



Testimony of

J. Michael Cottingham

Wilderness Ventures, Inc. dba Wilderness Adventures

On

The Impact of Executive Order 13658 on Public Land Guides and  
Outfitters

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on the  
Interior United State House of Representatives

June 10, 2015

Thank you Madam Chairman and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to offer my support for H.R. 2215 and to explain why the Department of Labor Rule implementing Executive Order 13658 threatens the viability of my program and numerous other similar travel camp programs and summer camps for youth operating on public lands.

In 1973, my wife Helen and I quit our teaching jobs in order to create an alternative outdoor educational experience for young people. The purpose of our program has been to assist young men and women in becoming responsible adults through team building, group living and caring for one another in challenging outdoor activities. Since 1973, we have provided life-altering experiences for over 24,000 young adults, including the children of several governors, congressmen and senators. Our self-funded scholarship program enables at least thirty deserving students to participate each summer.

Our programs operate in seventeen federally designated wilderness areas and twelve national parks throughout the United States. These adventures range from two to five weeks in length and usually involve our sub-contracting activities such as rock climbing and whitewater rafting. Executive Order 13658 would require our monitoring compliance of over thirty subcontractors operating on federal lands, which would be extremely difficult if not impossible for us both from a personnel and a financial perspective. If they fail to meet the requirements of the Department of Labor rule and do not pay their staff the higher minimum wage for federal contractors, then we would have to make up the difference.

Each summer, we hire between 80 to 100 leaders who are current college students or graduate students. They work six weeks on average. While they guide our groups on public lands, they also participate as clients with our students on a variety of sub-contracted

activities such as climbing Washington's Mount Rainier or Wyoming's Grand Teton or rafting for four days on Idaho's Salmon River or Utah's Colorado River. As is the case with hundreds of summer camps and other similar travel camp programs for youth, we must price our programs competitively. The implementation of the Department of Labor rule would not only be impossible to calculate but would be impossible for anyone in the summer camp industry to afford as it would increase our salaries dramatically. Implementation of Executive Order 13658 would shut down many summer programs for youth unless they were eligible for an exemption under the Fair Labor Standards Act as it would be impossible to meet the payroll requirements of camp counselors, who must be on call twenty-four hours a day for multi-week employment periods.

As a seasonal, educational summer program for teens, we also view ourselves as a training program for young leaders. Nearly all of our staff members view their time with us as a break from the rigors of school or as a final opportunity to share their love for the out-of-doors with youth before they pursue fulltime careers in law, business, medicine or the arts etc. Leading a group of young adults for several weeks is a challenging and very fulfilling opportunity as it provides a platform, which stresses responsibility, accountability, organization and many other life skills required for success. I always tell my staff that if you can successfully lead one of our programs, you are prepared for future and larger challenges ahead.

I very much appreciate your attention to this issue and to the corrective action in H.R. 2215 which will be necessary to save many summer camps and travel camp programs similar to mine from going out of business.



June 5th, 2015

**J. Michael Cottingham, Director of Wilderness Ventures, Inc., dba Wilderness Adventures**

**Mike Cottingham, along with his wife Helen, co-founded Wilderness Adventures in 1973 for the purpose of assisting young people in becoming responsible adults through two to five-week long outdoor experiences involving team building, group living and outdoor skills training in America's national forests and parks. Since 1973, more than 24,000 young people have participated in these life changing outdoor adventures.**

**Since 1975, Mike and His wife Helen have resided in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where they raised two boys. Mike has been involved in a wide range of community affairs, serving on the boards of the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Jackson Youth Skating and the Jackson Hole Community School. Mike also served on the board of America Outdoors Association for nine years.**

**Prior to co-founding Wilderness Adventures in 1973, Mike taught at Indian Hill High School in Cincinnati, Ohio after receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Notre Dame in 1967 and his Masters degree in education from Xavier University in 1971.**

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Witness Disclosure Requirement – “Truth in Testimony”  
Required by House Rule XI, Clause 2(g)(5)

Name: J. Michael Cottingham

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1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2012. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

No federal grants.

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2. Please list any entity you are testifying on behalf of and briefly describe your relationship with these entities.

Wilderness Ventures Inc.  
DBA  
Wilderness Adventures

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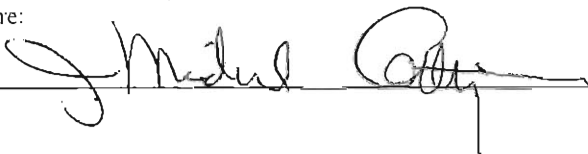
3. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) received since October 1, 2012, by the entity(ies) you listed above. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

No federal grants.

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*I certify that the above information is true and correct.*

Signature:



Date:

6/5/13