AMERICA OUTDOORS ASSOCIATION

2024 COMMERCIAL RIVER USE REPORT

U.S. Commercial River Use, 1990-2024

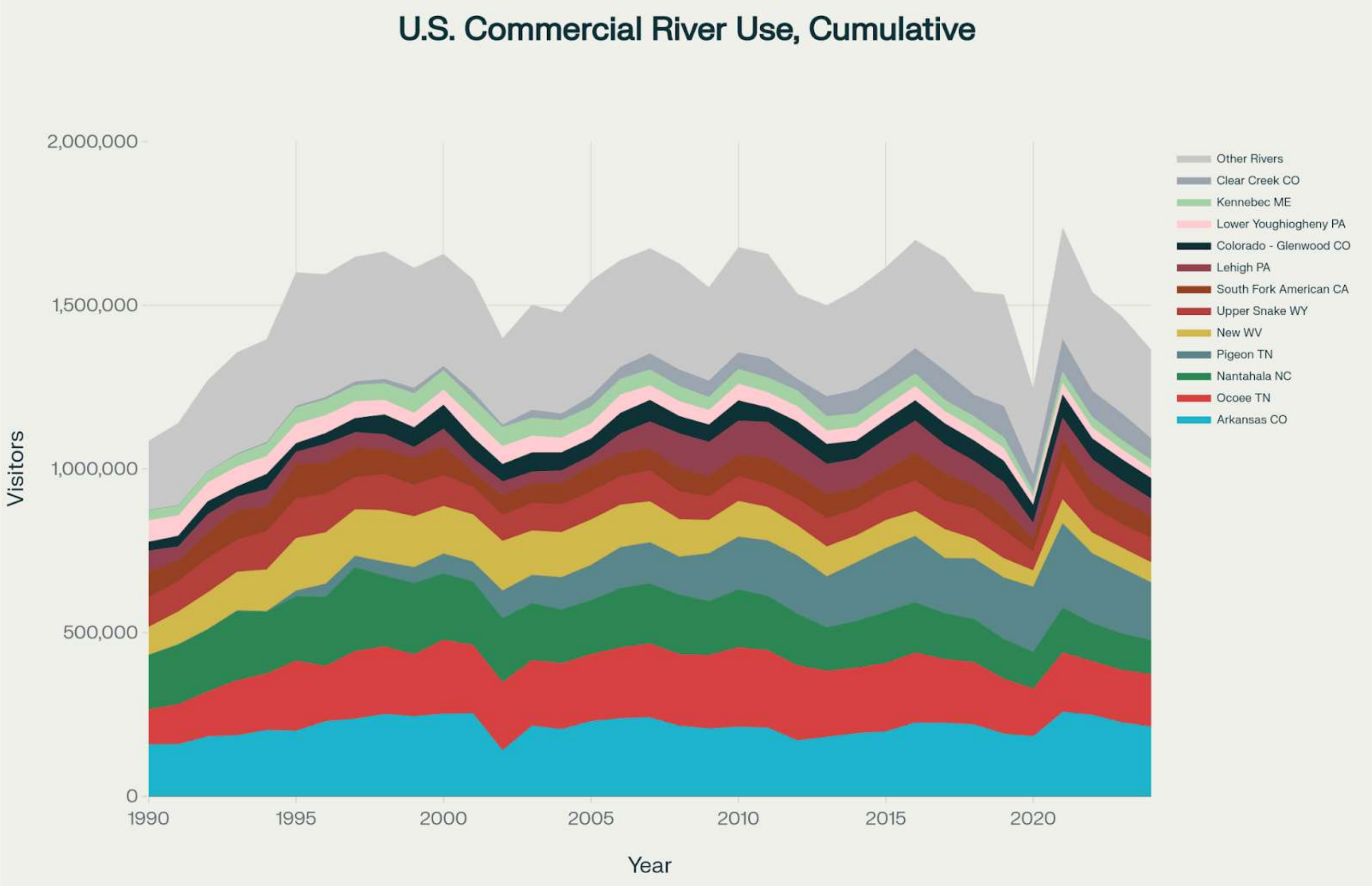


Figure 1. U.S. Commercial River Use, Cumulative, 1990–2024. Stacked area chart showing visitor volume across all tracked rivers.

Table 1. Total Visitors by Year, 1990-2024								
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
1,085,278	1,139,326	1,270,160	1,355,433	1,395,309	1,599,978	1,594,056	1,646,915	1,663,752
1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
1,613,466	1,656,023	1,578,596	1,397,998	1,500,565	1,477,723	1,574,640	1,637,151	1,673,069
2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
1,626,918	1,553,550	1,676,750	1,656,195	1,534,383	1,498,991	1,548,129	1,615,191	
2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1,698,661	1,645,429	1,541,055	1,532,150	1,244,064	1,735,842	1,540,237	1,466,949	1,362,738

The commercial whitewater rafting industry has experienced significant evolution over the past 35 years. After reaching a peak of **1,735,842 visitors** in 2021 during the outdoor recreation boom following the COVID-19 pandemic, participation levels have declined from the 2021 peak but remain above levels observed in the early-to-mid 1990s. Based on the river sections included in this report, **1,362,738 visitors were recorded in 2024**.

The 2024 data shows continued stabilization following the pandemic-era surge. While some regions experienced declines from 2023 levels, others maintained steady performance. Colorado accounted for 36% of all tracked visitors (496,871 in 2024), and Tennessee represented 25% (337,538 in 2024).

