

Sexism and harassment have plagued the river guiding industry around the country.

These Utahns are changing the 'dude-centric' culture in the professional river rafting world.

By Jessica Miller for *The Salt Lake Tribune*

September 20, 2022



(Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune) A Moab-based Colorado River rafting company begins their float trip at the Lower Onion Creek rapids, Saturday, Aug. 13, 2022.

Moab • It happens almost every time Tyler Jameson leads a river rafting trip.

A man among the passengers will ask her something like, “Do you need a break? I’ll row the boat for you.”

Early in her career, Jameson would brush off a suggestion like that — and more direct comments about the size of her body, or questioning her strength as a professional river guide.

Now, she’ll respond in a way that politely pushes back on the assumption behind it. She doesn’t need a break, she might say, while inviting him to try rowing if he wants to.

“If I couldn’t row a boat all day,” she’ll tell him, “I wouldn’t be very good at my job.”

Her approach is part of the new environment that guides are creating on rivers in Utah and the region — one where both women and men recognize sexism and sexual harassment in the moment, and know how to intervene effectively if they or a customer becomes uncomfortable while on the water.

“Trying to create safer spaces for people to be their authentic selves is the goal of a river trip,” said Lauren Wood, whose grandfather founded Holiday River Expeditions.

“Trying to create an experience where you are safe enough to let down those guards and kind of be present with yourself, with nature, is the whole point,” Wood said. “So if we’re not doing this work, we’re doing ourselves and our guests a disservice.”



(Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune) Laura Dewey, a river guide with Paddle Moab, guides a crew of eight paddleboarders down the Colorado River, Monday, Aug. 15, 2022.

Jameson leads trainings for co-workers at Holiday River, while others are hosting sessions elsewhere as guides talk about what’s long been ignored in the male-dominated rafting industry.

The outdoor industry has [several risk factors](#) that the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission says can lead to harassment, including having a homogenous and young workforce, a reliance on customer satisfaction and workplaces that are frequently isolated or remote.

Guides will sometimes be stuck for a week or more living, eating and working on the river alongside clients. Jameson has worked in the industry long enough, she said, to

know that other women experience unwanted comments, and behaviors that are “a bit more dark.”

Harassment on the river

But sexual harassment on the river hasn't always been talked about in the guiding world. That started to change in 2016, when the Interior Department's inspector general released a report that detailed a culture and pattern of sexual [harassment](#) by National Park Service employees who were leading river trips for other federal employees and contractors working in restoration and science projects.

The report came in response to a letter sent in 2014 by more than a dozen current and former Grand Canyon employees who alleged abuse and a hostile work environment targeting women.

It was those explosive allegations that led Maria Blevins, a former river guide and now a professor at Utah Valley University, to begin her research documenting sexual harassment often present within the river rafting industry — and to start to make efforts to change it.

She read that Grand Canyon report, she said, and thought back to her own experiences.

“I'd actually done a river trip with those guys, and I was like, ‘Those guys? They were so cool,’” she remembered. “And then I thought about it and I was like, ‘Well, except for when they asked us to run that rapid topless. Or when they were trying to get into my tent at night. All of these things were going through my mind that hadn't even fazed me on the trip. I had just been like, ‘Oh well, that's what you do on the river.’”

“But when I thought about it, we were all at work,” she added. “We were on a research trip. And people were hammered every night. They did things that would never be asked of me at a different job.”

Blevins found in her research that women have been hazed at work or told to shrug off crude jokes. Some have felt unsafe during overnight trips when men — either clients or coworkers — made unwanted sexual advances while they partied at night along the river.

What often happens to these women, Blevins found, is that they leave jobs they love and are good at because of this toxic work environment.

A 'dude-centric' culture

On a recent August morning, Margy Swenson tightened her life jacket and readied herself to float the Colorado River on a paddleboard, alongside her niece and a few others who booked a day trip with the local outfitter Paddle Moab.

Swenson is a paying customer on this day. But the Moab local knows Utah's rivers well — she spent a decade beginning in 1999 working as a professional guide.

She remembers being one of only three women working as a guide for a Vernal rafting company. The rest were men.



(Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune) Laura Dewey, a river guide with Paddle Moab greets Margy Swenson, right, during a paddleboard trip down the Colorado River, Monday, Aug. 15, 2022.

“And they let you know you weren’t part of the group,” she said. To her, the behavior never felt like sexual harassment, but more like hazing, yet the targets of the pranks were always the handful of women who worked there.

Swenson, a river rafting guide for 10 years from 1999 to 2009, experienced sexism and harassment from her former male coworkers.

Swenson remembers once coming back from a hike she'd led to discover her male coworkers had taken her tent, fully set up, and hung it high in a tree. She recalled another time when the male guides had told one of her female colleagues that she hadn't tied her boats down correctly and they had floated away — when they had hid them in a nearby creek bed that was out of view from the river.

Other river guides who spoke to The Salt Lake Tribune recalled a similar culture.

Colin Evans doesn't remember having female coworkers when he started guiding in Colorado in 2006. But he remembers how much he disliked the macho atmosphere.

"It was really a bullyish culture," he said. "Very dude-centric. I couldn't stand it. But that's how I learned."

Evans said he was never personally bullied by his coworkers. And when he got to Utah and continued working in the industry, topics like sexism or harassment just weren't talked about.

He lives in Moab, and is now the president of the Colorado Plateau River Guides ([link](#)), a nonprofit whose members are professional guides who work on the rivers in the southwest United States.

The organization has been around in fits and starts since the early 1990s. One of its hallmarks in the early days, Evans said, was hosting days-long interpretive training trips for guides. They would spend days floating down a river, learning lessons about astronomy, biology or camp life — critical skills needed for professional guides who need to be experts not only in directing boats safely, but also be able to answer any question a guest might have about the water, the rock formations around them or the vegetation they float past.

Richard Rootes, a CPRG board member, recently took a Tribune reporter and photographer on a float trip down the Daily, a calm stretch of the Colorado River in Moab that he's done hundreds of times. As he smoothly cut through the brown water with his paddles, he recalled being on those early training trips and hanging on the words of river guiding legends who would share their experiences with the ones who were coming up in the rafting world.

Like Evans, he doesn't remember there ever being a discussion of sexual harassment that could happen on the river. There was no talk of appropriate boundaries, or what to do if you saw a coworker being targeted by a client or a colleague.

“That kind of stuff, it was around,” he said, “But nobody really talked about it.”

A lesson in Cataract Canyon

When Evans took over as president of the Colorado Plateau River Guides, he wanted to bring back those interpretive trips. He organized a four-day trip in the spring, with guides from six local outfitters. But this year was different from the training trips of years past. It was time, organizers believed, to start talking about sexism and harassment within their industry.

They tapped Cora Phillips, director of prevention and education for Moab’s [Seekhaven Family Crisis and Resource Center](#), which helps people who have experienced domestic violence and sexual assault.



(Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune) Colin Evans, center, president of the Colorado Plateau River Guides (CPRG), shares a laugh with Richard Rootes, a CPRG board member and river guide and Cora Phillips, the Director of Prevention and Education for Seekhaven Family Crisis and Resource Center in Moab, Wednesday, Aug. 10, 2022.

When Phillips does these types of trainings, it's usually a more typical classroom presentation using a projector and a slideshow. But when she and Blevins led the discussion with 37 Moab river guides during their interpretive trip in April, they were on the sandy shores in Cataract Canyon. If they see someone on the river making an inappropriate comment or pushing boundaries, she said during the evening talk, they can distract the people in the situation.

Or they can take direct action, saying, "We don't use that language here." They can also seek someone else's help as away to establish within the group that the behavior is not an acceptable social norm.

Finally, she said, she taught the guides to check-in with the person who has been targeted, to make sure they are OK and feel supported.

In smaller groups, the guides discussed example scenarios and how they could respond. The deep conversations, she said, lasted for hours.

"It was clear that they were just itching for a space to talk about this," Phillips said, "and a safe environment where they could really process with other people."

Professional guides feel at home on the water, Evans said, and tend to be more open and comfortable in the outdoors.

"When you ask them those questions out on the river," he said, "I think you're going to get a better reaction than if you put them in a room in a community center and you tried to have that under fluorescent lights."

A changing industry

That training has had a ripple effect, Phillips said. After a few guides from Western River Expeditions returned from that trip, she said, they spoke to management and encouraged training companywide. Phillips did the training again for 80 people in that company.

In total this year, Phillips said she's trained over 300 people working in the outdoor industry. And more training is being done elsewhere, like at Holiday River Expeditions, where Wood said their guides have participated in a four-hour course at the beginning of the season for the last two years.

The goal, Wood said, is to talk about how some behaviors that start out innocuous can become problematic; and "how we can disrupt those moments and intervene on behalf of our friends."

"Because our coworkers are our friends," Wood said. "They're often best friends out there in the field. And no one wants their friends to be messed with."



(Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune) "Trying to create safer spaces for people to be their authentic selves is the goal of a river trip," said Lauren Wood of the river guides and customers of Holiday River Expeditions, Wednesday, Aug. 10, 2022.

