



Grand Canyon River Runners Association

PRESERVING PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE COLORADO RIVER

Grand Canyon River Runners Association Launches Public Awareness Campaign

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PRESERVING PUBLIC ACCESS TO GRAND CANYON RIVER TRIPS

A new public interest advocacy organization, the Grand Canyon River Runners Association ("GCRRA") announced its formation today, with its leaders vowing to protect and defend the public's historic rights of access to widely-acclaimed Grand Canyon river trips.

"Our goal is to respond to those who would reduce or narrow the range of river services traditionally made available to the general public in the Grand Canyon," said the new group's president, Dwight Sherwood. "Grand Canyon river trips change people's lives, and the vast majority of us could never experience this wonderful opportunity on our own."

GCRRA was formed by a group of past Grand Canyon river trippers. Its leaders came together after becoming increasingly concerned that the voice of the general public who depends on professional services to visit the Grand Canyon by river was unorganized and in danger of being drowned out.

"A trip down the Grand Canyon's mighty Colorado River is one of life's greatest experiences. For decades, people from all over America and from around the world have taken part in these trips" said Pam Whitney, GCRRA vice president. "We oppose new rules such as banning environmentally-responsible motorized trips that would put a Grand Canyon river experience out of reach for most people."

GCRRA is also fully committed to protecting the Grand Canyon's Colorado River in an unimpaired natural condition. In furtherance of this crucial objective, GCRRA donates twenty percent of all membership dues to the Grand Canyon Conservation Fund, a grant-making program that supports a diverse group of non-profit organizations working to protect the Grand Canyon's Colorado River corridor.

PUBLIC ACCESS ISSUES

Some have advocated sweeping changes to how the NPS manages the Grand Canyon's Colorado River that could potentially have a drastic impact on the public's historic rights of access to Grand Canyon river trips. These include proposals to eliminate the fifty year practice of environmentally-responsible motorized trip opportunities, and the shifting of limited recreational use currently allocated to the professionally-outfitted sector to the self-outfitted or private sector.

"The Grand Canyon is not a private playground, it is a national treasure protected by the government for the responsible enjoyment of the public at large," said Robert McConnell, GCRRA board member. "The issue is the public's right to access their national park. We're going to participate vigorously in the National Park Service's river planning process to make sure the public's voice is heard loud and clear."

Currently, three-fourths of all professionally-outfitted Grand Canyon river trippers utilize motorized rafts. These trips enable a visitor to see all of the Grand Canyon in about a week. The equivalent non-motor trip requires a two week commitment, something that is simply out of reach for most potential visitors because of limited vacation schedules. GCRRA supports both motorized and non-motorized trip options.

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“Many, many people just don’t have the choice to spend two weeks in the Grand Canyon,” said Mari Carlos, GCRRA Secretary/Treasurer. “It’s just not reasonable to take away the very trip option that most people can use, especially when these trips do no harm whatsoever to the Grand Canyon’s environment.”

Since the early 1970’s, the NPS has necessarily limited recreational use of the Colorado River to protect the resource from harm and to ensure a high quality visitor experience. The NPS has divided this fixed allotment between two user groups, those who depend on or desire the services of a licensed river outfitter and those who run their own trips. The current allocation ratio is 68% professionally-outfitted and 32% self-outfitted.

In wanting more use for themselves, private boaters are lobbying the NPS to reallocate use from the professionally-outfitted sector to the self-outfitted sector. GCRRA opposes this because the vast majority of those wishing to visit the Grand Canyon by river are in need of or desire the assistance provided by the National Park Service’s professional Grand Canyon river concessioners.

“The fact is that most Americans will visit the Grand Canyon by river only once or twice in their lives and must utilize the services of one of the NPS river concessioners to accomplish their trip,” said GCRRA board member Linda Kahan. “This wonderful resource belongs to us all, not just to the small number of recreational boaters who can do their own trip.”

LOCAL MEMBER CHAPTERS

The GCRRA is a member-supported organization that is establishing local and regional chapters around the country and in Europe. Founding GCRRA member chapters include Boston, Massachusetts; southern Massachusetts; Phoenix, Arizona; Salt Lake City, Utah; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; southern Los Angeles, California; northern Los Angeles, California; Columbus, Ohio; and northern San Francisco Bay Area, California. The members of the GCRRA Board of Directors come from Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington, DC.

Those who would like more information or who may be interested in becoming a GCRRA member should visit the group’s website, www.gcriverrunners.org. An annual membership is \$10. The mission of the Grand Canyon River Runners Association is:

- To defend, protect, and perpetuate the long history of general public access to the Grand Canyon river experience as facilitated by a licensed professional National Park Service river concessioner;
- To vigorously participate in all official government decision-making processes relating to the general public’s visitation rights to the Colorado River corridor within Grand Canyon National Park,
- To alert and educate the general public on Grand Canyon Colorado River management issues, with emphasis on allocation of recreational river use, trip diversity, and the need to continue environmentally responsible motorized and non-motorized use;
- To promote the highest ideals of resource stewardship and responsible, sustainable use of the Grand Canyon’s Colorado River corridor as fully consistent with maintenance of the area in an unimpaired natural condition.

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Please note: To be placed on the GCRRA media contact mailing list, please send an e-mail to media@gcriverrunners.org. Please include your name, organization, telephone and fax number.

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