



COLORADO RIVER MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

DRAFT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

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INTRODUCTION

The preferred alternatives described in the following pages have been developed from public input received during the revision of the Colorado River Management Plan. These proposed policy modifications represent a synthesis of suggestions received from public meetings, the CRMP Issue Workbook, and other written comments. A draft CRMP will be developed, incorporating public input concerning these alternatives.

Each issue is described, with current policies and future objectives explained. The preferred alternative is then presented and the rationale justifying the decision discussed. The National Park Service is striving to produce a Colorado River management program which addresses a wide variety of interests and concerns, yet holds fast to the mission of protecting the resource from adverse impacts and preserving a quality whitewater rafting experience.

In addition to the issues discussed in the following pages, there are other administrative decisions regarding changes to the Colorado River Management Plan. The Guides' Certification Program was initiated in the 1988 summer commercial operating season. All commercial river guides in Grand Canyon National Park are required to pass an exam based on the CRMP Annual Commercial Operating Requirements.

A computer simulation model for wilderness travel obtained by Grand Canyon National Park is being developed to determine what role it may serve in future mitigation of the campsite competition and attraction site crowding issues. This model will project potential on-river use scenarios and predict possible implications derived from manipulating launch schedules and length of visits at attraction sites on downstream crowding levels.

In order to reflect demand and carrying capacity levels occurring on the Colorado River and eliminate the traditional perceptions attached to the terms "summer" and "winter" seasons, these terms will be changed in the revised CRMP to "primary" and "secondary" seasons respectively. The dates of these seasons will remain as stated in the current CRMP.

A comprehensive review and revision of the CRMP will occur every five to ten years. The NPS will also institute an annual review of the commercial and noncommercial operating requirements, which will permit evaluation of the effectiveness and implications of the revised policies. This approach will increase the flexibility of the plan in responding to scientific findings acquired from future research and monitoring programs, and input from river users.

ISSUE: Colorado River Trips Conducted for Research Purposes

OBJECTIVES: To establish a strong, clear definition of research trips and develop appropriate guidelines; closely monitor and evaluate potential significance of use levels; and initiate the requirement that research trip reports and results be submitted in writing to the park subsequent to completion of the trip.

CURRENT POLICY: All research trips are subject to approval by the Superintendent through the Division of Resources Management and Planning on a case by case basis. Following approval, the launch date is scheduled by the River Permits Office. All research trips are required to comply with NPS regulations and requirements applicable to river users.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE: All research along the Colorado River through Grand Canyon National Park will continue to be subject to approval by the Superintendent through the Division of Resources Management and Planning prior to launching. Trip proposals must be submitted in writing to the Superintendent's Office no later than December 1 of the year prior to the research trip. Trip proposals must include an explanation as to why a river trip is necessary to accomplish the research.

Upon approval of the research proposal by the NPS, the researcher must submit an application to the River Permits Office. This application will be similar to the noncommercial trip application and will include a justification of each trip participant's role as essential to the purpose of the trip. The completed application must be received in the River Permits Office no later than 30 days prior to the launch date.

Approved researchers, will have three options to outfit their trip: 1) to utilize privately owned or rented equipment, much like a noncommercial river trip; 2) to contract with an approved commercial concessioner; or 3) to use another approved outfitter. Personnel and equipment must meet the qualifications and standards identified in the Colorado River Management Plan. Research trips must acquire an adequate insurance bond in order to secure permit approval.

Within 30 days of trip completion, a journal of trip activities and accomplishments must be submitted to the Superintendent. Similarly, if the study results in a technical report or professional paper, this information must be submitted to the park no later than 30 days following publication.

