

## **TSX CHALLENGE LLC – ATTACHMENT C: OPERATING PLAN**

### **A. EXPLANATION OF SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED**

We will be providing guided backpacking services in Grand Canyon National Park. TSX Challenge LLC was first launched in late 2010 and began Grand Canyon operations in 2014.

We are a local, independent organization, not affiliated with national brands, national clubs, or outfitting organizations. Since our modest inaugural Grand Canyon treks with the public in 2014, we've grown organically. In 2023 we expect to lead between 25-30 Grand Canyon backpacking treks.

We believe backpacking the Grand Canyon can be a life-changing experience and aim to extend this opportunity to people of all ages, shapes, backgrounds, and sizes. Our youngest participant to date was 9, our oldest was 76. We enable people to safely and confidently reach goals they may have never thought possible, like trekking to the bottom of the Grand Canyon to sleep on the banks of the Colorado River. For roughly one third of our participants, a TSX experience is their first-ever overnight backpacking trip.

TSX will be providing the following backpacking experiences in 2023:

#### **1) 3-Night, 4-Day Grand Canyon Backpacking Treks**

We band motivated individuals together and trek roughly 20-30 miles as a team through the Grand Canyon on inspirational, looped routes to the Colorado river. In 2023 we plan on conducting 25-28 of these backpacking experiences during the spring and fall months.

#### **2) 6-Night, 7-Day Grand Canyon Backpacking Treks**

We will also be offering a limited number of extended backpacking experiences in 2023 for select hikers seeking a more immersive Grand Canyon backpacking experience. In 2023 we plan on conducting 2 of these backpacking experiences, one beginning in April and one in October.

#### **3) Private Customized Backpacking Treks**

We plan on providing private, customized Grand Canyon backpacking experiences upon request.

#### ***Estimated distribution of treks (month/count):***

*Jan/0 – Feb/0 – Mar/4 – Apr/7 – May/3 – Jun/0 – Jul/0 – Aug/0 – Sept/5 – Oct/7 – Nov/4 – Dec/0*

**B. PROPOSED LOCATIONS**

We expect to make use of the following looped routes during our spring and fall treks.

Route 1 – Hermit-Bright Angel Loop (3 nights)
Route 2 – Tanner New-Hance Loop via Escalante (3 nights)
Route 3 – Thunder River-Deer Creek Loop via Indian Hollow (4 nights)
Route 4 – Tanner-Confluence-Escalante-Grandview (7 nights)
Route 5 – New Hance-Grand View Loop (3 nights)
Route 6 – Hermit-Boucher Loop (3 nights)
Route 7 – Rim to Rim, N. Kaibab to Bright Angel (3 nights)

Our maximum group size is 11 people including two guides. Our typical group size is 5-8 in total. Select private customized treks may make use of Rim-to-Rim backpacking experiences via N. Kaibab and Bright Angel trails.

**I. RESOURCE PROTECTION**

The following outlines important guidelines for all outings with respect to resource protection, park rules and regulations, and leave no trace best practices.

**A. MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID IMPACTS TO ECOSYSTEMS**

To protect park resources, each outing will operate in accordance with park guidelines:

- A valid wilderness permit will be secured when camping overnight in the wilderness.
- Food, toiletries or refuse will be stored in a manner that prevents animals from access.
- Equipment, personal items or supplies will not be left unattended for more than 24hrs.
- Camping within 100 feet of lakes, streams or trails, will be avoided, safety permitting.
- Washing/discharging soap waste will take place 200ft away from fresh water sources.
- Depositing human waste will take place 200ft away from lakes, streams, camps, or trails.
- Shortcutting a switchback on any trail is prohibited.
- Leaving any debris, garbage or refuse within the wilderness is prohibited.

All trips will be led in accordance with the terms of our Commercial Use Authorization and the terms of our Wilderness Permit at the time of travel. A copy of our CUA, including all pages, must be read, understood, followed, carried by each guide, and made available for inspection while operating in the park.

