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CANYON OUTFITTERS
Saying No to River Wilderness

Representatives of Grand Canyon National Park's $30 million commercial river outfitting industry are discussing a bill for Congress that would exclude the Canyon's river corridor from wilderness designation. If enacted, this would be a significant blow to efforts to restore the Colorado River in Grand Canyon National Park.

At issue is the use of outboard motors by the majority of Grand Canyon river outfitters. Motorized pontoon boats can accommodate 32 people and whisk them through the Canyon. The designation of wilderness would likely lead to a phase-out of motors, forcing the companies to revert back to smaller oar-powered rafts and traveling at river pace.

This is a major issue now being addressed by Grand Canyon National Park through a revision of its Colorado River Management Plan. Concerned that the outcome of this process might cause their motors to be destined for the scrap heap, the outfitters are considering help from Congress. The Grand Canyon River Outfitters Association is discussing a wilderness bill that only includes the terrestrial portion of Grand Canyon.

"This is a hollow bill which has nothing to do with protecting Grand Canyon and everything to do with preserving profits," says Jo Johnson of River Runners for Wilderness, a project of Living Rivers. Johnson's group and the Grand Canyon Wilderness Alliance, of which they are a part, is concerned that should such a wilderness bill pass, neither the Park Service nor Congress will be willing to challenge outfitters and pursue protection of the river corridor in the future.

"It's unimaginable that the soul of the Canyon would be excluded," says Roderick Nash, author of *Wilderness and the American Mind*. "This wild corridor of deep time, unique on this planet, deserves the most wilderness-conscious regulation our political system is capable of providing."

Certainly the biggest loser would be the Canyon's unique native ecology. According to Kim Crumbo, former wilderness coordinator for Grand Canyon National Park and now with the Arizona Wilderness Coalition, "Designation of wilderness would give the National Park Service a much stronger legal mandate to restore the river corridor back to its pre-Glen Canyon Dam state."

Although Glen Canyon Dam has caused extensive impacts to the river, this in no way precludes the river corridor from wilderness designation, as the criteria for inclusion into the wilderness system is a much lower standard than the criteria for how wilderness is managed once designated. In 1978 Grand Canyon National Park recommended the river corridor as potential wilderness, but it has yet to seek designation, largely due to pressure from outfitters.

According to the Wilderness Act, wilderness designation would compel the Park Service to work toward managing the river corridor in an "unimpaired state," and, "seek to sustain the natural distribution, numbers, population composition, and interaction of indigenous species." Such a mandate would allow the National Park Service to challenge the Bureau of Reclamation to go much further in its efforts to mitigate the impacts of Glen Canyon Dam on Grand Canyon. With four of the Canyon's eight native fish gone, and three more just hanging on, such designation, "would be a welcome tool," adds Crumbo.

One conservation group, the Grand Canyon Trust, feels it's inappropriate to pursue wilderness in the river corridor at this time. "We must first work to get the outfitters on our side, then work for wilderness on the river," stated the Trust's president, Geoff Barnard, at a meeting of Grand Canyon activists in November. But according to Johnson and Crumbo, this will never happen. "The outfitters will only get stronger and more set in their motorized ways if we continue to let them off the hook," says Johnson.

SAN JUAN RIVER FISH
Needs Lake Powell Drained

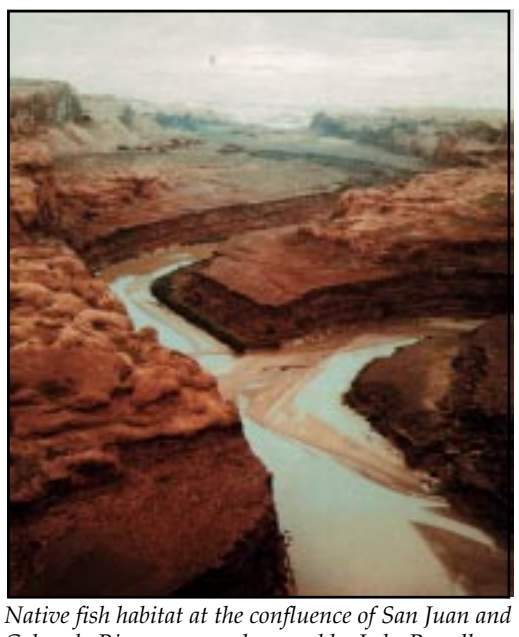
While Glen Canyon Dam's impacts on the ecosystem at Grand Canyon are well-documented, less publicized are the impacts that Lake Powell reservoir has on critical habitat upstream. Nowhere is this more apparent than on the San Juan River where 20 percent of the habitat has been inundated by the reservoir. The Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec) claims it can remedy these problems by re-operating Navajo Dam upstream, but Living Rivers is leading the effort to reinforce how futile this exercise has been, and will continue to be, until Lake Powell reservoir is drained.