RATIONALE: The preferred alternative is an effort to encourage legitimate research in Grand Canyon National Park by allowing utilization of the unique opportunity the Colorado River offers, while at the same time ensuring a measure of control over the level of use. Tangible benefits derived from research trips will help identify reasonable research use levels as they stabilize under the new system. Research results that can be directly utilized by the NPS in evaluating policies, managing use of the Grand Canyon, and furthering scientific understanding, justify the non-allocated use of the river within reasonable limits by researchers. Copies of trip reports and findings will be routed to the Divisions of Visitor and Resource Protection and Resources Management and Planning and will be included in the Grand Canyon National Park Library. The validity of these results may be used to evaluate future potential approval for related or continuing research.

In order to determine if a research proposal is appropriate, the inclusion of a trip justification will be required. This should address potential alternatives for completion of the research, i.e. seasonal restrictions, alternative methods of access to the research site, special requirements or conditions dictated by the study subject, etc..

There will be no allocation or launch limit imposed on research trips; however, research use levels will be closely monitored to determine if the level of research use is such that increased regulation is necessary. Research trips will be required to comply with maximum seasonal trip lengths allowed commercial and noncommercial users. Research permittees may request, through the permit approval process, an extension of those maximum limits based upon specific study needs. Research trips will not be allowed to visit attraction sites, if the sites are not specific to the research. Research trips are encouraged to utilize less popular campsites and schedule research during low use periods.

ISSUE: Commercially Guided Fishing Trips

OBJECTIVES: To ensure adequate protection for wildlife populations within Grand Canyon National Park, including the endangered humpback chub and bald eagle; and to preserve whitewater rafting as a multi-faceted recreational experience on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon below Lees Ferry.

CURRENT POLICY: Commercially guided sport fishing in Grand Canyon National Park is prohibited. Commercial river concessionaires may not advertise fishing as a primary purpose of a river trip. Fishing may be advertised only as a recreational activity secondary to the whitewater experience.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE: The current park policy of prohibiting commercially guided fishing is preferred. Fishing on commercial river trips may remain a secondary activity, and fishing may be mentioned in advertising literature as a peripheral part of a whitewater trip. However, no concessioner, group, organization, or individual may advertise, utilize a contractor, or operate a river trip down the Colorado River through Grand Canyon National Park for the primary purpose of providing an optimal sport fishing experience. Based on existing information and ongoing research, Grand Canyon National Park will continue protection of humpback chub, as well as monitoring and evaluating bald eagle populations feeding seasonally on trout spawning in sidestreams.

RATIONALE: The preferred alternative is designed to preserve the unique experience whitewater rafting in the Grand Canyon represents as the primary recreational goal, while still providing the opportunity for sport fishing to occur as a peripheral recreational activity.

The ability of endangered humpback chub and trout populations to tolerate increased fishing pressure is unknown. Present and future impacts of trout fishing on bald eagle population levels and distribution is also unknown. The National Park Service may initiate future consultations with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the scientific community to design a comprehensive study program that can accurately and safely determine the health and density of the present populations and provide reasonable estimates of population responses to different use scenarios.

ISSUE: Commercial and Noncommercial Winter Use

OBJECTIVES: To enhance utilization of existing winter allocation; to provide equitable access to winter allocation and at the same time recognize historical use; manage use levels such that a "wilderness experience" is an available option; and insure any increased impacts resulting from enhanced use can be mitigated by the remaining recovery period available to the resource.

CURRENT POLICY: The commercial winter user day allotment is distributed solely by a user day pool system. One commercial launch is allowed per day in the commercial season from October 1 through April 30. No motor-powered rafts are allowed to launch from September 16 through December 15.

The noncommercial winter season runs from October 16 to April 15, and the allocation is distributed under the same permit application guidelines as the summer season. Forty noncommercial launches are permitted during this time, and there can be no more than 3 launches per week with no less than 1 day between launches. Longer trip lengths are allowed in winter, and the lower use levels afford an opportunity for a "wilderness experience" with a minimum of contact with other parties. The majority of winter use by both sectors occurs in the so-called shoulder months of October, November, March, and April.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE: The dates for the commercial winter and no motor season will remain the same, October 1 to April 30. The winter allocation will be divided among all the existing companies utilizing a method combining both historical use and equal access to the allocation. This distribution will be determined utilizing average winter use figures established from 1981 to 1986. This will result in all commercial companies being allocated user days sufficient to run two winter trips. Any excess user days remaining after the initial distribution will go into a user day pool. If a concessioner does not wish to conduct winter trips, their base allocation will automatically go to the user day pool. The user day pool will be available to all concessionaires, with priority access to those with the greatest average historical winter use. Requests from the pool will be based upon the individual company's historic user day average for one trip or the overall average for the type trip operated.