In addition, each outing will adhere to the following best practices to avoid impact to ecosystems within the park:

**a. Respect Wildlife**

- Wildlife will be observed from a distance and not followed or approached.
- Wildlife will not be fed.
- Food rations and trash will be stored securely to prevent wildlife access.

**b. Minimize Campfire Impacts**

- A lightweight stove will be used for cooking and a flashlight for light.
- Wood or charcoal fires of any type are prohibited.

**c. Proper Waste Disposal**

- Campsites will be left as clean, if not cleaner than found.
- All trash, leftover food, and litter will be packed out.
- Solid human waste will be buried 6 to 8 inches deep at least 200 feet from water, camp, and trails. Used toilet paper and hygiene products will be packed out.
- Strained dishwater will be scattered away from sleeping areas.

**d. Minimize Travel Impacts**

- Use will be concentrated on established trails and campsites.
- Camps will be established on durable surfaces, such as rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow.
- Camp will be established 200ft set back from lakes, streams, trails, other campsites, and historic and cultural sites and structures when conditions permit.
- Camping within 200ft of water/trail is only allowed in previously well-established sites.

*In popular areas:*

- Use will be concentrated on existing trails and campsites.
- Hikers are advised to walk in the middle of the trail, even when wet or muddy.

*In pristine areas:*

- Use will be dispersed to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
- Use will be varied, to avoid places where impacts are just beginning.

**B. MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID IMPACTS TO OTHER VISITORS' EXPERIENCE**

Each outing will adhere to the following principles and measures to avoid impacts to other visitors' experience:

**a. Leave What You Find**

- Cultural or historic structures and artifacts may be examined, but not touched.
- Rocks, plants and other natural objects will be left as found.
- Rock walls, structures, fire rings, furniture, and trenches will not be built.

**b. Be Considerate of Other Visitors**

- All park visitors encountered on the trail will be treated with respect and courtesy.

- Breaks will be taken, and camp established, away from trails and other visitors.
- Creating unnecessary loud noises will be avoided.
- Yielding to other users on the trail will take place in safe locations.

### **C. RANGE AND EXTENT OF CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION GUIDES WILL BE PREPARED TO SHARE WITH CLIENTS**

Our guides will be prepared to share with clients a range of cultural and environmental information specifically targeted to the regions we traverse.

## **II. VISITOR SAFETY**

The following outlines important guidelines for all outings with respect to client safety.

### **A. ACCIDENT PREVENTION PROGRAM**

#### **a. Key Safety Precautions**

*Pre-trek preparation* – Roughly three months prior to each trek, monthly preparation emails begin disseminating to clients to set expectations and assist in physical, mental, and emotional preparation for our rigorous outings.

*Group talk and awareness* – Prior to each trek, a group safety talk and orientation takes place where we cover key safety procedures (itemized below) as a precaution to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all participants. Resource protection guidelines are also reviewed.

*Pack check to ensure appropriate gear* – A customized gear checklist, as well as an accompanying gear checklist video, is provided to each participant. In addition, a thorough pack-check is completed for each new participant prior to departure to ensure they have what they need, and importantly, to ensure they leave behind what they don't.

*Know our client* – Prior to each trek, previously completed medical questionnaires (see client assessment) are reviewed with each client. Medications that may be required in the event of emergency (i.e. EpiPen for clients with severe allergies) are identified, and storage location noted.

*“Thorns and Roses” and continuous on-trail communication* – Each night clients are engaged in a group discussion called “Thorns and Roses.” These are invaluable discussions that give participants an opportunity to speak about the positives, and challenges each day, and allow guides to uncover and probe issues that may cause a future accident or injury. Actions can then be taken to help mitigate risk of accident.

*First aid and remote communications* – A customized, group size first aid kit accompanies each outing to assist in addressing injuries that may occur while in the backcountry. An In-Reach satellite text communication device also accompanies each outing to assist in securing help in the event of emergency.

