

Sirs/Madams

The debate over whether legally carried firearms for self-defense are reasonable or not has largely been settled in the majority of states.

Nearly 40 states have now "shall issue" concealed carry permit laws after a groundswell of public desire and activism, making permits (often called CCWs--carry concealed weapons--or CWLs--concealed weapons licenses) available to all who meet the training standards and pass the criminal background checks. The permits must be issued, and aren't subject to the vagaries of politics, subjective judgments, etc. In several other states, permits are issued also. As of 2006, only two states had no provision for any permit issuance, I've read.

Good citizens, who desire the ability to be able to legally protect themselves and loved ones away from home, can now do so. The "red herring" arguments that were issued by opponents early on (e.g., that there would be "blood in the streets" as armed citizens shot it out over parking spaces), have proven to be false, and ridiculous hyperbole.

The biggest irony is that even in states with legal CCW permits available, permit holders cannot carry their firearms on their persons for self-defense in national parks. Until now, firearms must be unloaded, disassembled when possible, and not easily accessible to the driver. Transit through the parks is permitted. This makes use of that legally owned, legally carried (outside the park) virtually useless in a spontaneous self defense situation.

While I understand the impetus for arguments in favor of this, I disagree strongly. Legal permit holders have proven themselves over and over, for years, with few exceptions, to be safe, law-abiding, responsible people. The violations of the terms of these permits have been statistically a non-issue and irrelevant, in general. Often, when there have been revocations or suspensions, it has been for infractions tied to the permit regs, such as non-payment of child support or DUI where the gun was not misused.

On the contrary, there have been many thousands of incidents in the last decade where those legal permit holders have successfully defended themselves from criminal predation, including violent felonious assaults, rape, attempted murder, kidnapping, and carjacking. I know several people personally. It is estimated that people legally defend themselves with firearms nearly a million times a year in and out of the home, overwhelmingly without firing a shot. Scholar John Lott has exhaustively documented this data. [<http://johnrlott.blogspot.com/>]

Why should responsible, law abiding people be denied the right to protect themselves with firearms in national parks? I can think of no good reason. Why would otherwise well behaved CCW holders misbehave just because they are in a national park? That doesn't hold water.

As anyone who has spent much time in many of the national parks can tell you, the presence of a law enforcement ranger in remote areas, and even less remote ones, can be rare. They have a lot of ground to cover, and often visitors are on their own if they get into trouble. This is what inspires people to carry

firearms for self defense in the first place outside the parks (in the city or outside it). A tent or camper is not a well-secured home, and 911 often isn't an option with limited cell phone coverage.

Naysayers retort, "Parks are safe." Really? Predators go where they find prey, and all the better when they know their prey is largely defenseless, as unarmed people usually are. In California, where I once lived, the summertime brought an influx of gang members and other criminal elements to the parks like Yosemite; they brought their violent and criminal tendencies with them. The Yosemite Valley was home to shootouts and other violence and crime until the armed ranger presence was increased substantially. The parks are open to all, whatever their true motives: scenery or crime.

I have a young child, and when I am in the wilderness I carry a firearm when legal. I am her last line of defense; if I don't do it, who will? We have been stalked by a mountain lion, and while it didn't require the gun, I was prepared. We have also been stalked by "LA-style" gang members in the national forest, and I don't say that cavalierly. I spent 19 years on the streets of LA as a journalist have been to too many gang shootings and arrests to count, and I know the species. When we encountered them near Red Lodge, MT, I went from "condition white", relaxed, to "condition orange", high alert, because they were casing us, probably eyeing the new Ford Explorer. My confident body language and street smarts told them, non-verbally, "We are not prey. Move on down the road." To my great relief, they did. I was armed then too and glad for it, but using the firearm for self defense is always the last, unavoidable option.

Good citizens legally armed are also an asset to law enforcement. While one is never encouraged to be the vigilante or overzealous, I can personally say that were a Park Service ranger ever in trouble, outnumbered or in danger from criminal action, I would assist. It is my civic duty, and a moral responsibility I accept as a legally armed citizen. I have the benefit of law enforcement training and experience also, so that is a plus. I know that the friends and acquaintances I have who legally carry firearms share that sentiment. We would, and have, come to the aid of anyone in need. We are not the enemy, and we take the privilege of carrying CCW very seriously, as we should.

I urge you to implement these regulation changes to the benefit of CCW bearers, and the others who have ancillary benefit.

Thank you.

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[Attached: essay by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, expert on self defense]