

## NEWS

# Two drown in Arkansas River raft accident

By **CLAIRE TRAGESER** | The Denver Post

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Two people drowned Tuesday after a rafting accident on the Arkansas River in an area where state officials have warned boaters and rafters about high water flows.

Four people from the Denver area, a woman and three men, put their raft in a Class 5 rapids section of the river by U.S. 24 north of Buena Vista about noon, according to the Chaffee County Sheriff's Office. The group quickly hit severe rapids, and two people were thrown from the boat.

The two remaining rafters rescued one of their colleagues from the river. That person was unconscious, so they performed CPR.

The fourth person was found 7 miles downstream.

One person was pronounced dead at the river, and the other was taken to the Heart of the Rockies Medical Center in Salida, where he was pronounced dead.

The Sheriff's Office would not release the victims' names until their families are notified.

The group was on a private rafting trip on the Pine Creek Rapids section of the river. The state issued a boater's advisory for that section of the river a month



The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area recommends that rafters avoid the Pine Creek section of the river when it is flowing faster than 1,250 cubic feet per second. Those rapids were flowing at 1,840 cubic feet per second at the time of the accident, according to the Sheriff's Office.

"No commercial operators have been up there at all," said Duke Bradford, chairman of the Colorado River Outfitters Association. "This is not something that sprung up and surprised people."

At least four people have drowned in the state's rivers in the past 30 days, and the National Park Service has urged visitors to stay back from streams and rivers.

The search for the fourth rafter Tuesday included firefighters, deputies and emergency responders from Chaffee County and Salida, as well as Arkansas Headwaters State Park rangers and personnel from Arkansas River Outfitters, a group of rafting guides and outfitters, said Deb Frazier, the spokeswoman for Colorado State Parks.

"All of our rangers are trained in search and rescue," Frazier said. "They've pulled literally hundreds of people to safety."

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*This story has been corrected in this online archive. Originally, this story incorrectly reported that the Pine Creek section of the Arkansas River was closed. A boaters advisory is in effect for that portion of the river, but it is not closed to rafters or boaters. Additionally, the early version reported that officials of the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation area recommends that rafters avoid the entire river when flows exceed 1,250 cubic feet per second. That recommendation applies only to the Pine Creek section. Other sections of the Arkansas have different limits triggering that recommendation.*

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## Recent Colorado raft, kayak deaths

### 2009



**June 20:** Eric M. Kophs, 42, of Aurora and a Cherry Creek School District administrator, drowned after falling from a raft in the Colorado River near Kremmling.

## 2008

**May 25:** Subhash Nelakukthi, 26, of Kansas, was thrown from his raft and drowned while on a trip on the Arkansas River.

**May 31:** A physician from Parker, Michael Dennington, died when his raft overturned in the Gunnison River.

**June 1:** Christine Beltran, 29, of Santa Fe drowned in Larimer County while tubing in the Cache la Poudre River.

**June 16:** Richard Banks, 45, of Las Vegas drowned after falling out of a kayak on the Colorado River in Garfield County.

**June 19:** James Kennedy, 61, of Woodland Park died in a rafting accident on the Arkansas River in Chaffee County.

**June 22:** A 71-year-old, Volker Beer of Tucson, was found drowned in the Arkansas River near Buena Vista after falling from his kayak.

**June 23:** A 43-year-old man, Marcus Martin, of Castle Pines North, died after his raft flipped going over class III Graveyard Rapid in Brown's Canyon in Chaffee County.

**July 27:** Owen Gerson, 8, of Woodstock, N.Y., drowned after his kayak tipped in rough water when his family took a commercial whitewater rafting trip in Dinosaur National Monument.

## 2007:

In 2007, five deaths occurred on the Arkansas River alone between Leadville and Cañon City:

**May 19:** Charles H. Bointy, 52, of Boulder drowned in the Royal Gorge section of the river west of Cañon City.



**June 16:** Thirty-six-year-old Raquel Stiles of Omaha drowned in a dam drop south of Buena Vista known as “Silver Bullet” while rafting.

**July 5:** Two boats flipped in the Numbers Section of the river north of Buena Vista, and Lynn Marks, 52, of Texas, drowned.

**July 6:** Bea Kovich, 55, of New York, a second victim of the July 5 accident, also died of drowning.

*Sources: Denver Post archives, Pueblo Chieftain, Associated Press*

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