*Trail management* – Life on the trail is generally managed under the following precautionary guidelines: 1) hike within sight or sound of each other 2) stop at trail junctions and proceed as a group, 3) if you leave trail, leave pack on the trail adjacent to where you exit, 4) drink lots of water, 5) hike at your own pace and rest when needed, 6) cross all streams with guide supervision, and with hip and chest belt unbuckled, 7) hike over snow as group, 8) if lost, safely backtrack to last known point, or stay put.

**a. Key Safety Procedures and Health Practices**

*Gear prep* – All gear is reviewed prior to each trek. This includes meeting with each participant prior to each trek for a final pack-check. Each item is evaluated, and if appropriate, tested, to ensure it is adequate, safe, and in acceptable working condition.

*Food prep* – Known food allergies are identified in advance through our Reservation Confirmation Form (see client assessment). Each physical menu item is checked to ensure it is adequate for the duration of the trek, the number of participants involved, and the composition of the participants involved.

*Food safety* – Guides are to wash or sanitize hands before handling food. A hanging bladder with soap is established as a wash station at each campsite. Use of the wash station is encouraged for clients before and after meals. Dishes are washed, rinsed and sanitized daily.

*Food protection* – Food and scented items are consolidated into a centralized location in camp each night. All treks are required to use animal-resistant food sacks for food storage.

*Food and management* – Trash and food is consolidated into separate sacks each night to prevent contamination.

*Water management* – At least one water storage container is designated “clean water only” on each outing; water is then filtered into, and served out of, clean containers to minimize cross contamination of client hydration systems. Bring unfiltered water used for cooking to a full boil.

*Guide communication* – Guides sync each night to share information or concerns regarding clients and general group dynamics. Guides check in with TSX support staff each night via satellite text message to update group location and status.

## **b. Environment Assessment**

Before the backpacking season begins, and daily before and during each trek, we assess the following environmental factors (not an exhaustive list). A series of examples are included for each factor to demonstrate how outings are constructed and adjusted based on environmental assessment.

*Trail conditions* – Pack crampons when snow field traverses are expected. Allow additional time for route finding when downed trees and high streams are expected. Screen clients for suitability when extreme trail conditions are expected. Pack additional water carrying capacity when long segments between water sources are expected.

*Smoke and wildfire* – Monitor and adjust or cancel route to minimize risk from known or new wildfire.

*Climate* – Avoid hiking fully-exposed sections of trail in mid-day heat when possible. Quickly change into dry clothes once at camp if cold and wet.

*Wildlife* – Follow updates on Grand Canyon website and social media for additional known wildlife issues.

*Daylight* – Get early morning starts to maximize daylight on trail segments with long duration, or seasonably short days.

*Trek duration and remoteness* – Each outing is prepared with extra food rations, and to appropriately manage existing rations, during emergency situations.

*Other general assessments* – Other considerations include, but are not limited to, 1) ensure adequate protection during peak insect season, 2) be prepared with good knowledge of trail and navigation skills in event trail markers or signs are missing from year to year.

## **c. Client assessment**

In advance of each trek, we ask that each participant, regardless of age, complete an experience and medical questionnaire form to the best of their ability. We review each form to help plan each outing so that we can deliver a safe and enjoyable experience to participants of different ages and levels of experience. We also use the information so that our guides will be prepared to react and respond to any medical conditions rather than learning about them in a crisis.

Experience questions include:

- What personal trips with related experience have you taken?  
(dates/location/distance)

- What is the longest amount of time you have camped out?
- Please describe any high-altitude experience.
- Please describe your regular or planned physical fitness activities to prepare for this outing.
- Please describe any other interest, experience, or activities you believe would be relevant.

Medical questions include:

- Please describe any dietary restrictions and allergies you may have to medicine, food, animals, insects, dust, pollen, etc.
- Please list all prescription, over the counter, and natural medications you are taking (name, dosage, frequency, side effects, reason).
- Do you have asthma, diabetes, a history of high blood pressure, any problems with vision or hearing?
- Do you have any bone, joint or muscle problems? Have you ever had a seizure? Are you pregnant?
- Please describe any recent illness, accidents, operations or hospitalizations.
- This outing may require vigorous activity, extended climbing and hiking and other physically and mentally demanding exertion in isolated areas without medical facilities, medical providers, or means of contacting rescue or medical personnel. Please state below all physical, mental, or other medical issues, limitations or restrictions of which you are aware.

