



Interpretive Plan

For Concessioners Who Provide Guided Float Trips

Float trips are a unique way to experience the beauty and diversity of Grand Teton National Park (NP). They provide a visitor experience that offers wildlife viewing with ever-changing scenic vistas of the Teton spires and the enjoyment of floating the braided channels of the Snake River. From this unique vantage point, visitors can gain an appreciation of this landscape and understand the importance of protecting special places like Grand Teton NP.

As a park concession float guide, you have the opportunity to use the unique setting of the Snake River to share the resources of Grand Teton NP with your guests. You also have the responsibility to provide for the safety of your clients. This document provides you with safety and interpretive tips that will help you fulfill your responsibilities as a float guide who works for a park concessioner.

Safety

In the van

Safety is the most important element of a guided float trip. Seat belt use in the van is a major safety concern as you transport your guests to and from the river. The Federal Code of Regulation (CFR), which are the federal laws enforced in National Parks (i.e., justification for tickets) CFR 4.15 states, "Each operator and passenger occupying any seating position of a motor vehicle in a park area will have a safety belt or child restraint system properly fastened at all times when the vehicle is in motion." Another safety concern is safe driving. CFR§4.22 states, "Operating a motor vehicle without due care or at a speed greater than that which is reasonable and prudent considering wildlife, traffic, weather, road and light conditions and road character...[is prohibited]." In short, everyone in the van must use seatbelts. To avoid feeling like the bad guy, the seatbelt issue can be approached by saying "The Park Service makes us" or "It is federal law, so please use your seatbelt." Also, the driver must drive at or below the posted speed limit.

Safety orientations

Driving safely, using seatbelts, providing safety orientations, and handling the boat safely are the most critical elements of a concessioner guided float trip. A safety

orientation must be provided on every trip before guests climb into the boat. Guides should brief all visitors on the hazards of the river, weather conditions, and proper seating requirements while in the boat. See page 6 for an example safety orientation. In addition to sharing critical safety information with your guests, these safety orientations also help visitors relax because they have a better understanding of trip risks and your expectations of their behavior.

Introductions

Road Maps

A friendly introduction that includes your name and an orientation to the trip (e.g., length of trip, section of river to be traveled, water conditions, etc.) and to Grand Teton NP is the first step in building a rapport with your clients. Passing around a map of Grand Teton NP during the van drive that shows the section of river that your guests will be floating (e.g., a park map with the section from Deadman's to Moose highlighted in yellow) can help augment your verbal trip description and help folks visually understand the length and topography of the trip. Visual interpretive tools, such as maps and photographs, increase your ability to reach more of your audience by addressing both visual and auditory learners.

Guide and Guest Introductions

Sharing a bit about yourself, your river experience, and your company helps build trust and creates a friendly atmosphere. You may also want to include self-introductions of each of the guests. Self-introductions (i.e., each guest says his/her name, where he/she is from, and his/her familiarity with the local area) can help break the ice and provide you with an opportunity to learn the names and



“The purpose of interpretation is to stimulate the reader or hearer toward a desire to widen his horizon of interests and knowledge, and to gain an understanding of the greater truths that lie behind any statements of fact.”

-Freeman Tilden

something about each of your guests. These introductions will also help you customize your trip by giving you the opportunity to learn about the interests of your clients. Making an effort to remember your clients' names and addressing clients by their names also builds rapport and gains their respect. The van drive to the put-in location is an excellent time for road map, guide, and guest introductions.

Interpretation

Definition

Ham (1992) defines interpretation as “an approach to communication. Interpretation involves translating the technical language of a natural science or related field into terms and ideas that people who aren't scientists can readily understand” (p. 3). Interpretation involves more than just sharing factual information with visitors. Effective interpretive float trips are organized, have a main idea, and are relevant to your audience.

Organization

Think of last time you walked into a movie late. If you are like most people, it took you a while to figure out what was going on. Who were the main characters? What was the plot? Once you figured out those details, you could relax and enjoy the movie . . . but then, one of the characters did something that did not fit with what you thought was going on. You searched back through your memory of what you had seen and tried to again make sense of the movie. This process takes a lot of effort. If you paid a lot of money to see the movie, you probably were willing to stay and figure out the plot. However, if you were watching a movie at home, you may have been less likely to stick with the movie and may have flipped the channel to a program that was easier to follow. In either case you would be considered a “non-captive audience.”

