

The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence today filed suit in federal court asking that the court strike down a last-minute Bush Administration rule change allowing concealed, loaded firearms in national parks and wildlife refuges.

The suit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, and seeks an injunction to block the rule, which is scheduled to go into effect on January 9, 2009.

"The Bush Administration's last-minute gift to the gun lobby, allowing concealed semiautomatic weapons in national parks, jeopardizes the safety of park visitors in violation of federal law," said Brady Campaign President Paul Helmke. "We should not be making it easier for dangerous people to carry concealed firearms in our parks."

Attorneys with the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence's Legal Action Project and the law firm Ropes & Gray in Washington, D.C. are representing the Brady Campaign in this case. To read the complaint, go to www.bradycenter.org/xshare/pdf/kemphorne-complaint.pdf.

The rule will allow guns in rural and urban national park areas around the country, from Wyoming's Yellowstone and California's Yosemite to Philadelphia's Independence National Historical Park, home of the Liberty Bell. The suit was filed on behalf of the Brady Campaign and its members, including school teachers in the New York and Washington, D.C. areas who are canceling or curtailing school trips to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty and the National Mall in Washington, D.C. now that the Bush Administration will be allowing guns in these national park areas.

The suit charges that the Interior Department violated several federal laws in its rush to implement the rule before President Bush leaves office, including failing to conduct any environmental review of the harm that the rule will cause, as is required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The Department also violated a White House directive that no rules should be issued after November 1, 2008, except in "extraordinary circumstances," issuing the last-minute rule change on December 10, 2008. The rule also violates the National Park Service Organic Act and the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, which created the parks and wildlife refuges as protected lands for safe enjoyment of all visitors.

Rules in place since the Reagan Administration have allowed visitors to transport guns in national parks and wildlife refuges if they are unloaded and stored or dismantled. These restrictions have helped make these areas some of the safest places to visit in the country. Yet at the behest of the gun lobby, the Interior Department announced earlier this year that it planned to allow concealed firearms in national parks and wildlife refuges. Concealed carrying will be allowed in every state that allows concealed carrying, even if the state specifically bans the practice in state parks. Only Illinois and Wisconsin prohibit concealed carrying.

Numerous studies have confirmed that concealed carrying of firearms does not reduce crime and, if anything, leads to increased violent crime. Experience in states that have allowed concealed carrying of firearms has shown that thousands of dangerous people are able to get licenses. In Florida, for example, more than 4,200 licenses were revoked because many of these licensees committed a crime. Since becoming the first state to allow the concealed

carrying of firearms in 1987, Florida consistently has had one of the highest rates of violent crime in the nation. Florida has been ranked as the state with the highest annual violent crime rate more often than any other state in the last two decades.