

THE WAITING LIST - AUGUST 1998

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"I had to wait so long for my second trip, I died at the oars!" B.L. Hite, Ut.

CANYON TRIP FEES RAISED 200% \$25 PER YEAR \$200 TO LAUNCH

EVERYONE who is presently on the private trip waiting list, more than 6,000 private boaters, received a letter during December or January, from the NPS, advising them of a newly adopted fee schedule. Those already on the list have become accustomed to the initial \$25 filing fee and annual January continuing interest filing. This will no longer be the program.

The new policy will involve a \$100 initial filing fee, and an annual fee of \$25 for those with a continuing interest in a trip down the Colorado's Grand Canyon. Additionally the continuing interest filing must be made every January, no longer will a "waiter" be allowed to skip a year between filings. "No more spacing out," declare the feds.

The launch fee has been increased to \$200 and the per person park entry fee has been raised to \$10. A four dollar per person, per night, fee has also been added. That fee, alone, will generate \$64 per participant, per 16 day trip. The average trip consists of 14 people so that cost will add nearly \$1000 to the cost of a trip. There are about 250 launches per year. With more than 6000 people on the list, and 250 launches per year, the wait for a permit could be far longer than the 10 years that the NPS suggests is the time it takes to become eligible for a trip. At any rate the \$25 continuing interest fee will add a minimum of \$250 to the trip fees.

No mention was made if the NPS will continue to remove those persons from the waiting list who are lucky enough to participate in someone else's trip, more than once during the time they seek to get their own permit.

MORE MONEY

SINCE the park service announced their increase in fees many questions have arisen. Some have questioned the need for these funds and wondered if the increase in fees will result in more rangers on the river, improved facilities or what. Most people this writer has talked with, hope the fees will not be put toward more active ranger patrolling of the river. The park services's letter alludes that the river office is presently operating at a loss, and that fees collected from the commercial side have been subsidizing the costs related to services rendered to the private sector.

Analysis of the fee increases shows that the river office could generate an additional \$1100 per launch, based upon a 14 person trip of 16 days. In other words, each participant will pay about \$100 more in fees to the park for their trip or \$6.25 per day. Of course, if the trip is smaller the

spreading out of the fees will be less, and the cost per person will increase.

If 250 trips were to launch each year that \$1100 would bring to the park an additional \$275,000 per year. A nice chunk of change! Let's not forget the other new fee that has been imposed, the \$25 fee that must be paid annually to remain on the waiting list. The river office at the Grand Canyon reports that there are more than 6,000 people waiting in line for a permit. If all those waiting were to pay that \$25 fee, those fees would add up to \$150,000 paid to the River Office annually. The recently announced fee increase stands to bring in to the park, \$425,000 each year. A really nice chunk of change!!

Another question that has popped up over and over again is, are these fees being levied on commercial trips? As of this writing, it appears that they are not being charged to the commercial companies, and will not be until the 1998 season begins. For the private tripper, the fee schedule took effect on March 1, 1997. What does this policy mean to the park? During the 1996 commercial season paying patrons of the 16 companies amounted to 106,156 user days, and, guide user days totaled 11,797. Together, guides and passengers accounted for 117,953 days on the river. If the same per night fee of \$4 were applied to the commercial 1997 season, the GCNP would gain another \$471,812. The various companies are each allotted different user day totals, but supposing that they were all equal, not charging this fee increase, save the companies an average of \$29,468.25 each. This exemption to allow a 12 month notification period was not mandated by Congress.

At any rate, the 1998 season stands to be a bonanza year for the park service, who should generate nearly \$900,000 in new revenues.

GETTING TOGETHER

By the time you read this, it is hoped that the GCPBA will have held at least one round table discussion with the various parties who hope to participate and affect the up coming Colorado River Management Plan. GCPBA (that's us) hopes to bring together members of the park staff responsible for developing the plan, the private boating community, and the commercial interests. The purpose of such meetings is to identify the issues these various groups would like brought to the table for resolution. For the case of the private user, GCPBA will be addressing the issue of the current 70% commercial, 30% private user day ratio, as well as other issues that our membership would like to see the planners address. At our December 1996 meeting, the Board of the GCPBA established a Forum Committee for the purpose of putting these meetings together.

