



*"At the water's edge...just keep going"*

## American Packrafting Association

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June 18, 2013

Dear Senator John Barrasso;

I am writing to you today as a Wyoming resident and founding Vice-President of the American Packrafting Association (APA). APA was founded in the fall of 2012 to represent the growing packrafting community on issues of conservation, education, safety, and access. We currently represent 420 members.

Packrafting is a form of backcountry river paddling. It is similar to kayaking in that the boats can handle challenging whitewater, but different in that packrafters can deflate their boats and roll them up to the size of a stuffed sleeping bag. There are at least five manufacturers in the U.S. making packrafts for the burgeoning world market, producing boats that weigh between 3 and 10 pounds.

The result is a tool that allows backcountry travelers to inflate or deflate their boats as needed to concoct adventurous and highly rewarding tours through wild landscapes combining backpacking, mountaineering, canyoneering, and of course river paddling. Packrafting is not a new sport. It has been popular in places like Alaska, Grand Canyon, Idaho, and of course Wyoming for decades. APA works to ensure land managers consider venues for packrafting on public lands. More on the history of packrafting is available here on our website:

[http://www.packraft.org/American\\_Packrafting\\_Association/Packrafting\\_is\\_tradition.html](http://www.packraft.org/American_Packrafting_Association/Packrafting_is_tradition.html)

As you are aware, the Craig Thomas Snake River Headwaters Legacy Act requires managing agencies to produce river management plans that provide analyses of recreational uses such as paddling on designated Wild and Scenic rivers. In the Snake River headwaters, the Lewis, upper Snake, Pacific Creek, Buffalo Fork, and Gros Ventre were all recently designated Wild and Scenic. The joint agencies (Depts of Interior and Agriculture) published the Snake River Headwaters Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP/EA) and 2013 Forest Plan Amendment EA in early June this year. The comment period ends on June 30, 2013.

While the Bridger-Teton National Forest addressed paddling issues in their EA as required by Wild and Scenic law, Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks dismissed packrafting and other forms of river paddling from detailed evaluation citing the following reasons:

1. A study of paddling is moot because it conflicts with existing regulations prohibiting river paddling in the Parks.
2. A study of paddling is moot because the rivers were designated in conditions in which paddling was non-existent, hence adding paddling would degrade those conditions.

At APA, we believe that the Parks are in violation of the law here, and should be held to the standard set by the Wild and Scenic designation. We request that you review the CRMP, in particular pages 58-60, and submit a comment to the Parks asking them to include an analysis of paddling in the CRMP.

Links to the CRMP and EA, including commenting instructions, are provided on our website:

[http://www.packraft.org/American\\_Packrafting\\_Association/Snake\\_Headwaters.html](http://www.packraft.org/American_Packrafting_Association/Snake_Headwaters.html)

A link to APA's June 5, 2013 comment letter to Yellowstone Superintendent Dan Wenk also may be found on that web page. Our letter provides more specific details on our arguments.

Opportunities for the American public to enjoy their National Parks in low-impact ways such as paddling are important for quality of life. The paddling ban in Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks is just one example of a systemic failure in the National Park Service to allow Americans a close connection to wild places. At APA, we feel that the Park's blatant compliance breach in the CRMP is a great opportunity for Americans to stand up and demand low-impact access to our public lands. Your voice will greatly assist in this goal.

Thank you,

Thomas Turiano  
Vice-President  
American Packrafting Association

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We will see you on the trails and on the water!

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American Packrafting Association  
<http://www.packraft.org>

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