

## Grand Canyon's Historic River Boats: Project Update

By Jan Balsom – Grand Canyon National Park

The historic Colorado River boat collection at Grand Canyon National Park currently contains 19 regionally significant boats which contribute to the river running history of the Colorado River. These boats, some having been on outdoor display in the former Visitor Center courtyard, have been deteriorating for more than thirty years due to environmentally uncontrolled conditions and inadequate storage. These fragile and non-renewable resources are part of an important legacy of the Colorado River, and this collection represents the best preserved physical remains of the Colorado River boating tradition.

The boats, the earliest used in 1909, exhibit the story of their use in every scrape and scratch on their frames. These marks are part of their history, and stabilization and conservation of the physical remains of the boats is the essence of this project. Begun in 2003, the goal of the project is to conserve the boats so that they can be placed back on public display.

Through a number of partners, including the Grand Canyon Association and the Grand Canyon River Outfitters Association, these boats are all in the process of conservation. To date, all the boats have been moved to inside storage locations, and one boat, the 1938 Nevills Expedition WEN, is currently on display at the park Visitor Center. The others are being meticulously cleaned and conserved so that they too will be stable enough to go back on public display in the near future so that our visitors can enjoy their stories.