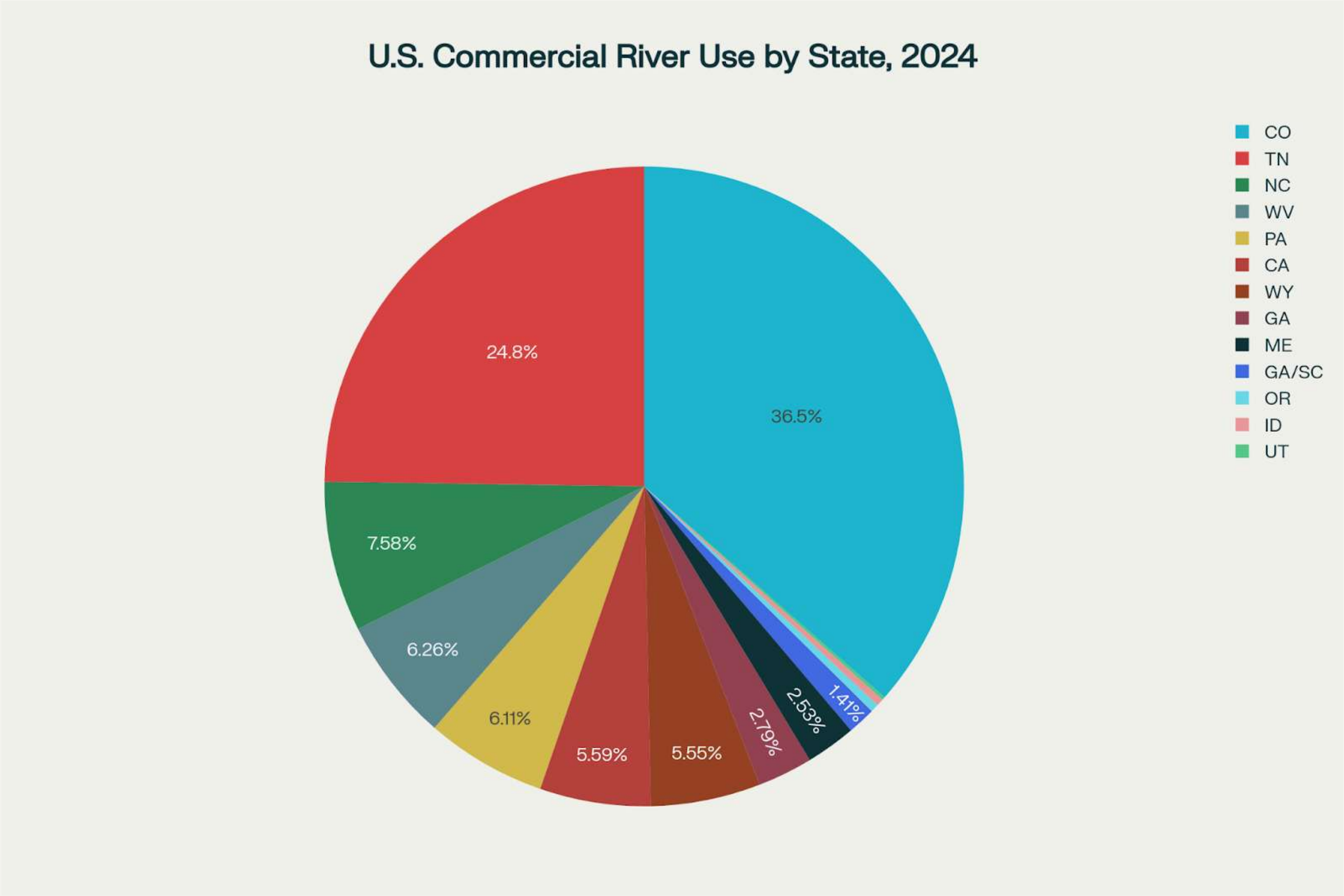


Figure 2.a. Visitors by State

Table 2: State-by-state data		
State	Visitors	Percentage
CO	496871	36.46
TN	337538	24.77
NC	103330	7.58
WV	85350	6.26
PA	83305	6.11
CA	76243	5.59
WY	75617	5.55
GA	38000	2.79
ME	34517	2.53
GA/SC	19194	1.41
OR	5667	0.42
ID	4987	0.37

Table 2. State-by-State Commercial Whitewater Rafting Use, 2024"

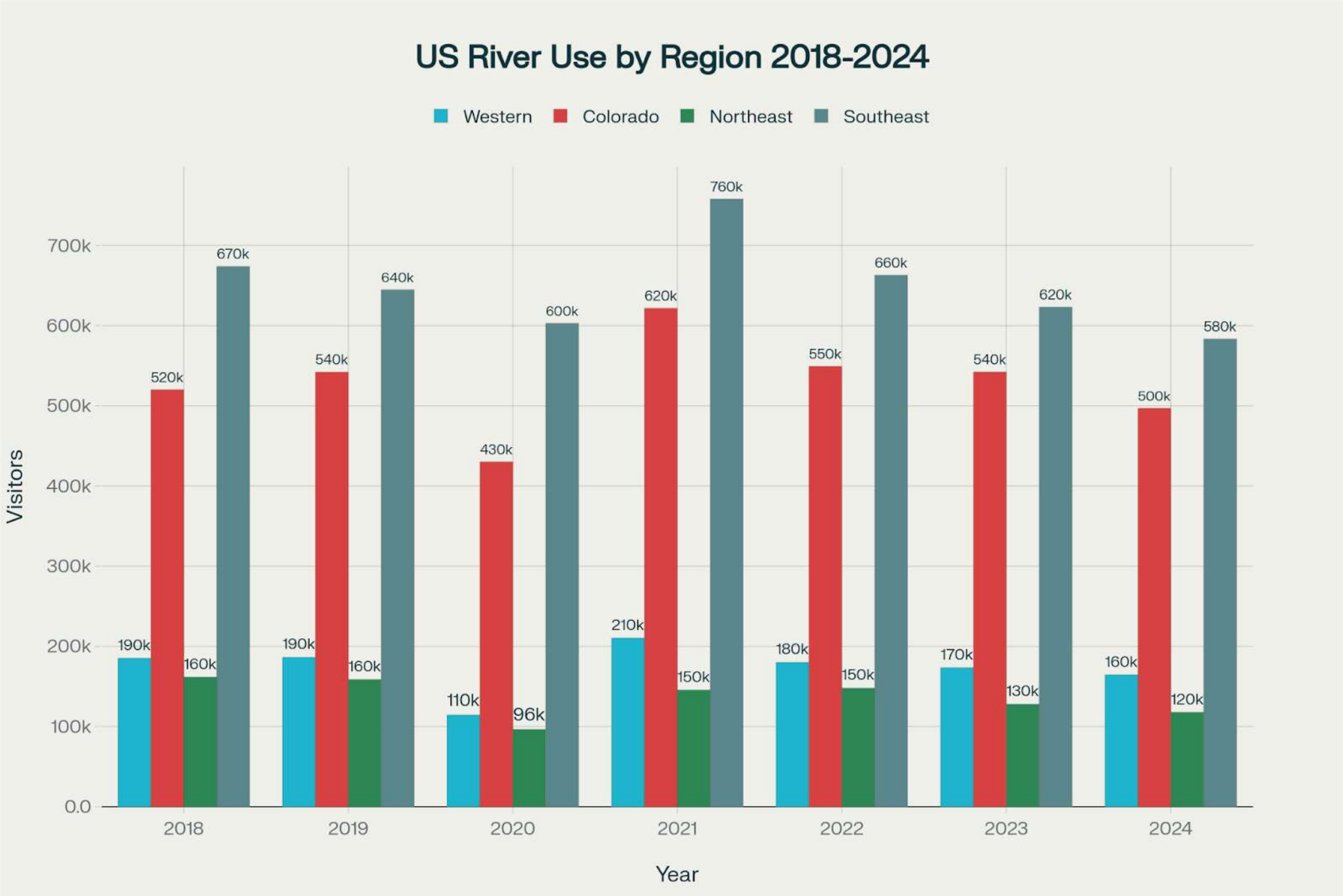


Figure 2.b. Regional totals (Colorado, West, Northeast, Southeast

National Trends and Analysis

Geographic Scope and Data Limitations: This report captures commercial river use data from four primary regions in the contiguous United States: Colorado, Western (including California, Idaho, Oregon, Utah, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Arizona), Southeast, and Northeast. The dataset reflects tracked operations through America Outdoors member reporting and other available data sources, **but is not comprehensive.**

