

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:
W34(2460)

APR 21 2003

Dear Mr. Boyer:

Thank you for your letter dated January 4, 2003, concerning the National Park Service (NPS) firearms regulation that was addressed to the Secretary of the Interior. Your letter has been referred to my office for reply and we apologize for the delay in our response.

With hunting prohibited by Federal statutory law in the vast majority of park areas, firearms are generally prohibited in most units of the National Park System under 36 CFR 2.4. In the 57 park units where hunting has been specifically authorized by legislation, however, firearms may generally be used during open hunting season as determined by State law. Firearms may also be transported in a vehicle through any park areas if they are temporarily inoperable or stored in such a manner as to prevent their ready use.

The NPS firearms regulation is designed to ensure public safety and provide maximum protection of natural wildlife resources by limiting the opportunity for unauthorized use of weapons, while still providing reasonable regulatory relief for persons living within, traveling through, or conducting activities on lands adjacent to park areas. Further, to help keep our parks safe, the NPS law enforcement program seeks to take reasonable measures to protect park visitors. While some crime does occur on parkland, such statistics are far lower than other similarly-situated communities, especially when considering that the National Park System has 280 million visitors each year.

Finally, besides the fact that we are unaware of any surveys that gun-licensed individuals "avoid" parks, we believe that any incidents dealing with dangerous animals are extremely rare and generally occur when a visitor attempts to feed, pet, or otherwise approach such creatures.

In any event, we believe that the firearms regulation, by ensuring public safety and the protection of natural wildlife resources, is fully consistent with both NPS policies and is constitutional (sic). Indeed, as Attorney General John Ashcraft (sic) stated on November 9, 2001, 3[t]he Department [of Justice] can and will continue to defend vigorously the constitutionality (sic), under the Second Amendment, of all existing Federal firearms laws.

Thank you for your interest in the NPS.

Sincerely,

Karen Taylor-Goodrich
Acting Associate Director
Visitor and Resource Protection