



October 8, 2013

Protecting &
Advancing
America's
Heritage
of Hunting,
Fishing &
Trapping

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Executive directives to “close” accessible public lands and waters, during the federal government “shutdown”, are unnecessary, contrary to law, and impose a needless hardship on the hunting and fishing community. We urge you to withdraw these closures and restrictions immediately.

Millions of acres of public land administered by agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Park Service (NPS) are generally accessible to the public without payment of special entrance fees, passage through gates, or access via controlled roads or waterways. For decades the public has been free to come and go without securing any specific form of permission or authorization from the land management agencies. This is especially true for hunters and anglers whose activities on federal lands are almost always governed by state established rules and regulations setting seasons, bag limits, means and methods and license requirements. Applicability of these state rules ensures there is no “free for all” on federal lands and waters.

Recent edicts to close many FWS and NPS lands and waters to anglers and hunters are transparent efforts to exacerbate the effects of the political standoff on federal government funding. These created impacts are being felt from Alaska to Florida and points in between.

In Alaska, guided sport hunters are being told they have to shut down their camps and leave public lands. This is occurring on lands where federal law mandates hunting and where hunting is statutorily determined to be a “priority public use.” Moreover, access via floatplanes and motorboats to these same federal lands is statutorily guaranteed.

Lack of federal appropriations and funding does not terminate the effect of these statutory provisions and guarantees and executive edicts to the contrary violate applicable law. Alaska Governor Sean Parnell has objected to the closures to Secretary Jewell and we appreciate his well-articulated objections.

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We note too that the FWS closure edict in Alaska allows “subsistence hunting” to continue. Nothing in law authorizes the Executive Branch to make this kind of discriminatory distinction between classes of hunters and allow one group to disregard this arbitrary political closure order while enforcing it on another.

At the other end of the nation, anglers are told they cannot venture into open navigable bodies of water (i.e., Florida Bay adjacent to Everglades National Park) where no access permits are required, no entrance fees are charged, no signs mark the boundary of partial federal jurisdiction, and these waters overlay State owned submerged lands. Of course, regulation of angling in these waters remains under State authority and control. No bona fide public purpose or resource protection purpose is served by a directive to close these accessible waters. Even if NPS rangers are not present to enforce applicable rules, State fish and wildlife officials remain present on these waters to enforce both State and federal rules.

NPS closure orders in the nearby Big Cypress Preserve, where hunting season is set to open on Oct. 12, are similarly out of line. Lands there are generally accessible - hunting is governed by State rules, and subject to State enforcement.

These are only a few examples, at our nation’s bookends, of problems created for the sporting community by unneeded executive closure edicts. Similar problems have arisen at locations in between such as Wisconsin. Efforts there by FWS to restrict access to navigable waters and other lands are being contested by the Governor. We recognize that lands with controlled access may be closed since federal personnel are not available to man entrance gates, collect required fees, or protect highly specific resources or sites. But where these limitations do not apply, there is no need to close public lands. Edicts and efforts to do so are merely political theater.

There is also no precedent for public land closures at this scale. When Congress and the White House locked horns over federal funding 17 and 18 years ago, the ensuing “shutdown” did not precipitate closure orders for accessible public lands.

We are urging the House, the Senate, and you to engage immediately in good faith negotiations to provide funding for federal government operations and end the shutdown. However, we urge you to withdraw immediately any directives and orders that close or restrict access by anglers and hunters to generally accessible public lands and waters.

Sincerely,

Nick Pinizzotto
President and CEO
U.S. Sportsmen’s Alliance