

AMGA Update for IFMGA Meeting Outreach and Advocacy Department

Scott Massey

advocacy.director@amga.com

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Guided access on public lands, backcountry and wilderness zones is becoming more significantly threatened around the country as we have seen in places like the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Denali National Park. This is a critical time for thinking outside the box, building stronger partnership opportunities and being a more powerful resource than ever to land managers. With this greater squeeze on guiding access (and climbing access in general), we will need to invest more of our attention and resources into maintaining guided access opportunities that we have perhaps taken for granted in the past. This has become one of the top priorities of the AMGA Outreach and Advocacy Department. This fall, the AMGA conducted a large-scale advocacy and outreach campaign to oppose the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park's proposal to ban guided climbing access. The AMGA led a second campaign to support continued growth of guided access opportunities on Mount McKinley. Both appear to have had some impact.

Black Canyon – Gunnison National Park, CO

As many of you were aware, as part of the Draft Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan of August 2011, the National Park Service (NPS) proposed to prohibit guided climbing in the Inner Canyon section, home of most of the Black Canyon's famous long multi-pitch routes. In an effort to prevent this seemingly arbitrary prohibition, the AMGA solicited support from several members of Congress. AMGA staff traveled to Washington, DC to meet with congressional staffers, and our members were mobilized in a campaign writing letters to their respective Senators and Congressmen, showing support for continued guiding opportunities in the Black Canyon. In April, the National Park Service sent a letter to the congressional delegates who had written on the AMGA's behalf, stating that they will not be moving forward with their proposal to prohibit guided climbing. While this is not a final decision, it does constitute an important step in the right direction. They expressed their interest in pursuing a more collaborative process in developing an appropriate level of guided climbing access. The AMGA will continue to be involved and follow up with the NPS on this crucial issue.

Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park, CA

Another issue that has developed lately is in Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park (SEKI). The National Park Service (NPS) was sued in 2009 for violation of the Wilderness Act in regards to commercial horse packing. In January 2012, a federal judge placed a moratorium on packing permits. In the letter that the NPS sent to all Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) holders in March, they announced that they were not issuing CUAs to packers for 2012, pending the judge's decision on 23 May. The letter also stated that the remedial action "may extend to all commercial services in wilderness." Besides the loss of business to local guide services that

utilize horse-packers in their trips in the park, which for some would constitute between 40-70% of their summer business, the potential that this could extend to other authorized operators is alarming. The consequences of such a decision would be enormous. For example Mt. Whitney, the highest point of the continental U.S., is the scene of hundreds of guided ascents throughout the year. The top 500m of the mountain are within the Park boundary. Arbitrarily prohibiting guided climbing, in addition to horse packing, would have a disastrous effect on the small businesses that form the local economy, and would probably put several guide services out of business. The AMGA's legal counsel has advised waiting for the judge's decision before proceeding further. Where the AMGA will get involved, however, is in the public process regarding the Wilderness Stewardship Plan that the Park is drafting. One of the topics this Plan will address is commercial use of wilderness. In conversations with Park staff, they have expressed great interest in having the AMGA and its members provide input regarding the appropriate level of climbing, mountaineering, and ski guiding in the Park wilderness.

Denali National Park, AK

Denali National Park (DNP) has been the scene of another reasonably successful advocacy campaign. The Park has added provisions to the CUA requirements stating that all guides in DNP outside of Mt. McKinley need to be employed by AMGA Accredited Programs. This will be a radical shift from the past, but it is encouraging to have such a major land manager realize that the AMGA is the proper vehicle for sustainable guiding in the Park.

Another project that DNP has been working on is the Environmental Assessment for Climbing Allocations. Currently there is a limit of 1500 climbers on the mountain during the summer climbing season. The Backcountry Management Plan of 2006 instituted a ratio of 25% of all climbing permits to be reserved for guided trips. This figure conflicts with the numbers allocated to authorized concessionaires in their respective contracts. Since those contracts are set to expire in 2012, the Park has been working on creating a new policy that would not contradict the 2006 Plan, but would allow for some growth of guided climbing numbers. The AMGA has worked closely with Park staff to formulate an alternative that is amenable to the NPS, the guiding community, and the non-guided public. In addition to the 25% of permits reserved for guided climbing, guides and guide services can apply for any unused permits up to 50%, so long as no independent climbers are displaced. As of April, we are just waiting on the final decision to be signed and the implementation plan to be released, hopefully within the next month or two. The plan would take effect in 2014.