The San Juan River is well-known for contributing about a third of the sediment that historically nourished the lower Colorado River system and its delta. The 355 mile long San Juan River is also one of the most unique ecosystems on the planet, supporting an incredible diversity of endemic plants and animals, as well as native cultures. But, like so many rivers in the Colorado watershed and beyond, the San Juan has suffered tremendously as a result of dams and water diversions.

Of the six native fish species that once thrived in the San Juan, four are species of "special concern," and two are threatened with extirpation. Under pressure from the Fish and Wildlife Service, BuRec has been studying ways to modify the operations of its Navajo Dam facility to improve San Juan River habitat conditions for the endangered Colorado Pikeminnow and the Razorback Sucker. Located 208 miles upstream from where the San Juan River becomes part of Lake Powell reservoir, it is believed that changes in dam operations could bring about the recovery of these native fish.

But, as was acknowledged in a recent Environmental Impact Statement on the operations of Navajo Dam, such flow regimes have yet to achieve a "positive population response." In fact, scientists have concluded that there has been little to no benefit whatsoever to the endangered fish populations as a result of present dam operations. Nonetheless, BuRec recommends continuing with the same regime.

"The problem is they're looking in the wrong direction," says Living Rivers conservation director John Weisheit. "The major constraint is not the need to manipulate flows, but to recognize that the remaining stretch of river is too short to allow for young fish survival."



Native fish habitat at the confluence of San Juan and Colorado Rivers, now submerged by Lake Powell

Historic habitat for the native San Juan River fish included the spawning beds above Navajo Dam and the rearing sections now inundated by Lake Powell reservoir. Navajo Dam, Glen Canyon Dam and the nine diversion dams in between, have reduced river habitat down to 81 miles (a loss of 75 percent). While it has been demonstrated that spawning habitat is available for the fish, the important rearing habitat for young fish is insufficient. Hatchlings drift into Lake Powell reservoir and are consumed by non-native fish before they have sufficiently matured to swim upstream against the current.

Historically, the native fish of the San Juan River could rely on the free-flowing Colorado through Glen Canyon to provide both rearing habitat and refuge habitat when the San Juan River ran dry. Decommissioning Glen Canyon Dam would restore the historic geomorphic habitat that the fish evolved with, as well as increase the range and conditions of critical habitat necessary for the recovery of these incredible fish.

"BuRec is completely ignoring these rearing habitat constraints and the role a decommissioned Glen Canyon Dam must play in eliminating them," adds Weisheit. "BuRec must stop wasting public monies pretending. They must concede that this remaining habitat is not sufficient to support recovery, and that they will be in violation of the Endangered Species Act until Lake Powell is drained."

CO RIVERKEEPER
Off and Floating

When the Waterkeeper Alliance approved Living Rivers' Colorado Riverkeeper program in October, we quickly discovered that many Colorado River boaters are very eager to advocate for watershed protection and to share that knowledge with the boating public. By combining environmental advocacy with river running, three patrol trips involving 25 people have already plied 335 miles of the Colorado watershed to spread the protection message by engaging the people they meet on the river, and by monitoring the river reaches for environmental degradation.

The first launch occurred in Grand Canyon National Park and was led by Tom Martin of River Runners for Wilderness. The second Patrol was led by the Colorado Riverkeeper coordinator, John Weisheit, which launched on the Green River above Canyonlands National Park and included the Colorado River through Cataract Canyon. The third trip was led by Susette DeCoster, of Colorado Plateau River Guides, and launched directly below Hoover Dam. These three river trips were completed in areas managed by the National Park Service, where the natural ecology has been heavily impacted by the two largest concrete dams on the Colorado River—Glen Canyon and Hoover Dams.

The Grand Canyon trip began below Glen Canyon Dam, with unnaturally crystal clear and cold water flowing past sediment-starved beaches which, like the river's endangered fish, are barely hanging on to existence.

Where was the missing sediment? In Lake Powell, where the Cataract Canyon patrol ended. These boaters had to endure 30 miles of massive sediment deposits revealed by the lowering of Lake Powell reservoir during the driest period on record for the Colorado River. Their final night was spent on a vast plug of sediment (moist sand/clay topped by tumbleweeds)

Colorado Riverkeeper, John Weisheit, on patrol in Cataract Canyon

that rightly belonged in Grand Canyon, 200 miles downstream. Upon arriving at their final destination, Lake Powell's Hite Marina, they found the boat ramp closed due to sediment and the low reservoir level. The alternate ramp had a warning sign that exclaimed, "Use at your own risk."

