Draft Business Plan for the
Desolation Canyon River Program

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Green River District
Price Field Office

January 2020 Draft

Business Plan for
Desolation Canyon River Program

RECOMMENDATIONS, REVIEWS and APPROVALS

Recommended by:

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Price Field Manager

Approved By:

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Lance Porter Date

Green River District Manager

This business plan was prepared pursuant to the "Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, 2004" (P.L. 108-447) and BLM recreation fee program policy. It establishes future management goals and priorities for the Desolation Canyon River Program in the Price Field Office.

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United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

PRICE FIELD OFFICE

125 South 600 West

Price, Utah 84501

In Reply Refer to:

2932 (UTW02000)

Dear Reader,

I would like to present for your review and comment the *Draft Business Plan for the Desolation Canyon River Program*. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Price Field Office manages the Desolation Canyon float trip that annually provides over 6,000 visitors with outstanding recreational opportunities on their public lands. Of these visitors, approximately 1,500 are passengers on commercial river trips, and 4,500 are private boaters. In addition to providing the whitewater float trip, Desolation Canyon offers a wide variety of amenities, including put-in and take-out boat ramps, parking facilities, camping and toilet facilities at both the put-in and take-out, trash removal, and canyon campsites.

The Price Field Office proposes to increase Individual Special Recreation Permit (ISRP) fees for the public's use of the Desolation Canyon Area. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act authorizes the BLM to regulate the use of the public lands through permits, and the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act authorizes the BLM to collect recreational fees when sites and areas meet specific criteria. The purchase of an Individual Special Recreation Permit for Desolation Canyon includes the use of all facilities located within the special area. Fees for Desolation Canyon have not been increased since 2008, when they were raised from $18.00 per person to $25.00 per person. Operational costs have risen substantially since that time to include 4 river rangers for a longer season and additional infrastructure maintenance. The proposed fee change is to raise the current $25.00 Desolation Canyon Special Area fee to $50.00 for the 2021 season.

The objective of the *Draft Business Plan for Desolation Canyon River Program* is to provide you with the opportunity to review how collected recreation fees have been and are being planned to be used, and give you the opportunity to submit comments on the proposed fee change. Comments may be mailed to BLM, River Business Plan Comment, 125 South 600 West, Price, UT 84501 or emailed to Jaydon Mead at jmead@blm.gov ("river business plan comment" in the subject line). Comments are due by February 12, 2020

Thank you for your interest in your public lands.

Sincerely,

Christopher Conrad

Price Field Office Manager

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Business Plan for
Desolation Canyon River Program
SPECIAL RECREATION PERMITS (River)
Commercial and Individual Special Recreation Permits
WBS# LVRD UT030000: Desolation Canyon

Executive Summary

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Price Field Office (PFO) Desolation Canyon Business Plan, upon approval, would increase the Individual Special Recreation Permit (ISRP) from $25.00 to $50.00 starting with the 2021 season.

SRPs for individual recreation use in a special area are referred to as "Individual Special Recreation Permits" (ISRPs) (BLM H-2930-1, Ch. 1, I.D.). Desolation Canyon was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1969 and the Desolation Canyon Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) was established in the Price River Management Framework Plan (MFP) of 1983. The Desolation Canyon River program has been referred to by many different names. There are instances where it is called "Deso Gray," "Desolation and Gray Canyons of the Green River," Desolation/Gray Canyon," etc. This document will refer to the entire Desolation and Gray Canyon of the Green River Program as the "Desolation Canyon River Program."

This business plan has been prepared to meet the criteria defined in the "Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, 2004" (FLREA). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) originally began collecting fees for the recreational use of public lands under the authority of the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act (1976) – known as the BLM's "organic act". The FLREA recognizes the Bureau of Land Management's authority to collect Special Recreation Permit fees for the recreational use of certain areas. FLREA allows collected Special Recreation Permit fees, as well as Special Area fees, to be retained locally and furthermore outlines how revenues are to be used for such things as facility repair, maintenance, enhancement, interpretation, visitor information, visitor services, visitor needs assessments, signs, habitat restoration, law enforcement related to public use and recreation, and direct operating or capital costs associated with the Recreation and Visitor Services program. At the PFO, the recreational use of certain areas within the field office is managed through the Special Recreation Permit program. Desolation Canyon is managed using the Special Area ISRP Fee established from Sand Wash put in to Swasey's Boat Ramp.

FLREA guidelines and the BLM 2930 Manual and 2930-1 Handbook require that each recreation fee program have a business plan which thoroughly discusses the purpose and rationale for recreation fees and explains how fees are consistent with the criteria set forth in FLREA. Business plans are to assist management in determining the appropriateness and level of fees, cost of administering fee programs, and provide a structured communication and marketing plan. The primary purpose of the plans is to serve as public notification of the objectives of the recreation fee program, including use of recreation fee revenues and to provide the public an opportunity to comment on these objectives. This Desolation Canyon River Program Business Plan is subject to public review and is the PFO's official documentation in the event of an audit.

In the PFO, river-based recreation fees are deposited in the Desolation Canyon Recreation Fee Account (WBS#LVRDUT030000). These deposits include 1) river outfitters' Special Recreation Permit fees for use of the Desolation Canyon segment of the Green River and 2) commercial

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passenger and private boater Special Area Fees for Desolation Canyon. This business plan covers both these sources of revenue.

The 84 mile long river segment from Sand Wash to Swasey's Boat Ramp is the boundary between the Price and Moab Field Offices. From Sand Wash, the land on river right is under general BLM jurisdiction for 4.1 miles, in the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area for 36.2 miles, and in the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Area for 43.7 miles. On river left, 68.8 miles of the 84 miles are managed by the Uintah-Ouray tribal government and 13.8 miles are within that portion of the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area managed by the Moab Field Office. The remaining 1.4 miles are under general BLM jurisdiction. The southernmost 13.8 miles of the river segment are managed as a Wild and Scenic River with a classification of 'wild' for 5.3 miles and a classification of 'recreational' for the last 8.5 miles.

The off site management consists primarily of the permit system including required permits and permit stipulations designed to protect both the user and the environment. Visitor contact at Sand Wash is also an important component of management. Every trip is inspected for permit compliance and information about the canyon and the importance of protecting natural values is provided. Regular patrols of the canyon provide further compliance checks, monitoring of conditions, weed control and site clean-up.

