

NEWS RELEASE

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“Drought has Surprising Benefits for River Rafting”

Colorado River Returning to Near Pre-Dam Conditions

While everyone in the West waits for a break in drought conditions that have plagued the region for six years, river runners are discovering an upside to the dry spell. As Lake Powell continues to shrink on an almost daily basis, the Colorado River seems to be coming back to life.

“We are seeing rapids that haven’t been exposed for well over a decade,” said Bob Jones, Utah Guides and Outfitter Association board member and veteran river runner.

“In Cataract Canyon on the Colorado River there are about four sets of rapids that had all but disappeared until the drought hit and Lake Powell started shrinking. Imperial Rapid, for example, is almost three-quarters of a mile long and the waves are 10 to 15 feet high. It’s a kick whether you are in a J-rig, raft or kayak,” said Jones.

Jones explained that as the water levels in Lake Powell drop, the Colorado is able to move more rapidly. When the reservoir is full, the river is more sluggish. As it empties, the gradient drop of the river increases and thus the speed of the water beneath the surface increases. The gradient drop of the Colorado River through Cataract Canyon is now about double the rates when the reservoir was full. The result is a faster ride and the appearance of more rapids throughout the canyon.

Another result of a receding Lake Powell is that raft trips through Cataract Canyon are now about 30 miles longer than in previous years. When the lake is full, the river disappears into the reservoir causing river runners to have to motor for miles before reaching the take out point.

With Lake Powell at 45 percent of its normal capacity, or about 120 feet below normal, the Colorado River is returning to more of a pre-Glen Canyon Dam character.

“What’s happening,” said Jones, “is that Lake Powell is being drained naturally and in doing so is improving river running dramatically.”

Jones said that he is seeing springs pop out that haven’t been visible for 40 years. He said he and other outfitters anticipate seeing some historic inscriptions that have been buried for decades. Jones has also noticed that Desert bighorn sheep are now able to travel along the river banks giving his guests more frequent sightings of the elusive animals.

“There are more river camps too,” explained Jones. “And flash floods are flushing sediment out of side canyons making it possible to take our guests on more hikes. Plus, because the river is moving more rapidly, we have more time to explore those canyons on our multi-day trips. It’s truly one of the most exciting times to be on the Colorado River...to watch the river reclaim the canyons is fascinating.”

“We are also seeing more rock falls and watching the action of the fast moving water as it undercuts rock walls. I can’t say enough about how exciting it is to be in Cataract Canyon right now,” said Jones.

While many people traditionally participate in river rafting during spring melt off, this year is offering excitement that is expected to last through the conclusion of the river rafting season.

“I can honestly say that thanks to the drought and the shrinking of Lake Powell,” continued Jones, “this year a raft trip in September or October will be one of the more interesting times to be on the Colorado River.”

The Utah Guides and Outfitters Association is comprised of 50 Utah outfitters offering a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities. UGO outfitters have decades of experience in guiding visitors from all over the world through the backcountry of Utah.

Travelers in Utah can choose from whitewater rafting, jet boat river cruises, scenic flights, rock art tours, hiking & backpacking, mountain biking, or horse pack trips. Members of the Utah Guides and Outfitters also offer customized trips for clients with specific needs such as special populations, youth at risk trips, high-end or corporate charters, family reunions or child-oriented tours, themes such as geology, archeology, or

other educational adventures. For more information about Utah Guides and Outfitters visit www.Utah-Adventures.com or call (435)260-2870 or 970-245-5428.

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