

**Association of National
Park Rangers**
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**Coalition of National
Park Service Retirees**
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**U.S. Park Rangers
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P.O. Box 1481
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February 1, 2008

Dear Senator:

We respectfully request that you vote NO on an amendment (#3967) that Senator Tom Coburn will offer to S.2483. His amendment would prohibit the Secretary of Interior from enforcing regulations currently in place that require gun owners to have their guns unloaded and stored while visiting most units of the National Park System.

The current regulation simply does **not** prohibit guns in the parks as some people evidently believe. According to 36 CFR 2.4 (a)(2), weapons “*may be possessed*” so long as they are “rendered temporarily inoperable *or* are packed, cased *or* stored in a manner that will prevent their ready use.” This sensible regulation was put in place both to prevent the poaching of wildlife and to ensure visitor safety.

This amendment could hamper efforts by park rangers to halt poaching, a chronic problem in many national park units throughout the country that is growing because of an increase in the illegal international animal parts trade. According to the National Park Service, poaching “is suspected to be a factor in the decline of at least 29 species of wildlife and could cause the extirpation of 19 species from the parks.” The provisions contained within 36 CFR 2.4 have proven essential to law enforcement officers who patrol the boundaries of national parks looking for poachers who illegally take wildlife enjoyed by all people within the parks.

We do agree that the majority of gun owners coming into parks would never use their guns to illegally kill or injure wildlife. We also recognize that a small number of gun owners will illegally use their guns to kill or injure wildlife no matter what the regulations or laws concerning guns in parks are. Senator Coburn’s amendment will make it more difficult to apprehend these individuals because possession and display of a weapon would no longer be probable cause to initiate a search for evidence of wildlife or wildlife parts. We also believe that there are a significant number of gun owners that fall in the middle of the two groups mentioned above. They might be tempted into an illegal act if the right opportunity in parks presents itself. Often such illegal acts of opportunity require two elements—desirable wildlife to be present, and a readily-accessible, loaded firearm. When either of these two elements is removed from the equation it dramatically reduces the chances that park wildlife will be harmed.

In our view, Senator Coburn’s amendment will make poaching in parks even more prevalent than it already is, thus reducing the opportunity for children, families, and

Americans from all walks of life to easily view wildlife that so many parks provide. Moreover, wildlife will not remain easily viewable when it is being shot at. If easily-viewable wildlife becomes scarce in parks like Yellowstone, Great Smoky Mountains, Grand Canyon, Rocky Mountain, Katmai, Mount Rainier, and others it will have economic impacts on the gateway communities and local residents whose livelihoods depend in part or in whole on the visitors that come to see park wildlife.

Senator Coburn's amendment could dramatically degrade the experience of park visitors and put their safety at risk if units of the National Park System were compelled to follow state gun laws. For example, since Wyoming has limited gun restrictions, visitors could see persons with semi-automatic weapons attending campground programs, hiking down park trails or picnicking along park shorelines at Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. Moreover, many rangers can recite stories about incidents where the risk to other visitors – as well as to the ranger – would have been exacerbated if a gun had been readily-accessible. This amendment would compromise the safe atmosphere that is valued by Americans and expected by international tourists traveling to the United States.

There is simply no legitimate or substantive reason for a thoughtful sportsman or gun owner to carry a loaded gun in a national park unless that park permits hunting. The requirement that guns in parks are unloaded and put away is a reasonable and limited restriction to facilitate legitimate purposes—the protection of precious park resources and safety of visitors.

We urge you to protect park wildlife and visitors by voting “No” on Senator Coburn's amendment.

Sincerely,

/s/

Scot McElveen, President
Association of National Park Rangers

/s/

J. W. “Bill” Wade, Chair, Executive Council
Coalition of National Park Service Retirees

/s/

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

About the Association of National Park Rangers:

ANPR is the responsible and credible voice of National Park Service workers, and we are passionate about comprehensive protective stewardship of the national parks. We are dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of a vital National Park System and a vibrant National Park Service, and we defend and promote the stewardship of the vital natural, cultural and caretaker resources of the national parks through education, training, advocacy and public information. ANPR has 1,100 members.

About the Coalition of National Park Retirees:

The 640 members of the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees are all former employees of the National Park Service with a combined 19,000 years of stewardship of America's most significant natural and cultural resources. In their personal lives, CNPSR members reflect the broad spectrum of political affiliations. CNPSR members now strive to apply their experience, credibility and integrity as they speak out for national park and program solutions that uphold law and apply the results of sound scientific research. They also support the mission of the National Park Service through public education. The Coalition counts among its members: former National Park Service directors and deputy directors, regional directors, superintendents, rangers and other career professionals who devoted an average of nearly 30 years each to protecting and interpreting America's national parks on behalf of the public.

About the U.S. Park Rangers Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police:

The U.S. Park Rangers Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police was organized to protect and advance the professional needs of commissioned law enforcement rangers while providing the camaraderie and social support system for which the FOP has been famous for since 1917. The lodge is run by rangers to benefit rangers. The U.S. Park Ranger Lodge has been in the forefront fighting to improve the professional lives of commissioned rangers since 1988.