

April 3, 2008

Hon. Dirk Kempthorne,
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, N. W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

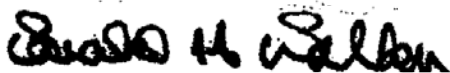
As former directors of the National Park Service, we are concerned about efforts to overturn the regulations controlling firearms in the national parks. The current regulations have served the Park Service and the public well for the past 25 years. These rules, promulgated during the Reagan Administration, are essential to park rangers in carrying out their duties of protecting park resources and wildlife, and in assuring the safety of visitors to the parks.

As matters stand, visitors to the national parks are not prohibited from having guns. The regulations require merely that firearms in a visitor's possession be unloaded and put away while within park boundaries. The regulation was crafted to be as narrowly restrictive as possible while assisting park personnel to prevent unlawful killing of wildlife. Informing visitors as they enter a park that their guns must be unloaded and stowed away puts them on notice that they are entering a special place where wildlife are protected and the environment is respected both for the visitor's enjoyment and the enjoyment of others. While most gun owners are indeed law-abiding citizens, failure to comply with this minimal requirement can be a signal to rangers that something is wrong. Removing that simple point of reference would seriously impair park rangers' ability to protect people and resources, and if necessary manage crowds.

In all our years, we experienced very few instances in which this limited regulation created confusion or resistance. Park boundaries are required to be well marked. Even where national parks border wilderness or other open public or private land there is really little reason for hunters to claim confusion as to their location. Rangers have discretion to determine whether a particular violation of the rule should be prosecuted. 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.

We thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments and strongly support retaining the existing regulation concerning the transporting and carrying of firearms within the boundaries of places administered by the National Park Service. We ask that this letter be made a part of the official record on the subject, and we will comment further when the proposed new regulation is made public.

Sincerely,



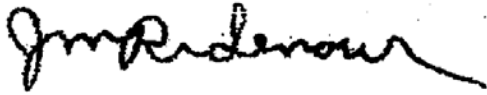
Ronald H. Walker
National Park Service Director
1973 - 1975



Gary Everhardt
National Park Service Director
1975 - 1977



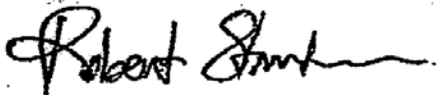
George B. Hartzog, Jr.
National Park Service Director
1964 - 1972



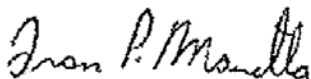
James M. Ridenour
National Park Service Director
1989 - 1993



Roger G. Kennedy
National Park Service Director
1993 - 1997



Robert Stanton
National Park Service Director
1997 - 2001



Fran P. Mainella
National Park Service Director
2001 - 2006