Significant commercial whitewater operations exist beyond this tracking framework, including Alaska's substantial rafting tourism industry (Nenana, Talkeetna, Kenai, Copper, and Six Mile Creek rivers); Pacific Northwest operations in Washington State (White Salmon, Skagit, Wenatchee, Green, and Skykomish rivers); Montana's Northern Rockies rivers (Flathead, Bitterroot, Clark Fork, and Smith rivers); Midwest regional operations in Wisconsin (Wolf, Wisconsin rivers) and Minnesota (St. Louis, Kettle rivers); and numerous other state and regional commercial river resources.

Within tracked regions, data collection varies significantly by state infrastructure and reporting capabilities. Individual river coverage is most comprehensive in Colorado (24+ tracked sections), while other Western states with substantial commercial operations report at more aggregated levels. This difference in granularity reflects data availability rather than relative industry significance. The analysis should be interpreted within these limitations, recognizing that tracked rivers represent significant industry segments but not comprehensive national coverage.

The 35-year dataset from 1990 to 2024 reveals several distinct phases in the commercial whitewater rafting industry:

Growth Era (1990-2000): The industry grew from 1,085,278 visitors in 1990 to 1,656,023 visitors in 2000, representing a 53% increase.

Stabilization Period (2001-2009): During the early-to-mid 2000s, visitor totals fluctuated between 1.4 and 1.7 million annually (without potential connections to the September 11, 2001 attacks and the 2008 financial crisis).

Recovery and Growth (2010-2019): The industry rebounded, reaching 1,676,750 visitors in 2010 and maintaining relatively stable numbers through 2019, with the highest pre-pandemic year being 2016 at 1,698,661 visitors.

Pandemic Surge (2020-2021): The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented demand for outdoor recreation activities. After a sharp decline to 1,244,064 visitors in 2020 due to operational restrictions and public health concerns, the industry experienced growth to 1,735,842 visitors in 2021—the highest number ever recorded in this dataset.

Post-Pandemic Adjustment (2022-2024): Following the 2021 peak, participation has declined. The 2024 total of 1,362,738 visitors represents a 21% decrease from the 2021 peak.

Regional Performance Patterns

Table 3				
Year	Colorado	Western	Southeast	Northeast
1990	284936	182705	434226	183411
1991	324170	171507	487713	155936
1992	362358	210449	528412	168941
1993	379526	223753	591009	161145
1994	411005	217568	594053	172683
1995	427270	274467	720831	177410
1996	445244	252690	703963	192159
1997	488965	230260	753097	174593
1998	517479	226600	747211	172462
1999	524548	210324	707790	170804
2000	518678	217320	729611	190414
2001	522866	162731	701304	191695
2002	319262	166511	728911	183314
2003	463914	176872	700666	159113
2004	441496	180790	703540	151897
2005	503750	203894	717530	149466
2006	510137	192604	750098	184312
2007	538624	188121	748279	198045
2008	516539	188063	702476	219840
2009	486059	160730	701842	204919
2010	514028	173598	772861	216263
2011	511304	183089	742666	219136
2012	411791	180284	730107	212201
2013	462752	173735	666726	195778
2014	498780	160427	699830	189092
2015	508701	168548	739755	198187
2016	550210	204096	748013	196342
2017	577847	202986	691254	173342
2018	520086	185276	673929	161764
2019	542149	186470	644820	158711
2020	430163	114552	602896	96453
2021	621799	210477	757995	145571
2022	549197	180116	662890	148034
2023	542284	173541	623103	128021
2024	496871	164633	583412	117822

The four tracked regions show distinct characteristics:

Colorado served 496,871 visitors in 2024. The state includes rivers ranging from Class II to Class V. Colorado rivers are located within proximity to Denver and Colorado Springs, along the I-70 corridor and throughout mountain regions.

Southeast region, comprising Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia, served 583,412 visitors in 2024. Tennessee's Ocoee and Pigeon Rivers account for nearly half of the region's total.

Western states (California, Idaho, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming, excluding Colorado) served 164,633 visitors in 2024. This region includes multi-day trips on rivers like the Middle Fork Salmon and day trips on California's South Fork American River.

Northeast region (Maine and Pennsylvania) served 117,822 visitors in 2024. Pennsylvania's Lehigh River remains the regional anchor.

