

John Sternberg
Denver, Colorado
Johnm1a@centurylink.net

Mr. Ronald Schmeits
NRA Whittington Center
Raton, NM
VIA Email: raschmeits@bacavalley.com

Dear Ron:

Whittington Center (WC) Match Cancellations

I am writing on behalf of myself and the broader shooting community at large who frequent The Whittington Center. To say the members of the NRA and WC are upset is an understatement!

First, I want to thank you for your time today and your service to the members of the Whittington Center. Also, we are all grateful for your past service as President of the NRA.

As we discussed today, the shooting community is:

- Rightly upset at the circumstances of the match cancellations at the WC.
- Angry at a few members of your staff for their deception, dishonesty and evasive behavior exhibited toward the Match Directors and shooters
- Confused at the favoritism displayed toward one shooting discipline at the expense of others
- Resigning their memberships from the NRA specifically because of your staff's decisions to cancel these matches

History and Tradition at The Whittington Center

The five matches at the Whittington Center impacted by your staff's decisions are:

- Sporting Rifle Match (SRM)
- He-Man Nationals
- Nightforce 2 Gun Match
- Rocky Mountain Three Gun (RM3G)
- Magnum Rifle Match

These matches are part of the long history and tradition at the WC. SRM, a long-range match held in natural terrain, has been in place for 15 years and has attracted hundreds of shooters from across the Western USA including New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, Utah, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Arizona, Montana and many other states. This long-range match contributes significant revenue to the WC.

The historic location of SRM, as are the locations for RM3G and others, offers unique and spectacular terrain. All of these cancelled matches are rightly known for being outstanding because of the use of natural terrain vs. typical square ranges.

The RM3G match typically sells out to three hundred shooters from across the USA. Match staff and sponsors add another fifty or so attendees to this match. This match, held in natural terrain, was originally titled Soldier of Fortune Three Gun Match and was supported by NRA/WC BOD Member LTC

Robert K Brown. SOF/RM3G has been part of the WC for at least 20 years and is the largest single event that contributes revenue to the WC.

The other cancelled matches are part of the more recent history of the WC and contributed to expanding the shooting sports to a broad number of shooters.

Demographics

These matches attract the future of the shooting sports and are the result of the NRA and the shooting industry's efforts to broaden and attract women, youth and long-time shooters to these newer disciplines. Cancelling these matches negates the investments of the shooting industry and is unacceptable because they threaten the future of our sport.

WC Staff Behavior

We are all grateful for the outstanding efforts and support of the WC staff. We have broad and deep support across all of your staff with a few exceptions.

We, the shooting community, have spoken with Josh and Ken of your staff on several occasions and take great exception to their treatment of our Match Directors and shooters. We have been deceived and lied to; mislead; and, judged to be part of an unfavorable shooting discipline. We encourage you to investigate their behavior and take corrective action while at the same time extending our gratitude to the rest of your staff.

Divide and Conquer

Josh has been quoted as saying he wants to close the natural terrain areas of the WC where we have held these matches in favor of hunters while moving our disciplines to square or narrow ranges. Josh's favoritism for three elk tags in Coal Canyon at the expense of thousands of shooters in other disciplines is unconscionable. The WC should be staunchly supportive of coexistence of all disciplines as has been the history and tradition for years.

Ken deceived and disrespected our Match Directors and shooters by first saying these natural terrain areas were being closed due to fire danger and then saying that the matches were being offered a suitable replacement area and would no longer be allowed in the area of Coal Canyon. This claim of suitability of another location is a falsehood of the highest order. Further, hunting will be allowed in the area of Coal Canyon while our disciplines have been cancelled.

The Magnum Rifle Match was held on a broad and narrow flat plain area in the interior part of the WC. Offering this location for SRM was not only a safety issue but was insufficient to place 60 targets in natural terrain and allow ten shooting locations as we had in the area of Coal Canyon. SRM would not have had any similarity to our traditional and historic location near Coal Canyon if forced to be held in this "suitable" location.

