

Grand Canyon to change 'unfair' permit system

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(AP) -- Getting one of the roughly 11,500 permits granted each year to backpack overnight in the Grand Canyon has become so competitive and "unfair" that managers at the national park have decided to change the system.

Now those who want the coveted permits either show up in person or try their luck with mail or fax machines on the day the permits become available.

Those who go in person line up at the backcountry office starting early in the morning. Those who try to fax often are in for hours of constantly redialing because of the demand.

October and May are the most popular months for those seeking permits to camp most places below the rim, with nearly one of every two people denied.

National Park Service administrators at the [Grand Canyon](#) have decided the system is unfair because it favors those who live near the massive gorge or have the time and resources to fly there just to get a permit.

The agency is proposing to end the current system in February, making everyone in the world compete for advanced reservations by fax and mail only. Eventually the park also plans to move to an online reservation system.

Also, the Park Service is not allowing any more individuals to establish commercial backpacking businesses until the agency sorts out a larger plan for the backcountry.

"We're trying to provide better equity between locals and international visitors," said Barclay Trimble, a deputy superintendent.

Some of the 26 commercial outfitters who take customers on paid, guided backpacking trips in the canyon are unhappy with the proposal.

"It's going to cost some people some jobs. There's no doubt about it," said Blaine Stuart, manager of Angel's Gate Tours.

He and others say the park's move will cost them the ability to guarantee faraway customers their choice destinations far in advance, meaning they will lose business and sometimes be unable to obtain permits at all.

Wayne Ranney, who guides some trips commercially and backpacks the canyon in his free time, said he believes locals should have the best chance of hiking the canyon.

"To think of somebody from Cape Town, South Africa, having just as equal a chance as someone from Arizona or the United States - I know it sounds weird, but I don't think that's fair," he said.

Trimble said he doesn't think a new system will harm commercial guides.

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