

Record of Decision Signed on Revision of Colorado River Management Plan for Grand Canyon National Park
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Grand Canyon, AZ ~ The National Park Service (NPS) announced in the Federal Register today the availability of the ~Record of Decision~ (ROD) for the revision of Grand Canyon National Park~s Colorado River Management Plan (CRMP).

Grand Canyon National Park began this latest process to revise the CRMP in 2002. The Hualapai Tribe, which shares a common boundary with the National Park Service (NPS) along 108 miles of the Colorado River, was a cooperating agency in the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement, prepared under the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act. Meetings were held throughout the country to identify the kinds of issues the public thought the NPS should consider in developing a long-term management plan. Major issues and concerns regarding resource protection, visitor experience and services raised during the public process included:

- ~ Appropriate levels of visitor use consistent with natural and cultural resource protection, visitor experience goals, and wilderness character
- ~ Allocation of use between commercial and noncommercial groups
- ~ Noncommercial permit system
- ~ Appropriate levels of motorized and nonmotorized boat use
- ~ Determination of the range of public services
- ~ Levels of helicopter use to transport river passengers to and from the river
- ~ Appropriate levels and types of upstream travel from Lake Mead
- ~ Quality of river trips including crowding, trip length, group size, and scheduling issues
- ~ Administrative use

For purposes of the Environmental Impact Statement, the Colorado River in the park was divided into two geographic sections that recognize the different management zones on the river, and a specific set of alternatives were developed for each section. The first section of river is from Lees Ferry (River Mile [RM] 0) to Diamond Creek (RM 226). The second section is from Diamond Creek (RM 226) to Lake Mead (RM 277). In developing the plan, NPS considered eight management scenarios for the first section of river and five management scenarios for the second section of river. Each scenario was analyzed for its impacts on the environment and for how well it complies with federal laws, regulations, policies, previous planning decisions, the park~s vision, and other mandates for the management of recreational use on the Colorado River through Grand Canyon National Park. The ROD adopts the NPS preferred alternative for each section of the river.

For the first section of river from Lees Ferry to Diamond Creek, the ROD calls for a mixed motor/no-motor alternative with 5.5 months of mixed use occurring from April 1 through September 15, and 6.5 months of non-motorized use from September 16 through March 31. The decision also calls for smaller group sizes and fewer daily allowable launches except during winter months, and allows for a moderate increase in estimated yearly passenger totals. Passenger exchanges at Whitmore will be allowed only during the mixed-use period, April 1

through September 15, with a time-of-day restriction, and in the non-motorized season only for those trips launching during the mixed-use period.

The ROD calls for use limits and a redistribution of Hualapai River Runner (HRR) operations for the section of river from Diamond Creek to Lake Mead. Peak daily use for commercial day trips launching from Diamond Creek will be comparable to current conditions, with smaller maximum group sizes, while commercial overnight trips could increase from a current average of three launches per month to up to three launches per day. The number of pontoon boat passengers in the Quartermaster area will be capped at 480 per day, but could increase to 600 per day based on favorable performance reviews and resource monitoring data. No jet boat tours will be allowed, and upriver travel will continue to be allowed up to River Mile 240. A No Action/Split Allocation system will continue to allocate use between the commercial and noncommercial sectors in a ratio that is reflected in the preferred alternative and will remain the same for the life of the plan.

A "hybrid" weighted lottery system for trip leaders will be implemented as the noncommercial permit system for Lees Ferry to Diamond Creek river trips. Each year a single lottery will take place and result in the initial awarding of the following year's noncommercial launch opportunities. Chances in the lottery will vary depending on whether or not applicants had been on a river trip recently. A three-stage expedited transition system will be instituted for those people currently on the noncommercial waitlist to transition to the hybrid-weighted lottery system. The NPS will develop an implementation and monitoring plan that outlines how it will implement the provisions specified in the ROD. The final CRMP, including the implementation and monitoring plan, will be published and made available to all interested parties. A complete copy of the ROD and associated information will be available on the park's Web site at www.nps.gov/grca/crmp. Written requests can be sent to CRMP Team at P.O. Box 129, Grand Canyon, AZ 86023.

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The ROD, signed by Intermountain Regional Director Mike Snyder, is the latest step of a multi-year effort to complete the revision of the CRMP - last revised in 1989. The CRMP is a visitor use management plan which specifies actions to conserve park resources and the visitor experience, while enhancing recreational opportunities. The life of the plan is intended to be at least 10 years, and it will also establish management goals and objectives for a longer timeframe.