

Testimony
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Outfitter and Guide Overview on NPS, USFS and BLM Lands
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
Congressman Rob Bishop, Chairman
May 7, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, Thank you for the opportunity to express my views on issues regarding guides and outfitters on Public Lands, National Forests and National Parks. Over the past 19 years, I have worked in the outdoor recreation industry and have had the experience and opportunity to work with each of the different land management agencies.

Public lands supervisors have a duty to preserve the natural resources within their jurisdiction while facilitating public enjoyment and access to these lands. We are only beginning to understand the complexity of these resources. Furthermore, the constant evolution of the recreational opportunities that take place on public lands challenges our stewardship efforts. Confronted with this task I believe that land management agencies should be more proactive in cooperating with local governments, partnering with outfitters and guides and avoid broad measures that will have unintended consequences.

One existing successful partnership model is the Sand Flats BLM recreational area.

A very successful partnership between the Moab Utah BLM office and the local county government is the Sand Flats Recreation Area in Moab, Utah. This partnership was formed in 1995 in which county employees manage and maintain a very popular camping and recreational area of BLM lands known as Sand Flats. The Sand Flats area is over 8,000 acres with 120 campsites and home to two world renowned trails, the Slick Rock Mountain Bike Trail and the Hell's Revenge OHV Trail that host over 100,000 visitors each year.

The recreation area is well planned, well maintained and also financially self-sustaining. The relatively inexpensive fees collected for entrance and campsite use exceed \$300,000 annually with an average budget surplus of \$40,000 that is then reinvested into the recreation area.

Through mutual hard work and respect the Moab BLM office and county managers have developed a very important high level of trust among all involved.

Guides and Outfitters are often an overlooked land resource.

Through partnerships with private outfitters and guides, public land supervisors can increase opportunities for environmental education and natural resource interpretation. Outfitters and guides have multiple roles. While providing outdoor educational and recreational opportunities to our clients we often come in contact with non-commercial visitors in the backcountry. Through these informal encounters guides act as the eyes and ears of land management agencies. As stewards of our precious

lands, guides strive to preserve the quality of the natural resources of the areas we guide in and at times even report vandals to the appropriate authorities. Guides and outfitters also frequently provide non-commercial visitors with area information, direction, additional equipment, supplies and even emergency assistance.

Overreaching bureaucratic processes make forming successful partnerships challenging and in some instances increase negative environmental impacts.

Two years ago at a National Park a moratorium was placed on guided commercial canyoneering trips. Up to this time the park had only issued one Commercial Use Authorization for this activity. The park did not have a management plan in place when they issued this permit. After a couple of years the park management determined that they needed to suspend the commercial activity altogether until they had a chance to develop a use plan. The park management chose to issue a broad moratorium as opposed to utilizing the operating permit holder's familiarity and presence to increase the effectiveness and timeliness of any management action. On several occasions, prior to this moratorium, the guides leading the commercial trips came upon private groups that were "in over their heads" and in need of assistance with everything from directions to drinking water. In these cases the guides were able to prevent the need for a Search and Rescue response to aid these park visitors. This moratorium had the unintended consequence of suspending all the benefits to the park of having the existing guide service in the back country.

Another way public lands will suffer an unintended resource loss is by choosing to increase the liability insurance policies that are required for all commercial outfitters and guides. In addition to higher premium costs, having a large amount of insurance monies available for pay out to anyone that can plan a possible winning law suit against a guide or outfitting company will only incentivize more claims. Defending against even the most frivolous claim is still very time consuming and expensive. At some point, operating with too many obstacles in the way and battles to fight it becomes unfeasible for responsible outfitters and guides to continue on. The loss of outfitting and guide services on public lands will result in a much larger negative impact on these areas than most would predict.

Conclusion

A typical scenario in recreational public areas is that a certain location becomes popular then becomes over used and under managed then in an effort to stop negative impacts to the area, the area is closed to all access and public use. What must become the scenario in the future is to have Federal Public Land Agencies partner with local governments and outfitters and guides to plan, implement and manage these areas before undesired environmental impacts occur. Thank you for this opportunity to express my views on these important issues.