



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:

L34 (GRCA 8226)

MAY 13 2014

Tom Martin
River Runners for Wilderness
PO Box 30821
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001

Dear Mr. Martin:

Thank you for your letter requesting information regarding river trips on the Colorado River at Grand Canyon National Park. I appreciate your thoughtful suggestions regarding the potential changes to the noncommercial permit system included in the National Park Service (NPS) River Permit Office's Eight-Year Review. I share your goal of ensuring that unclaimed self-guided trips are as available and accessible to the public as possible.

The potential changes included in the Eight-Year Review were developed by park staff based on user data as well as information and suggestions from rivers users, including some from River Runners for Wilderness. NPS staff developed these ideas in response to identified issues and in an effort to ensure that self-guided river permits are more flexible and less likely to be canceled; that permits that are canceled are readily available to the public; and that the Trips At One Time (TAOT) limits established in the Colorado River Management Plan (CRMP) are not exceeded. The potential changes were included in the Eight-Year Report with the intent to facilitate dialog and feedback from river users. They are not final decisions at this time. Any substantive changes, such as a change in trip lengths or in the way lottery points are calculated, will be fully analyzed and communicated to the public and stake holders well in advance of their implementation.

That said, I will attempt to respond to each of the questions and requests included in your letter. In addition, your request for correspondence that the NPS has received related to on-river crowding during the first two weeks of May (page 4 of your letter) is being processed under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). You will receive a separate response regarding that information.

On page 2 of your letter, you request an explanation of how the NPS intends to adapt the CRMP to ensure that self-guided river runners do not miss opportunities to utilize unused off-season trips. All winter trips are currently being claimed at least once through a Main or Follow-up Lottery. The NPS believes that unused off season trips occur as a result of late cancellations. Unused trips are primarily occurring when they are canceled within 30 days of launch, with most trips cancelled at least 60 days prior to launch being claimed through subsequent lotteries. This is likely due to the fact that very few individuals can plan the time and resources required for a

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Colorado River trip with short notice. The NPS is therefore focused on exploring methods for reducing cancellations, encouraging more timely cancellations and expediting the advertisement and re-release of cancelled dates in follow-up lotteries.

The NPS has taken steps to streamline and improve the lottery site for better speed, transparency and re-advertising of cancelled trips and will continue to make improvements in this regard.

The NPS also believes that cancellations may be reduced by increasing flexibility and encouraging trip applicants to list Potential Alternate Trip Leaders (PATL). As included in the Eight-Year Review, one option we are considering is a proposal to double lottery points for trip applicants who list a PATL. In response to this consideration, you request data showing the number of trips that transferred a permit to an assigned PATL, by month (page 3 of your letter). The NPS began recording this information in 2013 and the monthly data for 2013 and the first four months of 2014 is included as an attachment to this letter.

Your letter also included several questions regarding potentially shortening trip length during the last two weeks of April and, correspondingly, lengthening trip length during the first two weeks of September as included in the Eight-Year Review (pages 4 through 8 of your letter). NPS staff has suggested exploring this option as a way to ensure that the TAOT levels established in the CRMP are not exceeded. NPS staff has focused on options that do not reduce the number of available trips and that maintain current use levels. This is just one option that is being considered.

I appreciate your concern for on-river safety associated with spring winds and low water flows in relation to the potential shortening of trips. These conditions can occur at any time of year on the Colorado River through Grand Canyon, but the NPS would fully consider weather and river conditions before making any changes to the current trip lengths.

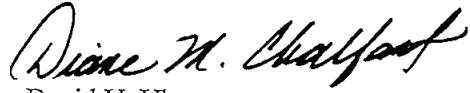
You requested daily TAOT data for the last 8 years broken down by the type of use. The NPS currently only maintains TAOT data for commercial and non-commercial recreational use. The TAOT data, to the extent it is preserved in our database, is also included as an attachment to this letter.

