

# Gorge Stewards Safety Issues Meeting

## Notes

Panelists at the meeting

- Sharon Lubinski – 3<sup>rd</sup> Precinct Commander, Minneapolis Police Department
- Tom Thompson – Community Crime Prevention Specialist, Minneapolis Police Department
- John Mills – Police Officer - Community Crime Prevention (CCP), Minneapolis Police Department
- Thea Evans – Community Connections Organizer, Longfellow Community Council
- Brian Rodgers – Minneapolis Park Police Department

**Question:** How big of an issue is safety in the gorge?

Response from Sharon Lubinski: It is the responsibility of park police to respond to calls in the gorge. If they are unable to respond, the Minneapolis Police will take the call. Therefore, Minneapolis Police must be on top of all crime in the precinct. Police do not receive a lot of reports from the gorge, especially not of a violent nature. Mainly reports of homeless people living there and graffiti. The gorge is generally a safe area and reports of criminal activity are minimal.

### **Issues Discussed:**

#### Homelessness

Tom Thompson: A lot of people have been living by the river – they are not necessarily bad people, they just want to live down there. It is a lifestyle they have chosen in most cases. The Community Crime Prevention team for the neighborhood (Tom Thompson and Officer John Mills) knows these people by name for the most part. Many are Native American males. Often times it is those people with the most serious mental illness that choose to isolate themselves by living in the gorge. Many also suffer from alcoholism. Staff from People Inc. tries to help these people by bringing them handbooks listing local shelters, hours, and ways they can get back on their feet. Other people who want to help out have been providing them with clothes and food. This poses a dilemma about whether we are really helping them or just giving them more reason to stay there. Reports of people living by the river should be made to the Minneapolis Police so that CCP can identify them and be aware of who is down there. Sharon Lubinski understands feeling compassion for them. The people who live by the river are more vulnerable to crimes, rape and murder. On top of that, they are less likely to report any crimes if they are victimized.

The legality of the situation is that it is illegal to be on parkland after 10:00 p.m.

The protocol for getting homeless people re-situated or to a shelter is for the police first to tell them to leave. The police then go back and help them to remove their stuff and connect them with a shelter. Usually the people refuse any offers of help, but in these cases they are not arrested.

Many residents of the gorge neighborhoods use the parkland and trails along the river as a wilderness place and like the serenity of being in a natural area. To some, homeless people and their encampments are viewed as a disruption to this wilderness place. The trash and refuse left behind can be unsightly and hard to deal with. Tom Thompson strongly recommends wearing gloves when picking up any trash. Disease among homeless people is common and can be very widespread. There's no doubt that the encampments generate a lot

of trash, which usually accumulates over the winter. It is these unsightly and unsanitary locations which receive the most reports. Volunteer crews from Sentence to Serve and some civic organizations have done clean-ups, which can help to dissuade people from staying down there.

### Graffiti

Tom Thompson: There are two types of graffiti – tagging and gang signage. Tagging is done by street artists who just want to leave their mark or their name on something. Gang signage is obviously that to be more aware of and can be identified by emblems of crowns, pitchforks, VL, or SUR13. Most graffiti seen in the gorge is done by kids just for fun and is not of a threatening nature. They just want their name or art posted somewhere.

All graffiti should be reported to the Minneapolis Graffiti Hotline or through the internet. Once reports are made, Community Service Officers take digital pictures of the graffiti to be added to a database. Citizens can do this as well and send them to their local Community Crime Prevention team. The Police Department has a top 10 list of the most frequent tags or signs.

### Bicycle Jumps and Dirt Bikes on parkland

Brian Rodgers: There is a catch-all law for parkland, which says that the area can only be used for its designed purpose. There is an \$85 fine for using bikes on parkland. Bikes are only permitted on the paved boulevard trails of the gorge and can not be used on the more “natural” trails.

Bicycle jumps have been reported and subsequently removed from the gorge near Ford Parkway. The removal ended up sending the bikers north to 44<sup>th</sup> Street, where another jump was built. Any use of bike jumps should be reported directly to Park Police or 911.

Showing community support against bike use on the gorge trails helps to promote the use of parkland as a natural area. Putting out the word will help to discourage bike jumps and destruction of parkland from continuing.

### Partying

Many people use the river gorge as a place to drink and party. As mentioned above, it is illegal for anyone to be on parkland after 10 p.m. Parties can be discouraged by removing fire rings from party sites, making it known that the area is being watched. Garbage left behind from parties is another frustration. There is question about having garbage cans placed near the river. It is difficult to have them emptied and often times garbage cans end up encouraging more trash.

Helpful Information for being more vigilant of crime in the gorge:

- Residents can sign up to receive email updates of crime reports and alerts. Contact Tom Thompson, Community Crime Prevention Specialist, by email for more information – [thomas.thompson@ci.minneapolis.mn.us](mailto:thomas.thompson@ci.minneapolis.mn.us).
- Reports of graffiti can be made to the hotline at 612-673-2090
- Park Police can be contacted by calling 612-370-4777
- Always call 911 if there is an immediate threat.