

Colorado River Management Plan Update Implementation Strategy

The 2006 revision of the Colorado River Management Plan (CRMP) marked a new era for both Colorado River boating and management. Things are not the same; the iconic waiting list is no more and non-commercial river trips now make up nearly half of the annual use. Surrounding these changes is concern over resource conditions and congestion; especially in the spring and fall when changes are most apparent. Luckily, the architects of the CRMP were also concerned with these issues and consequently included a strategy for implementing the CRMP based on monitoring, research, mitigation and adaptive management.

Monitoring & Research

Part of the overall approach to implementing the CRMP begins with monitoring resource conditions. Two trips a year, one in the spring and one in the fall monitor wildlife, vegetation, cultural and recreation resources. Visitor experience monitoring records attraction site encounters and campsite competition. Campsite expansion and condition are evaluated with GIS mapping and campsite assessments. Finally, field observations and visitor comments help guide monitoring indicators and research. The information collected from these programs is then put to use to inform managers on consequences of the revised CRMP and directs managers on where to focus mitigation resources.

Mitigation

In the CRMP the term mitigation is a planning term used to describe any action that minimizes impacts to natural and cultural resources and visitor experience. There is a spectrum of mitigation options available to managers; the principle is to use the least invasive tools first and the most restrictive only when absolutely necessary. Two of the many options outlined in the CRMP are campsite design and education. Campsite design is on-the-ground work such as delineating trails or creating more camp area. Education options include providing Leave no Trace information prior to river trip departure and alerting river users of special resource concerns. Mitigation also includes campsite rehabilitation in which old high water zone camps are rehabilitated and social trails blocked off and mulched. Examples of current programs that provide mitigation solutions are the campsite atlas, river management website, river orientation DVD, and courtesy brochure.

Adaptive Management

According to the Colorado River Management Plan “adaptive management provides systematic feedback to park management and allows activity adjustment to mitigate unplanned or undesirable plan implementation outcomes.” In instances when education, site design, or campsite rehabilitation is unsuccessful at resolving impacts identified by monitoring adaptive management allows for alterations to the management framework. This might include adjustments to the launch calendar or changes to trip length, but adaptive management changes are made only when resource conditions are no longer meeting established standards and when other mitigation methods are ineffective.

Please check the Grand Canyon National Park river management website www.nps.gov/grca/parkmgmt/riv_mgt.htm for CRMP implementation updates.