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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**Washington, DC 20515-6115**

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July 16, 2007

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The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write in regard to a recent audit report issued by the Department of Interior's (Department) Office of Inspector General, entitled *Private Use of Public Lands, National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management* (Report No. W-IN-MOA-0008-2005). That report found the National Park Service (NPS) has for decades regularly permitted private parties and clubs to monopolize public locations near major metropolitan areas to the exclusion of the public. In addition, the report finds that NPS has improperly kept millions of dollars that should have been remitted to the U.S. Treasury, and renewed permits without ensuring compliance with requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The Committee on Energy and Commerce has jurisdiction over, among other things, tourism, commerce, trade, and the environment. As such, the Committee is interested in the compelling findings of this audit report. In addition, we are troubled to learn that the Department's Inspector General may have conducted a similar audit in 1984, which highlighted the same issues. Therefore, the Committee requests information regarding what, if any, actions the Department and NPS have undertaken to respond to criticisms now more than 20 years old.

We question the appropriateness of your Department's continued practice of granting "special use" leases that permit private clubs to operate on Federal lands to the exclusion of the tax-paying public. We especially question such practices in major metropolitan areas such as Washington, D.C., where public access to waterfront land is limited. Need we remind you that the National Park Service Act of 1916 clearly prohibits leasing public land, if such activity interferes with free public access to it.

We find it especially troubling that one of the examples mentioned in the report—the Washington Canoe Club—appears to be an exclusive private club limited to a few hundred individuals who were lucky or wealthy enough to pass a rather restrictive screening process to become members.

Such a practice is especially troubling in light of news accounts that indicate that a number of educational institutions, including the School Boards of the District of Columbia and Arlington County, George Washington University, and Georgetown University, to name a few, have for decades unsuccessfully sought permits from the Park Service to build training facilities for their students on the Potomac. Ironically, the Park Service has regularly renewed the restrictive lease for the Washington Canoe Club while it denied the aforementioned requests on grounds that there was no available land for such facilities.

Accordingly, under Rules X and XI of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee on Energy and Commerce and its Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations request that you provide us with a briefing on your response to the abovementioned 1984 and 2007 audit reports, as well as the following records within two weeks from the date of this letter:

1. Any and all records related to the renewal of the lease of the Washington Canoe Club;
2. The names, titles, and contact information for all Department of Interior staff and contractors involved with the renewal of the lease for the Washington Canoe Club;
3. Any and all records reflecting any contacts made by or on behalf of the Washington Canoe Club to any and all officials of the Interior Department or any other Department of Office of the United States Government in relation to the renewal of the lease for the Washington Canoe Club;
4. Any and all records reflecting the membership of the Washington Canoe Club;
5. Any and all studies and reports conducted, or records held by the Department comparing the background of the membership of the Washington Canoe Club to the socio-economic make-up of the District of Columbia and an explanation if no such studies were conducted by the Department in granting any leases to the Washington Canoe Club;
6. Any and all records reflecting the standards used to determine the renewal of the lease for the Washington Canoe Club; and
7. Any and all records reflecting the Department's consideration of other uses for the Washington Canoe Club property by the District of Columbia Parks Department, the Board of Education, or other schools or municipalities.

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne  
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If you have any other questions, please contact us, or have your staff contact Steven C. Rangel, Investigative Counsel with the Committee, at (202) 226-2424.

Sincerely,



John D. Dingell  
Chairman



Bart Stupak  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

cc: The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Ed Whitfield, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations