

Grand Canyon National Park COVID-19 River Update, 7-22-2020

Since June 14, 2020 Grand Canyon National Park has been in the first stage of the Phased Opening of the Colorado River. In this stage use levels are to remain at or below 75% of Colorado River Management Plan (CRMP) limits. This phase is expected to continue until park leadership and health officials mandate otherwise. This phase includes:

- **Staggering of Launches:** Lees Ferry is working with all trips to try and stagger when each trip is at Lees Ferry. The goal is to eliminate contact between participants on different trips where possible,
- **Adhering to Health Guidelines:** All river trips are expected to follow CDC guidelines and Public Health Recommended Minimum Standards for River Trips (https://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/upload/Public_Health_Minimum_Standards_for_River_Trips_during_COVID-19.pdf),
- **Not Sharing River Camps:** Trips are discouraged from sharing river camps with other river trips,
- **Limiting Gatherings to 50 People or Less:** The total number of people at attraction sites and take-outs is limited to 50 people or two trips at a time,
- **Avoiding Tribal Lands:** At the request of local tribes who are dealing with COVID-19 situations, the NPS is encouraging all river users to voluntarily bypass tribal lands.
- **Monitoring:** The NPS will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation at the national, state, and local level. If infection levels substantially increase, additional trip cancellations may be mandated.
- **75% of Use:** Use levels are to remain at or below 75% of CRMP limits. For Commercial trips, this is to be achieved by limiting the total passengers launching on any day to 90 or less (reduced from 120). Similarly, for Noncommercial trips the target is for 75% or less trips to launch. This is to be achieved by allowing each existing trip to decide to launch or defer their trips to calendar year 2022.
 - **Mid-July Modification:** Many noncommercial river trip leaders have chosen to defer their launches to 2022, and noncommercial use during this time has dropped below the 75% trip target. Consequently, the Superintendent has authorized the River Office to make some of the cancelled launches available. These are being offered to trip leaders who had to cancel their trips due to the Park's shutdown. If any of the launches remain available, they will be offered in late July or August to the general public through a follow-up lottery. Unlike previously scheduled trips, these newest launches may not be deferred.

Grand Canyon National Park leadership remains concerned about the COVID-19 situation in the U.S. and in Arizona. If participants take appropriate precautions and start their trips healthy, chances may be good that the trip will remain virus free. However, if even one participant comes to the trip infected or is a carrier of COVID-19, there is a high risk of group transmission.

Additionally, the risk of transmission can extend to rescue rangers, helicopter pilots and other NPS staff should a river emergency or evacuation be required.

Park leadership hopes that all trip leaders and participants will remain safe and following CDC and NPS Office of Public Health guidelines for river trips (https://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/upload/Public_Health_Minimum_Standards_for_River_Trips_during_COVID-19.pdf). As required, river concessionaires have submitted COVID-19 Safety Plans to the park that outline how they will ensure their trips followed Public Health guidelines and remain safe. Noncommercial river trip leaders have been sent Public Health Guidelines, and each leader is encouraged to plan carefully, ensure their trip members follow the plan and remain safe. Thank you for taking this seriously and for your cooperation.

Additional information about river use during the pandemic has been made available through news releases posted on the park's website (<https://www.nps.gov/grca/learn/news/newsreleases.htm>). The NPS has closely followed guidance from the White House, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Health and Human Services Department, and local and state authorities. The following is a short summary of this information:

- All river operations cancelled starting March 24, 2020. News Release, March 20, 2020, *Grand Canyon National Park is Modifying River Operations to Implement Latest Health Guidance.*
- Closure extended to whole park. News Release, April 1, 2020, *Grand Canyon National Park Closed.*
- Some overlooks open, but river remains closed. News Release, May 13, 2020, *Grand Canyon National Park is beginning to increase access to South Rim Viewpoints.*
- Increasing access, but river remains closed. News Release, May 20, 2020, *Grand Canyon National Park is beginning to increase recreational access at the South Rim.*
- Initiating phased opening of the river starting June 14. News Release, May 28, 2020, *Grand Canyon National Park Increases Recreational Access.*