Wood, who was raised running the rivers of the Colorado Plateau region, co-authored the company's code of conduct, which all clients are required to sign before getting on the company's boats. Wood has also made efforts to create safer spaces for people of color and those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Wood, who is non-binary, has also made efforts to create safer spaces for clients — by putting on trips specifically for people of color and those in the LGBTQ+ community. And all clients, they said, are required to sign a code of conduct before getting on their boats.

Blevins is also part of the [A-DASH Collaborative](#), which provides sexual harassment training and consultation for outfitters across the country. She said she's seeing a change in the industry — people are ready to have hard conversations, and companies want their guides to feel safe and comfortable.

And who is on the river is changing, too. On a recent day in Moab, dozens of people clad in life jackets milled near a popular drop-in spot along the Colorado River, waiting for their river guides to unload their rafts from a trailer into the water.

About half of the professionals lugging gear and leading these groups were women — a far cry from 20 years ago when a female guide was an anomaly.

“Representation is changing,” Blevins said. “Who we’re imagining is going to be out in the wilderness is different. It’s not just going to be a tall, beard-y white dude. Like Ed Abbey isn’t the only one that gets to be outside anymore. It’s people with a lot of [different kinds] of bodies. It’s people of a lot of colors.”



(Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune) Multiple Colorado River rafting companies set sail from Lower Onion Creek Rapids on the Colorado River, Saturday, Aug. 13, 2022.

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As Lake Powell recedes, river guides race to document long-hidden rapids

by Molly Marcello

December 16, 2020

Summary

As Lake Powell shrinks due to climate change and increased water demand, river guides Mike DeHoff and Pete Lefebvre are documenting the emergence of hidden rapids in Cataract Canyon. Their project, Returning Rapids of Cataract Canyon, involves photographing and mapping the changing landscape, providing valuable data for researchers studying the Colorado River's ecosystem. Their work highlights the potential for natural forces to counteract human impact on the environment.



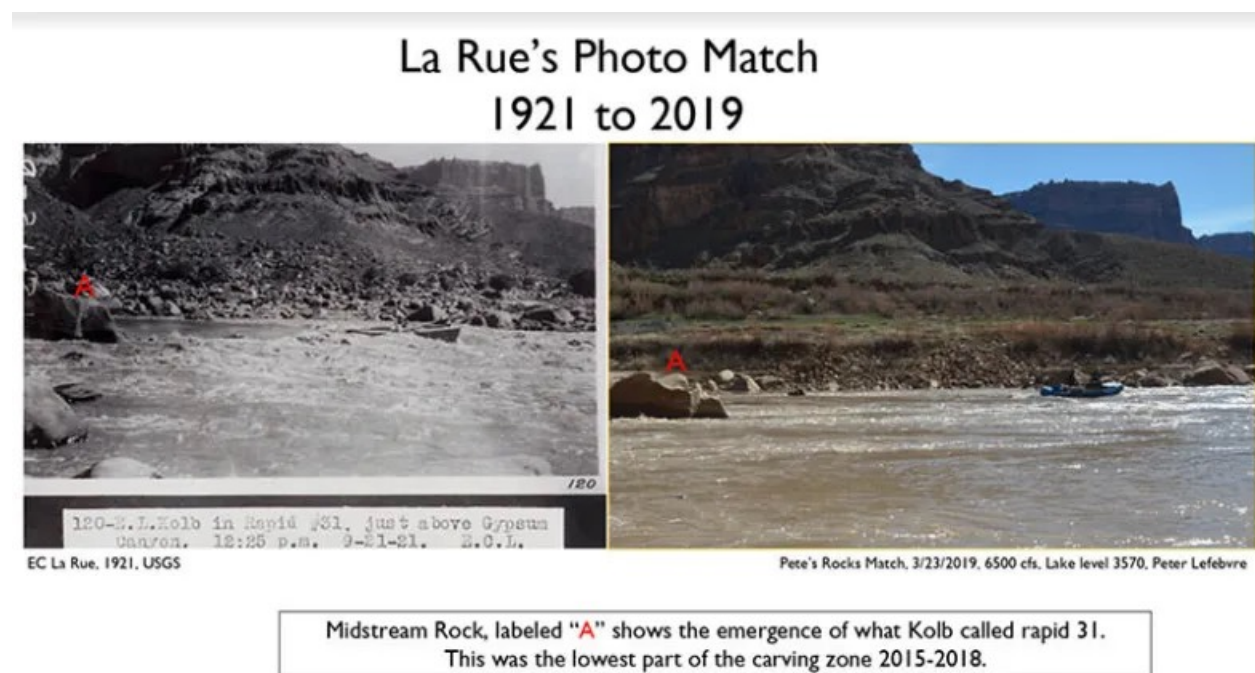
Research scientist Seth Arens matches a historic photo in Cataract Canyon in October 2020. (Photo courtesy of Glen Canyon Institute)

MOAB, Utah – Climate change and increased demand for water across the Southwest are shrinking the Colorado River's second biggest reservoir, Lake Powell. Although water managers worry about scarcity issues, two local river guides are documenting the changes that come as the enormous reservoir hits historic lows.

For the past three years, Mike DeHoff and Pete Lefebvre have carefully photographed and mapped Cataract Canyon on their guided raft trips on the river. For more than four decades, the lower portion of the beloved canyon has been submerged, but now that the lake's water levels are plummeting, things in Cataract are rapidly changing.

"There are rapids down there that are not on any published river map right now," DeHoff said. "They're coming back at a rate that publication can't keep up with."

The pair photograph these returning rapids year-to-year, illustrating in real time what it looks like as Lake Powell's water levels shift. Lefebvre said he was inspired by "Chasing Ice," a 2012 film that documented shrinking glaciers from a sustained rise in global temperatures.



The Returning Rapids project's first historic photo match was of a 1921 photo taken by federal hydrologist E.C. La Rue near Gypsum Canyon. (Photo courtesy of Returning Rapids of Cataract Canyon)

"I remember watching that movie and thinking, 'I need to be doing this in Cataract,'" Lefebvre said. "If I have a picture of Dark Canyon and the mouth of Clearwater (Canyon) and these places where the rapids used to be, maybe I can start documenting that change."

It wasn't long before their hunt for new rapids sent them digging into the past. DeHoff has spent hours poring over old river maps, guidebooks, and historic photos in search of clues.

“The great thing about it is it’s a real live treasure hunt and kind of terra incognita every year,” he said.

Their first “eureka moment” came when they correctly matched a 1921 photo from a survey of the Colorado River with one of their own. The picture shows a boat running through a dynamic stretch of Lower Cataract, where the reservoir’s mostly flat water exists today. But Lefebvre said some character now is returning to this stretch of river.

“It started with just like a little ripple in the water to the surface,” Lefebvre said, “and then there was a little burble. And then, oh, there was the tip of a rock sticking out. And then another rock was sticking out, and then eventually you start seeing this thing turn into a riffle,” which is a shallower, faster moving section of a stream.

They named the spot La Rue’s Riffle, for E.C. La Rue, the U.S. Geological Survey hydrologist who took that photo of the boat nearly a century before.

Fed up with the slow rate of guidebooks, the pair recently published their own supplemental river map on their website, *Returning Rapids of Cataract Canyon*. It lays out the freshest, gnarliest rapids of the lower canyon.

“Initially we were just doing it for us,” DeHoff said. “But people get excited about rapids. And that’s just been this thing that’s been a spark that has caught a lot of people’s attention.”



Cataract Canyon boaters head down Rapid #29, also known as “The Chute,” in high water. (Photo courtesy of *Returning Rapids of Cataract Canyon*)

Their citizen science work has attracted Colorado River decision makers and researchers like Utah State University professor Jack Schmidt, who runs the Center for Colorado River Studies. Some of Schmidt’s work receives funding from the Walton Family Foundation, which also supports KUNC’s Colorado River reporting project.

“The greatest value of what Mike DeHoff and Pete and others are doing in the Returning Rapids Project is that they’re collecting the basic data that gives people pause, to say, there’s a benefit and a cost to everything we do about the Colorado River,” said Schmidt, who has devoted more than 30 years to studying Colorado River issues. “That benefit or that cost is something we ought to know about before we do it.”

This fall, Schmidt joined other academics and research scientists on a trip through the canyon with DeHoff and Lefebvre. Cataract Canyon is becoming a well-known place to study what happens to an ecosystem when a reservoir recedes and a river has a chance to return to a sense of former wildness.



Researchers and academics study maps and historic photos of Cataract Canyon during an October 2020 trip. (Photo courtesy of Gle Canyon Institute)

“We’ve taken some people who are highly trained scientists, and geologists, and whatever out there,” DeHoff said. “And it’s really neat to see their faces where they’re like, ‘I’ve been studying geomorphology for 15 years and here I am out here seeing it right before my eyes, happening faster than I can even believe it’s happening.’”

Whether due to overuse, prolonged drought or political change, researchers are beginning to contemplate a future for a severely diminished Lake Powell. In October, the reservoir dropped to just below 11 million acre-feet of water, about 45% of capacity. With a dry and warm winter forecast for 2021, there’s no relief on the horizon.

Lefebvre said the Returning Rapids project is showing a silver lining to a reduced reservoir. It's not only about new thrills for rafters – they're also watching an entire ecosystem shift.