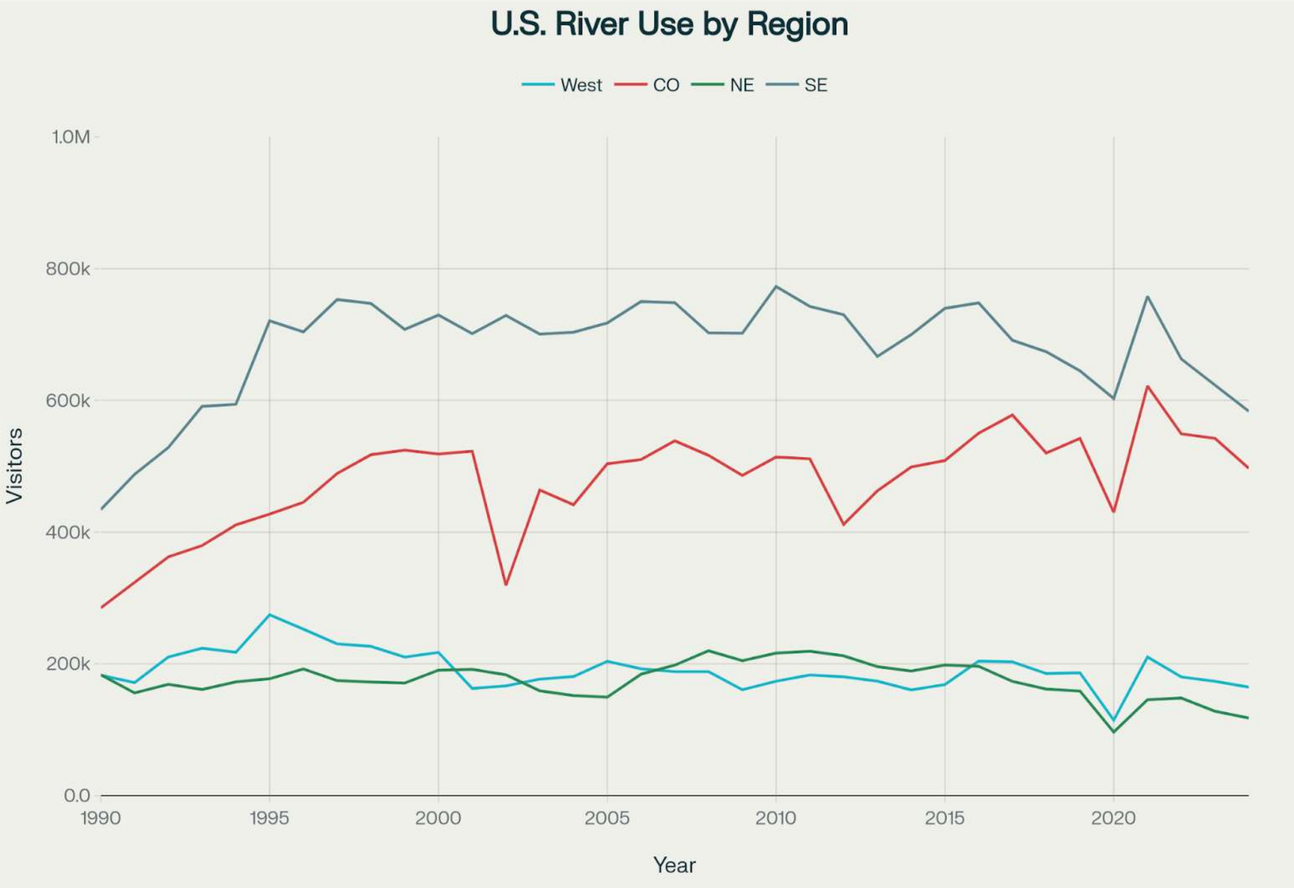


Figure 3. Multi-year National Trends in Commercial River Use by Region, 1990–2024

Data Limitations and Considerations

All regional interpretations in this report apply only to the rivers included in the dataset and do not represent complete statewide or regional commercial rafting totals.

Specific, important caveats apply to this dataset:

1. **Missing Records:** Some rivers report "NR" (No Record) for certain years, affecting regional and national totals.

2. **Excluded Rivers: Major river operations not included in this survey include, but are not limited to**, the **Grand Canyon** (Arizona), various **Alaska** rivers, and emerging commercial operations on smaller rivers and creeks across the country. Specifically excluded or not systematically tracked are: California's Tuolumne, Merced, Stanislaus, Kings, Truckee, and other Sierra Nevada rivers beyond the three tracked; Idaho's Main Salmon, Clearwater, Lochsa, Selway, Payette system, and Boise rivers; Oregon's Rogue and Deschutes (if not tracked), McKenzie, Hood, Clackamas, John Day, and Grand Ronde rivers; Montana operations entirely (Flathead, Bitterroot, Clark Fork, Smith rivers); Washington State's White Salmon, Skagit, Wenatchee, Green, and Skykomish rivers; New Mexico's Rio Grande and Rio Chama; Arizona's Salt and Verde rivers; Tennessee's Hiwassee and Nolichucky rivers; Maine's Dead and Rapid rivers; Northeast operations in Massachusetts (Deerfield, Millers, Concord rivers), Vermont (West River), and New York (Hudson, Sacandaga, Moose, Black rivers); Midwest operations in Wisconsin and Minnesota; Kentucky's Red River and Big South Fork Cumberland; and other regional operations. **These exclusions reflect varied data collection infrastructure rather than operational insignificance.**

3. **Whitewater Parks:** Artificial whitewater parks in urban areas (Oklahoma City, Charlotte, Montgomery) serve significant numbers of participants but are not captured in these natural river-based statistics. This use report does not account for several whitewater parks that also have significant participation such as Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Charlotte, South Carolina, and Montgomery, Alabama. Additionally, as noted above, **this data is not comprehensive**—in addition to rivers like the **North Platte**, which did not provide data in some years, we did not collect data from **Grand Canyon**, **Alaska**, and other river sections recently developing commercial use.

U.S. Commercial River Use by Visitor, 2018-2024

The following presents commercial river use data for 48 river sections tracked across nine states from 2018 through 2024. The data reveals several important patterns:

Top Rivers: The Arkansas River in Colorado consistently leads all tracked rivers with over 211,000 visitors in 2024, despite declining from its 2021 peak of 256,650 visitors. Tennessee's Pigeon and Ocoee Rivers rank second and third, demonstrating the Southeast's importance to the industry. These three rivers alone account for approximately 40% of all tracked commercial river use in this dataset. The Upper Snake River, Wyoming, accounted for 75,617 commercial visitors in 2024, maintaining consistent volume and securing its place among the nation's leading rivers among those analyzed in this report.

Pandemic Impact: The 2020 data shows significant declines across nearly all rivers due to COVID-19 related closures and restrictions. The subsequent 2021 rebound was dramatic, with many rivers achieving record or near-record numbers. By 2024, most rivers have settled to levels comparable to or slightly below 2019 figures.

Regional Concentration: Rivers in Colorado, Tennessee, Greater Yellowstone and California occupy the top rankings *within this dataset*.

Data Gaps: The presence of 'NR' (No Record) entries occurs for rivers like Green/Yampa, South Platte, and North Platte.

