



American Packrafting Association

3948 Hawthorne Lane
Wilson, WY 83014
907-947-6437
info@packraft.org
www.packraft.org

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House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Lands and Environmental Regulation

RE: Impediments to Public Recreation on Public Lands

Dear Members of the Subcommittee,

On behalf of the 370 members of the American Packrafting Association (APA), I appreciate the opportunity to comment on impediments to public recreation on public lands.

Packrafting is a low-impact activity that does not require typical boating infrastructure such as boat launches and take-outs. Packrafters travel very lightly, carrying our small, compact boats in our packs. The packability of packrafts allows us to access remote areas far from roads and even trails, and also allows us to roll the boats up and easily portage difficult river reaches. Packrafts are stable, durable and can be used safely even on technical whitewater.

The APA exists, in part, to secure and defend access for packrafting on public lands. We do not advocate for unfettered access. Conservation of wild rivers and wild lands is our highest concern, and we recognize that access to certain places should be restricted to protect fish, wildlife, wilderness values and the visitor experience.

One of the biggest challenges we face is securing and maintaining packrafting access in national parks. Packrafting access is either entirely or greatly restricted in Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Teton, and Dinosaur national parks. In Yellowstone, for instance, the park service has so far refused to even consider the potential for packrafting on any of 68 river segments in the park. Yosemite recently selected a preferred alternative for the management of the Merced and Tuolumne rivers that largely prohibits packrafting. In Dinosaur, hike in/float out day trips are not allowed. In other parks, such as Grand Canyon and Denali, the National Park Service has shown a willingness to accommodate packrafting. The inconsistency we encounter across the park units is hard to understand.

Heavy-handed regulation of public access can have unintended consequences. Where access is unreasonably restricted or regulated, some users will choose to go anyway, "sneaking" onto public lands without a detailed travel plan or essential safety gear, thereby increasing their risk.

Cash-strapped public agencies often resort to closing access to public lands because they feel they cannot afford to manage public access. However, most types of non-motorized public access require little to no management.

Sincerely,

Brad Meiklejohn, President