Non-captive Audiences

Non-captive audiences are voluntary audiences that do not expect external rewards and will switch attention if bored. Students in an academic class are “captive audiences.” They will make an effort to pay attention, even if bored, because the external reward (i.e., the grade) is important (Ham, 1992).

Guests on a concessioner guided float trip are non-captive audiences; they won't spend a lot of time and effort to follow an unorganized tour. It is important to present your information in an organized fashion that requires little mental effort to figure out what is going on because your non-captive audiences will tune you

out if you are too hard to follow. Leaving your guests with a better understanding of Grand Teton NP and providing them with opportunities to create emotional and/or intellectual connections to this place involves planning ahead for each tour with an organized presentation. The key components to an organized tour are a main idea, introduction, body, and conclusion.

Main Ideas

A float trip down the Snake River offers many interpretive subjects (e.g., river, mountains, animals, and geology). It may be tempting to toss out random bits of information along the way as you see one of these subjects. You can certainly use these subjects, but incorporate them into your predesigned float trip. Organization of your ideas will make your trip less work for your audience to follow and less likely that they will “flip the channel” to something that requires less mental effort. To provide float trips that are effective in conveying your message and easy for your audience to follow, you need to have a main idea or “theme.”

Imagine a pearl necklace. Now imagine that necklace, but without the string. You no longer have a connected string of pearls, but rather a pile of loose pearls rolling in many different directions. Trips without a main idea are like the string of pearls without the string: bits of interesting information all rolling in different directions. Information rolling in many different directions is much like a movie without a plot and a constant change in the main characters—would you sit through a movie such as that? Themes can be as simple as, “The Snake River corridor provides a lush home for many plants and animals,” or a bit more descriptive: “The diversity of plants and animals found in the riparian habitat along the Snake River Corridor contribute to the mosaic of life found in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.” Themes help keep your tour organized by providing a common thread throughout the many stops and conversations that occur during the float trip.



1. Select your general topic and use it to complete the following sentence:

"Generally, my tour is about put your topic here (e.g., wildlife)."

2. State your topic in more specific terms and complete the following sentence:

"Specifically, I want to tell my audience about put your specific topic here (e.g., wildlife viewing in Grand Teton NP)."

3. Now, express your theme by completing the following sentence:

"After my float trip, I want my audience to understand that put your theme here (e.g., "The riparian habitat of the Snake River is prime habitat for many wildlife species, and understanding what habitat animals prefer will help make wildlife watching trips more successful)."

*Text from Ham, 1992

Tour Introductions

We already discussed the importance of guide, guest, and trip introductions. Just as those introductions are important for orienting your guests to the day's activities, it is also important to introduce the "verbal" part of your tour. This introduction should capture the attention of your audience, introduce your theme, and engage your guest in the information you have to share.

Themes can easily be worked into your introduction. For example, you can use a map of Grand NP to highlight the route of the float trip and to show the different wildlife habitats (e.g., riparian, sage, forest, and alpine). This approach provides an entry point for introducing a theme about wildlife habitats and wildlife viewing.

Body

The body of your program is made up of the facts that support your main idea. A well developed body is organized and uses whatever facts, concepts, analogies, and examples are needed to make the information enjoyable, entertaining, meaningful, and relevant to your audience (Ham, 1992). Another important part of the body is various resource messages, such as "keep your distance from wildlife (a minimum of 100 yards), do not feed the wildlife by leaving trash out," etc. You can find details on the wildlife in Grand Teton NP and other information that will help you build the body of your program at: www.nps.gov/grte/parkmgmt/brguide.htm



Conclusion

It is quite common to cover more than one subject while guiding a trip. Maybe your clients are interested in plants, animals, and geology. Think about the abovementioned string of pearls. Now, instead of a single strand of pearls, imagine a pearl necklace with multiple strands. Geology can be one strand, animals can be another, and plants yet another. The idea is to keep these multiple subjects linked to themselves and ultimately to each other. Your conclusion should reinforce your theme and provide you the opportunity to clasp your multiple-strand pearl necklace and send your clients home with a packaged idea that they will remember each time they reminisce about floating the Snake River.

