

New law permits guns on the Blue Ridge Parkway *North Carolina allows loaded firearms with concealed carry permits*

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As of Feb. 22 loaded guns are allowed on the Blue Ridge Parkway and in other national parks, according to a new law.

"During the Reagan administration, firearms had to be packed away and unloaded," said Steve Stinnett, chief ranger of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

In North Carolina, loaded firearms are allowed on the parkway as long as the person has a concealed carry permit, but the law depends on what state visitors are in, Stinnett said.

"We recommend people go to the state and look up firearm laws," Stinnett said. "If they're in Virginia, they need to know the laws because they are different for each state."

The new law was not passed by the park service but by Congress, said Doug Morris, an executive council member for the Coalition of National Park Retirees.

"This is the law," Stinnett said. "When the regulation from the Reagan administration was put into practice, we administered the law, like we will do with this law."

For those who support gun laws, the new law is next on the agenda for furthering Second Amendment rights, Morris said.

"Those that support weapons think it's great," Morris said. "I think the great majority of visitors are concerned because most people are wary of people carrying guns."

Those who support the new law said it is merely for people to defend themselves.

"Crime doesn't stop at park gates," said Vickie Cleplak, National Rifle Association spokeswoman.

The probability of hunting could also increase, according to Morris.

"The law doesn't allow the use of firearms," Stinnett said. "Visitors can't go



Steven Hall Assistant Photography Editor

Robert Thompson, left, and Michael Cocker bike on the Blue Ridge Parkway near Asheville.

out on the Blue Ridge Parkway and target shoot. They can only carry firearms. Hunting is prohibited on the parkway."

Inexperienced firearm users could injure people or animals unintentionally, Morris said.

"There is the concern that those who bring firearms into the park might perceive a danger with animals and fire the gun," he said. "Very rarely would that be a legitimate reaction, and it results from a lack of knowledge of wildlife animals."

The parkway does offer a hunter ac-

cess program, Stinnett said.

"No hunting is allowed on parkway lands, but with a special permit, access to hunting on U.S. Forest Service lands is allowed from designated places along the parkway," he said.

Morris said the new law causes concern for families visiting the parkway.

"The great majority of park visitors would prefer to bring their families to parks and not worry about firearms," he said. "I think particularly foreign visitors are concerned because they are not used to seeing guns on display in their

country."

With guns present in the park, instances of violence will increase, Morris said.

"The amount of gun violence inside a park is one in 100,000," he said. "When you go outside a park, it is four or five times that. That's a big part of our fear. Parks have always been one of the safest places in America, and when people are allowed to have guns, violence will

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