In your letter you also mention the fees that the NPS charges self-guided river runner (page 2 of your request). These fees are set at the minimum level necessary to recover the non-commercial portion of NPS river related expenses. In 2013, non-commercial river related expenses included River Permit Office operations and a portion, based in total recreational user-days used, of River Ranger operations.

I am pleased that you find the NPS *Action Guide to Preservation* and other NPS handouts to be helpful tools in educating river runners regarding campsite congestion and competition (page 5 of your letter). The NPS includes the *Action Guide to Preservation* and other information in every trip leader package. Additionally, as resources permit, the NPS mails the guide to all non-commercial river trip participants. The guide and other information are located on the park's website and the NPS also makes them available to all commercial outfitters and at national and regional forums and meetings, including the Grand Canyon River Guide trainings.

Again, thank you for your thoughtful letter and I look forward to a continuing to work together on these issues. Please feel free to contact Chief Ranger Bill Wright at (928) 638-7800, or my office at (928) 638-7945 with any further questions or concerns.

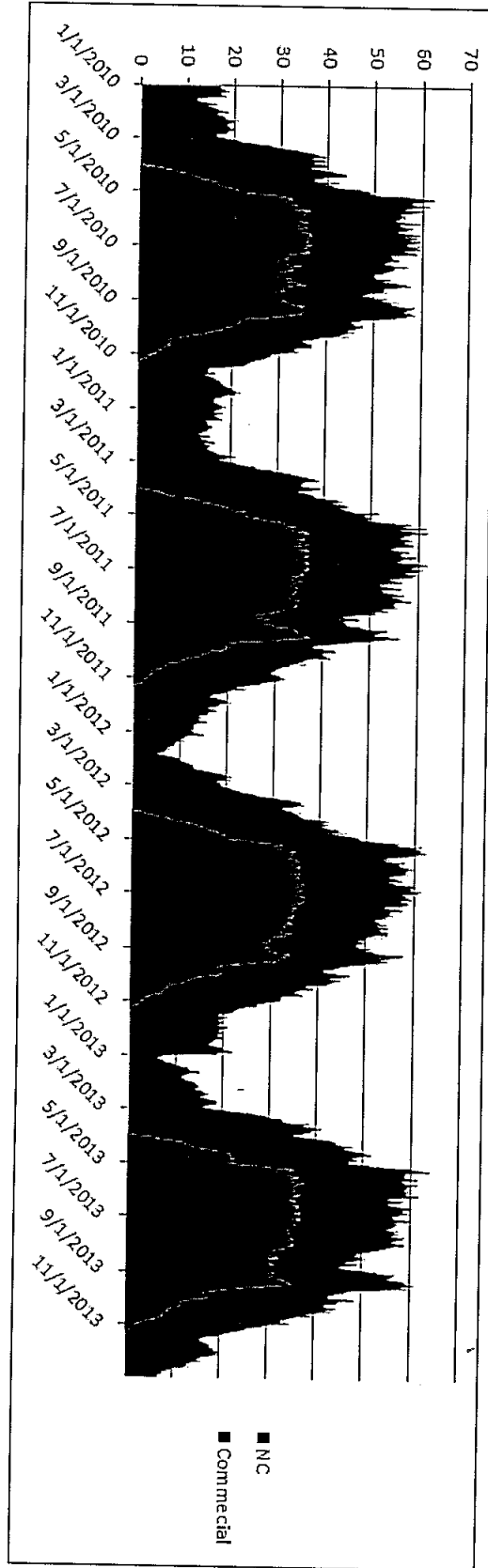
Sincerely,


David V. Uberuaga
Superintendent

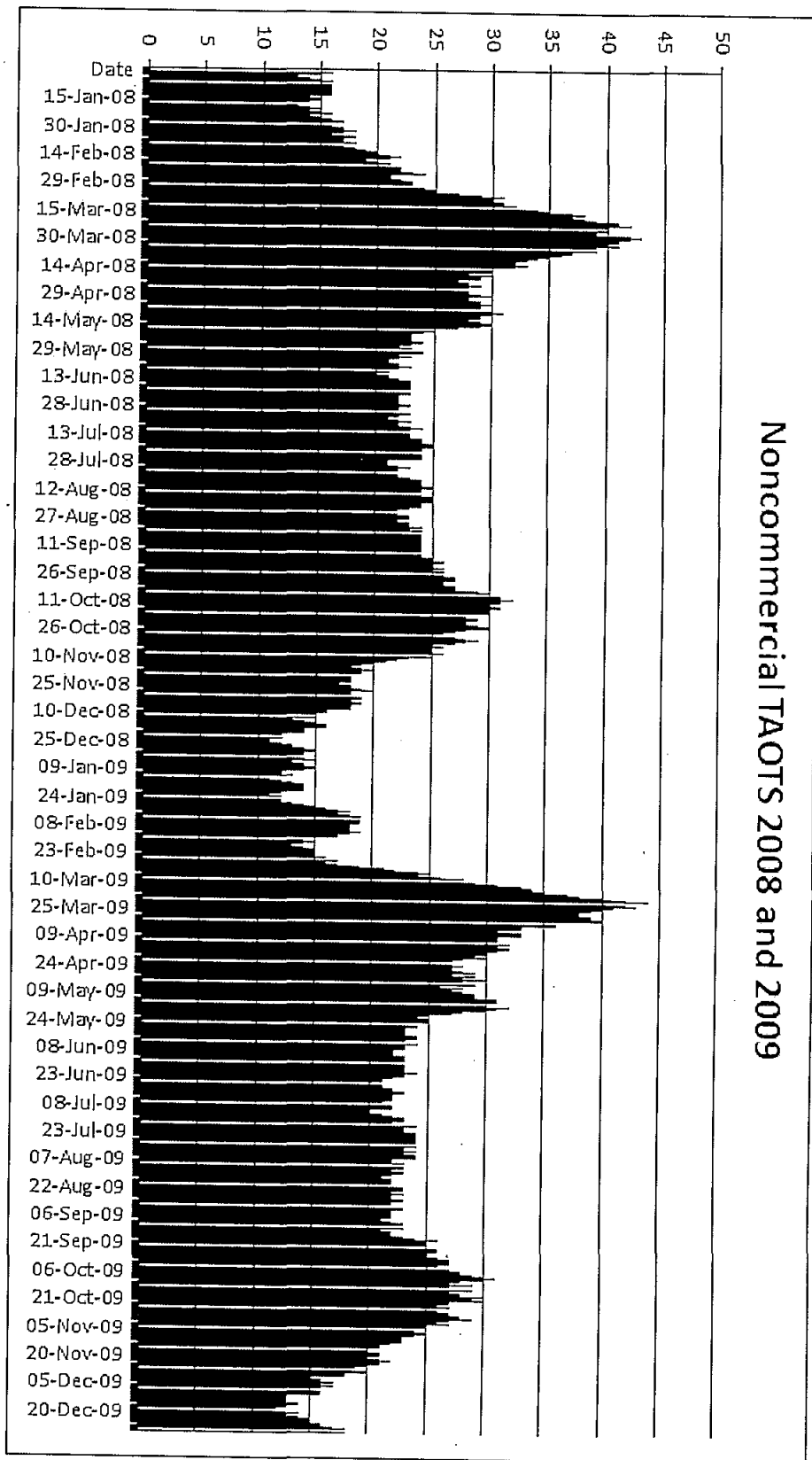
Enclosures

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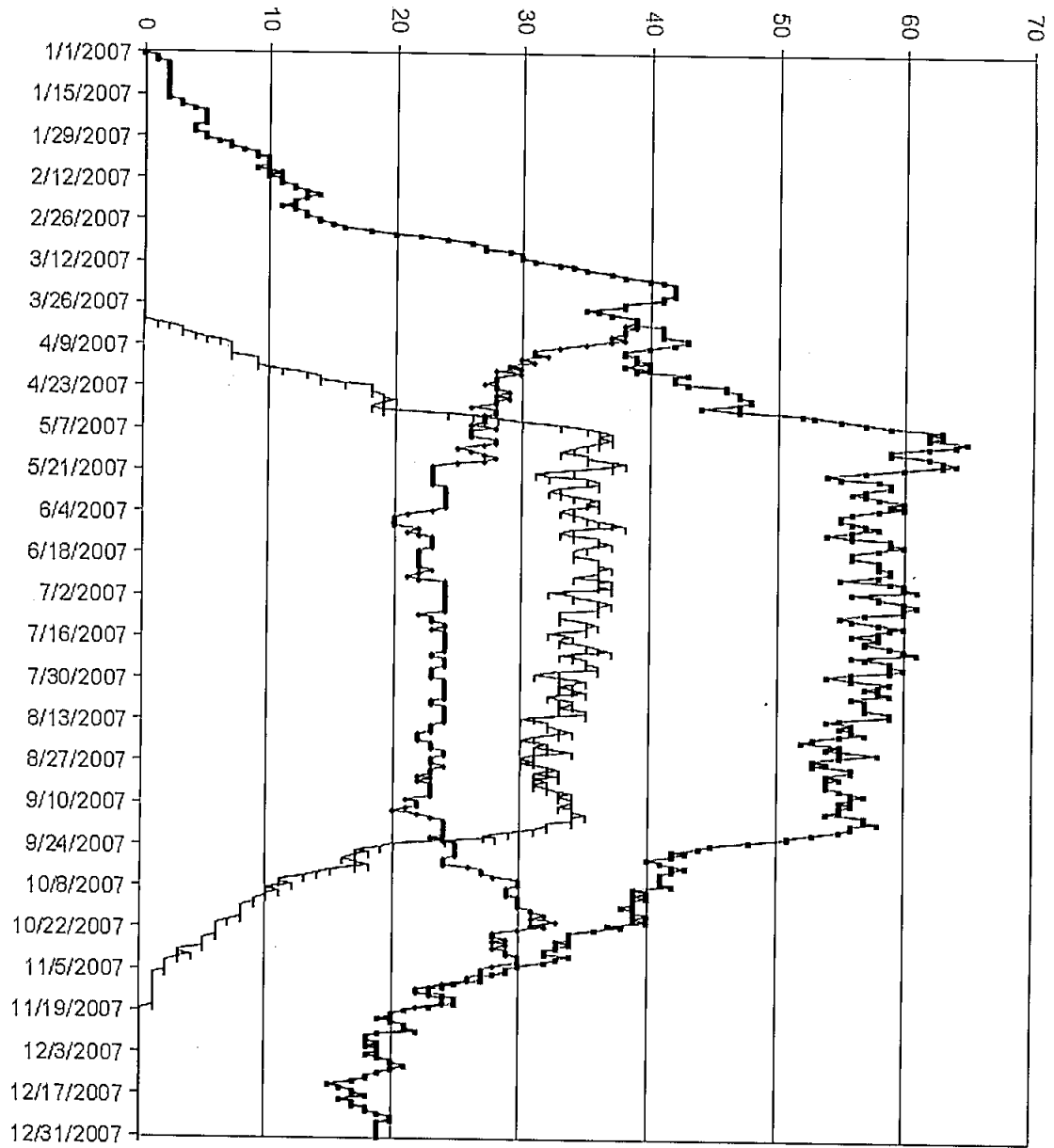
Attachment X - TAOT Data