Background and Authorities

This business plan has been prepared to meet the criteria defined in the "Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act 2004" (P.L.108-447). The authorities and regulations for this business plan, including fee collection for Special Recreation Permits, are:

- **The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), 1976,** [Public Law 94-579], contains BLM's general land use management authority over the public lands, and establishes outdoor recreation as one of the principal uses of those lands. Section 302 (b) of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands. Section 303 of FLPMA contains BLM's authority to enforce the regulations and impose penalties.

- **The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), 2004,** repealed applicable portions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and replaced BLM's authority to collect recreation fees in 2004. This current law authorizes BLM to collect recreation fees at sites that meet certain requirements, allows BLM to keep the fee revenues at the local offices where they were collected, and directs how BLM will manage and utilize these revenues.

- **Title 43, Part 2930 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (43 CFR 2930),** contains the regulations governing BLM's recreation permitting programs.

Recreation use is managed under the *Desolation and Gray Canyon of the Green River River Management Plan*. (River Management Plan) This plan was signed in 1979 and was incorporated into the Price River Management Framework Plan of 1983. It is incorporated by reference in the PFO Resource Management Plan of 2008. The River Management Plan contains six objectives directing the management of the SRMA:

1. Maintain the natural character of the canyon environment in Desolation and Gray Canyons.

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2. Provide for the equitable distribution of available user days to a broad spectrum of the public.
3. Provide for a continuing opportunity for a quality wilderness experience between Sand Wash and Nefertiti Rapid.
4. Provide an opportunity for day use oriented recreation below Nefertiti Rapid.
5. Protect the scientific value of cultural resources while allowing for their enjoyment.
6. Provide for safe and lawful use of the river resource.

This business plan has also been prepared pursuant to all applicable BLM recreation fee program policies and guidance, including:

- BLM Recreation Permits and Fees Manual 2930
- BLM Recreation Permits and Fees Administration Handbook (2930-1 Handbook)
- BLM Utah Instruction Memorandum UT 2007-056: *Fee Site Business Plan Development and Business Plan Outline*
- BLM Utah Instruction Memorandum UT 2013-037: *Utah Recreation Fee Program Toolbox*

The BLM strives to manage recreation and visitor services to serve the diverse visitor outdoor recreation demands while helping them to maintain sustainable setting conditions needed to conserve public lands so the visitor's desired recreation choices remain available. The BLM's goals for delivering recreation benefits from BLM-administered lands to the American people and their communities are:

- Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities;
- Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources; and
- Provide for and receive fair value in recreation.
- In addition, the Business Plans complements the BLM's Leadership Priorities of serving the American family, getting America back to work and making America great through shared conservation.

This business plan will assist the PFO in meeting these river-based recreation and visitor service goals. This plan covers trips conducted by commercial river outfitters and private boaters managed under the BLM's Special Recreation Permit Program. Fees from these uses include Special Recreation Permit commercial fees, as well as the Individual Special Recreation Permit Fees from both commercial passengers and private boaters for use of Desolation Canyon.

Fees collected for the Desolation Canyon River program include both commercial and special area fees. Commercial outfitters pay 3% of adjusted gross revenue for river trips. In addition, for Desolation Canyon, a $25.00 per person Special Area Fee is levied on private boaters as well as on commercial passengers. Outfitters collect $25.00 per commercial passenger and remit this money to the BLM. Private boaters pay the $25.00 Special Area Fee directly to the BLM. All these river-based fees are deposited into the Desolation Canyon Recreation Fee account, which is the subject of this business plan.

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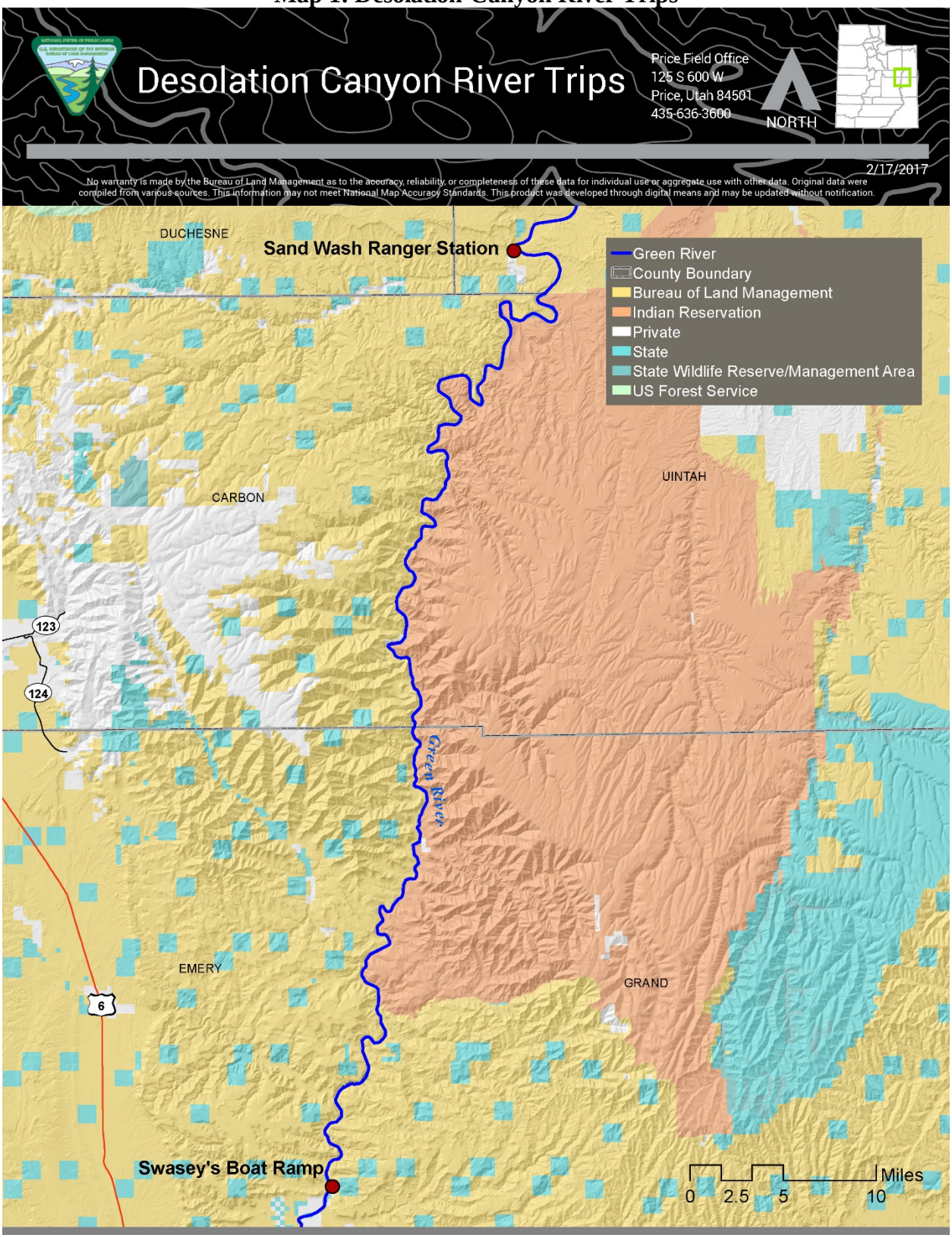
A. Introduction to the Price Field Office Desolation Canyon River Program

