

# The Pueblo Chieftain

## Rafting makes bigger splash

Arkansas River state's busiest; 211,000 rafters, \$24M spent.

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AP PHOTO/FILE Rafters ride upstream from Parkdale in 2009.

When it comes to rafting in Colorado, the Arkansas River is still king.

An estimated 211,150 people rafted the Arkansas River between Leadville and Pueblo last summer, according to the annual "Commercial River Use in the State of Colorado" report issued this week.

The river was the biggest draw in the state, accounting for about 42 percent of all rafting trips, based on figures in the report prepared by the [Colorado River Outfitters Association](#).

Direct spending by rafters during 2010 totaled \$24.4 million in the Upper Arkansas River Valley.

The overall economic impact of their spending totaled \$62.5 million when taking into account other expenditures the visitors made for things such as gas, food and lodging.

Statewide, commercial rafting companies hosted 507,392 guests, a return to prerecession levels at a time when many other parts of Colorado's economy remain stalled.

"The rebound was warmly welcomed," said Drew Kramer, spokesman for Colorado River Outfitters. He noted rafting visits topped 500,000 in each year from 2005 to 2008 before dipping in 2009.

Johnny Cantamessa, the newly elected chairman of Colorado River Outfitters, says rafting continues to offer vacationers a high "thrill-per-dollar" ratio.

"Rafting has always been a cost-effective way for outdoors enthusiasts to indulge themselves in nature and for families to vacation together," Cantamessa said.

"When times and budgets are tight, the thrill-per-dollar ratio becomes that much more important, as evidenced by our industry's strong 2010."

Statewide, the combined economic impact of commercial river rafting in 2010 was \$150.3 million, up 4.9 percent from 2009.

The statewide economic impact was the second-highest since the Colorado River Outfitters began tracking statistics in 1988, trailing only the banner year of 2007, Kramer said.