

What are Desolation and Gray Canyons Like at 700 cfs?

Extreme drought conditions have resulted in very low runoff and river flows that are less than 20 percent of normal. The Green River, through Desolation and Gray Canyons seems to have reached a base flow in the range of 650 to 800 cfs. Flaming Gorge Dam is committed to a constant release of 800 cfs. Increased reservoir releases are not expected until spring.

Desolation Canyon is definitely navigable at these low water levels. The BLM is still conducting patrols with 16-foot, self-bailing rafts. Commercial outfitters are still operating with 18-foot boats. The character of the trip is definitely changed. There are navigable channels through the flat water sections, although it takes good eyes and river sense to identify and stay in these channels. The rapids and riffles are rocky and technical. Maneuvering and quick direction changes are required. In places, you will be caroming off rocks and sometimes scraping over them. You might even park on a rock for a while - enjoy the break. Fortunately, the rocks of Desolation Canyon are fairly friendly. The BLM has not sustained any damage to their boats, and the outfitters have not reported any damage. It appears that Desolation Canyon is a good place to work on low water skills without working on your patching skills at the same time.

Desolation is definitely doable and remains a great wilderness adventure. If you decide to go:

- Allow more time. Plan at least six days for your trip. Days on the water will be longer and require more than the usual amount of effort and concentration. You will want some decompression time in a shady camp or lounging on the beach.
- If you have a choice of boats, smaller is better than larger, a self-bailer is better than a bucket boat.
- Pack a little bit lighter trip. BLM patrols have not been going backpack style, but we do take smaller, lighter equipment. This is not the best time to pack your entire collection of cast iron cookware.