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February 28, 2023

Mr. Malcolm McGeary
Deputy Director, National Park Service

Re: Colorado River Access, a Cataract Canyon take-out near Hite, Utah

Dear Deputy Director McGeary:

In early February this year, Canyonlands National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area announced that there would no longer be any maintenance performed at the North Wash Boat Ramp - the primary takeout for world famous Cataract Canyon multi-day river trips - on the Colorado River near Hite, Utah. Instead, visitors this season will need to travel 50 additional miles down the river corridor and motor across Lake Powell reservoir to Bullfrog Marina.

This announcement is the latest event in a long string of dismissive actions by Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, which appears to be clearly prioritizing one user group over another.

For the past 19 years as water levels of Lake Powell have dropped, Cataract Canyon's main take-out point has been consistently degrading. During these 19 years, and especially over the past 3 years, most river running parties have needed to roll, winch, tow, or carry their boats up a steep slope out of the water - using a complicated, costly and laborious set of techniques reminiscent of how Egyptians may have built the pyramids. In contrast, further south on the reservoir at Bullfrog Marina - where decreasing water levels have also been an issue - there have been two multi-million dollar, fast-tracked projects within two years that extended Bullfrog's boat ramps to the water's edge - actions that allowed motorized, reservoir-based users the opportunity to easily launch and retrieve their boats. In 2022, a project to pour additional concrete at Bullfrog Marina to allow reservoir access was completed in under 12 months.

Each year there are 3,000-4,000 Cataract Canyon users, supporting a multi-million dollar recreation economy in the region, who travel mainly through Canyonlands National Park crossing into Glen Canyon National Recreation Area near the end of their trip to take-out at the 19-year-old "temporary" North Wash Boat Ramp. Receding water levels in the Hite area have made it a defunct location for reservoir-based recreation. Unfortunately, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area's attention to the area has also gone away - making Hite a ghost town. Without immediate attention given to the North Wash Boat Ramp, the public will no longer be able to visit a significant portion of Canyonlands National Park via raft or boat.

With the announcement that the main take-out for Cataract Canyon will no longer be maintained, a number of whitewater concessionaires have chosen to not sell Cataract Canyon trips for the upcoming river running season. They will join a growing list of whitewater concession contract holders and many private parties who choose to not run Cataract Canyon trips solely due to the declining condition of the take-out. For those who do continue to run trips, the costs to do so will increase significantly.

The purpose statement in Glen Canyon NRA's foundational documents reads:

Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, located at the center of the Colorado Plateau, provides for public enjoyment through diverse land- and water-based recreational opportunities, and protects scenic, scientific, natural, and cultural resources on Lake Powell, the Colorado River, its tributaries, and surrounding lands.

But the agency appears to have forgotten half of its charter. The past 5 years have brought both accelerated access deterioration at North Wash and lightning-fast responses to maintain access at Bullfrog and Wahweep marinas. It is apparent that the decision makers who oversee this park unit do not deem it necessary to address Colorado River access, but instead want to focus solely on Lake Powell.

Cataract Canyon concessionaires and other river runners have attempted to work with the local Canyonlands National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area staffers to address the Hite area access issues. In doing so two things have become obvious:

- The quality of access to a Cataract Canyon take-out is a very low priority for Glen Canyon NRA.
- The working relationship between the two adjacent park units – Canyonlands and Glen Canyon – appears not to be effective or solution oriented, and riddled with conflict.

To be fair, Glen Canyon NRA has stated many times over the past 3-5 years that they are in a scoping process to identify a new river access point near the Hite area. However, little to no action has been executed. Instead, with the announcement that Glen Canyon NRA will no longer maintain the North Wash Ramp, we observe another level of disregard for the NRA's foundational purpose.

We are writing to request that the greater National Park Service administration take action: **A Memorandum of Understanding should be imposed between the two park units stating that Canyonlands National Park will oversee the maintenance of the take-out for Cataract Canyon until such time as an improved river access point is completed near Hite.**

Such an MOU will better serve the Cataract Canyon user group and allow for Cataract Canyon to be managed as a whole. It may allow Glen Canyon NRA to focus their attention on the reservoir-related issues they are already choosing to prioritize.

Going forward, Cataract Canyon outfitter representatives, and the greater river running user group need to be involved in the scoping and planning for a new river access point in the Hite area. Funding for a new access point should be set aside – separate from the emergency infrastructure funding provided to Glen Canyon NRA. Both Canyonlands and Glen Canyon need to agree to details regarding any new river access point near Hite.

Thank you in advance for your efforts taken to address this pressing issue affecting an iconic, world renowned, stretch of river managed by the National Park Service.

Sincerely,

The Utah Guides and Outfitters Association