Administrative Unit

The Desolation Canyon River Program is managed by the BLM's Price Field Office (PFO). The PFO of the Green River District, BLM, is the administrative unit for the WBS# LVRD UT030000 account (the Desolation Canyon Recreation Fee Account). The PFO manages approximately 2,500,000 acres of public lands in Carbon and Emery County, Utah. The Price Field Office is located in Utah Congressional District 3.

The River Program area actually includes geography within three field office boundaries. The entry point, Sand Wash, and the first four miles of the river are located in the Vernal Field Office. The last 14 miles of the canyons are shared by the Price (west of the river) and Moab (east of the river) Field Offices. The take out point, Swasey's Boat Ramp, is located in the Moab Field Office. By interoffice agreement, the PFO is responsible for recreation management over the entire area.

Map 1: Desolation Canyon River Trips



Price Field Office Recreation Program and Visitation

The PFO has a diverse and extensive recreation program. Recreation opportunities available on BLM managed public lands include hiking, biking, motorized trail use, developed and dispersed camping, hunting, fishing, canyoneering, rock climbing, bouldering, river running and antler shed hunting. These opportunities are an important part of the rural, historical lifestyle of long time generational residents, new comers and visitors alike. In addition, these activities are an important part of Carbon and Emery counties' economy.

Desolation Canyon is a popular multi-day float trip, known for its easy rapids, great scenery, varied wildlife sightings, moderate hiking and interesting historical locations. Most of the run is flat water floating, with over 60 riffles and rapids. Most of the rapids are easy, with approximately half a dozen class III rapids and one rapid that can escalate to a class IV depending on water levels. Of the 84-mile long river segment, 43 miles are managed as part of the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Area (on river right), and 36 miles are within the Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area.

The Desolation Canyon River Program is a limited entry allocated river program for both privates and commercials. Up to six launches are allowed per day. Commercial launches are allocated prior to the lottery being opened for the general public. The lottery period for a permit is December 1 to January 31. Lottery launch dates are May 1 to September 30 annually. Furthermore, high use season is May 16 to August 15 (6 launches per day), and low use season is August 16 to May 15 (2 launches per day). Permits outside of the lottery period are obtained via a first-come-first-serve basis on recreation.gov.

B. Description of Desolation Canyon River Usage

Area Description

The PFO administers commercial Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) and private ISRPs for boating on the 84 mile allocated river segment of the Green River from Sand Wash Ranger Station to Swasey's Boat Ramp. The Desolation Canyon Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) was established in the Price River Management Framework Plan (MFP) of 1983 and was carried over into the 2008 Price Resource Management Plan. The SRMA extends from Sand Wash to Swasey's Boat Ramp and includes lands within two miles of the river. The SRMA destination area is of national and international significance.

Total Visitation

The PFO currently administers 16 commercial Desolation Canyon permits that accommodated 1,524 commercial passengers in 2018. The PFO additionally issued 4,681 private river permit ISRP's in 2018. Thus, 6,205 visitors engaged in non-motorized boating through Desolation Canyon in 2018. The table and graph below shows commercial and private visitation for the last five years:

*Table 1**: Recreation Visits to Desolation Canyon Over a Six Year Period***

Year	Commercial Trips	Commercial Passengers	Private Trips	Private Visitors	Total Trips	Total Visitors
2013	91	1,130	391	3,677	482	4,807
2014	84	1,054	399	4,172	483	5,226
2015	107	1,035	470	4,290	577	5,325
2016	109	1,569	474	4,390	583	5,959
2017	123	1,726	536	4,787	659	6,513
2018	141	1,524	479	4,681	620	6,205

Visitation to Desolation Canyon has varied over the past 6 years depending on demand, river conditions and river flow. Both private boaters and commercial passengers pay per person fees to float through Desolation Canyon. The current per-person per-trip fee is $25 to float from Sand Wash Ranger Station to Swasey's Boat Ramp. The ISRP fee has been in place since the prior business plan was written in 2008.

Recreation Use

Recreation use in Desolation Canyon is governed by the 1979 River Management Plan. The 1979 plan established a maximum group size of 25. Use was allocated between commercial and private sectors on a 50/50 basis, but time has shown that roughly 70 percent of permits are used by private boaters. There are currently 16 commercial guides and outfitters operating through Desolation

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Canyon (one of the allocated commercial permits is utilized as an "access" permit for educational institutions).

During the high use season (May 15 – August 15), six launches are allowed on Desolation Canyon, with three allocated to commercial use and three to private boaters. During the low use season (August 16 – May 14), two launches are offered per day; one is allocated to commercial users and one to private boaters. Launches that are unused by commercial outfitters are offered to private boaters.

Private Use

Private permits for the high-use river season (May through August) are initially distributed through a lottery. Application for that lottery occurs on Recreation.gov from December 1 – January 31. Successful applicants receive a launch reservation, which they must confirm and pay for within 30 days of their launch date to obtain their river permit (additional passengers may be added at a later time prior to launch). Each year the PFO receives at least 3,800 private boater applications for the permit lottery for approximately 400 possible launches.

In 2018, 3,854 applications were submitted for launches during the peak user demand season of May 15th through August 15th. Of the applications submitted for May 15th through August 15th, roughly 10% were successfully drawn. Applications submitted for launch dates outside of May 15th through August 15th had a 75% success rate. Unsuccessful applicants, as well as applicants who apply for a permit following the lottery, can then obtain available and cancelled permits through Recreation.gov.

