

# Video Rangers

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*A proposal to the Parks Council to train youngsters to produce video interpretations of New York City Parks*

## **Long-Range Objective**

The long-range objective of this proposal is to create a sustainable Corps of Video Rangers for the public lands of New York City which would be modeled on the Park Rangers. In Frederick Law Olmsted's original conception of park rangers, their role was to educate the public to fully appreciate the land it owns in common. The Video Rangers would be trained to fulfill this role using the technology of television in a systematic way. Systematic use of television technology would include continuous, quality programming on a city-wide television channel dedicated to the ecology.

A special training program for city youth will be the basis for the Corps of Video Rangers. It will train them to be ecological videomakers for the city's public lands. The program will be replicable across the United States, not just for publicly owned city lands but also for state and federal lands. Ecological videomakers are people skilled in video production techniques proper to understanding and communicating about the ecology.

Besides job training, a major intent of the program is to provide a relatively small, elite corps of teenagers with the opportunity to take on a distinct identity that can become a source of pride and self-respect. The training would set up ongoing video production teams of three members. The teams would function like basketball teams. An on-site adult would function as the

coordinator/coach. In some ways, training would be analogous to sports training with its routines and esprit de corps.

## **Immediate Objective**

The immediate objective of this proposal is to gain support for a pilot training program. This pilot training could be organized in cooperation with some existing program or programs. Possible cooperative programs include:

- Coordinating the Video Rangers with the Natural Resource Group's "Adopt-a-Park" Program for Schools.
- Finding ways to link the Video Rangers with the NYC Public Schools.
- Developing a training program that combines the Parks Department's Summer Youth Employment Program with year-round part-time employment for high school students.
- Adapting the training of Park Rangers to the training of Video Rangers.
- Developing a training program that would teach Civilian Volunteer Corps members to be Video Rangers.
- Developing the Video Rangers in cooperation with scout explorer units and similar existing programs.

## **Training Programs**

The purpose of the Video Rangers is to produce videotapes about the ecology of public lands, for the people of New York City, so we can understand and respect the city's ecology. The training program will be based on a simple cycle that reflects this purpose:

1. Training in video techniques.
2. Instruction in ecology.
3. Videotaping the ecology.
4. Editing the video.
5. Showing the video to an audience.

This five-part cycle is flexible. Depending on the final program configuration, this cycle will be repeated on a daily, weekly, or weekend combined-with-after-school basis. Perhaps extended day or work-study programs could be used. Summer programs are also a possibility. For instance, a summer segment could be an intensive three weeks at a sleep-over camp with the cycle repeated each day. Or the summer segment could be a day camp arrangement for eight weeks with the cycle being repeated on a weekly basis.

This cycle will be repeated with appropriate elaborations. For example, showing the tape to an audience will be elaborated into methods for showing the same tape to different audiences and developing a consensus of interpretation among the different audiences.

Video techniques that will be taught include:

1. Moves from T'ai Chi Tuan adapted for handheld camerawork.
2. Learning to work in production teams of three.
3. Learning how to monitor an ecosystem.
4. Learning how to see patterns in nature with a camera.
5. Learning to edit landscape video.
6. Learning how to use video to facilitate consensus.

After the initial training period, each team of three Video Rangers will be able to produce at least a half-hour program each week. The cycle of videotaping, editing and showing expands into a coherent cycle of ten different sorts of programming. After initial training, the Rangers will produce weekly programming in accord with these ten different sorts of programming. Over the course of a year, each of the four seasons will see one tenfold cycle of programming.

Examples of the ten different sorts of programming are:

1. Bulletins that inform community television viewers of live events they may want to get involved with: viewing the migration of ducks, the turning of the leaves, hikes sponsored by various groups, etc.
2. Doing a line-of-sight study of a section of New York City coastline. Natural sound.
3. Time-lapse studies of the changing tides.
4. A study of the leaves changing color accompanied by local musicians.
5. Shows for community television based on the education programs of nature centers.
6. Shows that are a fair presentation of the position of different groups arguing over an environmental issue.
7. Collection and presentation of information about the ecology, to the community at large, that may help resolve an issue.
8. Production of programs that monitor the ongoing ecosystem of New York City.
9. Development of programming that supports long-term policy decisions about the ecosystem of New York City. Includes quality programming on ecology obtained from independent producers.

10. Development of programs that document and encourage practices that help insure the viability of New York City's ecosystem.

Each team of three Video Rangers will produce twenty hours of video each year. The nature of the tape will often be such that it bears repeating over a television channel. For example, line-of-sight video study of the coastline of New York City could be shown cumulatively over the years.

The ecochannel is not designed to compete with prime-time television but to be a window on the ecology, an ongoing scanning of the ecosystem. The expectation is that some people will have a second television tuned in to the ecochannel, like a painting on the wall, allowing them to monitor ecological events shown without voice over. When ecological issues heat up, the ecochannel will be there with reliable information and ways for citizens to get involved.

## **Video Rangers and the Community**

While video is not a panacea for ecological problems and a pilot training program cannot be expected to produce wonders, the Video Rangers would fulfill a definite role for the community as it struggles to make ecological decisions. The Rangers role will be to use video to monitor the ecology of public lands for public education and to use video to facilitate consensus about its optimum use. They will offer a communications medium that does not exclude the validity of anyone's perception of public lands and works toward consensus in decision-making.