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Ms. Charis Wilson, PhD, CRM
NPS FOIA Officer
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PO Box 25287
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Dear Ms. Wilson,

This letter pertains to the March 2, 2016, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) regarding the National Park Service's (NPS) Policy Memorandum 11-03 that was released on December 14, 2011. The memorandum allows parks on an individual basis to ban the sale of bottled water "following an extensive review and with the prior approval of the regional director." The FOIA tracking number is NPS-2016-00383.

As you may recall, CAGW has been trying to determine whether the ban on the sale of bottled water has reduced the amount of waste in the parks. We have received no information that indicates the parks are conducting yearly analyses on the effects of the ban, as required in the 2011 policy memorandum. We did, however, receive from you a copy of the NPS response to another FOIA request (NPS-2014-00051) provided on May 5, 2016, which stated:

A Search of the Sustainable Practices Report database has found that those parks that have discontinued plastic water bottle sales do not separately report their recycling quantities based on type (plastic, glass, aluminum, paper, etc.) As a result they do not have data available to conduct a post-ban analysis.

On June 14, 2016, the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform held a hearing on the National Park Service. During the hearing, Rep. Tim Walberg (R-Mich.) and NPS Director Jonathan Jarvis had the following exchange:

Rep. Walberg: Director Jarvis, in December of 2011, you issued an NPS Memo establishing a ban on plastic water bottles sales in the national parks. Is it true that most if not all of the parks that have implemented the plastic bottled water ban still sell other plastic packaged beverages - soda, enhanced water, juice, etc. Is that still the case?

Director Jarvis: Yes sir, they still do.

Rep. Walberg: Do you feel it is safe and healthy to ban the sale of bottled water?

Director Jarvis: When the public are provided an ample opportunity to get that water from a variety of sources, which we've built in, that's a requirement of the policy, they have to have filling stations throughout the park in order for them to refill reusable bottles.

Rep. Walberg: Can you say with absolute certainty, that this ban on plastic water bottles has reduced the garbage in national parks?

Director Jarvis: Yes, with certainty, absolutely.

Rep. Walberg: What analysis has been conducted?

Director Jarvis: We collect data on our solid waste management, I don't have that in front of me, but I would be glad to get back to you specifically on the reduction of waste in the waste stream.

Rep. Walberg: I'd like to see that on reduced waste, I'd like to see it on decreased disposal costs - information on that, I'd like to see it on increased recycling since implementation, those are issues I'd like to see, because frankly the question still remains. We get rid of the water in bottles and the sales of those water bottles, but we don't get rid of the sale of pop in the same bottles, energy drinks in the same bottles, juices in the bottles, as well. My concern is that we know that we need water. I've hiked enough of the national parks all across this nation to know that that's important, and the fact that the cost of putting in water-filling stations leaves me concerned that there are contractual issues that we ought to be concerned with, opposed to simply letting the sales take place to people that need the water. And, again, I'm not certain at this time that the necessary studies have been done to show that we have had an impact, other than stopping the sale of water bottles - water in water bottles - in the national parks for whatever reason that may be. I think there certainly ought to be questions that are raised about that subsequent to the needs of our visitors as well as contracting issues.

Please provide the analysis referenced by Director Jarvis in his answer to Rep. Walberg, including the data that was collected to conduct the analysis.

Sincerely,

Thomas Schatz