The majority of private use is regional. According to Recreation.gov, in 2018, approximately 70% of the private permits were issued to residents of Colorado and Utah.

Commercial Use

Commercial launches are allocated each year for 16 outfitter and guide permit holders for Desolation Canyon (one of which is an Access Program for educational groups). The 1979 River Management Plan allows for up to 50% commercial use through Desolation Canyon; however, commercial launches only account for about 30% of launches. Currently, all commercial use is allocated and no new commercial SRPs are being issued.

The Desolation Canyon River Program receives fee revenues from commercial Desolation Canyon SRP holders (3% of adjusted gross revenue), as well as the per person ISRP fees charged for both commercial and private use of the river. As commercial SRP rates are set by national BLM policy and regulation, only per person ISRP fees are proposed for fee change in this plan.

Visitor Demographics

The following demographic information is compiled from the *Utah River Study Results Report: Recreational Use, Value and Experience of Boaters on Rivers Managed by the BLM in Utah.* This five-volume report was published in 2001 by Utah State University, Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism. The study was done under a contract from the BLM and Utah Travel Council. Although the study is dated, there is no indication that use patterns have changed.

Most users (trip leaders and participants) come from Utah and Colorado. 24 percent come from other western states. Another 18 percent originate from states outside the west and 2 percent are international visitors. International and non-western states visitors are probably under-reported for a variety of reasons. They are more likely to be on their first private trip or on a commercial

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trip. For private trips, the permit holder is most likely to be a resident of the region even if others on the trip originate elsewhere. The survey technique was more likely to obtain a response from the regional residence.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Desolation Canyon Users

Age Distribution of Users (2001 Survey)	
Age	**Percent of Users**
15-20	16
21-30	16
31-40	23
41-50	33
51-60	7
61-70	4
>70	1

Desolation Canyon users are also experienced river runners. Forty-five percent of the users report having multiple Desolation Canyon trips, with seven as the average number of previous trips. Seventy-five percent rate their river running experience as at least intermediate. These users report an average of seven river trips per year.

C. Proposed Modifications to Recreation Fee Rates and Permit Distribution

The PFO proposes to raise the Desolation Canyon ISRP fee, which is payable by both private and commercial users. The current and proposed fee increase is shown in the following table for Desolation Canyon.

Table 3: Current and Proposed Recreation Fee Rates for Desolation Canyon

Fee Type	Current Fee	2021 Fee Change
Individual Special Recreation Permit	$25 per person	$50 per person

The increase in per person ISRP fees would affect approximately 6,500 visitors per year, who would pay an additional $25 per person starting in the 2021 river season. Since the Desolation Canyon river trip is a six day trip, this ISRP fee would result in a fee of $8.33 per day per person. The fee increase would also affect 16 commercial river outfitters, who would likely need to raise their rates slightly in order to adjust for the increased fee. The proposed ISRP fee increase would result in an increase in annual ISRP revenue. The proposed increase would raise the average annual revenue for Desolation Canyon from ISRP fees, resulting in approximately $325,000 in revenue. This would approximately double the current revenues from ISRP fees in Desolation Canyon.

D. Expenditures/Operating Costs

The PFO maintains an extensive infrastructure that supports private and commercial Desolation Canyon river recreation. The largest expense, aside from labor and staff costs, is the operation of the Sand Wash Ranger Station, which includes a drinking water system, two assigned vehicles, a boat ramp, two double vault CXT toilets (which must be cleaned and pumped), screen cabins, a warehouse and boatshed with all the boating equipment required for river patrols and rescues, parking lots, and historic cabins. Other Desolation Canyon infrastructure maintained by the PFO includes Swasey's boat ramp, along with the associated parking lots, toilets, trash removal, and recycling services.

Annual operating costs for Desolation Canyon River Program include expenditures for permit administration, on-site permit and resource monitoring, law enforcement services, facility maintenance and cleaning, vault toilet pumping, parking lot maintenance, internet and phone services and trash disposal. At a minimum, four career seasonal and four permanent employees provide direct services to the Desolation Canyon River Program. These eight people include four river rangers who provide on-site patrols, compliance checks, maintenance and cleaning, interpretation, resource protection, and safety services at the launch site and throughout the river corridor; one park ranger serves as maintenance staff; one outdoor recreation planner performs commercial and private permit issuance, one park ranger administers the permits, and one law enforcement officer provides law enforcement and safety services. Staffing at Desolation Canyon requires travel costs and per diem be paid at all times: currently, it costs the BLM a minimum of

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$646 per diem per week in 2019, in addition to salaries, for two river rangers to be on shift. A complete breakdown of labor and operating costs is available upon request from the PFO. Desolation Canyon costs are paid out of both 1232 UT03 funds and appropriated funding.

Table 4 identifies the expenditures on the Desolation Canyon River Program for the past four fiscal years. These expenditures are broken down by funding source. It should be noted that this level of expenditure does not include any costs of planned future improvements.

Table 4: Expenditures and Revenues on the Desolation Canyon River Program, Four Year Average, 2015 - 2018

Fiscal Year	Labor Costs: 1232 UT03	Labor Costs: Appr. Funds	Operating and capital costs: 1232 UT03	Operating and capital costs – appropriate funds	Total Costs, Desolation Canyon River Program	Revenue, Desolation Canyon River Program 1232 UT03	Net Loss in the Desolation Canyon River Program
2018	$162,000	$200,000	$21,000	$39,000	$422,000	$279,596*	$142,404
2017	$200,000	$162,000	$37,000	$23,000	$422,000	$275,174	$146,826
2016	$180,000	$182,000	$33,000	$17,000	$412,000	$232,785	$179,215
2015	$160,000	$182,000	$23,000	$30,000	$395,000	$247,056	$127,944
4 year ave.	**$177,550**	**$181,500**	**$28,500**	**$27,250**	**$412,275**	**$258,652**	**$149,097**

* See Table 5 for a breakdown of ISRP and commercial river fee contributing to revenue

As shown above, the costs of managing the Desolation Canyon River Program exceed the revenues generated by the program (at $25 per person and 3% of commercial adjusted gross revenue). There is a need to increase the user fee to cover more of the direct operating costs, as well as to pay for needed improvements to program infrastructure (see Appendix A for a listed of needed improvements). Currently, appropriated money is supporting the Desolation Canyon River Program through funding critical portions of the program including salaries for recreation program staff, maintenance staff, IT support for the remote location, and extra building space for equipment management. In 2018, appropriated money supported the fee program by over $200,000. Since expenses were $422,000, this means that there was a "net loss" of approximately $142,404 dollars in the river program in 2018. The goal of the program is to cover many of the direct operating costs as well as to pay for a portion of the required improvements and amenities.