RUN LEFT? RIGHT? RUN RIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE!!!

CHANGES in the use fees for private boaters came as a complete surprise to the boating community. The former fee schedule was adopted in 1989 for the purpose of providing funds for the activities carried out by the staff and rangers servicing the river office. The salaries of those working for the river office are paid out of the park's basic funding. This comes as a surprise because the public has come to expect some kind of call for input before radical changes are made in policy. Perhaps a mandate came from Washington D.C., for the park to generate more revenue, and there simply was not enough time for public comment.

A surprise because over the years it seems that government has become a model for careful planning, examining the potential changes caused by the actions to be taken, environmentally,

economically and aesthetically. What could the environmental impacts of fee raising be? Could increasing costs cause a trend toward larger trips over which to spread expenses? How about the larger pool of funds being used to pay for more patrols by rangers taking up more campsites, and further eroding "the get a way from society" feeling of a wilderness adventure.

What kind of improvements could be made with the additional funds? Trail upgrades in the heavily trafficked areas to make access easier, or upgrades in the lightly used areas so more people can use them? Eco-outhouses for all? Are improvements to river corridor facilities being postponed for lack of funds?

Perhaps capital raised will be used to purchase river companies, as they come up for sale, in order to acquire user days for the private sector. At the final Grand Canyon Constituency Panel meeting, a group made up of many elements of the river world, the Park Service reportedly made a commitment to make no major policy changes until the next Colorado River Management Plan (CRMP) is adopted.

Why were these fees raised for not only the river trips, but for hikers, car campers, and day trippers, exempting the patrons of the river and air tour operators for another year.

Many people asked felt that the fees, themselves were not so bad, but a process without public comment and characterized by apparent lack of planning as well as broken promises, was disappointing. Perhaps the Park Service would consider withdrawing this new schedule, and postponing the implementation for a year. Such postponement would give the boating public time to consider the issues facing the river office and the options to be implemented in search of solutions.

ON THE TABLE

THE Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association was organized as an attempt to identify issues that concern private users of the Colorado River and other rivers of the Southwest. Once those issues are identified, we hope to present those issues to the appropriate agencies, for instance the Grand Canyon National Park.

Becoming a voice for those on the parks river waiting list is a challenge, after all, there are over 6,000 waiting. Not only are they waiting to go, they are waiting to become "trip leaders." Organizing trip leaders, now that is really a job!

What are the issues? Members and non members alike have not been bashful about offering their ideas. We hope you will send us yours. The following is a list of issues that we have compiled:

- Should the user day allocation between private and commercial users be equal?
- Is equality an unrealistic goal?
- It takes too many years to secure a permit
- Is the cost of a river trip important?

- Is the use ceiling reasonable and based on scientific analysis?
- Should use ceilings be based on contacts with other trips?
- Commercial guides are not counted in the user day count, should they be?
- Would lower cost commercial trips be an alternative to private trips?
- Should private trips be able to hire a licensed guide?
- Should privates be able to hire a cook?
- Should the skill level of private boaters be regulated? π
- Would a lottery system be fair?
- Should flexibility of both private trip length and party size be maintained, even if it is a hardship on GCNP staff?
- Should the GCNP staff maintain a pool of names of any people wishing to travel on a private trip as passengers?
- Could names on such a list be made available to permit holders?
- Should campsite registration be made mandatory? Are layovers o.k., or should they be eliminated? Should private trips be able to rent equipment from trip participants?
- Should exchanges be allowed? Are helicopter exchanges incompatible?
- Should commercial and private users have the same length primary and secondary seasons?
- Could science allocations be shifted to the private sector?
- Should science user day allocations be considered as part of the total user day pool?
- Should any people who have been on a private trip in the past, be restricted from "tripping" until all others on the list have "tripped?"
- Are current use levels too low? Too high? Is wilderness designation important?
- The last time the Colorado River Management plan was revised was in 1989.

As you can see with the growth of private boating has come an explosive growth in issues.

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