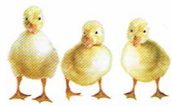


# New from NAI's InterPress

## Coaching Interpreters

MARGARET STYLES REPATH



Performing the role of a coach for interpreters is more than just knowing about interpretation theory and skills. It is about understanding relationships, supporting the agenda of those being coached, listening for cues, and being an accountability partner. Based on more than 200 hours of coaching tour guides and interpreters, this is the first book to provide the profession of interpretation with a precise understanding of what it takes to coach others in a way that will enhance interpretation skills and, ultimately, the audience experience.

Available in print on Amazon. \$12

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR  
INTERPRETATION

## Combating **RANGER DRIFT**

"Fireweed is a nitrogen-fixing plant." This line was handed down to me as a brand-new ranger at Glacier Bay National Park many years ago. I repeated it, along with all sorts of other wisdom, all summer to visitors on board cruise ships and at the visitor center.



JULIA PINNIX

But it was false.

At the beginning of my second season, having learned a good bit more about pioneer species colonizing the land left bare by retreating glaciers, I thought, "Fireweed isn't a legume like so many other nitrogen-fixing species I know about. Hmm..." I started researching fireweed, looking for evidence.

Plants can't actually convert the nitrogen of the atmosphere into usable form: That is done by bacteria, housed in swellings in the roots of host plants. I dug up lupine and alder, both nitrogen-fixing-bacteria hosts, and found the telltale nodules on the roots. I dug up fireweed and found none.

I concluded that I was a victim of Ranger Drift. Ranger Drift happens when people repeat information they got from other rangers without double checking the facts. It can

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Verify information you receive, even from trusted sources like experienced rangers. We are all fallible.

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also happen when you have repeated something so often that you start saying something inaccurate and don't catch yourself. The second form happened to me this year.

I was telling a couple of visitors that the salmon at the hatchery where I work have to pass five dams to reach the ocean. When they left, my new volunteer approached me. "Isn't it seven dams?" she asked. We went to the notebook I myself had compiled and verified that, yes, it was in fact seven dams! My brain just short-circuited.

It can happen to anyone. That's why it's critical to do two things: compile important information in a readily accessible format along with source links and citations, so you can refresh your memory; and verify

information you receive, even from trusted sources like experienced rangers. We are all fallible.

Sometimes information can change, too. I attended a ranger program at Mount Rainier National Park, and in the coaching session afterwards, told my employee she had made a mistake. "Pikas aren't related to rabbits," I said. "They're related to elephants and hyraxes." She pointed me to her sources.

Back when I was a young ranger, pikas were thought to be related to elephants. But more recent DNA work has revealed their true connection to lagomorphs (rabbits and hares). Mortified, I apologized for my Ranger Drift.

Ranger Drift can be a function of time (age!), change, or ignorance. Whether you're a new or an experienced interpreter, you should regularly review your baseline information, check your sources, challenge statements of fact that are unsupported (including your own), and avoid making assumptions. Whether you interpret science or history, going to the source is always a good idea.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Julia Pinnix is the Visitor Services Manager for the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Leavenworth Fisheries Complex in Washington State.*

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## Navigating the Waters of Interpretation



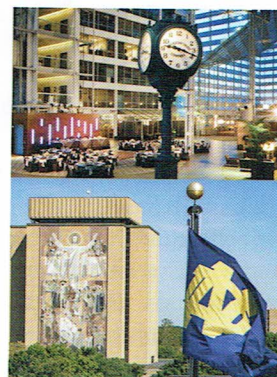
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