

**Nat Patridge  
Corporate President  
Exum Mountain Guides**

Written Testimony on oversight hearing on  
*“Concession Contract Issues for Outfitters,  
Guides and Smaller Concessions”*

August 2, 2012

Before the

**United States House of Representatives  
Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on  
National Parks, Forests and Public Lands**

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Dear Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Nat Patridge, and I am the Corporate President of Exum Mountain Guides, the oldest and largest guide service in the United States.

**Exum Overview:**

In 1929, Glenn Exum began climbing in the Teton Range with Paul Petzoldt, who had been guiding small numbers of clients since 1925. Together they formed a partnership that became the Petzoldt-Exum School of American Mountaineering.

Glenn Exum was a man of exceptional integrity, endowed with a charismatic and commanding personality. He was handsome and debonair, with a resemblance, some say, to Errol Flynn. He was also a superb athlete and gifted climber. We are honored that his name graces our company.

In 1931 when Glenn was 18, he climbed a new route on the Grand Teton, solo, with no rope, in a pair of borrowed leather-cleated football shoes that were two sizes too big for him. At the end of Wall Street is a crucial passage that allows access to the south ridge of the Grand Teton, a gap at the top of a terrifically exposed chimney. Seeing no way to climb across the

gap, Glenn walked back and forth along the ledge seven times until he finally picked out small handholds and a boulder on the ridge crest. Later he wrote, "When you get to the eastern extremity of Wall Street, why there isn't any place to jump from! So I climbed as high as I could, until I was sort of secure, and jumped from a standing start!"

Once across, Glenn was committed to the ridge, since no retreat was possible. He climbed the now famous pitches on the ridge and reached the summit. The Exum Ridge, named for his first ascent, is now the most popular route on the Grand Teton.

In the mid-1930's, Glenn was invited to climb in the Alps. While there he observed that European guides merely tied a rope around their clients and pulled them up difficult sections of a climb without giving them instruction in climbing techniques or rope handling. On the descent, the guides lowered their clients instead of having them rappel on their own.

Glenn believed that climbers would more readily appreciate the challenges of mountaineering if they could participate. When he returned to the Tetons, he applied this concept to the guide service. He developed the philosophy that guides should provide instruction, inspire, teach responsibility, and promote participation—a complete departure from the European model of guiding. His changes to the old traditions were a tremendous success and became the basis of the American guiding tradition.

Glenn's innovations remain the bedrock principles of Exum Mountain Guides. People of all ages are taught to climb before they attempt crags or summits. They learn balance, knots, rope handling, the use of the climbing rope for protection, climbing techniques, and how to rappel. Exum also emphasizes safety, awareness of hazards, and sensitivity to the mountain environment. Thus prepared, new climbers are able to ascend the Grand Teton and other mountains as full participants in the adventure that is mountaineering. They can be justly proud of their own accomplishment, and we are proud of them. Some have gone on to become fine climbers in their own right; some have even returned to Exum as guides.

After guiding and teaching for 83 years, Exum Mountain Guides enjoys an unmatched reputation for excellence. The guide service has grown since those early years, 70 guides currently, but we still hire guides who are able

to teach and inspire others. Our guides are highly trained, highly skilled and well paid. We have the most AMGA/IFMGA certified and licensed guides of any guide service in the United States measured by both total number and percentage. We are also proud to have high guide wages and guides who return to work for us for 10-20 years.

Exum Mountain Guides c/o Exum Mountain Guide Services and School of Mountaineering, Inc. is a National Park Service Concessioner.

### **The Impact of the Insurance Requirement:**

What are the reasonable justifications for the insurance increase? How are these justifications weighed against the higher financial burden for concessioners?

It is reasonable to assume that increasing limits to \$5,000,000 will increase a concessioner's premium by at least 50 percent. This is a significant cost burden to small concessioners especially during the current economic crisis. The real effect of increasing the limits is that smaller concessioners will be forced out of business because NPS regulates our rates therefore raising prices is not an option. The only cost saving could come from wage diminishment. This increase will put us out of business.

### **Business and Loss Reports:**

In the last 3 years, Exum has guided an average of 5,700 client days in each summer with an average of 10 incidents. We have a resultant accident rate of .002 which is statistically insignificant. The most serious incident in the past 20 years was a broken bone when a client slipped walking down the trail after a successful ascent of the Grand Teton and there was no settlement paid.

Exum has discussed the loss history for guide concessioners like Exum with an insurer and the overall loss report is likewise insignificant at an accident rate of .02. Historically, the highest claim paid was \$30,000.

## **In Summary:**

In conclusion, we are asking you to consider all parties, including the public, that will suffer as a result of the higher insurance limits. We believe the increased insurance will eliminate companies like Exum that have been operating for decades only to be replaced by large companies that can absorb the higher cost or self-insure. This will also likely reduce guide wages and drive the most skilled US guides to seek other employment options, which will most likely be the European Alps. The result will be a reduced quality of service to park visitors and lower standards which will deprive the public of a safe and authentic American mountaineering experience which Exum and other small outfitters currently provide.

NPS states on its website that, “Concessioners fill a vital role in helping the National Park Service (NPS) carry out its mission. Private companies are drawn to working with NPS in order to offer services to park visitors, which are not provided directly by the government. *Concessioners specialize in these operations and are thus able to provide quality services at reasonable prices.* By welcoming the private sector as a partner in park operations, the National Park Service broadens the economic base of the region and communities surrounding the parks.” (emphasis added). The increased insurance requirements are not sustainable or affordable long term and will drive out concessioners like Exum that the NPS currently relies on to provide “quality service at reasonable prices.”

Thank you for your time. I trust that you will consider our concerns and keep the integrity of our national parks authentic.