

Dave Uberuaga
Superintendent
Grand Canyon National Park
PO Box 129
Grand Canyon, Arizona 86023

December 3, 2012

Dear Superintendent Uberuaga,

As co-director of the non-profit River Runners for Wilderness, it was a pleasure to meet you in September of 2011. As I mentioned then, I greatly enjoyed our frank exchanges covering many aspects of river and backcountry management at Grand Canyon National Park (GRCA).

At that time, we had discussed the high number of unclaimed winter self-guided river trips, and had identified three simple changes to help decrease this number. Those changes included elimination of the one-river-trip-per-year rule for self-guided river runners in the commercial-free winter months, removing the lottery point “reset” for participating in a winter river trip, and returning winter trip lengths to the pre-2006 winter trip length of 30 days to Diamond Creek from the present 25 days.

Your follow-up letter of December 12, 2011, (A9031 (GRCA 8226), was encouraging, as you noted that two of our three suggestions, removing the one-trip rule and increasing trip lengths, either merited further enquiry or consideration. In your letter of December of 2011, you asked us to “be patient” while you reviewed others opinions and concerns. River Runners for Wilderness has been requesting these simple changes since 2007, and indeed, GRCA had attempted to move forward in this direction in 2009, only to be pushed back by other river running groups.

Another year has passed and we have heard nothing from your office. A recent GRCA on-line seven year lottery review noted 34 river trips in 2012 had gone unused in the January through September months, putting 2012 on track for the highest waste of self-guided river trips in Grand Canyon since the implementation of the 2006 Colorado River Management Plan (CRMP). We note there were 15 unclaimed dates in the month of January alone. This same report shows that winter trips continue to miss their 2006 CRMP targets for the number of self-guided winter trips launching, along with anticipated user day and passenger volume.

After waiting a year for your reply, and seeing the latest abysmal figures on unclaimed trips, our patience has finally run out.

The same report released this fall noted that the Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association (GCPBA) has recently asked the NPS for a similar relaxation of the one-trip-per-year rule. The report recognized the GCPBA was originally opposed to the idea but had come around to a similar request as River Runners for Wilderness. While this is very encouraging, we were saddened to see the GRCA response to our repeated and GCPBA’s new request, as the GRCA flip-flop report now cites the need for “substantial NPS time to change the lottery and educating public” as the inability to implement these simple changes, and noted that GRCA is “willing to take another look next year.”

At this point, it is clear that the most costly and complicated river lottery in the country now has a new problem, that of lacking staff time to implement much needed changes and educate the public about those changes. Given that GRCA has collected over \$785,000 in self-guided river runner lottery application, permit and per person fees in 2012 alone, we would greatly appreciate your office taking the time to explain to us, and to outreach to the general do-it-yourself boating public, as to why the NPS can suddenly no longer make these simple changes to assist and attract river runners in obtaining these unclaimed winter river trips. Should, on the other hand, your office be willing to make these changes, we will certainly do everything we can to notify the river running public about these much needed changes.

Sincerely,

Tom Martin, Co-Director
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