

TO: Grand Canyon River Guides
FROM: David Brower, Martin Litton, and Ken Sleight
RE: Restoration of Glen Canyon and the Colorado River
DATE: April 1, 2000

Dear Friends:

We are writing to you as friends of the Grand Canyon. As you know, we have had a long and wonderful association with the Colorado River and we have experienced its many moods, and all its beauty and fury over decades. We write to you today, on the occasion of the Guides Training Seminar, to enlist your support in ensuring the restoration of the Colorado River.

Thirty-five years ago—before some of you were born! —we were embroiled in one of the most important conservation fights in U.S. river history, struggling to stop the construction of Marble Canyon Dam and Bridge Canyon Dam. It's almost unthinkable today that the U.S. government came so close to destroying a World Heritage Site and one of our premiere national parks. Yet had we not undertaken the fight then, which so many people told us was unwinnable, there would be no Grand Canyon River Guides association today, because there would be no river in the Grand Canyon upon which to do your guiding.

The Grand Canyon was considered "saved" when President Johnson proclaimed Marble Canyon National Monument—killing Dominy's plan for dams in the gorge. Since then, however, the evidence has continued to mount that Grand Canyon is not safe and indeed it is growing sicker and sicker. The Colorado River's ecosystem is in trouble and we have little time to resuscitate it. There are many reasons why the canyon is dying, but there is one primary reason, one correctable mistake that we can point to, and that is Glen Canyon Dam.

We grew up in an era in which building dams was highly regarded. The heroism of the dam-builders was the stuff of legend even before the decision was made to build Glen Canyon Dam. By the time we got organized to stop Bridge Canyon and Marble Canyon dams, attitudes had begun to change. Since then, the image of dams has changed even more dramatically. Concrete plugs are no longer seen as life givers, but as river-killers.

Today we are at the threshold of a wholly new era. A major campaign is underway over the fate of four salmon-killing dams on the Snake River. Two dams on the Elwha are slated for demolition. Hundreds of dams are up for relicensing over the coming decade and many of them will be decommissioned. And these activities are not restricted to the U.S. From France to Thailand, Australia to Brazil, talk of decommissioning dams is giving new hope to dying rivers all over the world.

This is an exciting time for us to see and be a part of. Yet for us the biggest, most exciting opportunity is right here before us. It is the Holy Grail of dam decommissioning efforts and more importantly it is a key element of restoring the ailing Colorado River.

There are new developments in this effort that we are pleased to share with you. In the past three months, more than 50 organizations, associations, and businesses have teamed-up and lent their support to restore Glen Canyon. They're joined by the Dineh (Navajo) Medicine Men's Association, which recently announced their full support and campaign plans for decommissioning Glen Canyon Dam. The traditional religious practitioners have been silent over all these decades, but now they are beginning to speak out about the damage that was done to the hundreds of shrines and sacred places inundated by "Lake" Powell.

Restoring Glen Canyon and the Colorado River represents so much more than bringing back the most beautiful canyon on Earth. It is also about restoring the rights of indigenous people to practice their traditional religious customs.

This new information is exciting, but we want to emphasize that it is just the latest step in the growing movement that will bring about the restoration of this spectacular canyon. This movement also needs the support and involvement of all of you—people who know and love the river, at least what's left of it.

So we write to you today to ask you to join in this monumental, yet eminently achievable task. Individually and as a group, the Grand Canyon River Guides can help bring down one of the biggest environmental mistakes of the twentieth century. Let's make history, together.

We speak to you as friends but also as people who have experienced the wildness and beauty of Glen Canyon and the Grand Canyon. We recognize that draining Glen Canyon Reservoir will bring about changes in the river downstream. But these are necessary changes to restore the natural processes of a world-class river. Were this not to occur the integrity ecosystem of the Grand Canyon will soon disappear as well. This river did very well without Glen Canyon Dam and will do much better when it is decommissioned.

At the celebration for the Colorado River at Glen Canyon Dam two weeks ago, we ushered in the "Century of River Restoration." We can think of no more appropriate campaign to begin the 21st century than to correct one of the most monumental errors of the 20th.

Please join up, by first endorsing the Glen Canyon Declaration, then by considering participating in educational and outreach efforts for a restored Colorado River. Let us gather ideas about how to make the most of a Grand Canyon river no longer regulated by Glen Canyon turbines.

Lastly, you are all invited to join us on that first boat trip down the Glen. But you'd better hurry, because we're getting on in years, and we don't have any time to waste! And neither does the river, our river, the Colorado.