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Rafting season is here, and the Poudre River is running strong already

Rafting season is in full force on the Poudre River in northern Colorado, where the peak spring run-off is expected soc these photos taken recently. Most Colorado rivers will have less water than normal this summer, but the Poudre will ha average flow thanks to spring snowstorms and rainy days since. (J. Smolenske, Provided by Rocky Mountain Adventu

By **THE KNOW** |
June 1, 2021 at 8:30 p.m.

All those spring snowstorms that blanketed Front Range mountains and the rainy days that followed have made

"We have quite a bit of water here early season," said Kyle Johnson, co-owner of Rocky Mountain Adventures, operates on the Poudre. "We are running rafts now, and we've got great whitewater, both family-friendly Class 3 some of those more high-adventure Class 4 runs. For us, it's less about when that peak is, more about what tha the season looks like. I don't anticipate a very large peak this year, and I'm hoping we can hold on to some dece levels through June and July."

More rain and cool temperatures are forecast for that part of the state on Sunday and Monday. Above-average and cool temperatures across the Front Range this spring have had a benefit on the Poudre beyond the amoun rafting.

A rapid snowmelt upstream could have been problematic because of last year's Cameron Peak fire, which occu area that drains into Poudre Canyon. Cool temperatures prevented that.

"We don't operate on any sections of the river that were directly affected by the fire, meaning there is no burn sc banks of sections that we run commercially, but the headwaters were greatly affected," Johnson said. "There we early on of possible flash flooding scenarios, depending on how the snowmelt started. But some of these spring some of these light rains have really dampened those concerns. We did see a little bit of discoloration in the sta a little gray hue to the water, but things have cleared up and we remain optimistic that we won't have any great the fire."

Clear Creek is another stream that should benefit from above-average precipitation in the Front Range. Peak flo usually comes around mid-June, according to Dale Drake, general manager of the Clear Creek Rafting Co.

"We're really excited about a great season," said Drake, whose company operates roughly from Idaho Springs t down-river. "It's always exciting when the water levels are on the way up, because there's a lot of thrilling adven horizon for us. It looks like we're going to have a lot of guests, potentially, so it looks like we're going to have a r year. The phones are ringing."

Colorado's rafting industry reported more than 430,000 user days last year, a decrease of 20.7% from 2019 bec COVID-19, with an economic impact of $148.7 million. Rafting typically begins in May on most Colorado rivers, were prohibited from operating last year until June due to the pandemic.

"I think compared to last year, when we didn't know if we were going to have a season at all or if customers wou people are like, 'A little low water this year? I'll take it,' " said David Costlow, executive director of the Colorado Association. "I think that's kind of the attitude, 'If it's just low water, I can survive that, but being closed, I can't su

The heart of the Colorado rafting industry is the Arkansas River, by far the busiest in the state for rafting and one busiest in the nation. With outstanding rafting from north of Buena Vista to the Royal Gorge, it accounted last ye than 42% of the state's user days, and no other river came close to that. Although outfitters on the Arkansas will do this year with less water than normal, there are water storage and flow controls in that basin to mitigate the ir below-average year.

"We wish there was more of this resource that is the lifeblood of Colorado in so many ways," said Andy Neinas, Echo Canyon River Expeditions, one of the outfitters operating on the Arkansas. "That is going to have an impa industry. We're still going to be taking guests rafting, but we're not going to have those big flows.

"We're not going to see the big waves and holes for as long as we might normally see them, but we're still going great, authentic Colorado summer experience on Colorado's rivers throughout the entire state."

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