

A Narrative of Desired Future Resource Conditions for the Colorado River Ecosystem in Grand Canyon

The following statement was written by GCRG's representatives in the Adaptive Management Program with reviews and editing by the GCRG Board of Directors and Officers, to provide input into development of the Adaptive Management Program Strategic Plan. It will be integrated into a common narrative vision for future resource conditions presently being put together by all stakeholders in the program. We are open to your comments.

GCRG offers this statement to guide refinement of Management Objectives for the AMP Strategic Plan. While we cannot speak for other constituencies, we believe this statement is consistent with National Park Service policy, tenets of conservation biology, and goals of the river-runner constituency in Grand Canyon National Park.

We support a scientifically grounded definition of “ecosystem management” as the guiding principle for adaptive management, and a comprehensive understanding of the economics associated with management of the dam and environment downstream. This understanding should include local, regional and national valuation of hydropower, recreational, and social values relating to the Colorado River ecosystem.

Our near-term vision for river and dam management includes, but is not limited to:

- 1) a dynamic river ecosystem characterized by ecological patterns and processes operating within their range of natural variability.
- 2) numerous campable sand bars distributed throughout the canyon within a scour zone between the 8,000-35,000 cfs level; built and maintained by habitat maintenance and beach-habitat building flows timed to maximize utilization of sediment input.
- 3) annual variations in water temperature, quality, chemistry that parallel natural patterns, with contingency plans for mitigation of any unforeseen introduction of hazardous materials from outside sources.
- 4) a diverse “new high water zone” biotic community dominated by native species, and a healthy “old high water zone” biotic community to help preserve ancient cultural features located in the high terraces.
- 5) a thriving community of native fishes, mammals, and invertebrates.
- 6) increased communication and involvement with Native American tribes to better respect and integrate their concerns
- 7) preservation and enhancement of recreational opportunities and minimal impact of research activities on the river ecosystem. Wilderness qualities of the river corridor are highly valued for their remarkable length, breadth and unbroken primitive character. Wilderness experiences and benefits available here include natural sounds and quiet of the desert and river, solitude, connection to nature, personal contemplation, joy, excitement and renewal for extended time periods in a unique environment outside the trappings of civilization. This combination of qualities make the river corridor an irreplaceable, one of a kind, national and international treasure.

In the long term we foresee growing problems from reservoir sedimentation, erosion of fine-grained sediment and subsequent loss of habitat from the river ecosystem. As the Colorado River ecosystem loses its beaches, it will also continue to lose value as a world-class recreational resource. Our unsustainable use of this river and its ecosystem is becoming more obvious. Consequently, we have a greater responsibility to advise the Secretary on both short and long-term ramifications of our actions, and provide innovative approaches for establishing sustainable systems. We wish to protect and restore the Colorado River ecosystem, and preserve the unique, highly valued, but endangered experience opportunities available there for future generations.

Andre Potochnik
Matt Kaplinski