A third opportunity relating to Denali National Park is that this fall, DNP will be offering concessionaire prospectuses for the next 10 years. The application period will be open for 60 days, while they are accepting bids. This is a once-a-decade opportunity to apply for a concessionaire permit. The AMGA will provide updates as they become available. Questions regarding this can be directed to Scott Massey, Outreach and Advocacy Director at advocacy.director@amga.com.

Yosemite National Park, CA

We are continuing work towards a pilot CUA program in Yosemite. In spring 2012 we are drafting proposals to present to Yosemite National Park for a pilot CUA program. We are also working with Yosemite to create the permits for AMGA guides education to take place in Yosemite in 2013.

This is a time when, more than ever, guides need to become involved in the land management process in order to secure access to the wild places where we practice our craft and livelihood. While many policy decisions may be made on a regional or national level, the relationships cultivated locally really do have an impact in local areas of operation. The complexity of the public land management system in the U.S. dictates the need for both American and foreign guides to enthusiastically and sufficiently represent themselves to land managers, and serve as the best, most professional resource available.

Visa/Immigration Issue

The AMGA has had initial contact with some officials in Washington, DC about the visa status for foreign guides working on a 'pass through' (3 weeks or less) basis in the US. This possibility is potentially a large project, and the process will take a long time, but we are looking to see if there are some new possibilities at this level. The AMGA is also continuing to work together with the Certified Guides Cooperative to develop the avenue for foreign guides to join the cooperative; we have initial contact with some immigration lawyers, but we have not yet achieved any definitive results.

Update from the Certified Guides Cooperative

The Mission of the CGC

The Certified Guides Cooperative is a not-for-profit guides' co-op supporting AMGA certified and IFMGA credentialed guides by providing access in the United States and abroad.

The Co-op just finished its first year of operations and now is the perfect opportunity to give you an update of what the Co-op is doing to increase guided access in the United States.

Membership

In the coming months the Co-op will reach a milestone of 50 members. This is exciting because The Co-op will have already surpassed its membership goals for its second year in just over a year. It is important to note that all new members should activate their memberships so that they can start using membership benefits immediately.

Website

If you haven't become a member of the Co-op yet, it has never been easier. The **NEW** Co-op website is live and has features that revolutionize the way Certified Guides access public lands in the United States.

- If you have not signed up for the Co-op, you can now do so online! You can also choose a payment plan that works for you and your budget.
- Once you have created your profile, all the information is saved on the site so you won't have to re-enter it every time you log in.
- You can activate your membership and manage your trips online. This is a huge savings for your administrative time!
- Go to www.cgcoop.org and click the Join button today.

The site is also designed to be a resource for land managers so they can see the activities of Certified Guides on lands they manage. Check out the FAQs tab for tutorials and information about the site.

Permits

This winter the Co-op received new permits in Valdez, Alaska and in the Ouray Ice Park, Colorado. The Valdez permit opens up world class ski mountaineering terrain and the Ouray Ice Park is the preeminent single pitch ice climbing venue in the United States. These are great acquisitions in that the lands are managed by many different land management agencies and it is a testament to the hard work of the Executive Director of the Co-op and its members. AMGA Certified Guides were active in the Ouray Ice Park under the Co-op permit, maintained a good relationship with local guides and were valuable stewards to the Park this winter. The Co-op looks forward to providing access in Ouray to AMGA Certified Alpine Guides and IFMGA Guides again next season.

Work with the AMGA

The Co-op and the AMGA are working together to draw up a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations. In addition, the Executive Director of the Co-op and the Outreach and Advocacy Director of the AMGA are in close contact about access issues that affect the entire guiding community.

Looking Ahead

The Co-op will continue to grow in members and acquire more permits. The more members and active members the stronger the Co-op will become. As The Co-op strengthens it becomes a larger avenue for Certified and IFMGA Guides to access public lands. In addition, the Co-op supports the AMGA as a resource on access and as a link to the community of Certified Guides. Every time a new guide signs up for the Co-op or a guide runs a trip through the Co-op, the guiding community takes a step toward improved access. If you are planning on joining the Co-op *take the step now and help the cooperative grow*: remember that you can join online using simple quarterly payments. This is an important opportunity to directly influence your guiding future in the United States.