determined that the semi-automatic selector switches cost about \$21 apiece.

The supervisory park ranger told us that MNP had placed two separate orders for the Colt M-4 Model R0977, with each order containing four to six rifles. He said that about 6 months after the first order was delivered, MNP purchased semi-automatic selector switches and converted that set of rifles to fire only in semi-automatic mode. He told us that he attempted to obtain approval to purchase selector switches for the remaining rifles from the deputy superintendent but was told that funds were not available. The supervisory park ranger said that the remaining rifles were not converted to semi-automatic until December 2013, after the new chief ranger arrived.

During a follow-up interview, the supervisory park ranger acknowledged that he withheld information during his initial interview and that his requests to the deputy superintendent to purchase semi-automatic selector switches for the rifles were always part of a larger list of items that he was requesting. The supervisory park ranger acknowledged that he did not inform the deputy superintendent of the importance of procuring new selector switches or that the rifles being carried by MNP rangers violated NPS policy. The supervisory park ranger said that he did not consider asking the park superintendent to buy the semi-automatic selector switches, because purchasing the selector switches was “not one of his priorities.” The supervisory park ranger told us that the rangers had a “new toy” and he was “not in any hurry” to get the new rifles converted to semi-automatic to comply with NPS policy.

He acknowledged that he should not have ordered the rifles and, once they had arrived, he should have converted them to semi-automatic immediately. He said that he “failed as a supervisor” by not making the conversion of the rifles a higher priority, and he acknowledged that the purchase of the fully automatic rifles was a “bad decision.”

The park ranger/armorer told us that he researched the Colt M-4 fully automatic Model R0977 and the semi-automatic Model LE6920 to determine which one could best replace the M-16 rifles at MNP. He told us that the process involved contacting Colt and requesting price quotes for both models. He said that when the rifles arrived at MNP, he prepared a weapons log for each rifle, which documented that a semi-automatic selector switch was needed. He said that as soon as the new rifles arrived, he told the supervisory park ranger that it was critical to purchase and install semi-automatic selector switches so the rifles would comply with NPS policy. The park ranger/armorer said that he had to tell the supervisory park ranger several times that new selector switches were needed, and the response from the supervisory park ranger was that funds were

not available to purchase the switches. The park ranger/armorer told us that beyond mentioning it to the supervisory park ranger, he took no other action to obtain the selector switches.

The park ranger/armorer also told us that after carrying his new rifle on patrol for a few weeks, he removed the original selector switch and installed a personally owned semi-automatic selector switch to make the rifle comply with policy. He was worried about carrying a fully automatic rifle and the consequences if he were part of an “officer-involved shooting.” The NPS firearms program manager at FLETC told us that NPS policy prohibits employees from putting parts from personally owned weapons on U.S. Government-owned weapons and vice versa. She was not sure whether this is written in NPS policy, but thought it was “automatically assumed.”

The park ranger/armorer told us that after installing the switch, he carried the rifle in semi-automatic mode while on patrol, but when he went to the range he put the original selector switch back in so he could fire the rifle in fully automatic mode. He could not remember the details about the purchase of the semi-automatic selector switches, but a few years passed before they were ordered. He told us that he did not change the selector switches of any of the other M-4 rifles; he thought that the second park ranger we interviewed had changed them.

According to the second park ranger, shortly after the rifles arrived, he learned that some had been converted to semi-automatic to comply with NPS policy. He told us that those converted rifles were issued to the seasonal park rangers at MNP, but he did not know the rangers’ names.

He said that permanent rangers at MNP were issued fully automatic rifles and they carried them on patrol, but he could not remember how long they carried them. He told us that later he ordered new semi-automatic selector switches and converted all of the remaining M-4s to fire only in semi-automatic mode.

The deputy superintendent told us that he first became aware that the rifles were fully automatic in 2013. He recalled hearing about it from the chief ranger, and shortly thereafter he learned that the supervisory park ranger needed to purchase parts to convert the rifles from fully automatic to semi-automatic. The deputy superintendent explained that he had received requests for weapons parts from the supervisory park ranger, but he was never told that the parts were needed to correct a policy violation and to convert fully automatic rifles to semi-automatic. The deputy superintendent told us that if he had known the rifles violated NPS policy, he would have immediately purchased the parts required to convert them.

