

Mrs. Fredericka (Freddie) Hancock
Owner
Lake Powell WaterWorld, Inc.

Testimony
Before the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on Personal Watercraft Use in the National Parks System
May 4, 2005

Oral Testimony Outline for Ms. Fredericka Hancock
Owner, Lake Powell WaterWorld, Inc.
House Committee on Resources

National Parks Subcommittee
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10:00 AM
1334 Longworth House Office Building

Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to testify before the subcommittee.

My name is Freddie Hancock. I am a long time boater and personal watercraft (PWC) enthusiast from Page, Arizona. My husband and I own and operate Lake Powell WaterWorld, a company that sells, services and rents personal watercraft, sport boats and off-road vehicles. We also manage and service private houseboats. As implied by the name of our company, we are located on Lake Powell in Arizona, which is part of the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area on the Arizona/Utah border. Lake Powell is one of the foremost boating destinations within the National Park Service along with Lake Mead which is in Nevada. It is truly one of the most magnificent places in our nation. If you have never visited, I would urge you to do so.

I have been boating on Lake Powell since the 1960's, and in 1989 my husband and I moved there and opened Lake Powell Waterworld.

Our customers come to the lake to boat and ride personal watercraft. Many come to vacation on houseboats. Our customers either have their own personal watercraft or they rent from the concessionaire or local business. Lake Powell vacations are the ultimate family vacation and they center around boating and exploring the many canyons on the lake.

Page, Arizona and the surrounding communities are almost entirely dependent on tourism. The personal watercraft ban that was in effect on Lake Powell from November 2002 until May 2003 had an enormous negative economic impact on every business in our community and in the surrounding communities.

The media was relentless in its coverage about the possibility of a ban on personal watercraft at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, which negatively affected visitation in the summer 2002 season even though the ban was not yet in effect. Even though we did everything we could to cooperate with our local National Park Service to get the rulemaking completed, once the ban went into effect the lake personal watercraft use did not resume until May 2003 – which was too late for our visitors who were planning their vacations earlier in the year. As a result, families made plans to vacation elsewhere where they could ride their PWC and the summer 2003 season was adversely affected.

I cannot believe there are people who actually think that the ban was good for the local economy. I wonder what planet these people are from. Evidently they haven't talked to those business owners who survived the ban and more importantly to those business owners who were not able to sustain its impact.

I can tell you first-hand that there were businesses that went under. There were businesses that closed their doors for good – and not just the businesses that were directly related to boating on Lake Powell. Every business in our community was affected - hotels, restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores - and the list goes on. The visitors did not come.

If we had not had long-term, positive working relationships with our vendors and suppliers, my husband and I would probably be bankrupt today. I negotiated new payment schedules with my vendors and suppliers. I returned merchandise to offset outstanding amounts due and I transferred personal watercraft and sport boat inventory to other dealers in states with waterways where PWC were not banned. This helped to reduce my inventory. The bottom line is we worked hard to survive.

Unfortunately, however, no matter how hard we tried we reached a point where we had to lay-off employees and move to a smaller facility. The reduction in visitation over two boating seasons was just too much to sustain.

As I look back, the most frustrating part about this whole situation is that the environmental assessment was released before the ban went into effect and it concluded that personal watercraft should have access on Lake Powell. The environmental assessment was completed and released in September 2002. However, the ban went into effect on November 6, 2002 because the rulemaking process was not completed. One would think that the ban could have been avoided if the rulemaking had been completed within those two months. Instead, the deadline came and personal watercraft were banned.

I was the Chairperson of the Lake Powell PWC Task Force. We collected thousands of signatures – upwards of 6,000 - from concerned locals and visitors who were supporters of personal watercraft access on the lake. After the ban went into effect, we filed legal action. In conjunction with the BlueRibbon Coalition – a national recreation access organization of which I am a member – a lawsuit was filed in February 2003. Approximately three months later, in May 2003, The Bluewater Network reluctantly agreed to an extension to allow personal watercraft access to Lake Powell until the rulemaking process was complete.

The National Park Service did not complete the rulemaking until late September 2003. This was one full year after the environmental assessment that recommended personal watercraft use was complete. And as I explained, the damage had already been done.

Today, there are still many other national park units that appear to be logjammed – now years behind schedule.

I ask this subcommittee to rely on the conclusions of the fifteen environmental assessments which have been completed to reopen those national park units that are still closed today. This action would help negate the economic impact caused by the layers of bureaucratic red tape that appear to stall these rulemaking processes. The completed environmental assessments are overwhelmingly clear. It is unconscionable that millions of boating families and businesses owners are being unnecessarily adversely affected by personal watercraft bans that make no sense.

The Bluewater Network has fought us every step of the way. Its representatives cling to rhetoric, outdated studies and water level arguments. They allege that personal watercraft would somehow destroy the lake because of the drop in water level.

The truth is, Lake Powell has plenty of water. It is approximately 200 miles long with over 2,000 miles of shoreline. Lake Powell is awesome. Pictures do not do it justice...and the water level on the lake is expected to rise between 50 and 60 feet this year. This estimate comes from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

It's absolutely critical that this subcommittee walk away with one very clear point – that personal watercraft have evolved into some of the cleanest and quietest motorized vessels on the water. They do not emit a third of their unburned fuel into the water as the Bluewater Network has alleged for years. The National Park Service's environmental assessments in the fifteen parks which have been completed confirm this point. This fact simply cannot be refuted. If we are to have a constructive debate, then we must rely on recent – not outdated and inaccurate – information.

Thank you for calling this hearing and investigating this matter. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of the millions of families who enjoy riding their personal watercraft and the businesses who support them. Please use your leadership and oversight of the National Park Service to put an end to the lengthy rulemaking process that is long overdue. Thank you.