

June 24, 2008

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne  
Secretary of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

**RE: Statement of Support for National Park Service's current firearm regulations 36 CFR 2.4 (a)(2)**

Dear Mr. Kempthorne:

The Pacific Region Advisory Council of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) was formed to support NPCA's efforts to protect and promote America's greatest treasures—our national parks. The 391 units of the national park system represent and preserve a wide diversity of our nation's cultural and natural treasures; they are the true cathedrals of our nation.

We are aware of a serious threat to our Parks, to the resources therein, and to those who protect them. Since the Reagan Administration, 36 CFR 2.4 provides that unloaded weapons transported through park units be rendered temporarily inoperable or be packed, cased and stored in a manner to prevent their immediate use. This regulation has served our parks and rangers well, and should not be changed.

There is a current movement to permit individuals to carry loaded weapons into our national parks. This is a grievous error. We urge you to maintain the current reasonable regulations to best protect our national treasures, park visitors, and park service employees. Do *not* allow visiting individuals to carry loaded weapons into our national parks.

In 1973 Ranger Ken Patrick stopped a poacher in Point Reyes National Seashore. The poacher had a loaded weapon and Ranger Patrick, or "Slim Patrick" as he was known in Grand Canyon National Park, became the first national park ranger killed in the line of duty, shot three times by the poacher. Tragically, since then, nine law enforcement park rangers and park police officers have been murdered by gunfire, including Park Ranger Christopher Eggle, shot and killed in Organ Pipe National Monument by a criminal passing through the park. Allowing loaded guns in the parks would likely increase the occurrence of these tragic events.

Many park units offer day-use and camping sites, where large numbers of people come to enjoy the outdoors in our most beautiful and historic places. People often bring alcohol. Allowing loaded guns under these circumstances dramatically increases the chances for bad spontaneous decisions, horrible accidents, and the opportunistic shooting of park wildlife.

The Reagan Administration's appropriate and reasonable regulation has allowed national park law enforcement rangers to cite individuals with loaded weapons in national park units. Enforcement has undoubtedly saved the lives of rangers and visitors, protected park resources, and reduced poaching of park wildlife. Revising the current regulation to permit loaded weapons will hamper the ability of national park rangers to ensure their safety and that of park visitors.

We acknowledge and support the right of citizens to possess weapons. Our national parks comprise less than 1% of our nation's land, and continuing to limit the manner in which individuals possess loaded weapons in these treasures would have minimal or no impact on that right. On the other hand, permitting individuals with loaded weapons in national parks would have a chilling effect on visitation like family camping, church group outings, and other events that take place in our national parks on a daily basis.

Our national parks are the safest places in the world. People come to our parks to escape the worries of daily living, to enjoy their families and friends, to learn our histories, and to experience our beautiful places with the understanding that these places are safe and secure. In particular, international visitors come with this expectation, flying thousands of miles and bringing millions of dollars into local economies, many in rural areas of our country. They come to observe undisturbed park wildlife like deer, elk, moose, bear, bison, and birds. Reducing international visitation by making parks less safe could impact the fragile economies of park gateway communities

We applaud your protection of parks and park resources. We strongly encourage you to keep the current rules intact and not overturn a regulation that has served us so well for so many years.

Sincerely,

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