The BLM works hard to reduce operating costs through volunteer labor. The Desolation River Program has built a large volunteer group that donate approximately 1,000 hours each year. Volunteers help staff the Sand Wash Ranger Station for at least 3 shifts a year and assist with river patrols. For safety, solo river patrols by BLM are not ideal. Instead of staffing two River Rangers on the river patrols, BLM has been able to have at least one volunteer and one BLM river ranger on most patrols, thus greatly reducing costs. The BLM expects to continue with the volunteer program in the future to help reduce costs and effectively manage the river program.

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If the requested fee were to be approved, Desolation Canyon revenues would increase to approximately $474,000 per year. This amount would recover the estimated annual costs of $422,000, with about $50,000 remaining per year to enact needed infrastructure improvements.

E. Maintenance of Fund Account Balance

The fund balance is the amount of revenue the Desolation Canyon recreation fee account carries over at the end of the fiscal year. It is critical to have some monies in the Desolation Canyon fee account so that operations can begin in a timely manner at the start of the season. That is, expenditures for Desolation Canyon start before the revenues are received. Rangers must be on site, equipment secured, and the ranger station readied before revenues are realized. Approximately $200,000 is required for start-up costs each year. The fund balance helps bridge this gap.

The fund balance will also be used to pay for improvements and enhancements to the program. Appendix A lists improvements required for the Desolation Canyon River program to operate. For example, boaters need (and want) screened camping cabins at Sand Wash because the bugs are ferocious at the put-in. Many of these enhancements are rather expensive items, and require funds to finance them. By building up a modest amount of money in the fund balance, capital improvements can be obligated to benefit the Desolation Canyon boaters and enhance the Desolation Canyon experience.

In summary, the proposed fee rate increase would provide the PFO river program with long-term sustainability and continuity of operations. The Desolation Canyon River program would have the ability to fund start-up costs at the beginning of the season, to fund needed capital enhancements, as well as be able to respond to unplanned emergency expenses. See Appendix A for a list of improvements anticipated for the Desolation Canyon River Program.

F. Revenues

Desolation Canyon revenues are currently generated from two sources: ISRP fees charged for commercial and private Desolation Canyon boaters and additional commercial SRP fees charged to commercial river outfitters and established by national policy (3% of adjusted gross revenues). In addition, cabin rental fees collected for the screen cabins at Sand Wash are deposited in this account. (Cabin rental fees would remain constant and are not discussed further in this Business Plan). The Desolation Canyon ISRP fee is charged year-round through Recreation.gov. Private boaters pay this fee upon confirming a Desolation Canyon launch reservation. Commercial permittees are billed for the per person ISRP fees for their passengers, plus 3% of their annual adjusted gross receipts after submitting an annual post-use report in November after the use-year has occurred. That is, money is not collected from outfitters until the end of the river season. In accordance with their permit stipulations, commercial permittees also pay penalty fees for failure to cancel or use launch reservations.

Compared with other allocated rivers, commercial SRP fees contribute a relatively small percentage of total revenues on Desolation Canyon. That is, private boaters need to pay a higher percentage of the costs than on many river systems. Using 2018 figures, commercial operations carried 1,524 passengers, for which they paid per person ISRP fees of $38,100, and commercial

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SRP fees of $85,022 for a total of $123,122. The commercial receipts for Desolation Canyon trips in 2018 represented 44% of total 2018 revenues.

In comparison, in the Grand Canyon (National Park Service) in 2018, commercial users paid $5.5 million to the National Park Service and private users paid $686,500. The private user fee for a Grand Canyon trip is $100, and there were 6,865 private passengers in 2018. This means that commercial receipts for Grand Canyon river trips in 2018 represented 89% of total 2018 revenues on that river. Commercial permittees pay far more of the share of operating costs on the Grand Canyon than outfitters do on Desolation. This fact enables the Park Service to keep private boating fees relatively low.

Table 5: Annual Desolation Canyon Revenues

Federal Fiscal Year	Per Person Special Recreation Permit Fees (private and commercial)	Commercial Special Recreation Permit Fees (3% of adjusted gross)	Total Revenues
2018	$194,574	$85,022	$279,596
2017	$195,700	$79,474	$275,174
2016	$119,377	$113,408	$232,785
2015	$164,402	$82,654	$247,056
2014	$188,692	$83,947	$272,639
2013	$140,333	$48,843	$189,176
6-Year Avg.	**$167,180**	**$82,225**	**$249,404**

At the current fee rate, projected annual Desolation Canyon SRP and ISRP revenues are expected to remain relatively the same as the last six fiscal years. However, demand for permits is driven by river flow, with drought and low water years having a negative impact on annual visitation and fee revenues. This unpredictable variable makes it difficult to accurately project future annual revenues.

The average annual revenue from Desolation Canyon SRPs and ISRP's over the last six fiscal years was $249,404. If the ISRP fee were to double, Desolation Canyon revenues would increase to approximately $474,000 (note: the 3% of adjusted gross fee would not be affected by this action).

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G. Priorities for Future Expenditures

Future Expenditures for On-going Program Services

Priorities for future expenditures of the Desolation Canyon River Program include all aspects of maintaining current levels of service for river users. This includes maintaining and improving the standard visitor contact and customer service (including interpretive and information services) that promotes visitor health and safety, as well as protects the Desolation Canyon river resources and the quality of the recreation experience. Services include permit processing in an allocated permit lottery system; on-site river patrols (including canyon cleanup) and compliance checks for natural resource protection and visitor safety; law enforcement; regular maintenance of the Desolation Canyons facilities including the ranger station, appropriately equipped ranger warehouse, toilets, trash facilities, boat ramps, day use and picnicking structures, and parking lots.

