

RRFW Riverwire GROUPS CRIPPLED BY AGREEMENT March 5, 2006

River Runners For Wilderness recently discovered that four groups, Grand Canyon River Outfitters Trade Association, American Whitewater (AW), Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association (GCPBA), and Grand Canyon River Runners Association (a motor concessions customer group) signed a Memorandum of Agreement that restricts certain critical activities of the boards of all four groups for the next ten years.

The Agreement stipulates that the groups will use their “best efforts” to dissuade their membership from engaging in any activities that would not be consistent with the terms of the Agreement. The groups will support removal of wilderness designation for the river corridor, support the river concessionaire’s motorized allocation, and will not interfere with the award in 2006 of new ten year concessions contracts for the existing concessionaires.

The four groups agreed that they will not support any annual re-distribution of allocation between the commercial and non-commercial sectors. The re-distribution was initially suggested by the National Park Service.

The agreement came to light some 15 months after it was signed and only after several Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association members asked the GCPBA board of directors to reveal the memorandum’s contents.

GCPBA board member Richard Martin confirmed the terms of the agreement. “We have agreed to recognize the river as an access corridor and therefore exclude it from wilderness designation” he said. “We have agreed not to challenge their [the concessionaires’] allocation, and they not ours, we don't have an issue with their contract renewal.”

Mark Singleton, Executive Director of American Whitewater, is troubled by the lack of transparency to AW members by this deal, which was signed by his predecessor Jason Robertson, who is also on the GCPBA board. Singleton noted “Closed processes aren't something I'm comfortable with, transparency to our members is important.” Nonetheless, AW will abide by the agreement.

Jo Johnson, Co-Director of River Runners For Wilderness, notes the ramifications of this agreement are far reaching. “This agreement strangles GCPBA and AW. They are barred from protecting the Colorado River in Grand Canyon from overuse. They can’t advocate for equitable demand-based access for their own members. And even more troubling is that if Grand Canyon’s Wilderness Recommendation is moved forward in Congress, they will not support wilderness designation for the river.” She adds, “River Runners for Wilderness will continue to steadfastly defend Grand Canyon from resource degradation, inequitable allocation and continued illegal motor use.”

The Agreement is online at www.gcpba.org/content/view/50/28/.