



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20240

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## **Policy Memorandum 15-02**

To: All Employees

From: Director *Jonathan Jarvis*

Subject: Employee and Volunteer Participation in Commercial Filming

### **Background**

Our national parks continue to be popular locations for commercial filming, including feature films, documentaries, television programs, and advertisements. Often the parks themselves are simply the setting for these productions.

Occasionally, superintendents receive requests to interview National Park Service (NPS) employees or volunteers on camera as subject matter experts in a wide range of disciplines or to film employees or volunteers conducting tours, demonstrations or field work. This type of filming may advance NPS goals and individual park missions, and may help convey to the public the stories or messages we are trying to tell. The decision to permit commercial filming of these types of activities remains discretionary, subject to existing policies and regulations after consideration of the potential impact on park resources and the visitor experience.

Superintendents must carefully consider requests for NPS employees and volunteers to participate in commercial filming, within the framework of NPS policies, including NPS Management Policies (2006), [section 8.6.6](#), [Director's Order #53](#): Special Park Uses, and applicable material in [Reference Manual 53](#). Authorizing on-camera involvement by NPS employees and volunteers in commercial filming requires a very clear understanding and documentation of how our participation would advance NPS goals and individual park missions.

### **Policy**

The strategic use of film and photography can be a powerful tool, but it also has the potential to have a considerable negative impact on our agency's reputation and credibility if not handled well or with forethought; therefore, the NPS will NOT allow or issue permits where NPS employees and volunteers on duty are followed by commercial filming crews for extended periods of time, with the footage edited by the production company for later broadcast. Frequently, this type of filming is labeled "reality TV," and involves documenting the daily lives of individuals rather than concentrating on the stories or mission of the NPS, the final product being packaged as entertainment.

In addition, this memorandum clarifies that, at the discretion of their superintendents and as authorized by a special park use permit (issued to the filming entity), NPS employees and volunteers may be interviewed or demonstrate aspects of their job as part of those commercial filming productions. When employee or volunteer participation is approved, special park use permits will include conditions detailing the extent to which the specific employee or volunteer may participate in the filming and a copy of the conditions will be provided to the participating employee(s) and volunteer(s). Sample conditions are posted on the InsideNPS Special Park Uses [web page](#). In addition, park employees and volunteers should NOT sign model releases, location releases, or any other legal document provided by the permittee. These documents tend to be very legally dense, irrevocable, and written in a way that favors the production company, sometimes to the point of limiting liability and authorizing specific activities. In addition, these documents generally allow for the unlimited future use of footage and images by the production company for any purpose, including reuse, editing, and resale. The terms of use of the finished product may and should be addressed in the special park use permit. If the discussions with the permittee over those terms of use become contentious, please consult with your regional or field solicitor's office for guidance.

Managers must also adhere to [Policy Memorandum 14-05](#), dealing with the use of unmanned aircraft in the parks, including their use for commercial filming.

If you have any questions or comments about this Policy Memorandum, please contact the NPS Office of Special Park Uses at 202-513-7092.

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