"Instead of this monoculture of weeds and a mud canal ... we're getting all this character back with rapids, beaches, currents, eddies, animal life, and native vegetation," he said. "And so that's how I see (Cataract Canyon) recovering. It's a nicer place to be now."

Negotiations on a new set of operating guidelines for the Colorado River's management are set to begin at the end of this year. Who is at the table for those talks is still in flux, but Schmidt said river recreators have been – and will continue to be – powerful players in the Colorado River basin.

"They have the potential to change the debate," Schmidt said. "And it reminds us that boatmen have a tremendous stake and a tremendous potential influence, because they know and care about the resource so much – and it really needs to be celebrated." DeHoff hopes that the Returning Rapids of Cataract Canyon gets people thinking about how natural forces can counter the impact humans have on the environment. His advice? Pay attention to those special places in the world, and then decide which way you want the balance to tip.

This story is part of ongoing coverage of water in the West, produced in partnership with public radio stations KZMU and KUNC, and supported by a grant from the Walton Family Foundation.

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Additional Information

WEBSITE: [The Returning Rapids Project](#)

VIDEO: [Public Lecture on YouTube](#)

KUER Radio: [Story and recorded interview by Molly Marcello](#)

NEWS: [Story in Cronkite News by Molly Marcello](#)

Reference

April 24, 2020

Tolio: Foot Rot in Grand Canyon River Runners

[Tolio: Foot Rot in Grand Canyon River Runners. Myers et al.](#) Wilderness and Environmental Medicine.

"Treating skin disorders in wilderness settings is often challenging. In this report we describe common skin conditions affecting the feet of river runners on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon National Park. These conditions are frequently referred to by river runners with a catchall term, tolio. Several skin disorders have been identified as components of tolio, with the most prevalent currently being pitted keratolysis. We present a case of pitted keratolysis in a river guide occurring during a multiday river trip, where treatment can be difficult. Prevention is often more important."

Reference

November 19, 2019

Updates on river management in the Colorado River Basin

by Herm Hoops

NPS - Dinosaur National Monument

- 10,200 applications for private permits; The Yampa River is the most difficult permit to obtain in the U.S.
- Dinosaur will be hiring new river rangers
- Hazard tree removal project in camps is ongoing
- Completion of the Jones Hole project has resulted in fewer skunk complaints
- Monument will be conducting a river camp baseline study
- Jet boat next to Disaster Falls will be removed
- Monument is seeing more inappropriate river craft
- Double booking of river camps through [rec.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) is improving

NPS - Glen Canyon

- A ranger is now stationed at Hite, they are hoping to add additional rangers
- Hite has a new water system, new restrooms, and bathhouse
- Guided ATV tours have begun
- There are now food trucks at the Lees Ferry Launch for the Grand Canyon.

NPS - Canyonlands

- Backcountry permit fees are being reviewed; they may be raised for staffing costs.
- Generators are not permitted on the White Rim Trail
- Fish in vacuum sealed packaging for river trips creates excellent conditions for botulism when thawed. Cooking does not eliminate botulism. The FDA and CDC has internet information about the risk. Also, vacuum bags tend to have leaks.
- Thermometers should be sanitized between uses; Thermometers can be calibrated by putting them in a cup of ice and water - they should read 32 degrees.
- Disinfection wipes are not approved for sanitizing food preparation areas; Clorox should be used.

BLM - Desolation/Gray Canyons

- 496 private permits/4000 applications
- 146 Commercial/1884 available
- Wi-Fi coming to Sand Wash
- Swaseys Boat Ramp extension work as river level lower

Ute Tribe

- Ute Tribal Business Committee opposes non-tribal members on Ute lands.
- Permit (\$5) to scout Steer Ridge Rapid
- Few trespassers noted in 2019 on Ute Fisheries and Tribal Police patrols; if trespassing the Tribe will fine and possibly confiscate gear.
- Considering the installation of cameras at Moonshiners and McPherson Ranch to ID trespassers.
- Ute tribe concerned about antler collecting on Tribal lands. (Note, a few years ago Utah and BLM permitted antler collecting on UT and federal lands within season).
- Ute Tribe will be removing feral cows and horses.

San Juan River

- River Management Plan will begin

Westwater Canyon

- Westwater permits will now be through rec.gov
- New increased parking & 4 new campsites.
- Working on removal of non-native plants
- New water well to be drilled

BLM Lands

- E bikes are classified as motor bikes and not allowed on non-motorized trails

Utah Sovereign Lands

- Tony Mancuso (Forestry, Fire & State Lands, Southeast Area Office, 1165 S. Highway 191, Suite 6; Moab, UT 84532) will follow up on low flying planes. Utah sovereign lands does not allow landing on state lands, that includes dipping wheels on the waters of navigable rivers. You need to get (photograph) the tail number on planes. Flying within 500 feet of people is prohibited by FAA regulation.
 - College groups and outdoor clubs, usually operated through university or school staff are becoming a problem on State Lands.
 - UT DNR is proposing boat (quagga and zebra mussel) inspection stations at Hanksville and Blanding.
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River News

March 18, 2016

Out Here, No One Can Hear You Scream: The dangerous culture of male entitlement and sexual hostility hiding within America's national parks and forests.

HUFFINGTON POST
STORY KATHRYN JOYCE
VIDEO & PHOTO EMILY KASSIE

[Click here](#) to read the story.

On an early Friday morning in late June 2006, Cheyenne Szydlo, a 33-year-old Arizona wildlife biologist with fiery red hair, drove to the Grand Canyon's South Rim to meet the river guide who would be taking her along the 280 miles of the Colorado River that coursed a mile below. She was excited. Everyone in her field wanted to work at the Grand Canyon, and after several years of unsuccessful applications, Szydlo had recently been offered a seasonal position in one of the National Park Service's science divisions. She'd quit another job in order to accept, certain her chance wouldn't come again.

The Grand Canyon is a mecca of biological diversity, home to species that grow nowhere else on earth. But after a dam was built upstream 60 years ago, changes in the Colorado's flow have enabled the rise of invasive species and displaced numerous forms of wildlife. Szydlo's task was to hunt for the Southwestern willow flycatcher, a tiny endangered songbird that historically had nested on the river but hadn't been seen in three years. Her supervisor believed the bird was locally extinct, but Szydlo was determined to find it. The June expedition—a nine-day journey through the canyon on a 20-foot motorboat operated by a boatman named Dave Loeffler—would be her last chance that summer. When Szydlo asked a coworker what Loeffler was like, the reply was cryptic: "You'll see."

Szydlo, who'd studied marine biology in Australia and coral reefs in French Polynesia, was drawn to the adventurous nature of the work. "From my earliest memories," she told me, "there was never any place that felt safer or happier to me than the outdoors." On the morning of the trip, she arrived at the boat shop early. She assumed they'd leave at once, to make the most of the day. Instead, she said, Loeffler took her to a coworker's house, and for an hour and a half, she sat uncomfortably as Loeffler told his friend about the battery-powered blender he'd packed to make "the best margaritas on the river."

They set out from Lees Ferry in Marble Canyon, the otherworldly antechamber to "the Grand." From there, the river winds through towering, striated red cliffs and balancing

rock formations, under the Navajo Bridge, and, at around mile 60, into the Grand Canyon itself. The views are stupefying, the waters turquoise, and the disconnection almost total—a moonscape beyond cell phone reception. For many people, it's a spiritual experience.

It's also an intimate one. Travelers eat and sleep together, and, due to the lack of cover, must often bathe and go to the bathroom in full view, using portable metal ammo cans outfitted with toilet seats. Commercial river guides often say that no one can claim their privacy on the river, so fellow passengers should offer it instead.

In Szydlo's recounting of the trip, Loeffler didn't adhere to this code. When she bent to move provisions or tie up the boat, he commented on a logo on the back of her utility skirt. He asked frank questions about her sex life and referred to Szydlo as "hot sexy biologist." That June, the temperatures at the bottom of the canyon reached 109 degrees, and when Szydlo scorched her skin on a metal storage box, Loeffler said she had a hot ass. He adjusted her bra strap when it slipped and, one chilly night, invited her to sleep in the boat with him if she was cold. When they stopped to take a picture at a particularly scenic spot, he suggested that she pose naked. He told her that another female Park Services staffer would be hiking in to meet them at the halfway point, and that he hoped they would have "a three-way." Szydlo told me she laughed uncomfortably and spoke often of her boyfriend and their plans to get married.

By the third day of the trip, it seemed to Szydlo that Loeffler was getting increasingly frustrated. They stopped at a confluence where the Colorado meets a tributary and forms a short tumble of rapids gentle enough for boaters to swim through with a life jacket. Szydlo pulled on her preserver, but Loeffler insisted she didn't need one. When she entered the river without it, the water sucked her under. She somersaulted through the rapids "like I was in a washing machine," she recalled. She thought she was going to drown. Then the rapids spat her out into a calm, shallow pool. She came up gasping and choking to the sound of Loeffler's laughter, and thought to herself, "I'm in deep shit."