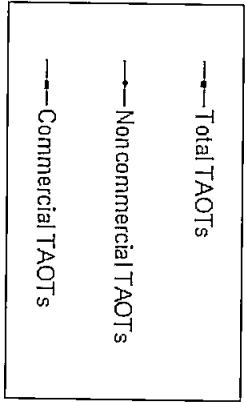
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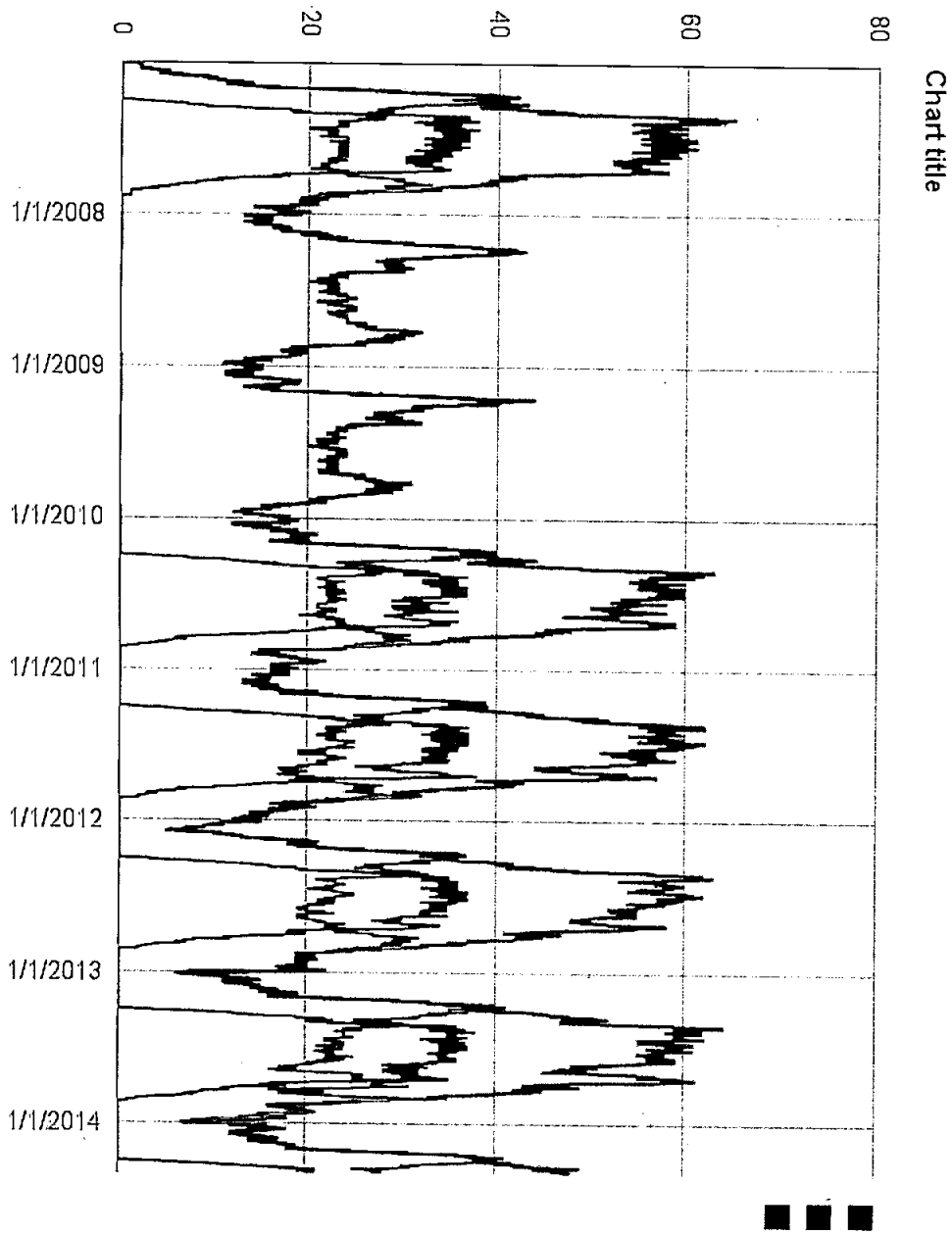


TAOT Analysis



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Trips At One Time



Attachment ~~A~~ - PATL transfers

We have been recording this information since January of 2013 and are supplying those numbers below.

January 2013	5
February 2013	0
March 2013	2
April 2013	1
May 2013	1
June 2013	1
July 2013	0
August 2013	1
September 2013	1
October 2013	0
November 2013	2
December 2013	2

January 2014	2
February 2014	2
March 2014	2
April 2014	1