

Canyon Boaters, Feds to Negotiate

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TUCSON, Ariz. -- Boaters and the National Park Service have broken a logjam over management of whitewater rafting inside the Grand Canyon.

Private rafters, commercial outfitters and federal officials settled a lawsuit Thursday and agreed to restart a contentious, 30-year-old planning process that the Park Service halted in 2000.

With demand for river trips far exceeding the number of permits the park issues, boating groups have clashed for decades over Colorado River issues.

Private rafters complain they must wait 10, 15, even 20 years to float the river because about 70 percent of the 169,000 annual "user days" are given to 16 commercial outfitters.

Wilderness advocates fault the Park Service for catering to wealthy tourists and spoiling the Canyon experience by allowing motorized boats and helicopters in the area.

Commercial outfitters say most people want to take their shorter, motorized trips because they're more convenient and perceived as safer.

"We're looking forward to tackling long-standing issues and finding solutions," said Mark Grisham, executive director of the Grand Canyon River Outfitters Association.