

TANCREDO CALLS ON DOI TO END NPS PARACHUTING BAN

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By Robin Heid

A congressman seeking fair access for backcountry parachuting in national parks has called on the parent agency of the National Park Service to rescind the NPS policy banning the sport.

"I would like to ask that you rescind Section 8.2.2.7 of the NPS 2001 edition of *Management Policies*," U.S. Representative Tom Tancredo of Colorado wrote November 15 to DOI assistant secretary P. Lynn Scarlett, "so that backcountry parachutists are treated the same way as other recreational users within national park service units and operating on a level playing field when it comes to the planning process."

Tancredo wrote in response to Scarlett's July 2004 letter wherein she encouraged backcountry parachutists to "involve themselves in the planning process that takes place at each park" – but left in place the NPS policy prohibition.

"I very much appreciate your willingness to move forward with the fair access process," Tancredo went on, "Despite this progress, however, NPS policy prohibition of backcountry parachuting... means access discrimination against backcountry parachuting remains institutionalized and, as such, makes impossible the full and complete participation of parachutists in the planning process, regardless of the invitation and assurances you extended to them in your July 1, 2004, letter."

Tancredo said participants in similar recreational activities who go through the unit planning processes don't face a similar policy prohibition and could have a chilling effect on any efforts by jumpers to obtain fair access through normal NPS channels.

"It seems to me," Tancredo wrote, "that forcing only backcountry parachutists to jump this additional bureaucratic hurdle is clearly discriminatory, and would also serve to discourage park superintendents and other NPS decisionmakers from making good faith efforts to give serious consideration to backcountry parachuting as part of their normal responsibilities for managing recreational uses in their units."

Tancredo's latest letter comes on the heels of several NPS actions to include backcountry jumpers in the planning process. In September, officials at Kings Canyon/Sequoia National Park invited the Alliance of Backcountry Parachutists to comment officially on their General Management Plan. During that same month, NPS Intermountain Region director Steven Martin told his unit superintendents that "responding to (the ABP), and inviting their participation in any current or upcoming planning exercises, is appropriate and encouraged."

ABP American director Jimmy Pouchert said backcountry jumpers "were ready for the parks and I think the parks should be ready for us."

"The ban should be rescinded because it's not fair," Pouchert said. "We have a right to be in the parks and the Constitution guarantees us the right to the pursuit of happiness. At the same time, we want the NPS to realize that times have changed. Backcountry jumpers are now wilderness literate and very respectful of the environment. I think our years of safe and conscientious use in the Moab BLM lands prove that, if we're given the chance, we'll be the best users in the park system."

As for Tancredo's continuing efforts on behalf of jumpers, Pouchert simply said: "He must eat a lot of ice cream to be that cool."