Future Expenditures for Program Improvements

To the degree available and consistent with maintaining an adequate fund balance of at least $200,000, additional fee revenues would be used toward improving visitor services and maintaining the quality of the recreation experience. Planned visitor service improvements include:

- The increased use of information technology tools like internet and phone service to sandwash to enhance visitor services and simplify the permitting process and commercial launch reservation system as needed. Expenditures include software purchase, technology upgrades, and information security measures for allocating commercial operations.
- Provide increased services and accountability through improved monitoring and reporting of conditions using electronic data collection and management systems.
- Funding a full-time maintenance position for the PFO (Desolation Canyon river fee revenue would be used to pay the portion of labor costs associated with maintaining the Sand Wash and Swasey facilities).
- Implementing the Sand Wash Master Plan (see list from Master Plan in Appendix A. The Master Plan is obtainable by request from the Price Field Office).

Improved infrastructure at Sand Wash Ranger Station from the Sand Wash Master Plan (~$240,000)

  - Expand current parking at Sand Wash (300' long x 45' wide) by 300 additional feet to accommodate 30 more vehicles.($50,000)
  - Road drainage improvement ($10,000)
  - Widen road access to boat ramp ($15,000)
  - Expand 7 existing campsites and add six more with 2 extra toilets. ($70,000)
  - Add 4 new screen cabins with concrete floors ($70,000).
  - Widen the boat ramp by removing tamarisk. Widen and clear existing foot path and spaces leading to the river. ($10,000)
  - Fence off native Cottonwood trees for protection. ($5,000)
  - Install educational kiosk near cottonwood trees and interpret historic cabins ($10,000)

- Road maintenance at the Sand Wash Ranger Station area (~$150,000).
- Improvements at Swaseys Beach Take-Out (~$333,000)
- Funding an additional seasonal ranger position, resource specialist, or youth intern position to support BLM ranger staff in meeting program objectives such as on-site river operations, cultural resource protection, and river management plan development (~$50,000/per year).
- Extended river ranger work seasons. Shoulder seasons are increasingly popular, and thus resource issues are occurring both earlier and later in the year. Ranger presence at Sand Wash during early spring and late fall would enhance both user safety and resource protection during these increasingly popular seasons. (~$25,000 per year)

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H. Analysis of Recreation Fee Rates

Desolation Canyon Individual Special Recreation Permit (ISRP) fees have been at their current rates since 2008. Since that time, the costs of operating the river recreation program have climbed substantially. The Consumer Price Index was 215.3 in 2008; as of August 2019, it has risen to 251.1, for an increase of 17%. Increases in costs have come in every category, including labor, fuel, vehicles, supplies, and maintenance. The first part of this section uses the Cost Recovery Fee Calculation Method to determine desired rates. The section also uses the Fair Market Value fee calculation method, which compares the fees charged by other offices and/or agencies for allocated river use with similar facilities and services.

Cost Recovery Fee Calculation Method

Fee rates are based on the concept that revenues should cover a program's operating costs where direct benefits are provided to users. Table 6 shows the revenues realized from fees and the operating costs for the Desolation Canyon River program over the past 5 years.

Table 6: Costs of Operating the Desolation Canyon River Program and Current Revenues Earned, 2014 -2018

Federal Fiscal Year	Revenues (1232)	Total Costs, Desolation Canyon River Program	Net Loss
2018	$279,596	$422,000	$142,404
2017	$275,174	$422,000	$146,826
2016	$232,785	$412,000	$179,215
2015	$247,056	$395,000	$127,944
4 year average	$258,652	$412,750	$149,097

Table 6 shows that the fee revenues pay about 65% of river program costs, while appropriated funds cover the remainder, or 35%. The four year average shows that the yearly net loss is $149,097. This calculus does not leave money available for any infrastructure improvements. In addition, costs are expected to rise as the years progress. The current price of a Desolation Canyon river trip is unsustainable into the future.

In conclusion, the ISRP rate that would generate 100% of the revenues needed to cover the river program's direct operating costs would be $68.00 per person per trip ($422,000/6200 passengers = $68 in 2019). If the ISRP fee were used to cover yearly expenses, the 3% fee on outfitter adjusted gross ($85,000 in 2018) could be utilized to help cover infrastructure improvements. Raising the ISRP fee to $50 per person would not completely cover operating costs, but would defray them.

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If appropriated funding continues at current levels, any surplus in 1232 funding could be used to cover needed improvements.

Fair Market Value Assessment

The Fair Market Value Assessment approach compares the permit and application fees charged for boating similar rivers in the western United States that are being administered by federal land management agencies. Table 7 compares the permit and application fees for various western rivers with an allocated permitting system.

The services and facilities provided at the sites listed in Table 7 are similar to those of Desolation Canyon. All of the rivers have an allocated permitting system, provide on-site ranger services, and offer a backcountry river recreation experience. For the purpose of comparing fees, each river permit was quantified by length of trip.

Table 7: Comparison of River Permit Fees

River Name – Segment	Agency	Permit Distribution	Permit and Application Fees	Trip Length
Colorado – Cataract	NPS	Reservation	$30 per trip + $20 per person	70 mi.
Colorado – Grand Canyon	NPS	Lottery	$100 per person + $25 application fee	226 mi.
Colorado – Westwater	BLM	Reservation	$10 per person	17 mi.
Green – Dinosaur	NPS	Lottery	$185 per trip + $15 application fee	44 mi.
Rio Chama	BLM	Lottery	$5 per person + $6 application fee	42 mi.
Rogue	BLM	Lottery	$10 per person + $6 application fee	34 mi.
Salmon – Main	USFS	Lottery	$4 per person per day + $6 application fee	79 mi. (6 days)
Salmon – Middle Fork	USFS	Lottery	$4 per person per day + $6 application fee	99 mi. (7 days)
Salt	USFS	Lottery	$125 per trip + $10 application fee	52 mi.
San Juan	BLM	Lottery	$30 per person + $6 application fee	84 mi.
Yampa	NPS	Lottery	$185 per trip + $15 application fee	71 mi.
DESOLATION CANYON CURRENT AND PROPOSED FEE				
Desolation Canyon (Current)	BLM	Lottery	$25 per person + $6 application fee	84 mi.
Desolation Canyon (Proposed)	**BLM**	**Lottery**	**$50 per person + $6 application fee**	**84 mi.**

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The variation in river fee structures makes direct comparison difficult. Some systems charge per trip and some charge per person per day. Many of the rivers have not seen fee increases in over ten years. Some of the river programs operate on large revenues from commercial outfitters. For example, the NPS charges 4% of adjusted gross revenue for the extensive commercial operations on its river segments. The Rogue River in Oregon has extensive commercial use far exceeding its ISRP fees. Services also vary, as do the costs of managing the river program, making direct comparison difficult.