We're used to hearing stories of sexual harassment in the Army, the Navy, or within the police force; 25 years after the Tailhook scandal, when scores of Marine and Naval officers allegedly sexually assaulted some 83 women and seven men at a military convention, there's a general cultural understanding of what women face in traditionally male-dominated public institutions. The agencies that protect America's natural heritage enjoy a reputation for a certain benign progressivism—but some of them have their own troubling history of hostility toward women.

In 2012 in Texas, members of the Parks and Wildlife Department complained about a "legacy" of racial and gender intolerance; only 8 percent of the state's 500 game wardens were women. In 2014, in California, female employees of the U.S. Forest Service filed a class-action lawsuit—the fourth in 35 years—over what they described as an egregious, long-standing culture of sexual harassment, disparity in hiring and promotion, and retaliation against those who complained. (That lawsuit is still pending.)

And this January, the Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General announced that it had "found evidence of a long-term pattern of sexual harassment and hostile work environment" in the Grand Canyon's River District, a part of the Park Service.

Ever since the U.S. created institutions to protect its wilderness, those agencies have been bound up with a particular image of masculinity. The first park rangers in the U.S. were former cavalrymen, assigned to protect preserves like Yellowstone and Yosemite from poachers and fire. The public quickly became enamored by these rugged, solitary figures. In the early 1900s, as the Park Service was created, a new breed emerged: naturalists who endeavored to teach the public the principles of conservation. As the historian Polly Welts Kaufman has written, the earlier generation of rangers resented the intrusion of "pansy-pickers" and "butterfly chasers." Also controversial was the presence of a small number of women at the agency. Male naturalists worried that their job would be seen as effeminate, instead of, as one put it, "the embodiment of Kit Carson, Daniel Boone, the Texas Rangers, and General Pershing." In the 1930s and '40s the ranks were mostly filled by returning veterans attracted by the ranger corps' quasi-military culture. Until 1978, female rangers weren't permitted to wear the same uniform or even the same badge as the men, but instead wore skirts modeled on stewardesses' uniforms.

The other major institution tasked with preserving and managing the American wilderness, the Forest Service, developed on a similar trajectory. Although the Forest Service comes under the direction of the Department of Agriculture (while the Park Service falls under the DOI), its employees perform similar work and its culture is also modeled along military lines. By the 1970s, women held only 2 percent of full-time professional roles in the service nationwide. In California—whose lands are the crown jewel of the national forest system—female employees filed a class-action lawsuit known as *Bernardi v. Madigan*. The case was settled in 1981 with a court-enforced "consent decree" that required the Forest Service's California region to employ as many women as the civilian workforce—at least 43 percent in every pay grade. The decision ultimately saw hundreds of "Bernardi women" enter the service, to the disgruntlement of many male employees.

Lesa Donnelly is a former Forest Service administrator who worked for the agency from 1978 to 2002. In 1994, she filed a complaint charging that three of her male colleagues were harassing her. After word spread (incorrectly) that she planned to file a class-action lawsuit, she received dozens of calls. She heard from women who claimed they were being threatened with physical and sexual assault, and women who said they'd been punished for making complaints. One said the men on her crew joked about raping her in her sleep and had tied her blood-stained underwear to the antenna of their fire truck. Two women told her that a notice in their office about the Bernardi consent decree had been defaced with a scrawled reference to the "cuntsent decree." She realized her own complaint was "nothing compared to what I found out was happening."

Eventually, Donnelly compiled claims from 50 women, and in 1995 she filed a class-action suit against the Forest Service, including declarations from many of the woman who had reached out to her. The agency negotiated a settlement that allowed for continued court oversight of California's Forest Service. But when the monitoring period ended in 2006, the old problems soon resurfaced, as Donnelly would describe in testimony to Congress two years later. One dispatcher reported that she'd been sexually assaulted and stalked by a manager. He was made to resign, but after six months the Forest Service tried to work with him again. In 2008, a male supervisor at the same forest said that he hated a black female employee and wanted to shoot subordinates he hated. When the employee reported the comment, the district ranger told her to ignore him.

This year, I met Donnelly, who is 58, in El Dorado Hills, outside Sacramento. Now the vice president of the USDA Coalition of Minority Employees, a civil rights group, she has the demeanor of a friendly bulldog. She told me that nearly every year for the last 15 years, she has traveled to Washington, D.C., to lobby the USDA, Congress, and the White House to protect women in the service. She managed to enlist the help of representatives Jackie Speier of California, Peter DeFazio of Oregon and Raúl Grijalva of Arizona, who in 2014 petitioned the USDA to investigate, without success. Each time Donnelly comes to D.C., she added, she brings details of 20 to 25 new allegations. But while her fight against the Forest Service has persisted for more than two decades, in the Grand Canyon, similar questions about the treatment of women have only started to surface.

"On the river, the boatman is god," Cheyenne Szydlo told me. In the Grand Canyon, river guides enjoy an almost exalted status, revered for their ability to "read water." Boatmen have almost total responsibility for their passengers—they keep the food and determine when and where to sleep, explore, or go to the bathroom. They also control the satellite phone, the only means of contact with the outside world. But within the Park Service, boatmen were more important still. Men like Dave Loeffler guided visiting officials or VIPs on adventures within the canyon, undertook rescue missions, and were featured in travel stories in newspapers and magazines. They "made it seem [to park management] like the river was the surface of Mars," one boatman for a private company recalled. The administration saw them as irreplaceable.

In the early 2000s, three men turned the boat shop into a small fiefdom. There were the "two Daves"—Loeffler and his supervisor, Dave Desrosiers—and Bryan Edwards, the boat shop manager. In addition to this small core of permanent staffers, the park periodically hired intermittent boatmen. One, Dan Hall, worked in the canyon during this period and was friendly with the trio. Hall is garrulous and not remotely prudish. "I have offended people I've worked with," he told me. "I do my best to apologize and not let it happen again But with the Daves, it had this very dark side to it." He remembered the three talking about who could sleep with the most women on the river. "They were always on the make," he said. In a written response sent via Facebook, Edwards said that "no competition ever existed."

Rafting on the Colorado has always had a bit of a party vibe, and that attitude held for Park Service trips, too. Boats sometimes carried a large quantity of alcohol. Participants sometimes hooked up. But during the early 2000s, Hall told me, it seemed short-lived river affairs were almost expected of female employees. According to one former employee, veteran female staffers warned new hires to make sure they set up tents with a friend rather than sleeping on the boats, as the boatmen usually did. Sometimes, Hall said, boatmen would lobby supervisors to send women from completely unrelated park divisions—an attractive new hire at the entry booth, for instance—on trips. Often, though, the targets were from science divisions that required river access, such as vegetation and wildlife.

The field leader of the vegetation program from 2002 to 2005, Kate Watters, said that she complained to her supervisor about the boatmen's behavior. In October 2005, an expedition was planned to see if the two groups could overcome their difficulties. The trip was led by Bryan Edwards. Participants included Watters, who was married to Dan Hall at the time, and her new intern, a biologist I'll call Anne.

"I did flash a camera below her skirt as she stood next to me," Edwards said. "It was intended for shock value only."

The expedition coincided with Halloween week, and one night most of the participants put on costumes. Many were drinking. Anne—dressed as a butterfly, in wings and a dress—was in the camp's kitchen area, when Edwards—dressed as a pirate—came up behind her. He grabbed the camera she'd left on the table. "The next thing I knew, his hand was between my legs," she said. Then Edwards shot a picture up her skirt.

Watters observed aloud that Edwards' behavior was unacceptable. Loeffler, who was attired as "a hillbilly axe murderer" and carrying a real axe, demanded that Watters talk it out with Edwards instead of filing a report. She recalled that he bellowed at her, axe in hand, "Fuck you, Kate Watters. You can't have control over people's jobs." Loeffler told me that he was unable to answer questions since he is still a park employee. Edwards wrote in his response, "I did flash a camera below her skirt as she stood next to me. It was intended for shock value only" as Anne had been drinking, he explained.

Watters said that in a meeting after her return with Edwards and Desrosiers' boss, Edwards glared at her and cleaned his nails with a 6-inch buck knife. (Edwards called this description "entirely false.") In 2006, he received a 30-day suspension over the incident, after which he resigned. Edwards confirmed this to me, but wrote in another message, "I suspect nearly everything you have been told is at least either 'misrepresentation' or outright lie." He felt that he had done "a lot of good in my 12 yrs in Grand Canyon," he went on. "Because of my abilities, I did things people dreamed about doing but simply could not on that River and dealt with their envy and accusations constantly." Edwards added, "But as the joke goes: '... ach, you fuck one sheep!'"

Following Edwards' resignation, relations between the boat shop and vegetation devolved into a cold war. On trips, according to multiple sources, some of the boatmen withheld food or avoided taking volunteers to work sites. Watters complained to the director of the science division and to regional Park Service authorities. After getting nowhere, she quit in frustration and Anne eventually assumed her place. According to Anne and Hall, Loeffler later showed up at a campsite where Anne was working to harangue her about Edwards. He and Desrosiers made it so difficult for her to schedule trips that sometimes she had to use a helicopter, at great expense. These acts of sabotage "became an art form for the two Daves," recalled Hall. The pair even erected a memorial to Edwards in the boat shop, said two former employees: a crude bust of Jesus wearing a crown of thorns with Edwards' name written on the base in Sharpie. The implication was clear: Edwards had been martyred.