After reviewing each questionnaire, the client may be contacted to discuss specific experiences or understand medical issues in more detail, and determine suitability for the experience.

#### **d. Continuous Client and Environmental Assessment**

We assess changes in the client and environment together on a continuous basis every step of the way. Continuous client assessment takes place through observation at breaks, during meals, or on the trail; through individual discussions; and through nightly debriefings. Continuous environmental assessment takes place through observation on the trail, and through weather forecast updates provided via satellite text message.

### **B. ABILITY TO SAFELY MANAGE INCIDENTS AND EMERGENCIES**

Our focus in the event of an emergency is to provide care within the scope of practice, stabilize, seek evacuation if necessary, and monitor. In the event of accident or other emergencies, we intend to operate under the following guidelines:

- a. Consider the safety of yourself and the group before attempting to assist an individual client or other hiker in need in the event of an accident or emergency.
- b. Once safety is established, assess scene or patient according to Wilderness First Responder best practices / patient assessment system.
- c. If situation is life-or-limb threatening and requires immediate assistance, use satellite messaging device to notify emergency personnel and TSX support staff.
- d. Treat as appropriate until rescue personnel arrive.
- e. For non-life-threatening emergencies, treat as appropriate, then contact TSX support staff via satellite text messaging device to arrange further support or evacuation as appropriate.
- f. TSX support staff may contact park or forest service staff for support or to arrange evacuation as appropriate.
- g. When camping near Ranger Stations, utilize guidance and expertise of ranger on-site, when available and practical.

Our ability to safely manage incidents and emergencies is supported by the following:

- A certified Wilderness First Responder guide is placed on each outing.
- A Garmin In-Reach Satellite text messaging device is used for nightly check-ins with support staff, and emergency communications.
- A dedicated, off-site TSX support member is on-call 24/7 during the duration of each back-country trek.
- Relevant client details, including medical issues, known allergies, and emergency contact information is carried on each outing for rapid communication to rescue personnel.
- A customized first aid kit is carried on each outing.
- Our singular focus and years of experience on one route, serving all ages, ensures strong trail familiarity and helps us proactively manage for varying trail conditions and group dynamics.

The Park's 24-hour emergency dispatch phone number is (928) 638-7805.

**RELEVANT EXPERIENCE**

**A. BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE NARRATIVE**

Since our Grand Canyon Operations began in 2014, we have been singularly focused on leading small groups along multi-night looped routes in Grand Canyon National Park, supporting individuals of all ages and skill sets. Strong trail familiarity helps us proactively manage for varying trail conditions and group dynamics. This experience supports sound judgment, with a deep understanding of resources available to manage unexpected and emergency situations.

**B. PREVIOUS AND CONCURRENT PERMITS**

We began operating the Grand Canyon Challenge under CUA for Backpacking within Grand Canyon National Park in 2014.

We have been operating related experiences under CUA for Backpacking within Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park and Inyo National Forest since 2011, and in John Muir Wilderness since 2018.

*Summary of Permits*

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park Backpacking CUA, 2011 – Present
Grand Canyon National Park Backpacking CUA, 2014 – Present
Inyo National Forest Temporary Special Use Permit Holder, 2011 – Present
John Muir Wilderness Temporary Special Use Permit Holder, 2018 – Present

**C. EXPECTATIONS FOR EMPLOYEE INTERACTION WITH PUBLIC AND COMMERCIAL OPERATORS**

Treat all people with courtesy and respect. When in the backcountry, always be willing to provide help, guidance and assistance to the public, and other commercial operators, in need.

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Thank you for your consideration of this application. Grand Canyon National Park is a special place to us personally. We have enjoyed working with the park over the last several years and look forward to growing with the park in years to come as a backpacking CUA holder!