The conclusion is also a great time to mention the importance of protected areas, such as Grand Teton NP, in ensuring that we, and future generations, will continue to have recreational and educational experiences in amazing places such as Grand Teton NP. Conclusions are also a great time to review pertinent safety issues such as using caution when exiting the boat and moving around slippery rocks.

Park Themes

Grand Teton NP has a list of primary interpretive themes (see the "Grand Teton NP Interpretive Themes" table on page 4). These themes are used to develop park interpretive programs. You can use these themes to develop organized and thematic float trips that will help your guests connect to, and understand, the amazing resources of Grand Teton NP. Tours that are understood by audience members are more enjoyable and can increase visitor satisfaction with your trip.

Teachable Moments

A float trip offers many opportunities for teachable moments that may not be directly tied to your theme, but are extraordinary chance encounters that warrant attention. For example, your group may spot a beaver gnawing on some

Through interpretation,
understanding.
Through understanding,
appreciation.
Through appreciation,
protection.

cottonwood trees. This chance encounter can be folded back into a cultural history theme about the important role wildlife played in drawing people in to Jackson Hole (e.g., beavers drew mountain men to the valley). Themes serve as organizational guides and can be complimented with teachable moments.

The Interpretive Setting: Floating down the Snake River

An interpretive setting is simply landscape that we “interpret” or share with our visitors. The interpretive setting for float trips in Grand Teton NP is the Snake River corridor, which includes the plants, animals, and cultural history of this riparian habitat. Also included in an interpretive setting are the opportunities guides have to interact with their visitors while floating the river. River trips often offer an abundance of time to interact with visitors. However, this setting is rather unpredictable because you never know when you’re going to come across several river otters playing or a group of bison taking a drink from the river. While there are predictable landmarks that you can prepare in advance to talk about, these unpredictable moments are often the highlights of the trip. Being well versed in the natural and cultural history of this area can help you enhance the visitors’ experience by adding depth to both predictable and chance sightings. Speaking clearly and addressing visitors who are sitting in front and behind you will ensure that all members of your group will be able to hear your information.

Tips to Engage Your Audience

Relevance

Relevant information is new facts or stories that connect with information that is familiar or has “context” for your guests. Relevant information is easier to understand because we relate to it in the context of something else we already know (Ham, 1992). Information that is not relevant or has no context is difficult to follow and understand; it is meaningless, much like a movie with a constant change of characters and no plot. The art of

interpretation is finding ways to facilitate connections between the new information you present on your float trips and the familiar information that is swirling around in the brains of your guests. One way to find out what is relevant to your guests is through chit chat in the van on the way to the put-in. You can use this information to customize your float trip and present new information in a way that will connect to something that is familiar to your guests.

Interpretive Tricks

The interpretive tricks listed below can help you make your information relevant and create a “learner friendly” environment that is more engaging and less work for your non-captive audiences.

*Use questions to focus attention on a specific object. For example, “Everyone look at the Teton Mountains. What were your thoughts when you first saw the Tetons? What do you think the early pioneers thought of those mountains when they entered the valley for the first time?” This line of questioning can help focus your audience on the determined spirit of the pioneers who helped settle this valley.

*Use foreshadowing. Foreshadowing can be used to peak curiosity and the interest of your guests. For example, “The Snake River corridor provides food and shelter for many animals. Who can list one such animal? As we float the river we may have the opportunity to view any of those animals you listed. As we make our way down river I will be sharing with you wildlife viewing tips and tricks.” Foreshadowing is an important tool because it can be used to create a sense of anticipation just like suspenseful music in a scary movie that hints danger lurks for the unsuspecting.

*Have a positive attitude. If you look like you are relaxed and having fun, your guests will take that cue from you and relax and enjoy the trip.

*Use a contrived situation. “If Congress had not established Grand Teton NP in 1950, what would this view look like today?”

Grand Teton NP Interpretive Themes

1. The dramatic scenery of the Teton Range and Jackson Hole comes from fault block mountain building and carving by glaciers and other erosive forces.
2. Grand Teton NP, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, and Yellowstone NP comprise the heart of one of the largest, most intact temperate ecosystems remaining in the world.
3. Grand Teton NP provides a diversity of habitats for a variety of plant and animal species that interact as a unit rather than as individuals.
4. Visitors bear responsibility for, as well as ownership of, public lands such as Grand Teton NP, and must strive for a balance between resource preservation and use.

