



Rafting on the Poudre River brought \$11 million to region in 2010

BY PAT FERRIER • PATFERRIER@COLORADOAN.COM • FEBRUARY 10, 2011

Local whitewater rafting companies last year had their third best year in more than two decades, thanks in part to a robust snowpack.

Guides brought nearly 37,400 people down the glistening waters of the Poudre River - about 400 more than the year before when the economic downturn hit the industry, according to a new report issued by the [Colorado River Outfitters Association](#).

The Poudre River was the sixth busiest of the 27 Colorado rivers with commercial activity.

Because the Poudre is designated as wild and scenic, rafting companies are limited on the number of trips they can run each year down the river to prevent overcrowding and overuse.

The five permitted outfitters can bring 100 people per day on the weekends and 120 on weekdays during the 100-day season.

Typically, outfitters run between 6,500 and 8,000 people per season, and most companies raft almost the full season, said Jon Halvorson of the U.S. Forest Service office in Fort Collins.

Because of the limits placed on rafting companies, the Poudre's numbers have remained relatively stable.

"That's one of the good things about a wild and scenic river," said Brad Modesitt, owner of Mountain Whitewater Descents, 1329 N. U.S. Highway 287. "It won't be too crowded."

"As a business owner, I can't grow my business but we are offering such a superior product; you can't beat that," he said. "I'm happy the limits are there."

In a business that ebbs and flows with the river, mountain snowpack is critical.

Last year, the season got off to a slow start when high water from snowmelt and rain kept many people away thinking the river was unsafe.

"It hurt us early, but we finished the year with not our best year, but close," Modesitt said. And this season, which starts May 15, is looking like Mountain Whitewater's best year ever, he said.

With mountain snowpack at about 130 percent of average, Modesitt already is getting bookings for summer trips.

"We will have some water and we'll have some fun out there."

Well-educated and affluent, customers of the five local rafting companies permitted to take visitors down the river spent \$4.3 million on rafting, food, lodging, souvenirs in the area. That translates into an \$11 million economic boon for the city and its surrounding area, according to the Colorado Tourism Board.

The economic impact is up slightly from \$4.2 million in direct expenditures and \$10.8 million overall in the 2009 survey.

Statewide, the 2010 economic impact totaled more than \$150 million from more than a half-million rafters.

"Rafting has always been a cost-effective way for outdoors enthusiasts to indulge themselves in nature and for families to vacation together - not to mention a great venue for team-building outings by everyone from corporate groups to scout troops," said newly elected CROA chairman Johnny Cantamessa in a statement.

"When times and budgets are tight, the thrill per dollar ratio becomes that much more important, as evidenced by our industry's strong 2010."

The Arkansas River was the busiest with 211,150 commercial user days, according to CROA.