All of these cancelled matches coexisted with all other disciplines for years. There has never been a fire from any of these matches. We suggest that a small effort to trim weeds and brush in the areas where we park our vehicles will mitigate any fire danger. Also, any suggestion that non-ferrous metals from ammunition will cause a spark and start a fire is another falsehood from your staff.

At SRM, we do not allow any smoking on the trails and insist that any smoking must take place inside vehicles. This rule is rigorously enforced by our Match Director and fellow shooters.

Lastly, the WC Brush Fire truck that was recently stolen and recovered could easily be parked in the area of Coal Canyon in the event a fire was to start from lightning or from someone passing by on highway 555 during our matches. We would all be happy to train in the use and operation of this truck to preserve the uniqueness of the WC

Shooter's Investments

Many shooters have made significant investments in equipment and gear to participate in these matches. Precision rifles for SRM can range in cost from \$2,500 to more than \$10,000. Many shooters have built rifles specific to this match and don't have access to other matches in their home areas to use these rifles. RM3G requires investments of a similar nature. This is great revenue for our suppliers, sponsors and service providers.

Other equipment and services used by shooters for these matches include powder, bullets, primers, reloading presses, holsters, scopes, cleaning equipment and the services of gunsmiths among many others.

The cancellation of these matches means these rifles and other gear will not be purchased by new shooters; or, used, refurbished, re-barreled, upgraded, improved or replaced by existing shooters. Our match sponsors and WC sponsors will not be supported by these shooters anymore and is unacceptable.

As you know, we are fighting to support these sponsors while retaining our rights every day. The cancellation of these matches will harm the shooting industry. Hopefully, this is an unintended consequence of your staffs' decisions. (@Bob Nosler, @Frank Brownell, WC BOD)

Impact on The Community of Raton

These matches contributed significant revenue to the local community of Raton. As a Banker, I am certain you appreciate the importance of outside money flowing to the local economy. We estimate businesses in Raton will lose in excess of \$500,000 annually due to these cancellations. We expect there will be a negative reaction from the Raton community once the business owners learn of this major impact.

Social Media Censorship

As I write this letter, The Whittington Center Facebook page contains a post from Josh Adams about rumors regarding match closures. Josh's post, for the first time, notes that these matches may be resumed in coming years once the fire danger subsides. Ken Mestas of your staff has sent emails to shooters who have objected to these cancellations claiming we will never have access to Coal Canyon again. When these emails were copied and posted to Josh's post, they were removed by members of your staff. This is effectively censorship and your staff should adhere to accepted social media norms about freedom of speech. Further, this behavior only adds to the distrust of Josh and perhaps others on your staff.

Resolution

We encourage an ongoing dialog between you, your staff and our shooting community to reestablish these matches in their original locations. Please let me know how and when we can begin these conversations and discuss the details necessary to redeem our collective future together.

Thank you

John Sternberg
NRA Life Member
NRA Whittington Center Life Member
Competitive Shooter
Gun Rights Plaintiff – **Sternberg v Hickenlooper** currently in Colorado Court of Appeals
NRA Civil Rights Defense Fund Recipient (~\$175,000) in **Sternberg v. Denver**

Copy of this letter to NRA WC BOD Members:

David Bennett – nrabadnm@comcast.net
Becky Fish – bfish@nrawc.org
Wilson Phillips Jr – wphillips@nrahq.org
Dr. Tom Arvas – timarvas@hotmail.com
LTC Robert K Brown – editorsof@aol.com
Frank Brownell – frankb@brownells.com
J. William Carter – jwilliam.carter@gmail.com
John Cushman – jcushman@juno.com
Tom King – tomkingnra@gmail.com
Robert A “Bob” Nosler – bob@nosler.com
James W Porter II – jwporterii@pphlaw.net
Kayne Robinson – kbr@reagan.com
John C Sigler – jsigler@ps-corp.net
John H Thompson, PH.D. – kweo@wbhsi.net
Dwight Van Horn – ddvanhorn@roadrunner.com
Robert L Viden, Jr – rlv@bobs littlesportshop.com