It was around the time of Edwards' departure that Szydlo took her boat trip with Loeffler. After the scare in the rapids, she said, the uneasy balance between them shifted. Szydlo stopped laughing at his come-ons. Loeffler would sleep in late and then tell her they didn't have time to visit her next work site. "This person was in complete control of everything I needed to survive," she said. "I was terrified." She began to formulate a plan to get out of the canyon if she needed to. "Even if there were trails to take, which in most places there were not, they'd land me in the middle of nowhere, in the desert, up on the rim," she said. "I didn't have enough food or water to attempt that." She could try to hike out on the Bright Angel Trail when they reached the halfway point at Phantom Ranch. But doing so would mean missing the nesting sites on the lower half of the river—and, she feared, abandoning any hope of being hired back next season.

The day before they reached Phantom Ranch, Szydlo said she felt as if some kind of assault was inevitable. Loeffler slowed the motorboat to a crawl, stopping at nearly every beach. Finally, in the middle of a channel, she heard the motor go quiet. Loeffler came up behind her, grabbed her shoulders and asked her to describe her sexual fantasies so he could act them out.

"I broke down crying," Szydlo said. "Saying, 'Get off me, stop harassing me.' As soon as I used the word 'harassment,' he was like, 'Whoa, stop. I don't know what you're talking about.'" He revved the engine and sped to Phantom Ranch. For the last five days, she said, they barely spoke, and at meals, Loeffler gave her minuscule portions. After she returned, she emailed her then-boyfriend and told him what had happened. Szydlo worried for months about whether she should file a report. When she finally contacted an HR representative almost six months later, she said, she received a brief response informing her she'd need dates, times and witnesses in order to pursue a complaint. She let it drop, not wanting to start a "huge, ugly fight." Much as she suspected, other women in similar situations have discovered that taking formal action can bring on its own host of problems.

The Eldorado National Forest is a mountainous expanse of nearly 1,000 square miles that stretches from east of Sacramento to the crest of the Sierra Nevada. Denice Rice

has worked here for 15 years as a firefighter—on engines and fire crews and as a prevention officer. These days, she likes to operate by herself, driving a truck with a small reserve of water through the hundreds of miles of back roads that cut into the Eldorado. She is often the first on the scene at a fire, helping direct in crews of “hot shots,” the firefighting elite who clear the tree line. On slower days, she might serve as “Smokey’s wrangler,” accompanying the unlucky staffer who has to don the sweaty mascot costume and make safety presentations to kids.

Many women in the Forest Service told me that “fire is a small world,” and that they repeatedly had to fight the perception that they were only there to meet men. Rice, who exudes a no-bullshit air of competence, prided herself on her toughness. When I visited her at her home in January, she drove to meet me on a four-wheeler, flanked by two bulldogs. “When you work in fire, you have to have a really thick skin,” she said.

Around 2008, Rice was a captain being groomed for promotion when she was befriended by her boss’ boss, a division chief named Mike Beckett. After about a year, their interactions took on a different tone. By Rice’s account, Beckett would describe sexual dreams he’d had about her and comment on her body. When they texted about work, he responded with crass double entendres. He cornered her in the office, followed her into the bathroom, and tried to touch her or lift her shirt. She said he groped or touched her inappropriately at least 20 times.

Even when she was out in the field, Rice felt as if there was no escape. Sometimes Beckett would wait late for her to return to the office. He took to radioing in to ask her location and seemed to monitor the line for word of her whereabouts: He’d appear, unannounced, when she was in some remote location—say, a tower lookout high in the Sierras. “He was paying a lot of attention to an employee three to four pay grades below him, which is uncommon,” recalled Rice’s former direct supervisor, who still works at the Forest Service. “He was constantly going around me.”

It became so uncomfortable that Rice stopped calling in her location—a significant safety risk. Eventually, Beckett arranged for her to be moved out of the office she shared with a colleague and into a room on her own. It was more of a storage area, recalled the former supervisor, tucked in the back of the building. During this time, her oversight duties were stripped from her one by one, Rice later said in a signed affidavit, and the former supervisor confirmed in an interview. (Beckett declined to answer any questions, and the Forest Service said it couldn’t comment on specific allegations.)

Still, Rice was reluctant to take formal action. She didn’t want to be “one of those women,” she explained. “You don’t cry in front of the guys, you don’t show weakness in front of them. And you don’t file. You just don’t file. You suck up and deal.” But one day in 2011, she said, after three years of harassment, Beckett came into her office and, with a letter opener, poked her repeatedly on her chest, drawing a circle around her nipple. She filed. Randy Meyer, the Eldorado union steward, said he got a phone call from Rice “that scared me to death. She was highly emotional and beside herself.” He

told a senior forest manager that he was prepared to alert the police—and “then everybody and his brother got involved in this mess.”

In the ensuing investigation, some 30 of Rice’s and Beckett’s colleagues were interviewed about humiliating details that Rice hadn’t even confided to her husband. “Everybody knew that he took me in the bathroom, tried to take my clothes off, things that he would say to me: ‘I want to watch you pee.’ They all knew,” she said. “And I still work with these people.” Rice said she got sick from the stress. The supervisor added that once, after he went to check on Rice, Beckett threatened him with disciplinary action.

In 2012, at the district ranger’s request, Rice’s supervisor called an all-hands meeting. Rice was certain that Beckett would be on the agenda. She begged not to have to attend, but said she was required to show up. (Rice’s former supervisor couldn’t verify this, but said the meeting was handled insensitively: “Nobody took into consideration that maybe she was still feeling like the target in the case.”) The situation with Beckett was discussed in front of at least 50 colleagues; Rice walked out in tears. “I think that was the worst thing that ever happened to me,” she said.

When we spoke, Rice was jumpy and broke down several times. “I can’t go anywhere without wondering, ‘Do people know who I am?’” she said. One male firefighter who has worked with Rice for five years told me, “It changed her whole life. People know Denice’s story on the forest, so she has this cloud around her. I’ve seen it for four years. I see Denice ‘trigger’ all the time: in classroom settings, out in the woods.”

Ultimately, the ranger in charge of the investigation recommended that Beckett should be fired. But Beckett retired before any action could be taken. Meanwhile, Rice’s career has effectively stalled. The firefighter who worked with Rice requested anonymity, explaining, “If the powers that be tie me to her in any way, I’ll never promote here again.”

Rice’s ordeal wasn’t unique. Lesa Donnelly said that in her capacity as an advocate, she has been contacted by scores of women in the service in California who allege they’ve been punished for pursuing sexual harassment complaints. One 22-year-old forestry technician filed a claim, and, several days afterwards, was visited by officials who searched only her side of the barracks with a drug dog. According to a subsequent complaint she lodged with the Forest Service, her roommate told her that one official had remarked, “You guys must have pissed someone off.” The woman left the service soon afterwards.

Elisa Lopez-Crowder, a 34-year-old Navy veteran, was hired as a firefighter in 2010. She ran 45-pound sections of hose into the forest and cleared live trees to create fuel breaks. In her first months on the Eldorado, she said, an assistant captain asked her whether she’d been a “bitch” or a “slut” in the Navy, and whether her skin was really that color or just dirty. One day while she was clearing brush, she claimed, he hoisted her by

her line gear and threw her to the ground; according to a male coworker's account, he held her down with his foot. The coworker intervened, and later joined her to report the matter to their captain.

The assistant captain was briefly placed on administrative leave. (In a court declaration he said Lopez-Crowder had "tripped" and that "before I helped her up, I jokingly placed my foot on her pack.") While an investigation was still underway, he was assigned to the same work sites as Lopez-Crowder. About a year later, she traveled with Donnelly and other Forest Service women to bring their concerns to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack in Washington, D.C. Lopez-Crowder said Vilsack apologized and assured her that the assistant captain had been removed from his position; it fell to Lopez-Crowder to tell the secretary that he was still on the Forest Service payroll.

A short time later, the assistant captain left the force. Lopez-Crowder transferred out of the firefighting division anyway, fearing that she had become a target. "In the years I served in the military," she said, "I never encountered such discrimination and harassment as I have working for the U.S. Forest Service."

Alicia Dabney, a mother of three who lives on the Tule River Indian reservation, became a firefighter, like her father and uncles before her, at the age of 26 in the Sequoia National Forest. According to Equal Employment Opportunity complaints she filed in 2011 and 2012, Dabney claimed that coworkers made disparaging remarks about her Latina and Comanche heritage and joked about sexually assaulting women. She said a male supervisor instructed her and another female firefighter to tell him when they began menstruating. At a training academy, other participants left lewd sexual propositions on her voicemail. One day she arrived at work to find the floor of the engine house strewn with printouts that read "Alicia Dabney The Whore." (She provided a photo of the printouts.)

Some of the harassment was physical. Once, a male coworker jumped on her neck, "riding me like a big horse," she recalled. On an assignment in Texas, she said, a supervisor put her in a chokehold and threw her on his hotel bed. A USDA investigation substantiated the first of those incidents but denied that there had been a "pattern of harassment." In 2012, Dabney was informed that the Forest Service was initiating her termination, claiming she had omitted part of her criminal record—a misdemeanor vandalism charge—and failed to disclose federal debt on her application. (Dabney maintains that she disclosed both.) In 2013, Dabney left and signed a settlement agreement with the Forest Service.