The noncommercial winter season will remain from October 16 to April 15 and retain the same allocation of user days. The 40 launch limit would be raised to 52 launches in the winter period based on the average user days per trip. Five launches per week will be allowed, with trips launching on no more than 2 consecutive days. Current trip lengths of 21 days and 30 days will continue for both sectors.

RATIONALE: The winter season will continue to provide a variety of trip experiences. The proposed system will provide for equity in access to the outfitted-public allocation for all existing outfitters, provide new companies the opportunity to establish a winter use precedent, and give a degree of historical preference to those companies that have traditionally utilized the winter season. The noncommercial system will allow those private rafters that would prefer to raft during the shoulder months, in milder weather and without motor traffic, a greater opportunity to do so. By increasing from 3 to 5 launches per week, the opportunity for utilization of the allocation at these more desirable times will be enhanced. In addition, the opportunity for solitude and a wilderness experience will continue to be available during the balance of the winter use period.

ISSUE: Noncommercial Waiting List

OBJECTIVES: To reduce the waiting time for a noncommercial permit; to enhance the opportunities for the private user to more fully utilize the noncommercial allocation; and to increase access to the most popular seasons of the year and still provide for a variety of experience.

CURRENT POLICY: The noncommercial waiting list is open to new applicants from February 1 to February 29. In order to remain on the waiting list, all applicants must continue their interest in writing every year from December 15 to January 31. A total of 223 noncommercial launch dates are available each year. During the summer season (April 16 to October 15), one noncommercial launch per day is allowed. During the winter season (October 16 to April 15), 40 noncommercial launches are permitted with a maximum of three launches per week.

The top 300 applicants are contacted each year in October to determine their preferred launch dates for the next season. Applicants contacted for preferred launch dates have the option of deferring their launch for one year once their number is 220 or less. Launch dates available following the initial scheduling period become available on the first working day in January to anyone on the waiting list on a first-call, first-served basis. Cancelled dates are filled by a first-call, first-served basis as well. All permittees are removed from the waiting list.

If a waiting list applicant accompanies another noncommercial trip, their name is removed from the waiting list. That person may reapply during the next application period.

Cancellation policies for those obtaining initially scheduled launch dates differ from those who obtain launch dates through the call-in (open season) system. Permittees cancelling launch dates obtained through the initially scheduled process either remain on the list or are simply removed from the list depending on when they cancelled and if they had used their deferral option before. Under the call-in (open season) system, those cancelling more than 60 days prior to the launch date remain off the waiting list but may reapply the following February. Those under this system cancelling less than 60 days in advance are restricted from the waiting list for one year. Failure to return the permit application 30 days prior to the launch date or failure to show at Lees Ferry on the specified launch date results in restriction from waiting list for two years.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE: A \$100.00 non-refundable, non-transferable application fee will be charged to all new applicants to the waiting list. Money orders only will be accepted and must be received with the application. Those applicants already on the list will not be charged the application fee as long as they remain on the list. The waiting list will be open to new enrollees between January 1 and February 29.

The continuing interest requirement will be abolished. It is the responsibility of the waiting list enrollees to inform the NPS of any address changes. If the permittees are unreachable by mail, they will be dropped from the list. The NPS may conduct a periodic certified mailing to verify continued interest of those on the list.