Desolation Canyon does not realize the large commercial revenues earned at many other locations. The remoteness of Desolation Canyon and its facilities makes it a particularly expensive operation for a commercial operation. For example, in 2017, commercial trips brought in $111,803 ($68,653 in 3% of their adjusted gross and $43,150 in the per person fee). This represents 48% of the total revenue with only 26% of the total visitation to the canyon. In comparison, commercial outfitters in the Grand Canyon pay 89% of all collected fees ($5.5 million) and private boaters pay only 11% of the collected fees ($686,000). Thus, the Desolation Canyon River Program relies much more heavily on the contributions of private boaters. In conclusion, the proposed Desolation Canyon fee increase is not out of line with fees charged by other federally-managed river systems.

I. Impacts from Changing and Not Changing Recreation Fee Rates

Anticipated Results of Modifying the Current Fee Rates

Benefits to Recreational Users

If the per-person fee to float Desolation Canyon were raised, current services and facility maintenance standards for the Desolation Canyon River Program would continue uninterrupted for recreational users. The modified fees would offset the rising costs of operating the Desolation Canyon River Program. Additional revenues could be used to improve Sand Wash Ranger Station facilities, the Swasey's Beach Take out facilities and provide additional maintenance staffing for facility upkeep.

The modified fees would also be used to enhance aspects of Desolation Canyon permitting process, using information technology to make both private and commercial permitting more user-friendly. In addition, the proposed increased fee would provide river rangers with more on-site staff support, allowing them to improve service, resource protection, visitor safety, thus and improving the recreational experience for Desolation Canyon users for years to come.

Benefits to the Local Economy

It is important to the local economy for the Desolation Canyon River Program to have the financial ability to maintain and improve, as necessary, the current services and facilities associated with commercial and private recreational boating for Desolation Canyon, as well as protect the quality of the backcountry recreation experience. The Desolation Canyon River Program provides a high-quality eco-tourism experience that draws approximately 6,500 recreational users to Carbon, Uintah, and Grand counties annually. Visitor numbers have been steadily increasing over the past 5 years. These visitors purchase food, gas, lodging, and vehicle shuttle services in the communities of Myton, Duchesne, Vernal, Green River, Price, and Wellington. In 2017, approximately 1,800 visitors went on commercially guided Desolation Canyon river trips. According to commercial SRP post-use reports received by the BLM, commercial passengers spent roughly $1,730,146 for

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guiding services on Desolation Canyon in 2017, in addition to what they might have spent in the area before or after their commercial trip.

Benefits to the Environment

Desolation Canyon permit fees enable the PFO to operate the Desolation Canyon permitting program. Launch limits in the permitting system serve to reduce negative impacts to sites and resources associated with higher levels of visitation through a narrow river corridor. By having the financial ability to provide an allocated permitting system for Desolation Canyon boaters, the BLM is able to manage the amount of visitor use and reduce visitor impacts to a fragile desert ecosystem and cultural resources. Permit requirements and on-site ranger patrols also serve to educate visitors about river use stipulations that are designed to protect the Desolation Canyon resource area, such as the use of a portable toilet system and fire pan. Rangers routinely perform visitor check-ins and patrols to ensure compliance with those stipulations. Additional environmental benefits may be realized from the development of a new river management plan with updated analysis and management of river resources.

Socioeconomic Impacts, including Low-Income Populations

Increasing the ISRP fees will have minimal impact on the ability of private boaters or commercial passenger to afford a Desolation Canyon trip. A 2001 Utah State University (Reiter et al, 2001) study found that found that, "consistent with backcountry studies, the BLM boaters have relatively high levels of income, education and occupational status." (page III.8) The study further found that from 60% to 80% of the boaters on Desolation Canyon and other Utah BLM river segments worked in professional/technical or managerial occupations. In the year 2000, when the median

personal income was $29,998, 57% of the boaters on Desolation Canyon had incomes above $40,000, with approximately 15% reporting incomes of $110,000 or more.

The permit fee is relatively low expense when considering the total costs of organizing a private river trip for Desolation Canyon (e.g. fuel, meals, vehicle shuttles, and equipment purchase or rental). Most private river trips are cost-sharing trips, meaning each individual pays for his or her share of the trip costs, including the permit fee. The proposed fee increase would mean an individual would pay $50 a person for a Desolation Canyon trip (approximately $8.33 per day, based on a six day trip length). It is unlikely that this increase would impact an individual who is participating in what is already a relatively expensive recreational activity. The permit fee also only represents a nominal portion of the cost to hire a commercial guide.

People utilizing Desolation Canyon fall into two categories. Some users are engaging the services of commercial outfitters; a commercial Desolation Canyon trip ranges from roughly $1,000 per person to $1,400 per person depending upon the length of the trip (average trip length is 5-6 days). An increase from $25.00 per person per trip to $50.00 per person per trip represents an increase of less than 1% on a commercial trip. It is unlikely that an increase of this amount in the cost of a commercial Desolation Canyon trip would make it more difficult for companies to attract customers.

The other users of Desolation Canyon are boaters who raft the canyons on a private permit. These individuals must be in possession of boats and boating equipment, trailers, vehicles and other recreational gear. As shown above, Desolation users tend to be of higher-than-average income.

Anticipated Result of Not Modifying Special Area Fee

Negative Impacts to Recreational Users

The purchasing power of the $25.00 Individual Special Recreation Permit has decreased by at least 17% since it was instituted in 2008. In addition, appropriated monies have been used to subsidize the Desolation Canyon River Program. The erosion of purchasing power means that, without a fee increase, even gradual and minor improvements to Desolation Canyon infrastructure will become less common as revenue will be largely used to cover basic services such as ranger patrols and cleaning. Additionally, it can be expected that ranger patrol and check-in presence will be reduced, introducing potential for reduced compliance with the permit system and with environmental protection requirements. Consequently, unauthorized use may increase and boaters may find more instances of dirty camps, human waste, and upstream travel.

