



Press Release — For Immediate Release

Arkansas River outfitters open for a predicted strong rafting season



SALIDA, Colo. — *April 22, 2017* — Buoyed by warmer temperatures melting Colorado’s alpine snowpack, whitewater rafting outfitters are opening for the season this month. Arkansas River guide John Treleani took a family of first-time rafters from New Orleans on a float trip last weekend through the upper reaches of Browns Canyon National Monument.

“We had a wonderful day doing a scenic trip with their children, who had never been rafting before,” Treleani said. “The family went skiing in Breckenridge and decided to also go rafting on their Colorado vacation. It’s really great to be back on the water.”

Multiple river outfitters in the Arkansas River Valley are open for a season primed to offer perfect water flows through August. At 110 percent of average, Colorado’s snowpack will deliver a good peak flow in late May or early June and sustain a measured runoff into July. Full reservoirs throughout the state will take boaters through mid August.

“The industry as a whole couldn’t be happier about the snowpack we have right now. We are excited for another good year,” said Brandon Slate, owner of Rocky Mountain Outdoor Center, where kayaking and SUP instruction as well as raft trips started April 15.

Colorado's snowpack is nearly identical to last year, when the state's whitewater rafting industry hosted a record 550,861 visitors, an 8.3% increase over the prior season, according to a report by the Colorado River Outfitters Association. The industry's economic impact totaled \$179.8 million, an 18.7% increase over the busiest, pre-recession record in 2007.



The Arkansas River holds 40% of the commercial rafting marketshare, or about a quarter of a million people that spend an estimated \$73 million in the region while boating from above Buena Vista through Salida to Cañon City.

"We used to start rafting in May but we've received more and more requests in April, especially as the weather gets nicer," said Travis Hochard, general manager at River Runners.

Whitewater rafting on the Arkansas River picks up in mid May but the shoulder season is an optimal time to avoid crowds and enjoy the technical nature of paddling lower flows.

"This is a unique time of year when it is really quiet and oftentimes, you can have the river to yourself," said James Whiteside, owner of Royal Gorge Rafting and Zip Line Tours in Cañon City. "It's a great time for viewing wildlife and the spring wildflower bloom."

Visitors can see Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and deer, among other wildlife. Whiteside said he looks for the fast-flying peregrine falcons in late April and May when the raptors migrate through the region.

Early season also offers the best fishing opportunities on the Arkansas River. During the famous Mother's Day caddis hatch, the larger aquatic insects become an important food source for trout and present anglers some of the best dry fly fishing of the year.

The paddling season officially kicks off in Buena Vista on Memorial Day weekend during PaddleFest, May 26-29, 2017, an event that encourages people to get involved in river sports through clinics, competitions, races and outdoor concerts. River events include kayaks, rafts and SUPs. Many events are participatory but professional competitions are fun to watch with music and riverside action. Further south, the weekend of May 4-7, 2017, brings the Cañon City Music & Blossom Festival, where a Main Street parade features marching bands and floats, along with the state's oldest rodeo, a craft fair and a carnival.

Music & Blossom Festival attendees can visit the Royal Gorge Bridge & Park and ride the Royal Gorge Route Railroad while in Cañon City, arranging those trips through their whitewater river outfitters. As more visitors discover the Arkansas River Valley, outfitters are offering additional activities such as rock climbing, ATV tours and zipline parks, for a second or third day of fun.

For information about Colorado's snowpack, river levels, and choosing the appropriate whitewater rafting trip and other outdoor adventures for your family or group, contact an Arkansas River outfitter at www.ArkansasRiverOutfitters.org.

About Arkansas River Outfitters Association

Arkansas River Outfitters Association (AROA) consists of knowledgeable, experienced and licensed professionals who are dedicated to offering world-class outdoor fun on one of the most popular rivers for rafting in United States, Colorado's Arkansas River. AROA's members offer a wide range of whitewater experiences for all ages and adrenaline levels, and are truly committed to providing exceptional service for a memorable adventure.



AROA, partnering with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and Chaffee County Visitors Bureau are grantees of the 2017 Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) Marketing Matching Grant program.