

May 20, 2009

Dear Representative:

We ask that you please vote “No” on Senator Coburn’s amendment to the Credit Cardholders’ Bill of Rights Act of 2009 (H.R.627) that would allow individuals to openly carry rifles, shotguns, and semi-automatic weapons in national parks if the firearm is in compliance with State law. If made law, individuals could attend ranger led hikes and educational programs with loaded rifles at Yellowstone National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, Flight 93 National Memorial, Gettysburg National Military Park, and other national park treasures.

The Coburn amendment is even more extreme than the regulation promulgated by the Bush Administration that was limited to loaded, concealed guns. National park rangers fear that allowing loaded guns (rifles, shotguns, handguns, or otherwise) increases the risk of opportunistic shooting of wildlife and vandalism of historic monuments, structures, and archaeological resources, as well as increase the risk of gun-related accidents.

In a letter sent to Secretary Kempthorne on April 3, 2008 seven former Directors of the National Park Service opposed changing the Reagan regulation, stating, “There is no evidence that any potential problems that one can imagine arising from the existing regulations might overwhelm the good they are known to do.” The American public also registered opposition to the Bush regulation: of the 140,000 people who voiced their positions on this issue during the comment period, 73 percent opposed the proposal.

Advocates for changing the existing Reagan-era regulation wrongly characterize it as prohibiting firearms in national parks. This is simply untrue. To the contrary, the regulation in effect since the early 1980s provides that: “unloaded weapons *may be possessed* within a temporary lodging or mechanical mode of conveyance when such implements are rendered inoperable or packed, cased or stored in a manner that will prevent their ready use.” (36 C.F.R. § 2.4, emphasis added)

Our national parks are extremely safe family destinations. In fact, according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report, there were only 1.65 violent crimes per 100,000 national park visitors in 2006--making national parks some of the safest places in the United States (compare this low rate to the national violent crime rate, estimated in 2005 at 469.2 victims per 100,000 citizens.)

Unlike other public lands, our National Parks were specifically set aside for conservation of resources for present and future generations. Thus, firearm rules that make sense for National Forests and Bureau of Land Management lands are not appropriate for national parks units. National parks are by definition special places whose management guidelines are set out in specific federal laws and regulations separate from those of other public lands.

America’s national parks are not state entities, but federal withdrawals that are managed in a public trust for all Americans in order to preserve our shared natural and historic national treasures. In the NPS Organic Act of 1916, Congress expressly provided the agency with the authority to issue regulations it deems necessary to protect parks in order to “conserve the

scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” We believe the existing regulation strikes a reasonable and appropriate balance between the rights of gun owners and the protection of park resources and visitors.

We hope you vote “No” on Senator Coburn’s amendment.

Sincerely,

Thomas C. Kiernan, President
National Parks Conservation Association

Bill Wade, Chair, Executive Council
Coalition of National Park Service Retirees

Scot McElveen, President
Association of National Park Rangers

John Waterman, President
U.S. Park Rangers Lodge, Fraternal Order of Police