Negative Impacts to Local Economy

Not raising the Desolation Special Area Fee would lead to the erosion of services, such as cleaning, at boating recreation sites. This would eventually impact the river recreation sector of the Emery, Carbon, Uinta, and Grand County economies, making people less likely to book or take river trips on Price BLM lands. Vacation dollars are entirely discretionary; people can spend their vacation dollars in many different locales. Should people be less likely to recreate in Desolation Canyon because of poor or unmaintained facilities, the aforementioned county economies would suffer.

Negative Impacts to the Environment

Should the BLM be unable to regularly service toilets along the river (all routine cleaning costs are paid by the (Desolation Recreation Fee Account) people would be less likely to utilize toilets.

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Additionally, recreation maintenance staff conduct site cleanup and weed control, and it is likely that such work would be reduced. This would lead to negative impacts to the environment.

Socioeconomic Impacts, including Low-Income Populations

While private Desolation Canyon users are often of higher income than average, some boating groups do include those of lower income. This may be especially true of youth groups. An increase of $25 per person for the entire trip represents a very small increase in the total cost of the trip, including gear, transportation, supplies etc. However, it is possible that even this small increase could put the trip out of reach of some low income and youth group populations.

Managing for Positive River Recreation Results

The goal of the river-based Special Recreation Permit program in the PFO is to enhance recreation services to meet the demand for river-based recreation. In order to meet the demand, the field office will seek to manage for positive results for the following groups: Special Recreation Permit holders, the local community, and the Special Recreation Permit participants.

The commercial river Special Recreation Permit holder benefits by:

(1) having the opportunity to build business value
(2) being able to operate a business in a more stable and predictable environment including efficient processing of routine transactions such as making and changing launch dates and trip sizes
(3) having a predictable and stable business relationship with BLM, including efficient, low-cost processing of routine transactions

The local community benefits by:

1) the development of business opportunities in the outdoor recreation sector
2) the provision of jobs for its citizens and tax revenues for local government
3) improved services and quality of life through facility development and resource protection

The participants, both private and commercial, benefit by:

1) enhanced interpretive and educational experiences
2) improved public lands facilities for outings (i.e. clean toilets)
3) outstanding river-based outdoor recreation opportunities
4) a focused opportunity to enhance outdoor skills, build group and family relationships, and introduce youth to the world of nature
5) Educated and trained river rangers provide in depth knowledge of the resource and are trained as Wilderness First Responders and Swift Water Rescue Technicians

The positive results summarized above allow commercial outfitters and private Desolation Canyon boaters to work with the BLM to achieve mutual benefits. As users of the public lands, outfitters and private boaters have a vested interested in their sustainability. The local community gains in its most important economic sector, and participants and the public benefit by increased opportunities to enjoy public lands.

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The achievement of positive river recreation results requires adequate funding to provide necessary services. Continuing actions include field patrols, maintenance of facilities, and careful auditing of commercial post-use reports.

Price Field Office Recommendation

After careful consideration of the fee calculation process, the BLM PFO recommends changing the Desolation Canyon Special Area Fee from $25 per person per trip to $50.00 per person per trip.

I. Public Outreach

Prior to increasing fees, the PFO is conducting the following outreach efforts to notify the public of its opportunity to review and comment on the proposal to increase the Desolation Canyon Special Area fee:

- Posting the Draft Business Plan on the BLM Utah website;
- Issuing a News Release to statewide print and broadcast media, including the local ETV News;
- Sent a letter with the News Release attached specifically to the commissioners and councils of Carbon, Uintah, Emery, and Grand Counties.
- Posting notification of public comment period on Recreation.gov and other websites trafficked by boaters;

In addition, the PFO will be presenting the Desolation Canyon Special Area fee increase proposal to the BLM Utah Recreation Resource Advisory Council (RAC) for its formal review. The Utah RAC is a 15-member advisory panel which provides advice and recommendations to the BLM on resource and land management issues for 22.9 million acres of public lands in Utah. The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act mandates that the appropriate Recreation RAC reviews all BLM recreation fee proposals prior to approval. Comments from both the public at large and the BLM Utah RAC will be considered prior to approval of the increase in the Desolation Canyon Special Area fee.

References

Reiter, D., Blahna, D., *Utah River Study Results Report: Recreational Use, Value and Experience of Boaters on Rivers Managed by the BLM in Utah,* Utah State University, Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, 2001.

Appendix A: Future Expenditures

Sites Utilized by Permittees that Require Major Improvements in the Price Field Office (capital improvements only; no maintenance costs are included)
Total = $723,000

1. Improved infrastructure at Sand Wash Ranger Station ($240,000)
    a. Expand current parking at Sand Wash (300' long x 45' wide) by 300 additional feet to accommodate 30 more vehicles.($50,000)
    b. Road drainage improvement ($10,000)
    c. Widen road access to boat ramp ($15,000)
    d. Expand 7 existing campsites and add six more with toilets. ($70,000)
    e. Add 4 new screen cabins with concrete floors ($70,000).
    f. Widen the boat ramp by removing tamarisk. Widen and clear existing foot path and spaces leading to the river. ($10,000)
    g. Fence off native Cottonwood trees for protection. ($5,000)
    h. Install educational kiosk near cottonwood trees and interpret historic cabins ($10,000)

2. Road maintenance to Sand Wash Ranger Station ($150,000)

3. Improved infrastructure at the Swasey's Boat Ramp Area ($333,000)
    a. Extend Swasey's boat ramp for safety during low water and widen the ramp ($40,000)
    b. Expand current parking at Swasey's boat ramp by up to 4 times as large as the current size ($20,000)
    c. Expand the camping area at Swasey's Beach, including adding toilets ($50,000)
    d. Improve the road to the Nefertiti Boat Ramp ($80,000)
    e. Improve the Nefertiti area, including additional parking and new toilets ($75,000)
    f. Install educational information at the boat ramps and camping areas ($10,000)
    g. Improve visitor services at Stone Cabin ($8,000)
    h. Add camping and launch facilities at Butler Wash ($50,000)

It is to be noted that all the above sites will require maintenance services on at least a biweekly basis, increasing operating costs accordingly.

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A detailed report on these planned improvements is available, upon request, from the Price Field Office. It is called the *Sand Wash Recreation Area Master Plan*, and include diagrams and maps of all planned improvements.

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