



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK
P.O. BOX 129
GRAND CANYON, ARIZONA 86023-0129



IN REPLY REFER TO:

L3425 (GRCA 8213)

JUL 28 2009

Tom Martin, Co-Director
River Runners for Wilderness, Arizona Field Office
P.O. Box 30821
Flagstaff, Arizona 86003

Dear Mr. Martin:

Thank you very much for your comments and questions regarding the implementation of the Colorado River Management Plan (CRMP) at Grand Canyon National Park. As you know, the opportunity to conduct a self-guided, noncommercial river trip through the Canyon is among the most sought after and rewarding experiences available to park visitors. We receive frequent feedback from individuals and membership organizations representing the noncommercial boating community. In your letter of June 15, 2009, you asked several specific questions. We have attempted to answer your questions below.

Regarding fees for the lottery, you express several points of concern regarding the expense, administration and transparency. The expenses involved in administering the noncommercial permit system are not limited solely to the actual nuts and bolts of running the lottery. The fees charged contribute to, but do not cover, the costs of staff directly engaged in providing services to permit applicants. At this time, we have two full-time staff members dedicated to administering the river permit system. Their day-to-day work involves the various administrative tasks associated with issuing permits, but the bulk of their time is spent providing information to lottery applicants, trip planning and accommodating the needs of those who've obtained launch dates. The public response to this level of service has been overwhelmingly positive. Staff members are very conscientious about providing accurate information and personal assistance. The cost of personal services directly related to the program and its supervision total approximately \$130,000 annually. Since inception, the total income from the annual lottery permit fees have covered only 40 to 50% of the river permit program costs. Statistics for the river lotteries are posted for the public on the park's website.

Regarding the one trip per year rule, you question the need for this rule and inquire about our administration of the rule with respect to the commercial sector. As you point out, noncommercial river runners must provide identifying information prior to their launch. Likewise, the commercial outfitters are obligated to provide the NPS with their trip participant's identifying information. In administering the one trip per year rule, we maintain complete records for both noncommercial and commercial participants.

Your observation that relaxing the one trip per year rule would not likely restrict the access of others is timely. Now that we have a few years of data from the lottery we are able to evaluate the necessity of the rule as it's presently administered. Our evaluations of the number of trips that either cancelled or went unclaimed despite follow-up lotteries argue for a possible modification of the policy.

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We are evaluating a number of adjustments that would suspend the one trip per year constraint in certain circumstances. We would be interested to have your input as we evaluate this issue.

Your suggestions on the lottery system are similar to options considered in the CRMP Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The "Weighted Lottery for Groups" option as explained in the FEIS (page 111), would have provided an additional chance for each year an applicant had unsuccessfully competed in a lottery. It was recognized however, that awarding points based on unsuccessful applications would serve to encourage people to apply even in years when they were not really interested in going, and would thereby reduce the chance of success for other applicants. We believe the current weighting system handles this issue in a better way.

Regarding trip length, the 2006 CRMP set limits for the summer months based on the system's carrying capacity. The capacity was based on number, size, and distribution of camping beaches, and visitor experience and resource standards. The number of trips at on time (TAOT) is the maximum total in the canyon at one time. For the summer months, capacity is set at 60 TAOT. The reduction in trip length allows for more daily launches including two noncommercial trips on alternating days. Increasing the trip length in the summer months would require reducing the number of launches with similar trip length for the same time period.

We appreciate your thoughts and suggestions to improve the self-guided boater's experience in this great resource. Thanks for taking the time to articulate these concerns and for your continued interest in Grand Canyon river management.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Martin", written in a cursive style.

Steve Martin
Superintendent