



April 28, 2010

Ms. Valerie Jarrett
White House Office of Public Liaison
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500

Subject: Discrimination against disabled American war veterans by Bureau of Land Management

Dear Ms. Jarrett,

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, restricts access to rivers managed by it in a manner that discriminates against Americans with disabilities, including disabled veterans, sometimes referred to as Wounded Warriors.

In particular, on the basis of archaic regulations, the Utah State Office of the BLM, which manages public access to popular whitewater stretches of the Colorado, Green and San Juan rivers, has denied Special Recreation Permits to Colorado Discover Ability (CDA, www.coloradodiscoverability.org), a tax exempt charity which is largely run by volunteers who provide educational and therapeutic services to the disabled by teaching outdoor sports skills such as skiing, kayaking and rafting, bicycling and camping.

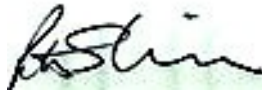
As a result, CDA, with the support of Team River Runner (TRR, www.teamriverrunner.org), Disabled Sports USA (www.dsusa) and many other adaptive sports organizations, petitioned its elected representatives, Congressman John Salazar and Senators Mark Udall and Michael Bennet, to write letters first to BLM National Director Robert Alley and subsequently to Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar, requesting short-term access to these rivers and long-term changes in the regulations. Responses by Director Abbey and Deputy Secretary of Interior David Hayes were not supportive. These letters and other supporting documentation are available upon request.

TRR, which teaches kayaking skills to disabled veterans, is in the process of asking Secretary of Veterans Affairs Shinseki and Secretary of Defense Gates to intervene with President Obama on behalf of disabled American veterans to gain access to these river segments. If this approach is not successful, one alternative to force change is to create a public campaign showing BLM discrimination against disabled veterans. This will be embarrassing to the Obama administration, especially considering fact that during the election campaign in 2007 Mr. Obama promised to support our veterans in response to widely publicized mismanagement of veteran services at Walter Reed Army Medical Center by the previous administration.

Another alternative to force change is a lawsuit against the BLM, probably funded by large veterans organizations, to force the BLM to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) with regard to the process by which Special Recreation Permits were issued by BLM in the 1970s. BLM essentially gave certain companies exclusive lifetime ownership of access to rivers managed by the BLM via Special Recreation Permits (SRPs), including the right of companies to sell their SRPs at market prices. The National Park Service (NPS) recently completed a river management plan that addressed access to the Colorado River in Grand Canyon National Park as a result of more than one lawsuit related to NEPA compliance. Contact NPS if you'd like to know more about this multi-year process and the high cost to taxpayers.

Neither of these alternatives is desirable. Congressman Salazar and Senators Udall and Bennet proposed a simple solution to provide access in the short term (a Memorandum of Understanding that allows BLM to issue Administrative Permits, such as the MOU between the Wounded Warrior Project and NPS used by Grand Canyon National Park) while long term changes are developed (such as the regulations developed by Dinosaur National Monument decades ago). Given Secretary of Interior Salazar's lack of support for the proposals made by Congressman Salazar and Senators Udall and Bennet, we implore you to engage Mr. Obama in this discussion to provide immediate and fair access for Americans with disabilities to public lands managed by the BLM.

Sincerely,



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cc Congressman John Salazar
Senator Mark Udall
Senator Michel Bennet