DeCoster's patrol below Hoover Dam was marked by incredible amounts of pollution, including trash, toilet paper, human feces and odors of human urine, which impacted the camping areas and the natural hot springs for which this river corridor is famous. Additionally, Homeland Security helicopter overflights kept a close eye on all river visitors.

The Colorado Riverkeeper will continue to document the violations they encounter on their patrols and to engage in outreach activities whenever possible. Our next patrols will occur in the coming Spring on the Green and San Juan Rivers. Contact Living Rivers if you would like to take part.

Hear the Echo, "Unfinished Business!"
50th Anniversary Yampa & Green River Trip, June 2-6, 2003

In June, 1953 Living Rivers co-founder, the late David R. Brower, launched the modern-day river advocacy movement with a trip down the Yampa and Green Rivers in Dinosaur National Monument. His objective, which was achieved, was to raise awareness to defeat the proposed Echo Park Dam and to save the Monument from inundation. Join Living Rivers and the Colorado Riverkeeper, in association with Holiday River Expeditions and other leading Colorado watershed advocates, as we relive this historic trip and launch a new initiative to save Dinosaur from the much slower death caused by Flaming Gorge Dam upstream. The trip is limited to 25 people, so act quickly. The cost is $1,000.

DELTA MAY SUFFER
From Low-Flowing Rio Conchos

Living Rivers is monitoring a new threat to the people and ecology of the Colorado River delta. In retaliation for an overdue Mexican water debt, the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) has begun researching the feasibility of stopping Colorado River water from reaching the already parched Baja California.

Under a 1944 treaty, the U.S. must deliver to Mexico an average of 1.5 million acre-feet of water annually from the Colorado River. This represents a scant ten percent of the river's historical natural flow which nourished the delta region before the Colorado was dammed. Although the river basins are geographically unrelated, the same treaty requires Mexico to deliver to the U.S. an average of 350,000 acre-feet of water a year from the Rio Conchos Basin and other tributaries. Due to an extraordinary drought in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico has fallen behind on its deliveries for two consecutive five-year cycles.

The Colorado River water currently delivered to Mexico is used for irrigation in Baja California and for the densely populated city of Mexicali. What little water is left, to support the environment and the many threatened species of the delta, comes mostly from agricultural runoff, or excess "spills" from U.S. reservoirs during years with above-average runoff. This is an unlikely occurrence considering the current drought cycle.

Gordon Hill, general manager of Bayview Irrigation District in south Texas, said recently, "When I suggested blocking the Colorado more than three years ago nobody—the Clinton administration, the State Department, the IBWC—would look at it. Now, finally, we have come full circle."

The threat has received support from both Texas Agriculture, Secretary Susan Combs, and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Chairman Robert Huston. Secretary Combs has called on the Bush administration not only to withhold Colorado River water from Mexico but also to cut economic aid.

BIG STRAW
Colorado's Pipe Dream

A $500,000 study is being considered by the state of Colorado to determine the feasibility of a project to pump water from the Colorado River, at the Utah border, to the suburbs of Denver. Although officially known as the Colorado Aqueduct Return Project (CARP), it's nickname has become "The Big Straw." Early this month, Living Rivers voiced its opposition to the 600,000 acre-feet diversion at a public meeting held in Grand Junction.

With the federal government now forcing California to start reducing its take from the Colorado River, the state of Colorado is aggressively seeking ways to develop its unused water allocation. Initial costs for the Big Straw have been estimated to be $5 billion. This projection does not include the operation costs, such as the energy necessary to pump the water uphill, nor the costs to mitigate the environmental damage. Pat Mulhern, a civil engineer speaking at the meeting stated "I'm not yet convinced that this project is economically or environmentally feasible and suggest that the proposed study focus on these two fundamental questions." Electricity costs alone have been estimated to be $165 million annually. Matt Sura, director of the Western Colorado Congress said, "Isn't this the fatal flaw of the project? Why is a study even required?"

Water quality was one of the biggest issues raised by the public. Al Pfister of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service mentioned that selenium in the Colorado River at the Utah border "exceeds the current state standard 85 percent of the time. Poor water quality could affect numerous fish and wildlife species in the rivers and streams where the water is delivered."

The boosters refuse to look at conservation policies that would increase water yields by reducing consumption. Representing agriculture, Harry Talbott recommended a way to increase water yields by removing "guzzling plants, such as Tamarisk." Nic Korte of the Grand Valley Audubon Society noted that, "drip irrigation for agriculture can reduce water use by 30 -70 percent and increase crop yields 20-90 percent."

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