

The Pueblo Chieftain

BUSINESS

Colorado whitewater adventures await: Arkansas River outfitters ready to float into summer



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CAÑON CITY – April snow in the high country is expected to bring May waves on the Arkansas River, where rafting outfitters are gearing up for a busy season on the nation's most-rafted river.

Although the Arkansas River Basin currently has an average snowpack, “we can get so many big, wet snows in April,” Royal Gorge Rafting Owner Ty Seufer said. “Those April dumps really, really help the initial surge and runoff.”

Seufer is ready for his 18th season on the river and expects full-time rafting to start April 22. Right next door, Andy Neinas, owner of Echo Canyon River Expeditions, is set to open for business May 7.

Summer rafting up 41%

The number of rafters participating in guided whitewater trips on the Arkansas River jumped by 41% from 2020 to 2021, Neinas said. Rafting generates an estimated \$66 million in financial impacts on communities along the Arkansas River, according to the Colorado River Outfitters Association.

Neinas, who owns the region’s largest and oldest rafting outfitter, said he believes that upward trend will continue this summer.

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“In terms of trip volume, the summer of 2021 was the best year of our 44-year history,” he said. “I know many of my rafting colleagues experienced similarly huge seasons and we fully expect summer 2022 to be amazing as well.”

Seufer agreed.

“We had a fabulous year last year and there is no reason why 2022 won’t be the best season ever,” Seufer said. “We are pumped for a great year.”

Trips tailored to fit the customer

Rafting outfitters tailor trips to fit any family and the level of adventure their customers are seeking. Mild trips are suitable for first-time rafters or families with children as young as 4, while wild trips through fast-moving sections like the Royal Gorge are ideal for big-water fans.

“Rafting the Arkansas River appeals to so many people because of its varied terrain and rapids,” Neinas said. “The river transitions so the smooth water of the scenic float is followed by the fun rapids of the Bighorn Sheep Canyon, which is followed by the heart-pounding waves of the Royal Gorge.”

The outfitters also offer a range of multi-day camping trips, full-day or half-day trips. Fishing trips and kayaking trips also are among options for customers to try.

Royal Gorge Rafting is located at 45045 U.S. Highway 50 west of Canon City. Seufer also owns the Royal Gorge Zipline Tours, numerous summer lodging facilities and the Whitewater Bar and Grill at the same location. For details, go to royalgorgerafting.net.

Echo Canyon is located at 45000 W. U.S. Highway 50. Neinas also owns the 8 Mile Bar and Grill as well as the Royal Gorge Cabins and glamping tents. For details, go to raftecho.com.

The Arkansas River Outfitting Association encompasses 31 different companies. To find out more, go to arkansasriveroutfitters.org.

Rafting: Float your boat: Southern Colorado rafting industry rides high on a 'perfect storm'

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