



ANPR is the Association for All National Park Service Employees and Partners

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Feb. 19, 2010

Bryan Faehner, National Parks Conservation Association, 202-419-3700

Bill Wade, Coalition of National Park Service Retirees, 520-615-9417

John Waterman, Park Ranger Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police, 610-823-2907

Scot McElveen, Association of National Park Rangers, 423-286-8644

New Law Allows Loaded Guns in National Parks; Puts Park Visitors, Wildlife and America's Heritage at Risk

Statement by Bill Wade, Chair, Executive Council, Coalition of National Park Service Retirees

“This law is a very bad idea. It is not in the best interests of the visitors to national parks, the resources to be protected in national parks, nor the employees in national parks. Opportunistic shooting at wildlife and historic resources, such as petroglyphs, will increase. Employees, especially law enforcement rangers, will be more at risk. And visitors will not only be more at risk, but will now see national parks as places where they need to be more suspicious and wary of others carrying guns, rather than safe and at peace in the solitude and sanctuary that parks have always provided. It is a sad chapter in the history of America's premier heritage area system.”

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

“The Ranger Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police has opposed this ill-considered law from the beginning. The new law goes beyond concealed carry to include all guns anytime. The chances of an inexperienced visitor who has not seen a bear or buffalo wandering through a campground, gets frightened and takes out the now readily available firearm and shoots blindly at an animal or a person in a misguided effort to "protect themselves" from a perceived threat is now increased. Allowing untrained and unlicensed people carrying guns in National Parks is an invitation to disaster. It puts the safety of the public and rangers at increased risk and virtually invites the desecration of our natural and historic treasures. The previous Reagan era gun rules were designed to curb poaching and they worked. Commercial and opportunistic poaching decreased with the prohibition on open armed carry of firearms in National Parks. What was once a straight forward, easy to understand regulation has now been changed to a law that encompasses a menagerie of state regulations. The law now allows individual states to dictate what occurs on Federal Land that belongs to all Americans and not just the citizens of that particular state. This law threatens the very nature of a family-friendly National Park. We will continue to work to change this law.”

Statement by Scot McElveen, President, Association of National Park Rangers

“ANPR members represent a portion of the National Park Service workforce, professionals in operating and managing the National Park System for the enjoyment of Americans both present and future. In many instances we have devoted our professional lives to that idealistic purpose that Congress presented us in 1916 and has amended several times since, each amendment making the emphasis on preservation of park resources stronger and stronger. Whenever Congress passes legislation that potentially lessens that preservation mandate, we're concerned.

“In this two-year discussion there are those that have argued that a change in firearms laws will have either no effect or minimal effect on park wildlife and other resources. Our experience in dealing with those that have carried loaded firearms in parks to date leads us to a different conclusion. We that daily work and in many cases live inside park boundaries know first-hand the difficulty of being in the right place at the right time in 84 million acres to locate enough evidence to successfully prosecute a poacher, whether they be purposeful or opportunistic. We know, first-hand, all the difficulties of successfully prosecuting poachers in federal court, and the deterrent effective that successfully prosecuted poaching cases can have. We think it naïve to believe that purposeful poachers will not take every advantage of this change in the law and make every attempt to camouflage themselves in it to avoid detection. The new law also makes the harried decision for opportunistic poachers to act illegally an easier one. And, the result of less deterrence is almost certainly more wildlife killed and injured, less wildlife that is easily viewable inside parks for true park visitors, and national parks that are less special as compared to other lands in this country. If national parks become less special then they become just one more group of lands to be exploited for their economic potential.

“History tells us that wildlife populations can be decimated by firearms. The American bison once numbering as many as 200 million and the passenger pigeon once numbering in the billions are the most striking examples. These instances didn’t happen all at once, they happened one shot from a firearm at a time. It can happen again. ANPR is disappointed in this change in the law and hopes that one day that Congress will support those that live and work in national parks with the best management judgment for the National Park System. As was said in the recent PBS series *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea* in the early years of Yellowstone National Park when wildlife populations were still disappearing, park officials noticed that when they prohibited park visitors from taking their firearms into the park, wildlife populations rebounded quickly. The equation is still that simple today.”

Statement by Bryan Faehner, Associate Director for Park Uses, National Parks Conservation Association

“We remain astonished and disappointed by votes cast by many elected members of Congress to allow people to openly carry rifles, shotguns, and semi-automatic weapons in national parks unless otherwise forbidden by the state or local law. The new law guts balanced and reasonable regulations last updated during the Reagan Administration that called for visitors to places like Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Acadia, and Gettysburg to keep their firearms unloaded and put away. These common sense regulations have helped keep our national parks safe, family-friendly destinations for many years.

“The new law places an even greater burden on the already understaffed National Park Service. Congress must take appropriate action to provide the agency with sufficient resources to effectively enforce the new law and the management challenges it creates. As the National Park Service works to educate the public about the new law, NPCA will closely monitor the steps being taken to ensure the safety of park visitors, and protection of our American heritage and wildlife for future generations.”