



Letters to the Editor: Sunday, July 28, 2002

Don't ban powered pontoon rafts from Grand Canyon

In June, the Grand Canyon National Park superintendent announced the revision process for the Colorado River Management Plan and the opening of a public-comment period. The management plan governs access to, and activities within, the Colorado River corridor within Grand Canyon National Park.

The new management plan will dictate how the American public may visit and interact with the Grand Canyon via river trips for the next 10 to 15 years. Specifically, two issues are of concern:

Who will be allowed to make Grand Canyon river trips?

How much access will the public get?

For the past 15 years, about 19,000 visitors a year have enjoyed professionally outfitted Grand Canyon river trips. The majority of them utilize low-powered, motorized pontoon rafts that travel the canyon in six to eight days. Given the length of most Americans' vacations today, these trips are ideal for the average citizen, plus they allow children to experience one of our nation's greatest natural treasures with their families.

Many private rafters, who compete with professional outfitters for river-use permits, argue that people who prefer the services of a professional outfitter do not deserve Grand Canyon river trips. This is akin to saying that an elderly tourist should not be permitted to use the elevator to access the top of the Washington Monument.

Private rafters urge a ban of the low-powered motorized pontoon rafts. This would free up more use permits for the private groups - and effectively shut off access to average Americans who do not have the rafting expertise required to navigate the Colorado through the canyon.

It has been my experience as a two-time customer that the river guides are professionals who care deeply about the environment in which they are working. Professional guides are far more diligent about preserving campsites in pristine condition than are private river rafters. Their livelihood depends on the preservation of the river. On the other hand, individual, private boaters are generally not as careful in their care of the campsites and the river.

Clearly, we need to accommodate both private rafters and professional outfitters. The management plan should allow both forms of adventure. Low-powered pontoon rafts should not be banned.

KEN KINGSHILL

Westfield, Ind.