Table 4: Main master table, all rivers, all years 2018–2024

River Section	State	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Arkansas	CO	218,120	190,246	182,005	256,650	247,721	224,700	211,635
Pigeon	TN	185,376	187,784	199,385	257,589	213,426	200,399	176,982
Ocoee	TN	191,157	168,213	146,039	182,073	164,286	160,703	160,556
Nantahala	NC	131,052	121,064	111,610	136,611	115,997	111,111	103,330
Upper Snake	WY	93,624	84,735	56,730	114,124	80,139	72,838	75,617
Clear Creek	CO	66,174	95,063	52,044	100,203	80,364	81,674	67,116
South Fork American	CA	68,509	72,184	39,458	71,102	73,097	72,001	64,761
Colorado - Glenwood	CO	62,181	65,302	55,228	70,753	63,222	64,940	62,137
New	WV	59,987	58,983	50,023	72,907	63,250	61,292	61,214
Lehigh	PA	75,552	75,550	48,377	64,286	71,263	61,369	54,715

Table 4: Main master table, all rivers, all years 2018–2024								
River Section	**State**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Chattahoochee	GA	35,000	36,500	34,000	38,000	40,000	40,000	38,000
Colorado - Upper	CO	50,681	35,777	46,375	45,433	33,866	32,866	35,183
Animas	CO	28,495	37,553	33,120	52,967	36,132	37,139	30,079
Poudre	CO	38,741	37,707	21,481	39,877	33,008	29,921	29,076
Lower Youghiogheny	PA	38,635	38,848	23,495	35,452	33,471	30,419	28,590
Kennebec	ME	35,308	33,211	17,637	33,783	32,480	28,286	26,523
Chattooga	GA/SC	24,960	25,714	20,194	25,986	23,475	21,132	19,194
Gauley	WV	22,556	19,845	24,588	25,390	20,900	16,027	13,586
Taylor	CO	13,279	13,665	11,652	15,234	12,974	13,616	12,991
Shenandoah	WV	23,841	26,717	17,057	19,439	21,466	12,439	10,550
Kern Lower	CA	7,241	11,775	7,832	7,915	8,939	7,614	9,849
Eagle - Below Edwards	CO	3,549	8,851	4,129	5,233	7,507	8,776	8,801
Penobscot	ME	10,057	8,939	5,942	10,053	8,939	6,170	6,421
Rogue	OR	5,921	5,760	4,346	7,206	6,599	1,660	5,667
Green/Yampa	CO	15,645	NR	3,755	5,132	3,085	5,846	5,636
Gunnison Gorge	CO	4,787	4,039	4,553	6,110	6,096	5,054	5,057
Middle Fk, Salmon	ID	5,300	5,345	4,297	5,816	5,591	5,312	4,987
San Juan - Pagosa	CO	1,012	5,517	0	NR	4,000	9,340	4,743
San Miguel	CO	2,061	9,778	4,899	8,201	5,547	7,173	4,152
Colorado - Westwater	CO	6,654	7,324	4,190	6,369	5,299	3,550	3,884
Roaring Fork - Upper	CO	560	6,751	1,045	948	1,541	2,639	3,726
Gunnison - Forks to Austin	CO	991	1,254	1,617	2,326	2,276	2,162	2,959
Blue	CO	1,086	11,066	636	0	0	1,856	2,252
Roaring Fork - Lower	CO	831	7,245	338	221	655	3,691	2,206
Cataract Canyon	UT	2,814	2,963	1,644	3,943	4,086	2,025	2,119
Kern Upper	CA	1,867	3,708	245	371	1,665	7,591	1,633
Dead	ME	2,212	2,163	1,002	1,997	1,881	1,777	1,573

Table 4: Main master table, all rivers, all years 2018–2024								
River Section	**State**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Rio Grande	CO	131	NR	156	221	1,469	2,415	1,304
North Platte	CO	NR	34	5	NR	NR	301	1,010
Colorado - Horsethief/Ruby	CO	933	1,122	1,268	820	943	1,158	968
Gunnison - Upper	CO	3,276	2,129	NR	4,170	2,883	827	794
Eagle	CO	428	399	1,076	266	88	669	399
Gunnison – Escalante	CO	187	149	27	144	241	376	364
Gunnison – Lake Fork	CO	267	245	425	348	169	217	186
Gore Creek Vail	CO	0	324	98	0	0	0	175
Piedra	CO	17	249	41	173	36	438	38
Dolores	CO	0	360	0	75	940	0	0
South Platte	CO	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR

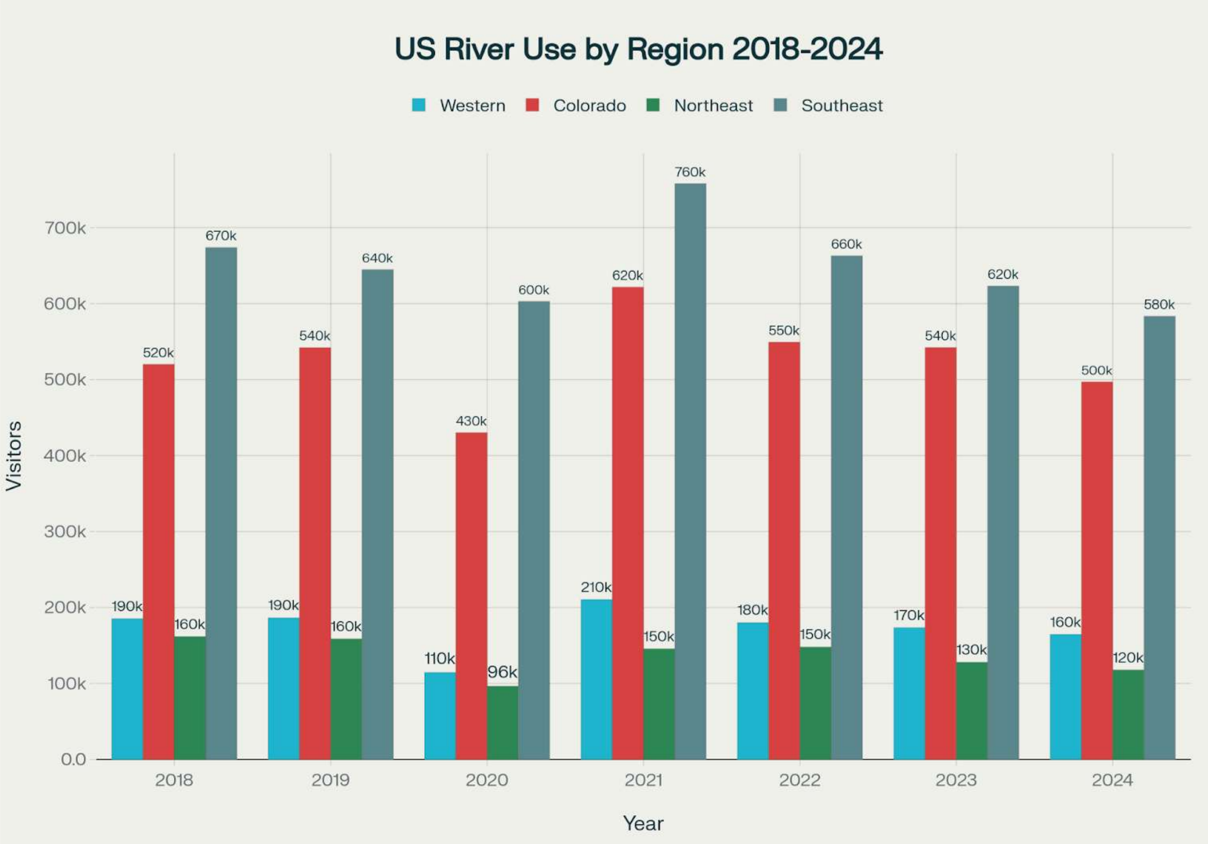
Note: NR is short for No Record

Regional Comparisons, Commercial River Use

U.S. Commercial River Use Data by Region, 2018-2024

These charts analyze the four predominant regions polled in the River Use Survey: Colorado, Western states excluding Colorado, the Northeast, and the Southeast. Trends are analyzed over 35 years (1990-2024), over the last seven-year period (2018-2024), and uses are compiled for 2024.

Table 5: (Regional totals 2018-2024: Colorado, Western, Northeast, Southeast, Cumulative)							
River Section	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Western	185,276	186,470	114,552	210,477	180,116	173,541	164,633
Colorado	520,086	542,149	430,163	621,799	549,197	542,284	496,871
Northeast U.S.	161,764	158,711	96,453	145,571	148,034	128,021	117,822
Southeast	673,929	644,820	602,896	757,995	662,890	623,103	583,412
Cumulative	**1,541,055**	**1,532,150**	**1,244,064**	**1,735,842**	**1,540,237**	**1,466,949**	**1,362,738**



Regional Analysis

Colorado reached 621,799 visitors in 2021—the highest number recorded for Colorado within this dataset. This represented a 44% increase from 2020. By 2024, Colorado's numbers declined to 496,871 visitors, down 20% from the peak. The state includes rivers ranging from Class II floats on the Colorado River through Glenwood Canyon to Class IV-V whitewater on Clear Creek and the Arkansas River's Browns Canyon section.

Southeast maintained visitor numbers between 583,000 and 758,000 across the seven-year period. The region's 2021 peak was 757,995 visitors. The Southeast showed a 6.5% decline from 2019 to 2020. By 2024, the region served 583,412 visitors, representing 43% of all tracked commercial river use.

Western states (excluding Colorado) served 164,633 visitors in 2024. The 2020 decline to 114,552 visitors may have reflected pandemic restrictions. The region reached 210,477 visitors in 2021 and has since declined to 164,633 in 2024. California's South Fork American River consistently delivers 64,000-73,000 annual visitors. With 75,617 visitors in 2024, the Upper Snake River accounted for 45.9% of all Western-region use in this dataset.

Northeast Region served 117,822 visitors in 2024. The region peaked at 161,764 visitors in 2018 and reached its lowest point at 96,453 visitors in 2020—a 40% decline. The 2024 total represents 27% below the 2018 baseline. Pennsylvania's Lehigh River provided over 54,000 visitors in 2024, representing 46% of the regional total.

Note: **Midwest commercial operations–notably, in Wisconsin (Wolf River, Wisconsin River, St. Croix River) and Minnesota (St. Louis River, Kettle River) are not tracked in this four-region framework.**

The 2020 Anomaly and Recovery Pattern

The 2020 data point represents a unique moment in the industry's history. Cumulative use dropped to 1,244,064 visitors—a 19% decline from 2019 and the lowest total since 2002. However, the regional impacts varied:

Southeast: -6.5% decline (least affected) | **Colorado:** -20.6% decline | **Western:** -38.6% decline | **Northeast:** -39.2% decline (most affected)

The 2021 recovery showed Colorado and the Southeast exceeded their previous peaks. The Western and Northeast regions recovered to levels comparable to their 2018-2019 baselines.

Long-Term Regional Trends (1990-2024)

Examining the full 35-year dataset reveals distinct regional trajectories:

Colorado expanded from 284,936 visitors in 1990 to 496,871 in 2024—a 74% increase over the period.

Southeast ranged from 434,226 visitors in 1990 to a high of 772,861 in 2010. The region's 2024 total is 583,412 visitors.

Western ranged from a low of 160,427 visitors in 2014 to a high of 274,467 in 1995.

Northeast peaked at 219,840 visitors in 2008 and declined to 117,822 visitors in 2024, representing a 46% decline from that peak.

State-Level Performance: 2024

Breaking down the 2024 data by state reveals the concentration of commercial rafting activity:

Top Five States by Visitor Volume:

1. Colorado: 496,871 visitors (36.5%)
2. Tennessee: 337,538 visitors (24.8%)
3. North Carolina: 103,330 visitors (7.6%)
4. West Virginia: 85,350 visitors (6.3%)
5. Pennsylvania: 83,305 visitors (6.1%)

These five states account for 81% of all tracked commercial river use. California (76,243 visitors) and Wyoming (75,617 visitors) provide important western operations, while Maine (34,517 visitors) anchors the Northeast market.

Note on Data Interpretation

The decline in the Western region in 2024 compared to previous years may in part be a function of the more limited data set evaluated here relative to commercially run rivers and river sections across Western states. (Intermittent reporting from Colorado's Green/Yampa and other rivers also affects year-over-year comparisons.)

These data limitations underscore the challenges of comprehensive industry tracking in the commercial river use sector, where operations range from large, professionally managed companies on major rivers to small family operations on lesser-known streams. Despite these limitations, the broad patterns are clear: commercial whitewater rafting remains a significant component of outdoor recreation in the United States.