In 2011, the USDA put the Forest Service into temporary receivership for its failure to adequately respond to sexual harassment claims. For the next year, all EEO complaints were handled by the secretary's office in Washington. Tom Tidwell, the chief of the Forest Service, explained in an email to staff that the change would allow the agency "to better process a series of EEO complaints within the Forest Service that, frankly, we have not handled well."

In the Canyon's River District, the problems had continued unabated since Cheyenne Szydlo's 2006 trip. Certain boatmen were repeatedly accused of harassing or assaulting women in strikingly similar scenarios. One young boatman covered his Park Service boat hatch with pictures of topless women and boasted to coworkers, including Dan Hall, about a side gig recruiting college women for Girls Gone Wild-style videos. Hall said that half a dozen intermittent boatmen who, like him, objected to the boat shop's culture, found themselves blacklisted from river assignments. And even in the rare cases when management did take swift action, the targets weren't always the people you'd expect.

In 2011, Mike Harris, a contract hire then in his late 50s, was training a 40-year-old river ranger named Chelly Kearney to operate a new boat. She said that he directed her to pull to the shore, away from their group, and announced that he was going to take a bath. Then, she said, he removed all of his clothes and invited Kearney to join him in the water. When Kearney asked if they could leave, he put on his life jacket and climbed back on the boat naked. He "stood there with his penis completely exposed," Kearney later wrote in a detailed letter to park leadership. "I stated to Harris, 'Do not get on this boat until you put your clothes on.' He stated to me that he needed to dry his clothes out. I said, 'No, do not get on this boat without your clothes.' He finally put on a pair of long underwear pants." Harris confirmed to me that he climbed onto the front of the boat naked: "I just wanted to sit in the sun and dry out," he said. However, he said he thought he had permission from Kearney to bathe and didn't ask her to join him.

Upon Kearney's return, she said she told a supervisor about the incident. The supervisor, she alleged, joked that they "used to not call it sexual harassment until the guy whipped out his penis and slapped you across the face with it." Kearney didn't take the matter further.

The next year, on another trip, a biologist I'll call Lynn said Harris repeatedly asked her to sleep in his tent when hers started leaking during a rainstorm. After she refused, he set up his tent directly next to hers. Harris told me that he only asked Lynn to join him in his tent once, and hadn't meant the invitation as a come-on. "It wasn't to have sex," Harris said. "I think I said something like 'We could snuggle and that's all.'"

Lynn said she emailed her supervisor about the episode. After a third female employee filed an EEO complaint about his behavior in 2013, Harris resigned. Lynn's complaint was supposed to be confidential, but she noticed that boatmen she'd been friendly with began to act coldly toward her. And matters only escalated from there.

The supervisor, Kearney alleged, joked that they "used to not call it sexual harassment until the guy whipped out his penis and slapped you across the face with it."

In February 2014, Dave Loeffler led a joint Park Service-private sector trip. Both Anne and Lynn were apprehensive about being on the river with him. At one point, Lynn said,

a passenger inquired about a boatman who'd been let go and Loeffler ranted about "complainers" who had ruined boatmen's lives. The following day, as the group approached a campsite, Lynn was standing in the bow of her boat when Loeffler pulled her out roughly by her life jacket—a shocking breach of river norms. Anne came up to Lynn on the beach to find her concealing tears behind her sunglasses. Lynn wanted to leave, but at that point there was no way for her to hike out.

On the last night, the party celebrated with dinner and drinks. A woman who worked for a private boat company produced a novelty penis-shaped straw she'd received at a bachelorette party and dropped it in a colleague's drink. People laughed and passed the straw around. At one point, Lynn was holding it when Loeffler tried to take her picture. Then, someone put on music. It was an eclectic playlist, and people danced accordingly: interpretive dance, head-banging, two-stepping. A hip-hop song came on, and the group started talking about twerking. Lynn gave a comically awkward demonstration in her heavy canvas Carhartt pants, puffy down jacket and rubber boots.

Two days later, Anne and Lynn were called into the offices of upper management and informed that they'd been accused of sexual misconduct. In written statements, Loeffler and two of his friends claimed that Anne and Lynn had shoved the penis straw in Loeffler's face, danced provocatively in short skirts, and, as one complainant put it, behaved "coquettishly" throughout the trip. "I felt I needed to remove myself from this increasingly hostile work environment," Loeffler wrote in his statement. "They were being so rude and inappropriate to myself and others." According to notes from the manager assigned to look into the situation, Loeffler said he wanted Anne and Lynn to be "treated similarly" to other employees accused of harassment—that is, with the Park Service deciding not to renew their contracts.

Both women protested to the managers that they were being retaliated against for their previous reports of sexual harassment. Nonetheless, the park launched an investigation, although both Superintendent David Uberuaga and Deputy Superintendent Diane Chalfant would later acknowledge in an official report that it may not have been thorough enough. In particular, the investigators weren't made aware of the history between Anne, Lynn and the boatmen.

In a meeting, Lynn said Chalfant told her that Loeffler's charges couldn't be retaliatory, since Lynn's previous sexual harassment complaint was confidential. Both Lynn and Anne were informed that their contracts would not be renewed. In Lynn's termination letter, Chalfant wrote, "We cannot afford to have team members in our employment who are not on board with management's expectations and requirements."

"What happened to [Lynn] was the most horrifying thing I'd ever seen," said Chelly Kearney, who had made her own efforts to draw attention to the treatment of women on the river. About a year after she resigned in 2012, she wrote a 29-page letter to Grand Canyon Chief Ranger Bill Wright documenting multiple instances of harassment, assault and retaliation and describing a culture that protected male harassers while allowing

victims to be targeted for retaliation. The Park Service requested a formal EEO investigation, but the final report was never distributed beyond the uppermost level of park management and no disciplinary actions were taken.

Following Lynn and Anne's dismissals, Kearney tried again. She forwarded her letter to Uberuaga, writing that she had witnessed a "disturbing and pervasive level of hatred" toward Anne and her boss and that Anne should be protected by federal whistle-blower laws. She received a brief response from Uberuaga thanking her for her concern.

Some former park employees now ruefully refer to the fateful party as "The Night on Cock-Straw Beach," and the incident became an unlikely rallying point. Hall sent around an email asking a core group of former park employees and colleagues in private rafting companies to gather names of other women who'd been harassed or run out of the River District. With Donnelly's help, 12 women and Hall wrote to Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, requesting a formal investigation into the "pervasive culture of discrimination, retaliation, and a sexually hostile work environment" in the River District.

Where Donnelly had tried for decades to get federal authorities to intervene more decisively in the Forest Service, the DOI responded quickly. In October, its Office of Inspector General launched an investigation that grew from the 13 initial complainants to include multiple interviews with more than 80 people. Their final report would identify 22 additional victims or witnesses. It included accounts of Cheyenne Szydlo's 2006 trip with Loeffler, the Halloween party where Edwards took the photo up Anne's skirt, the twerking incident that led to the complaint against Anne and Lynn, and several allegations involving a boatman that a former employee identified as Mike Harris.

The women's complaints, the investigators said, were "extremely credible." The investigators also determined that Chalfant, the deputy superintendent, had allowed the complaint letter signed by the 12 women and Hall to make its way to some of the accused boatmen, in violation of policy. In an interview, the lead investigator, Greg Gransback, criticized the park's handling of the accusations against Anne and Lynn. "If you compare what had happened to these two in the past and what they were accused of, I mean there's just no comparison. It's apples and oranges," he said. "The park got it wrong where they went overboard."

In a February response to the investigation, the Park Service's Intermountain Region didn't contest any of the details in the report, and admitted that, in many instances, appropriate action hadn't been taken. In the OIG report two boatmen whose actions are clearly consistent with those of Loeffler and Desrosiers deny all allegations made against them. (I was unable to reach Desrosiers directly despite contacting the Park Service, former colleagues, and two family members.)

Boatman 3—whom a former employee identified as Loeffler—told the OIG that he "acknowledged making sexual remarks to women, but said that he did so only when he sensed a 'mutual attraction.'" James Doyle, the communications chief for the

Intermountain Region, said he couldn't discuss individual allegations against employees and added, "We maintain a zero tolerance for sexual harassment and hostile workplace environment."

During the year and a half that the investigation was underway, the park made some changes. After Bill Wright transferred out of the district, his role was filled by a woman. The policy for staff boat trips was revised. There would be no alcohol permitted and an outside supervisor would be required on all expeditions. Dave Desrosiers retired in May 2015. According to its response to the OIG, the Park is introducing a detailed plan to improve its sexual harassment policies, and considering disciplinary action against managers who mishandled complaints. All employees are now required to wear "standard uniforms" on river trips.

The OIG team was more than familiar with sexual harassment cases: Gransback had worked on the inquiry that resulted from the 1996 Aberdeen Proving Ground scandal, when 12 Army officers were charged with assaulting female trainees. Still, Gransback told me that even he and his seasoned colleagues teared up when they heard Grand Canyon women describe the fine line they had to walk to do their jobs, "between not being hated and not being desired."