Scheduling of noncommercial launch dates will be conducted on a two year revolving scale. Applicants from the top of the list will be contacted in order to assign launches for two full seasons. Each September, unscheduled dates available during the next two years will be scheduled. Individuals contacted must list a minimum of 15 preferred launch dates. Launch dates will be assigned in priority order, with the applicants at the top of the list having first preference for scheduling dates. Supplemental information will be obtained from a permittee's launch preference sheet to assess their potential for claiming a cancelled date when given a minimum notice of 120 days, 90 days, 60 days, and 30 days.

Launch date deferrals will not be allowed unless there is a confirmed medical problem that would prevent the permittee from participating in a river trip. Exceptions may be requested in writing from the Chief of Visitor and Resource Protection.

Launch dates may be rescheduled for the same season if notification of the cancellation is received more than 60 days in advance of the initial date and only if an alternative date is available.

Those cancelling more than 60 days prior to the launch date remain off the waiting list but may reapply the following February. Those cancelling less than 60 days in advance are restricted from the waiting list for one year. Cancellations less than 30 days prior to the launch date result in restriction from the waiting list for two years.

Any cancelled launch date will be filled using the information obtained from the launch preference sheets. If the cancellation occurs 90 days or more prior to the launch date, written notification will be sent to all those expressing interest in that particular time period. Any applicant desiring the launch date must notify the River Permits Office in writing or by telephone by a specified time not less than 5 days from notification. If the cancellation occurs less than 90 days and greater than 30 days prior to the launch date, the River Permits Office will attempt to locate persons expressing interest in that time period by telephone during a two working day period after the time of cancellation.

A call-in system will be in place to schedule any dates not claimed by other processes. These dates will be open to anyone on the waiting list regardless of their priority position on a first-call, first-served basis.

All launch dates will be given to the applicant with the lowest waiting list number who is willing to accept the launch date. These people are then subject to the cancellation and rescheduling regulations. Any cancellations occurring less than 30 days prior to the launch will be filled by the call-in system. Applicants claiming a cancelled date will be immediately deleted from the waiting list. These permittees will be subject to the same cancellation regulations as described above; however, if a date is accepted less than 30 days prior to a launch date, no restriction from the waiting list will be imposed if that date is cancelled at a later time.

Waiting list applicants or permit holders which accompany other noncommercial trips will no longer be removed from the waiting list.

The National Park Service will continue to monitor the effects of the experimental double launches added in the 1988 season. Pending a favorable evaluation, this program will be continued to improve access to the noncommercial allocation. If continued, double launches of noncommercial trips will occur once a week from April 16 to August 31, and will be scheduled on days that traditionally launch fewer commercial trips. Ten double launch days will be scheduled in September, and an additional two double launches will occur in the first two weeks of October. These thirty additional launches will allow the noncommercial sector the opportunity to utilize up to 96% of their allocation. On double launch days, the commercial passenger launch limit at Lees Ferry will be held to 134 and the two noncommercial trips will be scheduled for morning and afternoon departure times in order to mitigate downstream and launch ramp crowding.

A noncommercial user day pool, comparable to the system available to the commercial operators, will be established in order to achieve the objective of 100% utilization of the noncommercial allocation. The user day pool will be formed from unused days that result from cancelled trips and smaller than maximum group sizes or trip lengths. User days left over from completed trips due to smaller than maximum allowed groups or shorter duration trips, will be pooled beginning June 1. When sufficient user days (based on the maximum number of user days for a primary season trip) become available, double launches will be added in the months of August, September, and October. These dates will be filled by the same process as any other open date.

RATIONALE: Many of the proposed policy modifications will improve access to the existing noncommercial allocation of user days. Double launches and launches created from the user day pool will assist the private sector in approaching 100% utilization. By scheduling two years in advance and filling cancellations from the top of the list, applicants that have been on the list the longest will receive priority preference in scheduling trip dates. The no deferral policy will facilitate the movement of names off the list, and the application fee will discourage multiple trip members or less than serious applicants from artificially inflating the waiting list. However, it must also be noted that many of the changes resulting from public input may serve to lengthen the waiting list. Over 800 names previously dropped off the list every year due to the continuing interest and no-repeat policies may remain on the list under the new system.

