

Park run-in angers resident

Says ranger harassed her

By Adam Cooper

Staff Reporter

ANDERSON TWP. — Recent allegations of menacing and harassment against Anderson Township park rangers leave officials defending the tough task of keeping parks clean.



McClure

Although no formal complaints have been

made, resident Angela Connolly is claiming she was harassed and threatened by an off-duty ranger April 3 at the Beech Acres Park on Salem Road.

In a letter to Molly McClure, executive director of the Anderson Park District, Connolly described a situation in which “an aggressive and angry man” in plain clothes confronted her about cleaning up her dog’s waste.

According to Connolly, she thought the confrontation was enough to threaten her safety, so she walked away from the man rather than cleaning up the waste. It wasn’t until Connolly received a \$100 citation 10 minutes later that

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she learned the man was off-duty park ranger Capt. Skip Berger.

Connolly maintains that it was always her intention to clean up after her dog, but her conflict with Berger began before she could find the park's nearest pet station, which provides materials needed for cleaning pet waste.

"Due to this man's aggressive and angry behavior, I thought it was in my best interest and safety to put distance between us," Connolly said in her letter to McClure, explaining why she did not go to the nearest station right away to clean up after her dog. She said she may have reacted differently had she known Berger was a park ranger.

"Not once did Capt. Berger identify himself as a park ranger," Connolly wrote.

McClure is investigating the situation and is planning a meeting with the president of the park board Nadine Gelter. Prior to any fact finding investigation, McClure is reluctant to comment on Connolly's allegations, but she does note that "we have had a significant problem with dog waste in our parks and it is something to take seriously, because our citizens ask us to."

According to McClure, Berger said he did identify himself to Connolly. McClure said Berger would not be made available for comment.

Although McClure said the parks department has received calls on situations involving Berger and other rangers in the past, she said it's hard for people to be told what to do.

"People don't understand that these are armed peace officers with the same training as police officers," McClure said of the rangers.

In 2004, Anderson Park District spent \$975 to post dog signs in the parks, \$2,200 on dispensers and doggie stations at 12 different parks, and almost \$3,800 on bags provided to patrons, McClure said.

"We see a lot of patrons self policing," McClure said. "A lot of the park users are helping each other out."

Regardless of Connolly's intent to clean up after her dog, she says she will plead not guilty at her hearing April 18, claiming her non-compliance was due to the threatening nature of her confrontation with Berger.

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