In the Tailhook case, he noted, the accused military members had developed a "Top Gun" mentality, believing they were too important to be taken down. He observed the same dynamic at work among the boatmen. "They became almost untouchable," he said. But the military, Gransback pointed out, has made "drastic changes," including evidence-based sexual harassment and assault prevention programs. So far, neither the Park or Forest Service has proposed anything so extensive. (Since June 2015, the Forest Service's California region has strengthened its protocols for sexual harassment training and reporting, a spokesperson said.)

In my conversations with the women, they expressed great pride in their strength. For years, they had performed dangerous, physically demanding jobs. Many of them had faced life-threatening situations. All of them had operated within environments in which women had very little room for error. The harassment they described had not only brought about personal humiliation or the loss of a job or even a career. It had shaken their entire perception of themselves—as tough and resilient, able to handle anything that man or nature could throw at them.

They lost other things, too. After her boat trip with Loeffler, Cheyenne Syzdlo found herself avoiding the river. "When I'd hear people talk about how much they loved river trips, I'd be like, 'Oh God, I hated them, I hated them,'" she told me. Then, in the course of our conversations, she came across an email she'd written to a friend after her second time in the Grand Canyon, before she'd ever met Dave Loeffler.

In her message, Syzdlo described the thrill of riding huge rapids in the bow of an inflatable boat. She remembered how even the most experienced guides would pause and become tense, studying the water before steering them in. She recalled the night

her group camped on a sliver of beach when a thunderstorm suddenly erupted, sending loose boulders tumbling down the sheer cliff face. She and her colleagues had huddled in their tents and contemplated the possibility that they might die, and then, when the morning dawned damp and bright, laughed as they fished their supplies out of the river. “I’d never thought about that second trip again because the third trip did change everything. It was magical,” she told me. “It’s so primitive and you feel so free. You never experience that in life.” She’d forgotten about it for nearly a decade, but that morning on the river, she hadn’t wanted to leave.

CREDITS

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STORY - KATHRYN JOYCE

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River News

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Cataract classroom

Float trip teaches river guides history and ecology to pass on to clients

By Brett Prettyman for The Salt Lake Tribune

CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK - When it comes to natural resources, it's hard to beat the varied landscape of this southern Utah destination. But amid the towering canyon walls, unique rock formations and the art of ancient peoples, one natural resource may be more important than others.

More than half of the visitors to the Colorado River's Cataract Canyon come with commercial outfitters paid to get them through its 28 intense rapids. But that isn't the guides' only role.

About the time novice river runners realize they no longer have cell phone service and Game Boys are not waterproof, they begin to look around.

"What's that flower called?"

"What kind of rock is that?"

"Who made the image on that rock?"

Those are just a few of the questions guides say they hear during the 100-mile float from Moab to the takeout near state Highway 95 in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

Knowing the answers can yield tips from clients at the trip's end, but organizers and speakers on an annual interpretation trip for river guides say that knowledge will pay dividends for years to come. While the setting itself creates lasting memories, they hope a deeper understanding of the land, water, wildlife and history will create a connection that will be passed on to the guides' clients.

"You are part of the next wave of water policy in the West," Dan McCool, a political science professor at the University of Utah, told a group of guides during this year's trip on the Colorado River in May. "If you want to keep your jobs and keep them existing for people who love the river like you do, then the laws have to change and you can only change the laws if you impact the people and give them a reason to get involved."

While the trips teach rookie guides about the prehistoric, as well as modern, history of the river, they also are a time to share details about the best ways to run rapids and to improve relationships with river rangers, biologists and other outfitters.

This year's trip attracted guides from nine of the 15 groups that have Cataract permits. Among the "faculty" were a political science professor specializing in Western water issues, a food-handling specialist from the National Park Service and a retired U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) geologist. Learning from legends: To give guides a more spiritual view of the land, organizers also invited two Canyonlands legends: Kent Frost, 88, and "Black" George Simmons, 82.

"Learning the history makes [guides] more and more interested in the land and the river. That, in turn, makes them better informed to share the history of the place with their guests," said Simmons, who guided the first USGS research boat trip down Cataract in 1956 and still volunteers at Canyonlands.

Simmons handed out samples of local rocks and asked the guides to taste their varying saltiness. He also entertained the group with long, funny poems around the campfire, pulling people from the crowd to play different characters.

Frost shared stories of exploring Canyonlands during his youth in the 1930s. His memory of feeling like he was the first European settler to view American Indian art and dwellings had many guides wishing they had been born a few decades earlier. Making a difference: As guides gathered for cocktails on the comfort of the rafts while waiting for dinner, McCool staged a pep talk/rally, preaching the gospel of helping clients develop a passion for protecting wild places. As the stars grew thicker, he asked them to think about what impact they were having on the land.

The topic came up again when Melissa Memory, an archaeologist for the Southeast Utah Group of the National Park Service, led the group to an ancient granary and three living areas found just off the Colorado River at Indian Creek.

While many of guides already had seen the site, Memory fielded such questions as whether people who built the structures used human urine to bond the materials. Possibly, she said; they may also have used blood.

She also said many treasures left at the 150 ancient sites along the river corridor "were used as target practice by local cowboys" in the early days.

Canyonlands river ranger Steve Young, aka T-Berry, implored guides to share sightings of animals, rare plants and illegal activities along the Colorado.

"Commercial outfitters have a lot more eyes on the river than we do," said Young, who first floated Cataract in 1983. He worked as a river guide until 2000 when he became a river ranger. "They can, and do, help us in so many ways and it is important that they feel comfortable enough to approach us on the river or on the street in Moab and share their experiences with us. This trip helps make that happen." Not just for rookies: The interpretation trips originally were set up as a way for older guides to share knowledge with newcomers. But they're not just for rookies anymore.

River-running companies can send any employee on the trip. Dee and Sue Holladay, owners of Holiday Expeditions, elected to make the trip this spring when none of their staff members signed up. The couple provided historical facts, talked about the importance of professionalism and encouraged newbies and old timers alike to follow a code of ethics on the river.

Robert Ho has been a guide on the Colorado for 13 years and says he learns something new each time he joins the interpretive float. "Having the park officials, geologists and biologists is great. For them to share all the knowledge they have accumulated through the years is priceless," said Ho, who has 16 trips scheduled on Cataract this summer. "It is imperative that guides have as much information as possible so we can pass on the importance of this place to others."

John Weisheit, host of the trip sponsored by Utah Guides and Outfitters, Colorado Plateau River Guides and the NPS, says any guide, no matter how experienced, will learn something on the trip.

"This is an incredible place and after a while, the guides become intimate with it," he said. "They soon begin to defend it and eventually become a caretaker who assumes stewardship of it. That intimacy they develop is eventually passed on to people and it is vitally important they do it with accurate knowledge."

Weisheit made his first trip in 1986. In addition to learning things the organizers intended, he especially appreciated the camaraderie.

"Most of the time guides stay in the tight circle of the companies they work for," he said. "Barriers are broken when you bring all the companies together like this. That is an important aspect of the trips. It builds the rafting community and keeps it healthy."

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Part Two

Q&A with Tag-A-Long river guide Jen Homel

Jen Homel, a Brighton High School graduate, is working as a river rafting guide for Tag-A-Long Expeditions out of Moab. This is her fourth year as a guide. She shared her thoughts about the recent interpretation trip held on the Colorado River through Cataract Canyon. How was the first interp trip you went on different than the last? On my first trip I tried to listen and learn the things they were telling us, but I'd never been there and didn't have any clue about this place or that archaeology style that the interpreters would refer to in their talks. Now I am familiar with the area and can picture the certain petroglyph style or geological event and really pick up a lot more usable information.

Why are these trips important? Being out in that country breeds curiosity in those whose eyes are really open to what they're seeing. As guides, we also have responsibility to pass on information to our guests, to try and spark that same passion and respect for the land, to hopefully protect it for future generations. And, interpretive material is a great subject to fall back on when all attempts at conversation with your guests have failed.

Have you seen first-year guides change during the trips? Do they at some point realize being a guide is serious business and not just a way to pass a summer? It's always fun to watch first-year guides experimenting with which river-guide persona they are going to wear, be it a funny hat or a goofy shirt, or being too tough to wear raingear. I don't know if many first-year guides see the river as more than a way to pass the summer until they start doing more than just Moab dailies. Guiding one-day trips all summer is a good way to weed out the people who are just there for the job and not because they love the river.

How often do you think of things you learned on interp trips while guiding? I use the information that I've learned on interp trips all the time - especially the geology. The interpreters do a great job condensing technical details into relevant information that I can tell my guests.

What was the most important part of the last interp trip? For me, it was taking a good look at the events unfolding on the parts of the river that are covered by the lake at higher levels. It's a unique opportunity to see the new (to us) rapids being uncovered and to see the miniature version of Cataract Canyon geology - slumping and rockfall - that is occurring at an accelerated rate on every silt bank from Imperial to Hite.

What was your favorite part of the last interp trip? My favorite part is always listening to the old-timer guides and explorers; Black George, Kent Frost and Dee Holladay, to name a few, tell the best stories and it always reminds me how much easier we have it in terms of equipment and roads and experience.

