

GRAND CANYON TRUST
Glen Canyon Dam Operations Challenged
Grand Canyon Trust Sues Bureau of Reclamation

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GRAND CANYON—The Grand Canyon Trust filed suit today against the Bureau of Reclamation for violations of the Endangered Species Act. The Trust claims that current flows from Glen Canyon Dam are in violation of the Act, that the Dam has been operated illegally for the past seven years.

The 1994 Biological Opinion for Glen Canyon Dam operations, written by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, requires steady flows for the benefit of humpback chub and other native fish. It states: "A program of experimental flows will be carried out to include high steady flows in the spring and low steady flows in summer and fall [called "Seasonally Adjusted Steady Flows"] during low water years (releases of approximately 8.23 million-acre-feet per year) to verify an effective flow regime and to quantify, to the extent possible, effects on endangered and native fish."

Nikolai Lash, Senior Program Director at Grand Canyon Trust, said: "Although the last seven years have been low water years, the Bureau of Reclamation continues to violate the Endangered Species Act and 1994 Biological Opinion by not testing Seasonally Adjusted Steady Flows. To put it bluntly, current flows from Glen Canyon Dam are in violation of federal law."

Grand Canyon Trust scientist, Rick Johnson, spoke of the difference between the current fluctuating flows and the steady flows that are required by law: "Fluctuating flows erode sediment faster than steady flows. If we are to maintain humpback chub habitat in the Colorado River through Grand Canyon, we need to slow the loss of sediment with steady flows and periodically use spike flows to replenish the beaches. In addition to increased erosion, fluctuating flows threaten the survival of humpback chub by destabilizing the shoreline habitat, and reducing shoreline warming. If we are to retain humpback chub in the Colorado River through Grand Canyon, the research points to steady flows being a big part of the equation."

The Grand Canyon Protection Act resolved a long-running debate over whether dam operations should favor cheap peaking power or protection of the Park resources downstream. Although Congress gave precedence to park resources, politics favor cheap peaking power, a kind of varying power generation that sends daily floods out of the dam

when air conditioners turn on, and turns off the dam spigot when demand drops. The Bureau of Reclamation, charged with operating the dam, follows the politics of power, creating an artificial river that is destroying the vestiges of the real one.

Because hydropower revenue is used to subsidize additional diversion projects from the Colorado River, the seven basin states and power entities typically vote as a block within the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program. The result is gridlocked majority support for a fluctuating flow regime beneficial to power and detrimental to Grand Canyon.

The Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program is the 25-stakeholder committee that makes recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior on Glen Canyon Dam operations that will improve resource conditions in Grand Canyon. But in spite of the U.S Geological Survey's recent SCORE report documenting the decline of Grand Canyon resources over the past 10 years, environmental interests continue to get outvoted by water and power interests. The effort to change from a fluctuating flow regime to a steady flow regime has been continually rejected.

The USGS SCORE Report found that between 1998 and 2003, the total campsite areas in Grand Canyon decreased by 55 percent. Four of the eight native fish historically found in Grand Canyon have vanished. The endangered humpback chub, found only in the Colorado River, has dropped in population to 6,000, down from 10,000 in 1989.

What does the Trust want to see happen as a result of their lawsuit? Neil Levine, Grand Canyon Trust attorney, said: "We are asking for compliance with the law. That means changing the current regime of fluctuating flows to Seasonally-Adjusted Steady Flows, or SASF, as required by law. The SASF regime requires there be steady flows between April and October, for the benefit of the endangered humpback chub."

Lash concluded: "Arizona has never been called the Glen Canyon Dam state. Power can be replaced, but not the Grand Canyon. Alternative power options for Glen Canyon Dam exist today, and more will exist in the future, including renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power. But no replacement options exist for Grand Canyon. Isn't the Grand Canyon deserving of the best care and protection possible?"