Use on Patrol and at the Range

The supervisory park ranger told us that in the interest of “officer safety” he allowed fulltime park rangers at MNP to carry the fully automatic rifles with them in their patrol vehicles. He said that it was the “lesser of two evils,” as his choices were either to have them continue to carry the unreliable M-16s or to violate the policy and allow them to carry the new fully automatic M-4s.

According to the supervisory park ranger, he told all the rangers to fire the new rifles in fully automatic mode at the range to familiarize themselves with the rifles. He said that he told the rangers not to tell anyone that they were carrying fully automatic rifles. He was concerned that

using the rifles at the range would reveal that the rifles were fully automatic. He acknowledged that he did not tell any of the chief rangers that MNP park rangers were carrying fully automatic rifles.

During our interview with a fourth MNP park ranger, she recalled that when she took her new Colt M-4 rifle to the range to qualify, she noticed that it appeared to be able to fire fully automatic because of the movement of the safety selector switch. She said that the rifle was issued to her by either the supervisory park ranger or the park ranger/armorer. According to the park ranger, during a conversation with the supervisory park ranger she mentioned that the rifles appeared to be capable of firing fully automatic. She said that he did not appear to be surprised.

The fourth park ranger also told us that she had heard that the supervisory park ranger claimed to have received approval for the procurement of fully automatic rifles. He told her not to shoot the rifle when the chief ranger was around and not to tell anyone about it. She said that at the time she did not know why the supervisory park ranger told her not to do these things.

She also said that park rangers continued to qualify with the rifles twice a year for the next few years, occasionally firing the rifles in fully automatic mode at the range. She was aware of the policy violation but did not discuss it with the supervisory park ranger; she told us that she did not feel comfortable discussing the matter with him for fear of reprisal.

CTS Model 7290 Flash-Bang Distraction Devices

During our investigation, we determined that the supervisory park ranger purchased 24 CTS Model 7290 flash-bang distraction devices on his Government-issued purchase card in 2012.

On June 26, 2014, we took the devices as evidence. They were released to an LESES supervisor for storage in his evidence storage room at the NPS Investigative Services Building in Boulder City, NV.

The chief ranger said that he learned there were flash-bang distraction devices at MNP around May 2014, but he could not recall who told him. When he asked about the devices, the supervisory park ranger told him that he had received approval for the devices from the former chief ranger. According to the chief ranger, the supervisory park ranger said that a law enforcement specialist for the NPS Pacific West Region (now retired) also approved the devices. The chief ranger said that the supervisory park ranger told him that none of the devices had been issued to park rangers because he was waiting for a standard operating procedure (SOP) to be completed and approved. The chief ranger was not aware of any flash-bang distraction devices being issued to or carried by any of the park rangers.

The chief ranger said that he contacted the DCOP, who checked office records and did not find an authorization for MNP to have a flash-bang distraction device program. The chief ranger said that the supervisory park ranger was not truthful with him when he said that MNP was authorized to have such a program.

The former chief ranger told us that it had been 2 to 3 years since the purchase of the distraction devices and he could not remember in detail what conversations took place or what led to the purchase. He said that it was possible that he approved the purchase, but he could not recall. He never saw any of the devices that were purchased.

Regarding the supervisory park ranger's purchase authority, an MNP administrative officer told us that he was issued a Government purchase card with a purchase threshold of \$3,000. The administrative officer said that the supervisory park ranger could make purchases as long as they were approved by the chief ranger. She also said that if he needed to make a purchase above his \$3,000 threshold, he would still need approval from the chief ranger, after which he could then go directly to the contracting officer, who would make the purchase as long as funds were available in the law enforcement account.

The administrative officer recalled that one year the supervisory park ranger was "kind of spending blindly" with his purchase card and had overspent the law enforcement account by several thousand dollars. She did not remember what he had purchased; she was more concerned with the dollar amount balances on the account. She remembered that because of his overspending, the former chief ranger restricted his purchasing privileges, but she could not provide any more detail about the restriction. The former chief ranger confirmed that because the supervisory park ranger routinely made purchases without his permission, at one point he prohibited the supervisory park ranger from using his Government purchase card without first coming to him for approval.