Brett Prettyman

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Cataract facts

Cataract Canyon contains 14 miles of rapids ranging in difficulty from easy Class I to challenging Class V. It is a particularly hazardous and isolated section of the Colorado River and is subject to extreme water level fluctuations.

A permit is required for all trips through Cataract Canyon.

Most Cataract Canyon trips put in at Potash, Moab, Green River or Mineral Bottom. The usual take-out for Cataract trips is Hite Marina. However, a prolonged drought has significantly changed conditions on Lake Powell and the take-out situation changes according to the river.

While hiking trails lead to the rivers from each of the Canyonlands districts, the trails are too long and rugged to be seriously considered for shuttles, even for inflatables and other lightweight boats.

Source: <http://www.nps.gov/cany/river/cataract.htm>

River News

New Rapid in Glen Canyon

By John Weisheit

March 12, 2005

Due to the rise of Lake Powell during the snow melt of 2005, this rapid is now under reservoir water. However, it is possible that it will re-emerge and it is also possible that others may develop. Caution is advised when traveling and camping on the the Colorado River where unstable sediment deposits exist between the last rapid in Cataract Canyon and the environs near and below Hite Marina. Advisory: Hiking up Dark Canyon from its confluence with the Colorado River is slick (mud) and there is no alternative route.

- [See the pictures of the new Rapid in Glen Canyon](#) [700k PDF File]
 - [Rapid near Hite rafting take-out](#) [485k PDF File]
 - [Rapid near Hite rafting take-out and left side view of the New Rapid](#) [587k PDF File]
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River News

September 9, 2004

On the range, gas trumps wildlife

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0909/p13s02-sten.html>

Mark Clayton Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

At Sand Wash, Utah, a dusty slice of back country 45 miles from the nearest paved road, river-raft guide John Weisheit lectures tourists about the history of the Green River and the wilderness experience that will soon unfold for them.

Climbing into rafts, they float on chocolate waters, following the path of 19th century explorer John Wesley Powell, beneath the cliffs of Desolation Canyon. No car engines or cellphones mar this trip far away from it all.

But soon, Mr. Weisheit says he may chop all wilderness references from his little lecture. They'll ring hollow, he says, if Sand Wash, a onetime crossing for pioneers and cattle, echoes instead with the sounds of diesel engines and drilling rigs exploring for oil and gas.

Wednesday, in the biggest sale of its kind in Utah history, the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) offered at auction oil- and gas-exploration leases on more than 360,000 acres of rugged back country - including UT-201, a 120-acre chunk of Green River flood plain that abuts Sand Wash, and another 16,000 acres a few miles away.

Not long ago such remote regions seemed on track to one day become officially protected wilderness areas. Now they're part of a huge debate over the proper use of public lands in the United States. At issue: When does energy security trump wilderness protection?

No one claims the oil and gas from public lands will free the nation from dependence on foreign oil. The amount of oil in the Rocky Mountain West is negligible - less than a year's supply for the nation. But the region's gas could supply the nation for a few years and, by lowering prices, save consumers billions of dollars. So should the US encourage such energy development wherever it's economically viable? Or, in the case of wilderness, does some higher standard apply?

To hear the White House and the oil and gas industry tell it, gaining access to public lands is a key to greater energy self-sufficiency.

"Basically, we've taken large chunks of the country and put it off-limits to any kind of exploration or development," said Vice President Dick Cheney at a town hall meeting in

Hot Springs, Ark. "We don't drill off the East Coast, we don't drill off the West Coast.... Large parts of the Rocky Mountain West are off-limits."

Some 29 percent of the Rocky Mountain area's gas reserves are "effectively off limits" because of conditions that limit drilling, estimates a 2003 report done for the US Department of Energy by the National Petroleum Council, an industry lobby group. If such restrictions were removed nationwide, that easier access to public lands could save consumers \$300 billion over 20 years, the report says, thanks to lower natural gas prices.

But such figures almost certainly overstate the case, energy analysts and environmentalists counter.

For example, domestic energy production is apparently not being held up by a lack of oil and gas leases. Since 1982, the US has leased or offered for lease 229 million acres of public land for oil and gas development across 12 Western states, according to a new report by the Environmental Working Group (EWG), a Washington-based environmental organization. That represents nearly 9 of every 10 BLM acres and covers an area bigger than Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona combined.

That doesn't leave much to exploit. In the five richest geological basins in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico, only 15 percent of the oil and 12 percent of the gas reserves on federal lands are off-limits, according to a 2003 joint study by the US departments of Energy, Interior, and Agriculture.

Drilling for gas is already on the upswing in the region. Five Rocky Mountain states saw drilling activity in August rise to their highest levels in a decade. Wyoming had 84 rigs operating versus an annual average of 38 over the past decade - 121 percent higher. For Utah, the 22 rigs operating are 76 percent higher than the average over a decade. For New Mexico, it's 30 percent; Montana, 166 percent; and Colorado, 171 percent.

Yet the energy produced from public lands is minuscule. Interior Department records show that only enough oil was produced between 1989 and 2003 to supply the nation for 53 days and enough natural gas for 221 days at current rates of consumption, the EWG report adds.

"These numbers put a hole in the argument you hear all the time from the oil industry and their allies that, 'If we could only get access, we could reduce our dependency on foreign oil,' " says Dusty Horwitt, coauthor of the EWG report. "In fact, they've had almost unfettered access, but dependence on foreign oil has increased significantly."

Nor are energy companies knocking each other down to drill more. EWG analysts say BLM's data show about 13 percent of public land is leased and 4 percent currently producing oil or gas. The US Department of the Interior, which oversees the BLM, reports smaller totals: 8 percent and 1 percent, respectively.

"You need to remember we are not talking about significant quantities of oil - or natural gas, for that matter," says Gal Luft, executive director of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security in Washington, which focuses on energy security. "Tactically it may sound like a lot, but strategically it is not a lot of oil or gas."

But the federal study, which estimated there were 123 trillion cubic feet of "technically recoverable" natural gas in areas already open to leasing - enough to fuel the nation's needs for about six years at current consumption rates - may be too rosy.

Such numbers overstate the case because only about half of technically recoverable gas is likely to be found, says Michael Lynch, president of Strategic Energy & Economic Research in Winchester, Mass. "It will help on the margins - and of course the industry would rather have it than not," Mr. Lynch says. "But any notion that you're going to change the US energy balance significantly is an exaggeration."

Despite this, the federal government is pushing to open more public land anyway. A series of land-use decisions and proposals over the past four years shows the US is gearing up to make an average of 12.7 million acres a year available to oil and gas drilling, says the EWG report.

"We're not challenging the vast majority of these proposed leases," says Liz Thomas of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, an environmental organization, in Moab, Utah. "What we oppose is leasing these very remote places." Her group has been trying to block energy exploration on what she calls "wilderness quality" lands.

No land is being stripped of protections, says Rebecca Watson, assistant secretary for Land and Minerals Management at the Department of the Interior. She concedes, however, that in some areas where seasonal drilling prohibitions intended to protect wildlife overlap, these will be adjusted to give companies time to get in to drill for oil and gas.

"Nobody's advocating going into wilderness areas or parks," Ms. Watson says. "We're simply asking: 'Are all those constraints necessary, or are there other ways to protect these lands?' "

In fact, the BLM in Utah set aside from Wednesday's auction tens of thousands of acres of land that might otherwise have been leased - much of it for further environmental review, officials say.

Rather than a lack of land to lease, the real obstacle may be the leasing stipulations and conditions placed on exploration and development - conditions environmentalists say are vital, but oil men decry.

"The problem for us wasn't getting leases; the problem was being able to drill and develop those leases," says Geoff Ice, exploration manager at Rosewood Resources

Inc. His Dallas oil and gas company has been working with three other companies for several years to get the necessary environmental approvals to drill on an 80,000-acre parcel near the Book Cliffs region of Utah. "It's just been ridiculous things holding us up. We got to the point where we're not as active in Utah anymore. We just got tired of fighting it."

Even so, environmentalists aren't optimistic such lands will be protected. The Book Cliffs region of Utah - a 250-mile-long escarpment with cliffs 2,000 feet high - is the longest such continuous formation in the world and serves as home to mountain lions, bald eagles, and peregrine falcons. But it sits on the edge of a zone of major oil and gas production. Back at the Green River, environmentalists worry scores of wells could be operating within a few miles of historic Sand Wash within a few years.

"Despite talking about protecting these lands, all the BLM has done is open them to oil and gas," says Nada Culver, a Wilderness Society attorney based in Denver. "They went through the full analysis for thousands of acres that met all the legal requirements for wilderness - but now they're not going to designate them wilderness, they're going to drill on them."

Who owns the land?

* The United States government owns nearly a third of US land, but the share varies widely by state - from a high of 88 percent in Nevada to a low of 0.4 percent in New York.

* Throw in the amount owned by states and government holdings account for 40 percent of US land.

* In China, the state owns all the land. Reformers leased it to farmers in the '80s. But as the economy boomed, local officials began taking it back for roads, dams, and other projects. More than 30 million have lost their farms.

Sources: National Wilderness Institute; Los Angeles Times

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