We Don’t Feel Safer

Anticipating what Barack Obama has called “common-sense gun safety laws,” the Bush administration has rushed through a last-minute gun rule that is the antithesis of common sense. The Interior Department published a rule last week that will allow loaded, concealed weapons in nearly all of this country’s national parks.

The rule, which will take effect next month, will apply to national parks in every state that has a concealed carry law, even if guns are prohibited in state parks. The administration — again — also has ignored the point of a public comment period. It received 140,000 comments on this proposed rule change, the vast majority opposing it, and still went ahead.

There already is ample provision for carrying unloaded and properly stowed guns in transit through the parks. This is a rule that was bought and paid for by the National Rifle Association, and it reflects its obsession with overturning even the most sensible restrictions on gun use.

Right now, the National Parks are among the very safest places in this country, according to the F.B.I. The presence of concealed, loaded weapons is likely to change that, and it also is likely to pose an increased threat to wildlife.

The parks were set aside to preserve their natural beauty and provide enjoyment for visitors. Loaded guns — concealed or unconcealed — are completely inconsistent with that purpose and with the enjoyment of visitors who do not wish to come armed.

Unfortunately, far too many states have laws that allow citizens to carry concealed weapons. But no one should misinterpret those laws as the will of the people. They too are the will of the N.R.A., which has done everything in its power to force dangerous gun laws through one State Legislature after the next.

We hope that one of the incoming Obama administration’s first steps in bringing common sense to bear will be the reversal of this absurd and dangerous rule.