Colorado Commercial River Use

Data Source Acknowledgment:

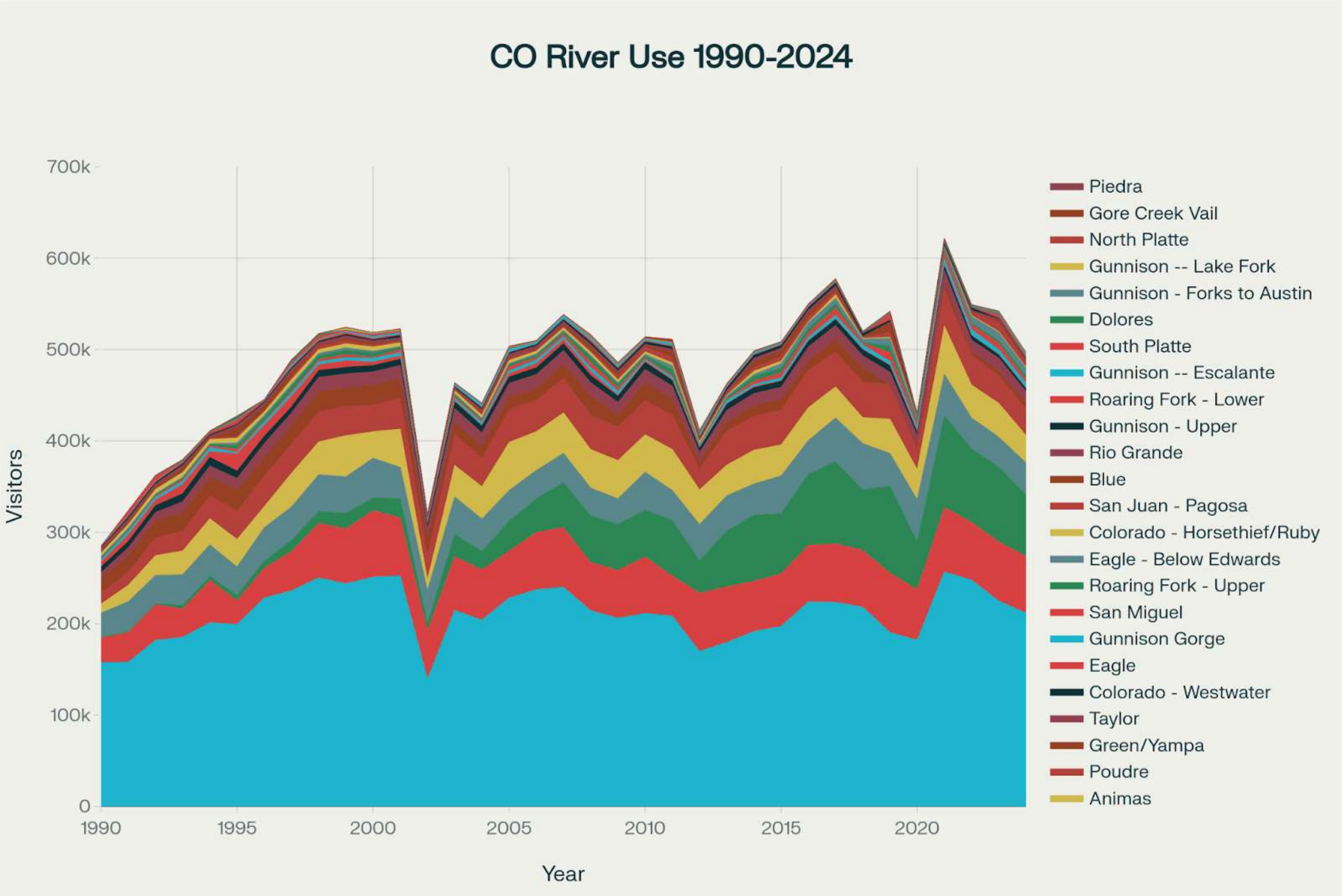
All Colorado commercial river use data presented in this section—including river-level visitor counts, historical comparisons, and statewide totals—are derived directly from the Colorado River Outfitters Association (CROA) 2024 Commercial Rafting Use Report (1988–2024). The full report is publicly available here:https://www.croa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2024-Commercial-Rafting-Use-Report-1988-2024.pdf.

America Outdoors gratefully acknowledges CROA's longstanding leadership in compiling, maintaining, and publishing the most comprehensive and detailed commercial river use dataset available for any state in the nation. Their work makes meaningful statewide analysis possible and provides invaluable insight into long-term trends across Colorado's rafting industry.

Colorado maintains its position as a dominant state for commercial whitewater rafting in the United States, accounting for 36.5% of all tracked visitors in 2024 using these data. The state's 496,871 visitors in 2024 represent a decline of 8.4% from 2023 and 20% from the 2021 peak, but the state remains well above historical averages from the 1990s and early 2000s.

Colorado Commercial River Use, 2018-2024							
River Section	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Animas	28,495	37,553	33,120	52,967	36,132	37,139	30,079
Arkansas	218,120	190,246	182,005	256,650	247,721	224,700	211,635
Blue	1,086	11,066	636	0	0	1,856	2,252
Clear Creek	66,174	95,063	52,044	100,203	80,364	81,674	67,116
Colorado - Glenwood	62,181	65,302	55,228	70,753	63,222	64,940	62,137
Colorado - Horsethief/Ruby	933	1,122	1,268	820	943	1,158	968
Colorado - Upper	50,681	35,777	46,375	45,433	33,866	32,866	35,183
Colorado - Westwater	6,654	7,324	4,190	6,369	5,299	3,550	3,884
Dolores	0	360	0	0	75	940	0
Eagle	428	399	1,076	266	88	669	399
Eagle - Below Edwards	3,549	8,851	4,129	5,233	7,507	8,776	8,801
Gore Creek Vail	0	324	98	0	0	0	175
Green/Yampa	15,645	NR	3,755	5,132	3,085	5,846	5,636
Gunnison — Escalante	187	149	27	144	241	376	364
Gunnison - Forks to Austin	991	1,254	1,617	2,326	2,276	2,162	2,959
Gunnison — Lake Fork	267	245	425	348	169	217	186
Gunnison - Upper	3,276	2,129	NR	4,170	2,883	827	794
Gunnison Gorge	4,787	4,039	4,553	6,110	6,096	5,054	5,057
North Platte	NR	34	5	NR	NR	301	1,010
Piedra	17	249	41	173	36	438	38
Poudre	38,741	37,707	21,481	39,877	33,008	29,921	29,076

Colorado Commercial River Use, 2018-2024							
Rio Grande	131	NR	156	221	1,469	2,415	1,304
Roaring Fork - Lower	831	7,245	338	221	655	3,691	2,206
Roaring Fork - Upper	560	6,751	1,045	948	1,541	2,639	3,726
San Juan - Pagosa	1,012	5,517	0	NR	4,000	9,340	4,743
San Miguel	2,061	9,778	4,899	8,201	5,547	7,173	4,152
South Platte	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Taylor	13,279	13,665	11,652	15,234	12,974	13,616	12,991
Total Commercial Use	**520,086**	**542,149**	**430,163**	**621,799**	**549,197**	**542,284**	**496,871**



Major River Sections

Arkansas River: The Arkansas River served 211,635 visitors in 2024, the highest number of any single river in the dataset. The river served 211,635 visitors in 2024, down from 224,700 in 2023 and 247,721 in 2022. Despite recent declines, the Arkansas remains critical to Colorado's rafting economy, representing 42.6% of the state's total commercial use. April–August flows from snowmelt enable a consistent operating season for commercial use. The river corridor contains multiple launch points, shuttle services, and riverside accommodations.

