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Congress of the United States
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Hon. Dirk Kempthorne
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Loaded, readily accessible guns do not belong in National Parks and your proposal to allow them should be abandoned. Please respond to this letter and include it in the administrative record of the proposed rulemaking announced last month (1024-AD70).

A covert, coercive, campaign -- organized by the National Rifle Association and culminating in a December 14, 2007 letter to you signed by Members of the United States Senate -- appears to be the impetus for your proposal. As with many back-room, political operations, this effort relied on misrepresentations repeated in the NRA-drafted letter. The allegation that the current rules governing the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "prohibit individuals from possessing a firearm" on lands managed by those agencies is plainly false and thus provides no justification for your actions.

The *Federal Register* notice alleges that the proposed rule will "promote uniformity of application, better visitor understanding of the requirements, visitor safety, resource protection, and increased cooperation between state and federal law enforcement officials." These claims range from false to ridiculous.

In January, the National Park Rangers Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police wrote you stating, "as field rangers who contact tens of thousands of visitors to our National Parks each year we can, with authority, state that there is almost no confusion" caused by the current rule. In contrast, your proposal to allow 50 varying state laws to govern National Parks will create chaos, particularly in the 39 units located in multiple states.

Further, because state gun laws are not uniform across state land, the proposed rule requires guns laws in National Parks to mimic gun laws on "analogous" state lands. The rule does not define the term "analogous," however, making it impossible to predict which gun laws will control which parts of which National Parks. Contrary to the claim included in the *Register*, the proposed rule will destroy uniformity of application and hopelessly muddle visitor understanding of the requirements. The hoped-for cooperation between state and federal law enforcement officials will be swamped in the same quagmire.

Far from promoting visitor safety, the proposed rule will place visitors at risk. The proposed rule will significantly increase the number of loaded, readily accessible guns in National Parks. In urban units, more disagreements between visitors – domestic disputes, confrontations between neighbors at crowded camp sites – will turn deadly. In backcountry areas, more gun accidents will occur in locations where medical attention is hours away.

NPS law enforcement personnel will also be put at greater risk. Most of these brave men and women work alone, confronting large crowds where alcohol can be prevalent. Wading into such a situation alone to restore order and protect visitors and park resources is daunting under the current rule. The last thing these dedicated public servants need is loaded guns hidden in the crowd.

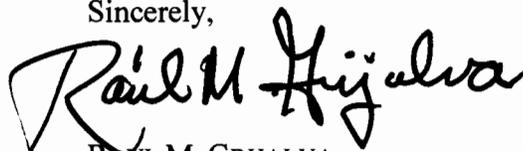
The assertion that the proposed rule will promote resource protection is laughable. Park wildlife is already threatened by poaching. The proposed rule will expand that threat by increasing incidents of random, impulsive shooting at animals. Cultural and historic resources will be subject to the same impulsive target practice. Far from protecting Park resources, the proposed rule will fill them full of holes.

Obviously, this proposed rule is not sound policy; it is pandering to an interest group with no interest in National Parks. For these and other reasons, the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees, the Association of National Park Rangers, the National Park Rangers Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police, the National Parks Conservation Association, and every living former Director of the National Park Service strongly oppose this proposal.

Given that the NRA seeks to use National Parks as political symbols, it is also important to consider the symbolism of this proposal. America's National Parks are America's cathedrals. They celebrate the glorious natural resources with which we have been blessed and serve as sanctuaries for wildlife and visitors. In general, loaded guns which can be brandished at the drop of a hat are wholly inconsistent with these values. Specifically, a policy increasing gun violence on the battlefield at Gettysburg, or at the grave of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., or in any other NPS unit, is unconscionable.

Mr. Secretary, you are the steward of our National Parks for future generations. I urge you not to let this be your legacy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raul M. Grijalva". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

RAUL M. GRIJALVA
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Parks,
Forests and Public Lands