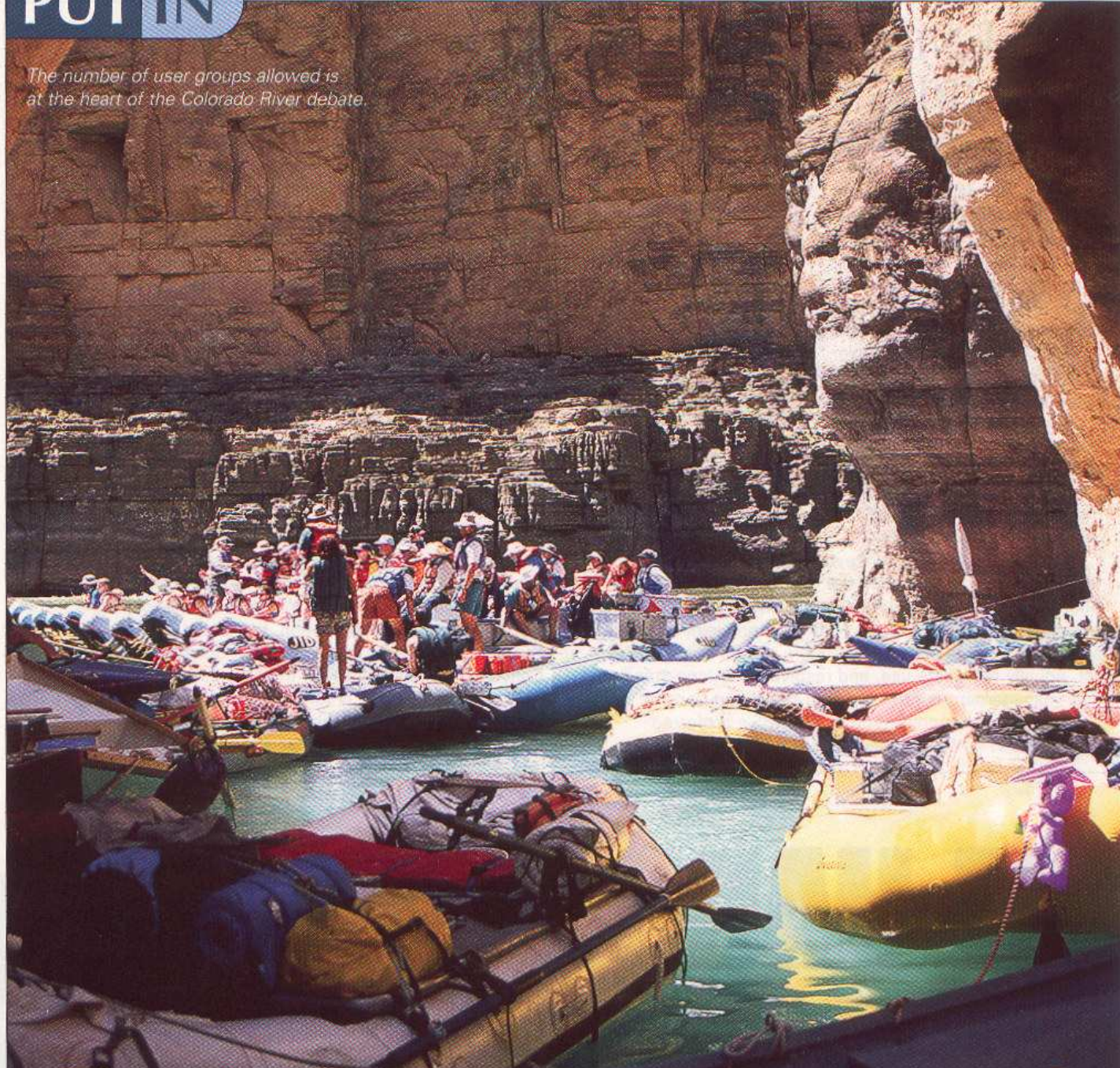


*The number of user groups allowed is at the heart of the Colorado River debate.*



# GRAND LARCENY?

WILL AMERICAN WHITEWATER'S PROPOSED COLORADO RIVER MANAGEMENT PLAN END A DECADES-LONG FEUD OR GIVE PADDLERS THE SHAFT? YOU DECIDE.

**FOR DECADES, COMMERCIAL OUTFITTERS AND PRIVATE boaters' groups** have clashed over the use of the Colorado River as it runs through the Grand Canyon. This winter, some environmental groups were stunned and angered when American Whitewater endorsed a new river management plan supported by such interest groups as the Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association, the Grand Canyon River Outfitters Association, and the Grand Canyon River Runners Association. The plan, known as modified Alternative H, recommends that the National Park Service increase the number of private trip permits, equalize allocation of commercial and noncommercial use, continue motorized use, reduce simultaneous river trips, and improve the current permitting system.

However, a coalition of wilderness organizations—River Runners For Wilderness, Sierra Club, Bluewater Network, and the Natural Resources Defense Council—has denounced the plan. They want to ban motorized trips, reduce the number of visitors, and allocate more of the permits to non-guided paddlers.