The fourth park ranger we interviewed recalled overhearing conversations between the supervisory park ranger and other park rangers in which they discussed purchasing flash-bang distraction devices as part of a program designed to allow rangers to escape ambushes. The park ranger recalled seeing the devices in July or August of 2013, stored in cardboard boxes inside a closet in the back room of the supervisory park ranger's office at MNP. The park ranger did not know when the devices were purchased, how they were purchased, or who purchased them.

The park ranger/armorer told us that he had completed the FBI's Basic Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) course and the flash-bang instructors' course. He said that the recommendation to purchase flash-bang distraction devices was "probably" his idea, which the supervisory park ranger agreed with and then tasked him to draft an SOP on their use. The park ranger/armorer said that the supervisory park ranger later told him that he had obtained approval from the then-chief ranger to purchase the devices and had spoken with the law enforcement specialist for the Pacific West Region, who said that nothing in NPS policy prohibited the purchase. The park ranger/armorer did not believe that NPS policy specifically addressed the use of flash-bang distraction devices.

The park ranger/armorer also told us that once the devices had been procured, they were secured in a safe in the supervisory park ranger's office. He told us that he prepared a draft SOP and provided it to the supervisory park ranger, but he did not know what the supervisory park ranger did with the document. He said that he was not aware of the devices being issued to any of the rangers and as far as he knew, they remained secured in the supervisory park ranger's office.

When we interviewed the supervisory park ranger, he told us that sometime after NPS Park Ranger Margaret Anderson was killed at Mount Rainier National Park in 2012, he and his subordinate rangers at MNP were discussing different law enforcement scenarios that they might encounter while on duty, and he felt there was a need to purchase flash-bang distraction devices. The supervisory park ranger said that he spoke with the then-chief ranger, who authorized the purchase of the devices. He told us that the then-chief ranger directed him to contact the Pacific West Region office to see what they had to say about the purchase and use of such devices. He said that he spoke with the law enforcement specialist, who told him that the devices were not prohibited by policy and recommended that the MNP rangers obtain training on use of the devices and develop an SOP. The supervisory park ranger said that he purchased the devices from LC Action Police Supply at a cost of \$1,038.

The law enforcement specialist recalled speaking briefly with the supervisory park ranger sometime in 2012 about the purchase and use of flash-bang distraction devices by NPS park rangers. The law enforcement specialist said that he told the supervisory park ranger that NPS policy prohibited rangers at local parks from carrying the devices while on duty. The law enforcement specialist said that he knew that Special Events and Tactical Teams could carry the devices, but he did not believe that they were appropriate for rangers patrolling in the parks.

The NPS firearms program manager said that NPS policy does not address flash-bang distraction devices. She was not aware of any other NPS parks that had purchased the devices. She said that if the rangers at a park wanted to purchase them, they were required to obtain approval from the DCOP.

The second park ranger we interviewed said that he was aware that flash-bang distraction devices had been purchased for the law enforcement rangers at MNP sometime after Anderson was killed in 2012. He told us that he was not aware of any NPS policy that prohibited the devices. He was not involved in the decision to purchase flash-bang distraction devices at MNP, but thought that the supervisory park ranger was, and that the supervisory park ranger had obtained approval from the then-chief ranger.

The park ranger also told us that MNP did not conduct any training on the devices, and as far as he was aware, the devices were never issued to any of the rangers or taken on patrol.

The third park ranger we interviewed said that the supervisory park ranger wanted to purchase flash-bang distraction devices for MNP. She said that she “kind of knew that one wasn’t legit” because at one point the supervisory park ranger commented that he did not know how he was able to convince the then-chief ranger to approve the purchase.

She also told us that the supervisory park ranger tried to obtain approval for the park rangers to carry the devices in their patrol vehicles. She recalled a staff meeting where another park ranger and the supervisory park ranger had an argument about the devices, in which the supervisory park ranger told the park ranger that it was mandatory to carry them in patrol vehicles. The park ranger said that she and the other park ranger refused to carry the devices in their patrol vehicles.