LNT Principles Applicable to Float Trips

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
(e.g., bring water, sunscreen, etc.)
 2. Leave What You Find
(e.g., don't take home river cobbles)
 3. Respect Wildlife
(e.g., keep a football field of distance from large animals)
 4. Be Considerate of Other Visitors
(e.g., let nature sounds prevail and avoid making loud noises)
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*Use personification. "What might an eagle say if he could share his stories about stealing fish from osprey?"

*Self-referencing or getting your clients to think about themselves and their experiences draws your guests into what you are saying because it makes the information personally relevant. This also helps individuals remember new facts because they can attach the new information to something familiar. "Think of the last time you . . ." or "Have you ever . . ." are effective self-referencing questions.

*Make a joke. Humor may also be used to help lighten the mood. Humor can be a very effective tool for engaging your audience, but it should be used with caution because what one person thinks is funny can be very offensive to another person.

*Comparisons can enhance learning because they allow you to bridge the familiar with the unfamiliar. "Picking a route in a braided river like the Snake is like finding the right freeway in Los Angeles; you have to keep your eyes open for important landmarks and signs."

Non-verbal Communication

Interpretation includes more than just oral communication. We communicate through the signs we post at our offices, pamphlets we handout, and most importantly through our actions. For example, if, while floating down the river, you see a moose, you turn and look at your clients with a finger to your lips and raised eyebrows while gesturing toward the animal, your guests will know there is something special to look at. You do not need to say anything to convey your excitement.

Visitors also learn from our river etiquette. For example, if we toss trash (even organic waste like an apple core) while floating, visitors will assume that is correct behavior and also toss trash into the river. Knowing the communication power of our actions, it is important that everyone practices Leave No Trace Ethics (LNT) while on the river and in the backcountry—on and off duty. We all need to work together to minimize

our impacts on the resources so that we and future generations can continue to enjoy the park's resources for many years to come.

Why Share These Resources?

This rugged landscape can mean many things to many people. Some may focus on the grandeur of the snowcapped mountains while others may marvel at the diversity of wildlife. We rely on you to share the natural, cultural, and recreational resources of Grand Teton NP with your clients. If we miss opportunities to inspire visitors to care for and about protected resources, like those found in Grand Teton NP, we jeopardize the future of wild places for generations yet to come. Through an organized and thoughtful approach to your guided float trips, you can share the wildlife, scenic vistas, and ever changing beauty of the Snake River with your clients and inspire them to care about and for the protected resources of Grand Teton NP.

References and Suggested Reads

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Example Safety Orientation

Listed below are several important points that should be addressed during a safety orientation before each float trip. These points are written as if a guide was giving the safety orientation to a group of clients.

- Most accidents on the river occur within 20 feet of the shore (e.g., slipping on wet rocks and tripping or falling when entering and exiting the raft). We need to be careful when moving around shore and the raft.

- If you should fall out of the boat, make eye contact with me (the guide), and I will provide directions for what to do. I may have you swim to shore, swim toward the boat, or I may maneuver the boat toward you, or toss you a rope.

- If you start floating downstream, position your body into a “lounge chair pose.” That means, point your feet downstream with toes out of the water. The reason for this pose is to prevent foot entrapments (catching on submerged trees or other submerged objects) and for hitting other obstacles feet first instead of head first.

- When in the water, avoid strainers/sweepers. These are partially submerged trees and the branches in the water act as strainers. These branches allow water to pass through, but not people or other objects. If you cannot avoid a strainer, try to get your body on top of the tree/log.

- If you find yourself under the raft, pick one direction and keep swimming that direction until you are out from under the raft.

- Do not grab branches, and watch out for low-hanging branches as we float down river.

- The best way to sit in the raft is to have both feet touching the bottom of the raft. This offers the best stability and reduces your chances of falling out of the boat.

- In the rare event that I (the guide) should fall out of the raft, first, don't panic, and second, make eye contact with me. I will provide directions to help me get out of the water.