Is modified Alternative H a fair and reasonable solution that protects the Grand Canyon's environment and ensures that it remains open to boaters or does it squeeze out self-guided boaters and compromise the environmental sanctity of this most spectacular river trip? We asked Jason Robertson, managing director of American Whitewater, and Jo Johnson, co-director of River Runners For Wilderness, to defend their respective sides of this rhetorical canyon. See pages 20 and 21.



# AW ENDORSES SENSIBLE USE

## IN 1998, THE PRIVATE-PERMIT

wait list on the Grand Canyon was already a decade long, and now it stretches nearly 25 years into the future. The commercial outfitters, private boaters, and even the National Park Service were at loggerheads and would barely speak to each other after two decades of frustration over Colorado River management. Our community has come a long way in seven years; we've built bridges and pulled the majority of the river-running community together by focusing on common interests and working in a climate of mutual respect.

In January, American Whitewater, the Grand Canyon River Outfitters Association, the Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association, and the Grand Canyon River Runners Association submitted to the NPS a historic joint comment endorsing a single proposal to fix the private-boater wait list, equally reallocate use, and resolve other long-standing river-management controversies in the Grand Canyon.

We based our modification of the NPS's preferred Alternative H on four primary reasons.



*Jason Robertson  
Managing Director,  
American Whitewater*

First, we independently came to the conclusion that Alternative H represented a good start with many elements of merit that deserved serious consideration rather than simple dismissal.

Second, we agreed that it was important to show our support for the NPS's preference rather than an entirely new plan or concept, which we felt would muddy the waters.

Third, we listened to the concerns of our members, the NPS, and Congress, which overwhelmingly feared that our relatively minor differences over river management would derail the planning process and lock down the broken status quo for decades.

Fourth, and most importantly, we reviewed the NPS's environmental-impact models, conducted our own calculations, and came to the understanding that a modified Alternative H provided strong environmental protections while also providing a positive social experience for river runners.

It's time to heal and reunite the Grand Canyon boating community. Our compromise gives the NPS time and breathing room to implement the new plan and to prepare a foundation for addressing additional concerns, including passage of Wild and Scenic Rivers legislation on the Grand Canyon.

## JO JOHNSON REBUTS

The four "compromisers" represent less than 1 percent of the players. More than 20 groups with 4 million members, including the Grand Canyon Wilderness Alliance, the Northwest Rafters Association, the Grand Canyon River Guides, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, and the Grand Canyon Trust, disagree with the "compromise."

The "gang of four" is touting a false compromise for the sake of publicity, while sacrificing America's strongest values: justice and the protection of our national parks.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AMERICAN WHITEWATER

## PLAN END A DECADES-LONG FEUD OR GIVE PADDLERS THE SHAFT? YOU DECIDE.

# SENSIBLE USE? NO WAY

## THE SO-CALLED "HISTORIC

breakthrough" is a farce. Despite claims to the contrary, modified Alternative H fails to resolve the current and historical disparity between river paddlers and the park's river concessionaires. Under the proposal, the concessionaires continue to get more river access than they can market and sell, while self-guided paddlers are told that "demand for river trips exceeds supply" and are subjected to a lottery. How is that fair? Everyone must compete equally for a known launch date.

More than 130,000 noncommercial paddlers are already in line for a permit—some of whom have been waiting for more than 13 years to get on the river. The so-called "breakthrough" will allow almost 20,000 commercial passengers each year to cut in line ahead of everyone waiting for a permit. The NPS proposes, and we agree, that real demand should be measured and that the ratio between user groups should reflect that real demand.

The opposition's much-touted 50/50 split in user days is simply a lie. Guides are not counted as users. The number



*Jo Johnson  
Co-Director, River  
Runners for Wilderness*

of people and launches severely favor commercial use and don't reflect real and obvious noncommercial demand. This compromise adds shorter-length, self-guided trips in the off-season, while in the summertime, the concessionaires get the lion's share of use (81 percent for concessionaires to 19 percent for self-guided users). We suggest that everyone be counted, that all groups have the same size limit, and that the number of launches be adjusted periodically to reflect actual demand.

When paddlers who love wilderness rivers invest the money and time—and endure the red tape—for a once-in-a-lifetime river journey through the Grand Canyon, they shouldn't be subjected to an overcrowded and heavily motorized environment, denied fair summertime access, and rushed through the off-season canyon in fewer allowed days. We support all paddlers getting a fair shake at floating the Grand when they want to go, while maintaining present trip lengths, and preserving the resource.

## JASON ROBERTSON REBUTS

We too "support all paddlers' getting a fair shake at floating the Grand when they want to go . . . and preserving the resource." That's why access to and preservation of the Grand Canyon can no longer be framed as a case of Us vs. Them. Instead, it's time for compromise, through which we can achieve much more for the paddling community and the river environment. Yes, there will be change; but as whitewater river-runners on one of the nation's greatest rivers, shouldn't we be able to accept living in a dynamic environment and embracing the first real opportunity for a new management standard on the Grand Canyon in more than 25 years?

PHOTO COURTESY OF RIVER RUNNERS FOR WILDERNESS