ISSUE: Crowding and Congestion at Camps and Attraction Sites

OBJECTIVES: To alleviate as much as possible competition for campsites and congestion at attraction sites; to provide a higher quality experience for river corridor users; to attempt to offset the increased use levels resulting from enhanced access to allocations; and to implement a research and monitoring program utilizing expertise from the field of social science in order to improve responsiveness to this issue.

CURRENT POLICY: While on the river, decisions regarding campsite selection and visitation to attraction sites are largely the responsibility of the individual trip leaders, and the degree to which groups communicate and cooperate to alleviate crowding is variable. Excessive on-river regulation has been reduced and replaced with education and enhanced communication, with much of the mitigation of crowding and congestion remaining in the domain of individual choice.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE: The National Park Service recognizes the need to regulate on-river travel to some degree. Critical corridor areas of the river have been identified where campsites are scarce. These areas include Marble Canyon (Mile 0 - Mile 39), Hance Rapid to Phantom Ranch (Mile 77 to Mile 88), and the Havasu set-up corridor from Upset Hotel to National Canyon (Mile 150 to Mile 167). It will be strongly recommended that layovers in these corridors be avoided from Memorial Day to Labor Day. This will facilitate traffic flow through the canyon and help reduce campsite competition and crowding at attraction sites. Specific camps where primary season layovers are particularly discouraged include South Canyon (Mile 31.5), Nankoweap Creek (Mile 52), Hance Rapid (Mile 77), Grapevine Camp (Mile 82), Lower Bass Camp (Mile 108), Stone/Galloway Camps (Mile 132), Tapeats Creek (Mile 134), Olo Canyon (Mile 146), Upset Hotel (Mile 150), and Ledges Camp (Mile 155). The 87 Mile or Cremation Camp will continue to be open only to those trips exchanging passengers the next day at Phantom Ranch. In addition, it is recommended that camps in the entire corridor from Hance Rapid to Phantom Ranch be utilized only by trips with passenger exchanges.

No commercial training trips will be allowed during the peak season from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Individual trainees, approved under the definition of "crew" in the Commercial Operating Requirements will be permitted to accompany summer trips providing all the regulatory requirements and stipulations are met.

"Deadhead" trips to Phantom Ranch or Whitmore Wash are discouraged in order to eliminate exceeding the Lees Ferry 150 passenger/day departure limit. To accomplish this, the number of passengers to be picked up downriver will be included in the 150 passenger limit on the day of the boat departure from Lees Ferry. Deadhead trips will be required to adhere to crew limitations as specified in the Annual Commercial Operating Requirements and will be required to expedite travel to the passenger pick up point. Motor trips must arrive at Phantom Ranch on the second day out from Lees Ferry, and oar-powered trips must arrive at Phantom Ranch on the fourth day. Motor trips deadheading to Whitmore Wash must arrive on their third day away from Lees Ferry. Exceptions to these deadhead trip lengths will be contingent upon adverse water conditions.

Trips carrying commercial passengers may average a maximum of 40 miles per day and may not travel farther than 50 miles in any one day except in an emergency.

RATIONALE: Specific areas of the river corridor tend to produce a more crowded or congested experience due to limitations imposed by natural features, geographic restrictions, and water flow levels. This plan will seek to mitigate, through education, voluntary compliance, and modification of the current system, these concerns.

The corridor from Hance Rapid to Phantom Ranch has very few camps, and these camps are critical to trips exchanging passengers at Phantom Ranch. By discouraging trips without passenger exchanges at Phantom Ranch from camping in this corridor, much of the congestion and related problems currently experienced by many river trips can be alleviated.

The revised policy concerning deadhead trips will help reduce campsite competition in the upper sections of river, discourage abuse of deadhead trips, and will eliminate the historic inflation of downstream use levels due to passengers joining trips and not being counted against the Lees Ferry launch limit. Each season, primary and secondary, is managed differently to provide options for a variety of trip experiences. It is the responsibility of the user to learn what level of use each season is managed for and to decide if that level is acceptable. Based upon this information, expectations can be formed in advance, situations may be anticipated, and a visitor's experience enhanced.

