

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Testimony of

CRAIG W. COLLETT Collett's Recreation Service, Inc.

Before the Subcommittee on National Parks,

Forests and Lands

30 April 1996

Dear Committee;

My name is Craig W. Collett. My family and I operate two businesses within the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area. One business, located in the town of Dutch John, Utah, is under Forest Service Special Use Permit and was started in 1957 when Flaming Gorge Dam construction began. In 1971 my family purchased Flaming Gorge Lodge, which is on private property.

The Green River flows out of Flaming Gorge Dam. It has always been a big tourist attraction in the area and brings in a very large part of our business. The river has always been popular for self-guided rafting for families and youth groups, but lately is probably most noted as a premier blue-ribbon fishing river.

Over two million people visit the Recreation Area each year. Flaming Gorge NRA provides many recreational opportunities for people from all over the country and world.

In 1988 the U.S. Forest Service began looking at developing a new Green River Management Plan. As part of developing this plan in 1991, the Forest Service had studies done to analyze the recreation use capacity of the Green River.

In 1988 I wrote a letter to the Forest Service stating our concerns about allowing additional outfitters to guide on the river. (See attached Exhibit "A") In this letter I quoted from the NRA Plan which states: "Existing permittees will normally be given first opportunity to provide or expand services if it is determined there is a demonstrated public need for them....Furthermore, new concessionaires will normally be discouraged if public demand for goods and services can be practically met on private lands near or within the NRA."

At this time there were three outfitters on the Green River. Eleven additional outfitters were allowed to come in and we were NOT given the opportunity to expand services before the additional outfitters were allowed to come in.

The most recent attempt to complete the new Green River Management Plan was begun March, 1995. There were five proposed alternatives of which Alternative "B" was the proposed action. (See attached Alternative "B") My concerns about this proposal are stated in a letter which I sent to the Forest Service April 25, 1995. (See attached Letter April 25, 1995)

As a business that depends on visitors for our livelihood we are concerned about public restrictions, or even the perception of restrictions, on the Green River. News releases and publicity about possible restrictions have already been circulating. I am convinced that because of this some people have already decided not to come to the Green River.

The Forest Service has stated that they can deal with the environmental and safety concerns created by more people on the river.

Therefore, my question is, does the Forest Service have the right to restrict public use of public lands because of perceived over-crowding? And I say "perceived" because I am not convinced that an actual problem exists.

The public is intelligent enough to decide for themselves if the river is too crowded. The choice is then theirs to choose

if and when to come. On the Fourth of July weekend crowding is fun. The more rafts and people the merrier. For a tranquil fishing experience coming during the week, early morning, early or late season would be best.

People don't like to be told what they can and cannot do. Use of the Green River hasn't significantly changed since 1991. It therefore appears that people are already deciding for themselves if the river is too crowded. Let the public continue to make their own choice!

- QUESTIONS TO ASK THE FOREST SERVICE

- 1- How much has total River use changed in the last five to seven years?
- 2- Are there more people using the River now than in 1991?
- 3- Is the River being used more in the winter and off-season?
- 4- How many days last year were over your proposed public use limits?
- 5- How many days in the last five years have been over your proposed public use limits?
- 6- Do you believe that people's perceptions of crowding are different on a summer holiday weekend as opposed to a day in February?
- 7- How do you plan to manage these public restrictions?
- 8- Do you have the manpower to implement these proposals?
- 9- Why do you want to limit public use on the Green River?

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