Supervisory Park Ranger's Truthfulness and Candor

The supervisory park ranger provided inconsistent accounts to OIG agents in separate interviews and made statements that contradicted the narratives of other interviewees. For example, according to the chief ranger, the supervisory park ranger told him that MNP had not ordered fully automatic rifles, but they arrived from the manufacturer with that capability. In contrast, the supervisory park ranger later admitted to OIG agents that he knowingly violated NPS policy by ordering the fully automatic rifles. He claimed, however, that he was “shocked” that the manufacturer actually sent the fully automatic version he had ordered because he thought the manufacturer would reject or correct the order as being out of compliance with NPS policy.

Moreover, the supervisory park ranger first told us that he did not research which rifle model to purchase for the rangers; he “just facilitated” transferring the rifle selection information he received from the park ranger/armorer to the then-chief ranger. The supervisory park ranger said that he did not provide any input concerning which model was chosen and that he did not know the Model R0977 was a fully automatic rifle until he was issued one. He said that he was “shocked” when the rifles arrived at MNP capable of firing fully automatic. In a follow-up interview he later admitted, however, that he assisted the park ranger/armorer with the selection of the fully automatic rifle after researching different rifle models made by Colt and other manufacturers. He also knew that the rifles would arrive at MNP capable of fully automatic fire.

The supervisory park ranger initially told us that he attempted to obtain approval to purchase semi-automatic selector switches for some of the fully automatic rifles from the deputy superintendent, but was told that funds were not available. He later told us that the selector switches were always part of a larger list of items that he was requesting and he did not inform the deputy superintendent of the importance of procuring new selector switches or that the rifles being carried by MNP rangers violated NPS policy.

Regarding the purchase of flash-bang distraction devices, the chief ranger told us that the supervisory park ranger said that MNP was authorized to have a program for the devices. The chief ranger subsequently contacted the DCOP, who did not find an authorization for MNP to have such a program.

The chief ranger and the park ranger/armorer both told us that the supervisory park ranger claimed that the law enforcement specialist had told him that NPS policy did not prohibit the purchase of flash-bang distraction devices. When we interviewed the law enforcement specialist, however, he said that he told the supervisory park ranger that NPS policy does prohibit rangers at local parks from carrying the devices while on duty.

Another example of contradictory statements relates to a story that surfaced during our investigation. An MNP IT specialist told us that in 2013 one of the park rangers invited him to go shooting with him. The IT specialist said that he had heard rumors that the MNP rangers had fully automatic weapons, but it was not until he actually fired the rifle that he knew it was true. He heard later that the fully automatic weapons violated NPS policy. He provided a video from his cell phone of him shooting the fully automatic rifle.

The park ranger told us that he asked the supervisory park ranger whether he could take the IT specialist to the range to shoot. According to the park ranger, taking the IT specialist to the range would improve the relationship between the rangers and other MNP employees. The park ranger said that the supervisory park ranger approved his request and that he converted his M-4 to fire in fully automatic mode, allowing the IT specialist to fire the rifle in fully automatic mode at the range. He also allowed the IT specialist to shoot his Government-issued .308 rifle and shotgun.

The supervisory park ranger, however, denied that he allowed anyone other than the park rangers at MNP to shoot the fully automatic rifles. He said that he knew that the park ranger had allowed the IT specialist to fire one of the new rifles in fully automatic mode at the range, but he was not present when that occurred. The supervisory park ranger said that he felt that the park ranger should not have allowed the IT specialist to shoot the rifle since the park ranger was not a firearms instructor.

SUBJECTS

1. Supervisory Park Ranger, MNP, NPS.
2. Park Ranger and Armorer, MNP, NPS.

DISPOSITION

We provided this report to the Director of NPS for appropriate action.

During our investigation, we developed concerns over the control and approval of purchasing controversial and aggressive law enforcement equipment without significant controls, policies, oversight, and justification. We issued a management advisory to the NPS Director with four recommendations to help NPS put in place policy and procedures for control and oversight of the purchase of tactical law enforcement equipment. NPS responded that it generally agrees with our recommendations and has taken action to strengthen policies and controls governing equipment purchases.