Education is critical to the mitigation of user perceptions concerning crowding. An NPS river orientation video will be produced and will be shown to all river passengers before embarking on a river trip through the Grand Canyon. This video will assist the viewer in aspects of pre-trip orientation, including an awareness of the potential for encountering some crowding and congestion. Improved orientation of passengers prior to launch will alert them to potentially crowded attraction sites and related problems. Improved communication between commercial guides and noncommercial trips will allow groups to manipulate their schedules in a cooperative atmosphere, helping to alleviate competition for camps and crowding at attraction sites. The newly formed Grand Canyon Guides Association will help provide leadership among professional guides in responding to these concerns.

Given present use levels and public pressure to increase or facilitate the maximum use of allocations, achieving the objective of reducing crowding and congestion becomes complex. Consultation with the social science community has the potential to open new avenues for change within the existing system. Their assistance will be solicited to monitor visitor perceptions of crowding and congestion to determine the effectiveness of changes that have been implemented.

ISSUE: Equity of Allocation/Access Between Commercial and Noncommercial Users

OBJECTIVES: To enhance utilization of existing allocations by modifying current policies and initiating new programs while maintaining adequate protection of the resource.

CURRENT POLICY: The National Park Service manages the Colorado River for 68% commercial use and 32% noncommercial use. Twenty commercial companies have been approved as concessioners to provide a professional outfitter and guide service to individuals without the skills and/or equipment to manage their own river trip. The noncommercial allocation is available through a permit system to parties that possess the ability to carry out their own trip. Allocations for both sectors are distributed by a user day system. Since 1984, 94 percent of the available summer launches have been used; however, only an average of 75 percent of the user day allocation has been utilized. Deficiencies in the noncommercial permit distribution system have prevented full utilization of available user days. Commercial outfitters, with the advantage of a user day pool, a flexible schedule, and a 110% scheduling window, have utilized an average of 91% of their user day allocation over the last seven years.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE: Noncommercial and commercial allocation levels will remain intact, while management of the specific allocations will be adjusted. Modifications to the existing distribution systems, administration of new policies regarding the noncommercial waiting list, and changes in commercial operational requirements represent methods for increasing the equity of access to the Colorado River between commercial and noncommercial users.

RATIONALE: Mitigation of this issue will occur by improving access to the noncommercial allocation and providing more options for obtaining desirable dates, as described in the Noncommercial Waiting List Preferred Alternative.

It is difficult to measure the demand for a whitewater raft trip, whether commercial or private, down the Colorado River through Grand Canyon National Park. Neither system of allocation distribution was designed to serve as an indicator of demand or preference.

Many private permit applicants have chosen not to accept launch dates at their first opportunity, as indicated by a 50% deferral rate. This indicates that noncommercial users, when faced with the logistical burden of organizing a Colorado River trip, need and want time to prepare. Many others on the waiting list are content to wait while they acquire the skills and equipment necessary to run a Grand Canyon river trip. Entire groups desiring to run the river together have put all their names on the list, hoping to improve the chances that at least one person in the group receives a permit. Several hundred names are removed from the list each year due to failure to continue interest in remaining on the list. All of these factors artificially inflate the noncommercial waiting list and make it a poor indicator of actual demand. The outfitted public have less distinct but real limits on their access to a river trip, including time, schedules, and finances. At present there is no way of determining how long a person has waited to arrange their schedule or to save enough money to go on a commercially outfitted trip. There may be many people with the desire to go on a commercial river trip, however no list of such people exists, thus they are not being counted. There is also no way of telling how

many commercial passengers have been turned away by one or more river concessioner. The fact that commercial companies turn prospective customers away every year due to allocation limitations would seem to indicate excess demand in that sector too.