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PM MDT

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Subject: Fw: Winston-Salem editorial

Rebecca, fyi. --b

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Nash/DENVER/NPS) itc.nps.gov Subject: Winston-Salem editorial

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Winston-Salem (NC) Journal
Tuesday, September 21, 2004
Seashore Safety

Visitors to National Park Service facilities on the Outer Banks had better not count on the federal government to assure their safety this fall. The Cape Hatteras National Seashore, the Fort Raleigh National Historic Site and the Wright Brothers National Memorial are operating with about half of the ranger protection that they require and with almost no lifeguards.

The park service has cut to 13 the number of rangers assigned to the three parks, according to a recently released report by the U.S. Park Police that was described in The Virginian Pilot newspaper. Lifeguards are assigned to only one beach.

Although the summer season is over, this kind of cost cutting is nothing short of government malpractice. To save a few hundred thousand dollars, in a year when the deficit has been allowed to balloon to more than \$400 billion, the federal government has put in danger not only the lives of visitors to the parks but also wildlife. In addition, there is hardly enough of a police presence at the sites to protect against vandalism and poaching.

The 2004 budget for the facilities is \$1.5 million, the newspaper reported. The facilities could have their full complement of 25 rangers with a \$2.3 million budget. North Carolinians have to wonder how the federal government can put their lives, and the enormous environmental value of the parks, at risk for such a small savings.

The 13 full-time rangers must patrol 31,261 acres, 90 miles of roads, 18 miles of trails and 155 miles of park boundaries. The budget-cut survivors are stretched thinner than were the Alamo defenders. The rangers have had to eliminate night patrols, which leaves beaches and marshes unprotected.

The areas get some small measure of police protection because local authorities help. But those authorities cannot charge anyone with a federal offense. Only rangers may do that.

Along the seashore, the federal government doesn't have the resources to provide for lifeguards at the four Hatteras Island beaches. There is still a lifeguard on Ocracoke Island. But who knows how long it will be before some advocate of less domestic spending doesn't determine that even one lifeguard is too many?

The national seashore facilities along North Carolina's coast are some of this nation's

most beautiful places. Tourists and locals alike flock to them. It is outright foolish and irresponsible not to have a sufficient number of rangers on duty to both protect the visitors and the facilities. But that is what passes for good government at a time when the federal deficit is what it is.

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