

Congress of the United States

Washington DC 20515

June 26, 2008

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to ask that you extend from 60 to at least 120 days the public comment period on the proposal to allow concealed firearms on lands administered by the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which was published in the Federal Register on April 30, 2008 ("General Regulations for Areas Administered by the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service," Docket No. 1024-AID70).

The Department's proposal would allow visitors to carry loaded, concealed firearms in National Parks and Wildlife Refuges in states where guns are allowed in parks and refuges under state law. This would be a substantial change from the current regulations that require that firearms be unloaded and put away. The current 60-day comment period, which is set to expire on June 30, 2008, is an inadequate amount of time to allow the public to comment on such a controversial and complicated proposal.

We believe that a 60-day extension, at a minimum, is warranted and necessary to provide the American public and stakeholder groups adequate time to fully understand and define how the proposal could impact visitors and other park and refuge resources. This is especially important in light of the Supreme Court's recent 64-page decision in support of *Heller* in *Heller v. District of Columbia*. This decision is the first time in 70 years that the Supreme Court has ruled on the Second Amendment; and, it is unclear how this decision may impact the Department's proposal. We strongly believe that the June 30 deadline for the comment period is an inadequate amount of time for the public to make informative comments that take into consideration the High Court's decision.

In addition, an extension is merited in light of the fact that the National Park Service provided for a 120-day comment period when this regulation was last revised in 1983 under the Reagan Administration.

As you know, the Department's proposal is ardently opposed by current and former park ranger professionals who have countless years of experience in park management and resource protection. In a letter you received on April 3, seven former directors of the National Park Service stated that there is no need to change the regulations. They wrote: "In all our years with the National Park Service, we experienced very few instances in which this limited regulation created confusion or resistance... 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." Furthermore, the Association of National


Park Rangers, the Ranger Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police, and the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees have grave concerns with the Department's proposal

Due to the recent *Heller* Supreme Court decision and the controversial nature of the proposal, we request in the strongest possible terms that the Department provides for at least a 60-day extension to the comment period on the proposed new rule regarding Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service firearm regulations.

Sincerely,



Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman
Senate Subcommittee on National Parks
Committee on Energy and Natural
Resources



Raúl M. Grijalva, Chairman
House Subcommittee on National
Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources