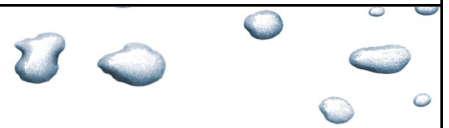


LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION



Colorado River © Alexeys/Dreamstime



WEST'S GREATEST WATERWAY

The Colorado River

Fewer than one percent of the Grand Canyon's visitors see the natural wonder from the river bed, but this view affords a visceral sense of the force that carved this 18-mile-wide chasm: the Colorado River. Down here, boaters stare up at sheer 2,000-foot cliffs striped with two billion years of geology and negotiate rapids with standing waves taller than one-story houses. It is so wild that it's easy to imagine you are the first person to ever see it.

There are few rivers in the world that give life to such a diversity of landscapes.

Since John Wesley Powell first traveled the length of the river through the Grand Canyon in 1869 and 1871, the West's great waterway has hosted a parade of human visitors, from admirers and adventurers to profiteers. Thankfully, forward-thinking conservationists helped found Grand Canyon National Park and eight other national park sites that protect—and are defined by—the Colorado River: Rocky Mountain

National Park, Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Curecanti National Recreation Area, Dinosaur National Monument, Arches National Park, Canyonlands National Park, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, and Lake Mead National Recreation Area. »



Stamp © Raclo/IStockphoto



Green River © Rinusbaak/Dreamstime

A Host of Threats

Within these protected lands, there is a staggering array of natural wonders. In Rocky Mountain National Park, 14,000-foot peaks dot the horizon and bear, elk, and mountain lion patrol the Colorado River's headwaters. In Dinosaur National Monument, visitors can see 1,500 dinosaur bones and ancient Native American petroglyphs. Farther downstream, Arches and Canyonlands protect a wonderland of geology, like crimson pinnacles, hoodoos, arches, and slot canyons.

Though the river has the power to carve stone into cathedrals and light up millions of houses, it is also strikingly vulnerable—and so are the parks on its banks. As Western populations grow, so do demands for the services the river offers. More than 30 million people in seven states depend on the river for daily household needs, and already, water levels across the Colorado River Basin have dropped 20 percent over the last 11 years.



Humpback Chub

Dhe humpback chub may be one weird-looking fish, but it is an essential part of the original Colorado River ecosystem. Once found in abundance in the river's fast, deep, turbulent waters, the endemic fish dwindled to nearly 5,000 individuals in the 1990s, thanks to changes in flows and predation from nonnative species. Because these endangered fish, which can reach 20 inches and live for 40 years, are an important component of a rare ecosystem, the National Park Service and NPCA are working to resuscitate them. Thanks to our efforts, numbers are now estimated as high as 10,000.

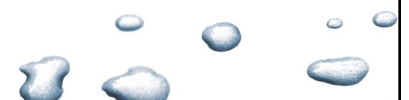
Humpback Chub © Arizona Game and Fish Department

While government agencies work to devise a solution to the shortfall, special interests clamor for their share of water. Amazingly, many of the parks, such as the Grand Canyon, Canyonlands, and Dinosaur, have no federally recognized rights to the water flowing through their land, which means it could be siphoned away by other interests.

A host of localized threats to the river could have lasting impacts downstream. For example, a proposed pipeline would funnel water from the Upper Green River—the Colorado's longest tributary—to Denver, Colorado. If built, the pipeline would slash the river's summer base flows by an estimated 25 percent, decimating fish populations and strangling recreational activities like rafting and fishing. The effects of decreased flows could strike parks far downstream.

Adjacent to Canyonlands, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has proposed the selling of potash, oil, and gas leases, which could pollute the groundwater in nearby parks. In Green River, Utah, upstream of Canyonlands, a private company has proposed a nuclear power plant.

Meanwhile, dams have inflicted damage on the river's parks for decades. The timing of the flows, the quantity and temperature of water, and the distribution of sediment and nutrients have had far-reaching effects. Native fish and insect species, the bedrock of a healthy ecosystem, have declined in many areas; invasive species like tamarisk have thrived; and archaeological and cultural sites have both washed away and become more accessible to vandals.»



Innovative Solutions



Fisherman © JonnyNoTrees/iStockphoto

These diverse problems require a far-reaching and holistic approach to conservation. That is why NPCA is taking a new, bold step: We're connecting all of the Colorado River's parks into one strong, interwoven voice for conservation. Only by advocating together will we see a whole, healthy river ecosystem that transcends individual park borders—and preserves them all for years to come.

Comprehensive Research

Little is known about exactly how much water parks need to protect their landscapes, flora, and fauna. NPCA is currently undertaking a massive, comprehensive study to determine healthy river flows for each national park on the river. By determining optimal flows for a complex web of park assets, from endangered fish species to ancient riverside ruins, we will be able to advocate for policies that will keep the whole system healthy and balanced.

Advocating for the National Park Service

Already NPCA is acting as a voice for the Colorado River parks in several landmark government studies that will affect water flows for years to come. For example, the Park Service and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) are reviewing the management of Glen Canyon Dam and making recommendations for changes to dam operations. NPCA staffers are advocating for flows that would mimic the river's natural fluctuations—and could start to restore downstream ecosystems and fish habitat within two years.

Building a Coalition

The next step is spreading the word about imminent threats to the diverse array of people who are affected by parks—and who have never, until now, been collectively informed and assembled. In 2012, NPCA founded Park Friends in the Colorado River Basin, a coalition of business owners whose livelihoods are linked to the parks. NPCA aims to gather some 250 members in the next two years. Through Park Friends, NPCA informs businesses about issues threatening the park and the river, legislation that could affect their livelihoods, and opportunities to take action such as letters to lawmakers. »



Goose © AmbientIdeas/iStockphoto

Why Act Now?

The future gap in water supply across the Colorado River basin is further complicated by the uncertainty of climate change. The multitude of competing demands could result in less water for fishing and boating, less habitat for wildlife, fewer cultural resources like ancient riverside ancestral Puebloan dwellings, and declining ecosystem health in national parks.

There is also risk of losing the enormous benefits of recreation activities which support the larger economy of the basin. The Colorado River supports a quarter million jobs and produces \$26 billion in economic output, drawing revenue from the 5.36 million adults who use the Colorado River for recreation each year. They come for picnicking, trail activities, wildlife watching, camping, fishing, water sports, bicycling, snow sports, and hunting. These seemingly simple outdoor activities are major economic drivers fueling a multi-billion dollar recreation industry, and pouring millions of dollars into local businesses and state treasuries.

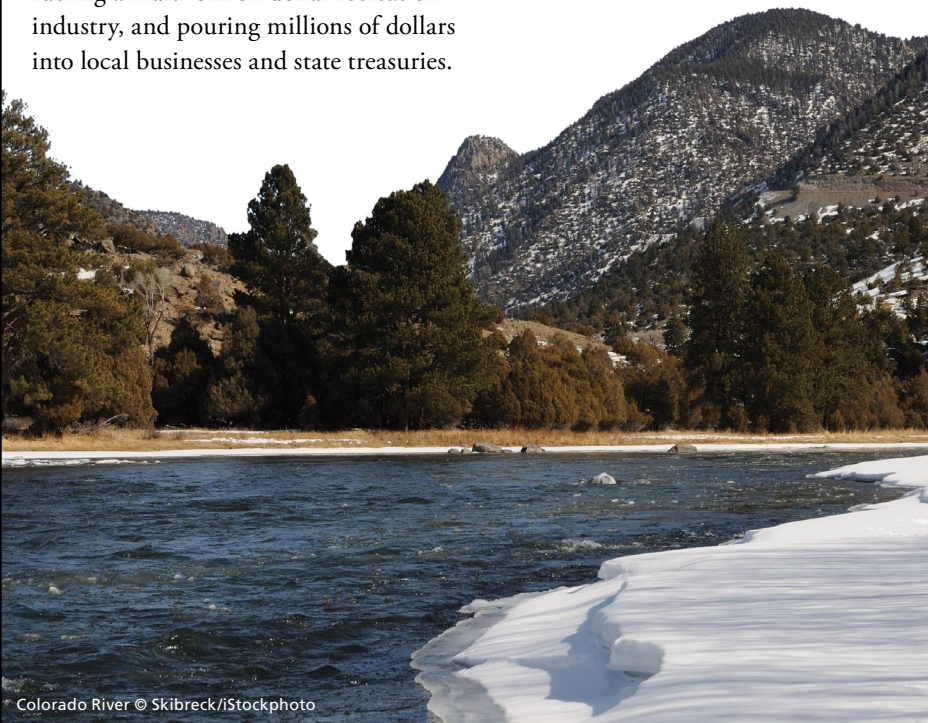
If the Colorado River were a company, it would rank #155 in the 2011 Fortune 500 ahead of companies like General Mills, US Airways, and Progressive Insurance, and would be the 19th largest employer in the Fortune 500. National parks are a major component of the recreation economy in the basin. Now is the time to safeguard the national parks dependent on the Colorado River. 🐘

How Your Gift Will Make a Difference

Donor gifts are critical to funding the hard work of conservation and advocacy. Already, they have helped NPCA secure key victories. For example, when a foreign company sought to mine uranium in the Colorado River corridor, NPCA and other groups paved the way for the Secretary of the Interior to enact a 20-year ban on the destructive practice on nearly one million acres adjacent to the Grand Canyon.

Donor gifts are essential for NPCA to continue this work through projects such as:

- Compiling studies to determine healthy flows for national parks along the Colorado River, then advocating for long term or permanent protection of flows critical for park resources.
- Fighting the development of Tusayan, a 500-person community on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon that is projected to grow to 8,000 residents with 3 million square feet of commercial space. Lacking a sufficient or sustainable water supply, the project would also create traffic, dust, and pollution impacts to one of the country's most beloved natural wonders.
- Preventing major water diversion projects such as the pipeline proposed on the Green River and advocating for responsible and realistic oil and gas leases to prevent unnecessary siphoning and polluting of water that runs through national parks.
- Continually monitoring hundreds of miles of the Colorado River for developments that could threaten national parks, such as the Green River nuclear power plant proposal.
- Building and strengthening Park Friends in the Colorado River Basin, a powerful coalition of business owners devoted to preserving the parks and sustainable local jobs.



Colorado River © Skibreck/iStockphoto