

The following is text of the National Park Service's July 30, 2002 reply to Congressman Tom Tancredo's letter demanding explanation of and changes to NPS rules and regulations regarding backcountry parachuting.

July 30, 2002

Honorable Tom Tancredo
House of Representatives
Washington DC 20121-0606

Dear Mr. Tancredo:

Thank you for your letter of April 8, 2002, regarding backcountry parachuting in National Park Service (NPS) units across the country. We apologize for the delay in responding. You have raised several issues in your letter and I hope we can provide some answers for you.

Most notable is the issue of backcountry parachuting, more commonly referred to as B.A.S.E. jumping, within New River Gorge National River. In the regulations regarding parachuting at 36 CFR 2.17(a)(3), that activity is prohibited except under the terms and conditions of a permit. This coincides with our Management Policies 2001 which states that this "is not an appropriate activity" but also allows the Director to grant a waiver for certain activities after evaluating consistency with regulations, consistency with planning documents, impacts to park resources, and costs to the National Park Service and whether the public interest will be served. The NPS headquarters has worked closely with the staff at New River Gorge to understand the impact of allowing B.A.S.E. jumping activities in conjunction with the Bridge Day celebration sponsored by the Fayette County Bridge Day Commission. Since the event originates outside the park, occurs for approximately 6 hours 1 day each year, causes little to no resource impact and numerous safety and visitor management precautions are taken, we are satisfied that permitting B.A.S.E. jumpers to land on NPS property is appropriate to authorize under Special Use Permit.

As you can see, the nature and duration of the event are quite different from the general use of parachutes within park units. In addition, the NPS generally does not distinguish between national parks and national recreation areas in determining what activities are appropriate unless the enabling legislation for that unit provides for specific exceptions. The NPS takes a fairly conservative approach to new or developing recreational uses. Often uses do not require a national park setting and are more appropriate in other areas. The Management Policies that support this decision were recently updated and reflect the current position of the NPS in regards to this activity.

We are sorry that your constituent was unable to celebrate his anniversary as he had hoped. Unfortunately, we are not always able to accommodate all uses. We hope that this letter has helped to clarify the NPS' position on B.A.S.E. jumping within NPS units.

Sincerely,

Richard G. Ring
Associate Director
Park Operations and Education