Clear Creek: Colorado's second-highest volume river served 67,116 visitors in 2024, down from 81,674 in 2023. Clear Creek's proximity to Denver (accessible via Interstate 70) and its location in a major recreation corridor make it a primary choice for Front Range residents seeking convenient whitewater experiences. The river experienced significant growth during the pandemic years, reaching 100,203 visitors in 2021—its highest recorded total.

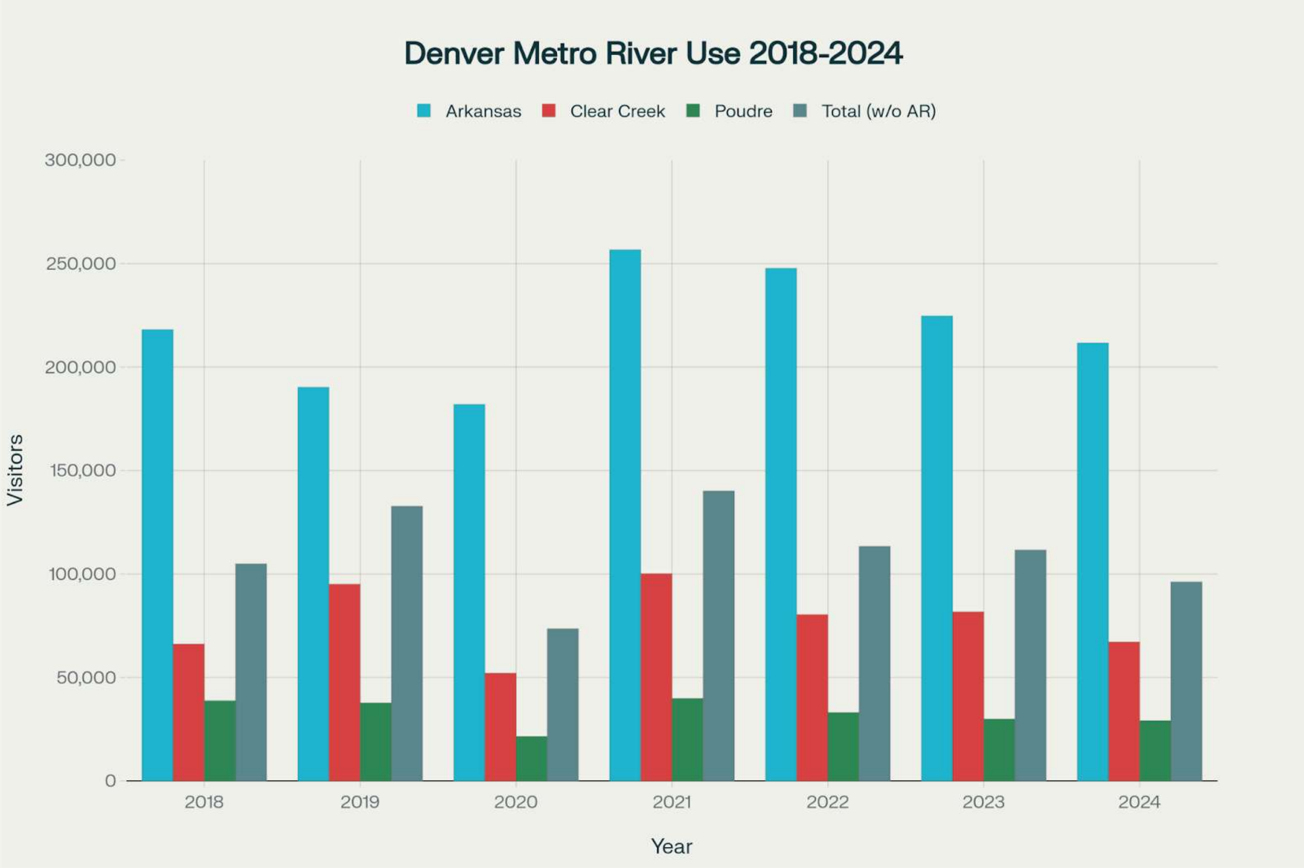
Colorado River - Glenwood Section: This scenic float through Glenwood Canyon served 62,137 visitors in 2024, maintaining consistent performance across the seven-year period. The section's reliable flows, maintained partially through reservoir releases and base flows, enable a longer operating season than some snowmelt-dependent rivers. Located along I-70 near major resort communities (Vail, Aspen), the Glenwood section benefits from tourist traffic and serves as a complementary activity to the region's other attractions.

Colorado River - Upper Section: The Upper Colorado section through Gore Canyon and adjacent stretches served 35,183 visitors in 2024, recovering slightly from 2023's 32,866 visitors but remaining below historical peaks.

Poudre River: Fort Collins' local river served 29,076 visitors in 2024, continuing a decline from the 2021 peak of 39,877 visitors. The Poudre provides important accessibility for Northern Colorado residents and visitors.

Animas River: Serving Durango's tourism economy, the Animas River brought 30,079 visitors down its whitewater in 2024, declining from 37,139 in 2023. The Animas saw dramatic growth during the pandemic period, reaching 52,967 visitors in 2021—its highest recorded number. Durango's position as a southwest Colorado tourism hub, combined with the scenic Animas River valley and the town's historic character, creates strong support for commercial rafting operations.

Regional Groupings Within Colorado



Denver Metro / I-70 Corridor Rivers: The Arkansas, Clear Creek, and Poudre Rivers collectively served 307,827 visitors in 2024, representing 62% of Colorado's total commercial river use. Without the Arkansas River, the Denver Metro rivers (Clear Creek and Poudre) served 96,192 visitors in 2024.

Roaring Fork Valley / I-70 Mountain Corridor: Rivers including the Blue, Eagle (main and lower sections), Gore Creek, and both Roaring Fork sections served a combined 17,559 visitors in 2024, rebounding significantly from 2022's 9,791 visitors but below the 2019 peak of 34,636 visitors. The 2019 spike was particularly notable, with multiple rivers in this group seeing unusual peaks (Blue: 11,066; Eagle - Below Edwards: 8,851; Roaring Fork - Lower: 7,245; Roaring Fork - Upper: 6,751).

Southwest Colorado Rivers: The Animas, Dolores, Piedra, Rio Grande, San Juan - Pagosa, and San Miguel Rivers served 40,316 visitors in 2024, down from 57,445 in 2023. This region shows considerable variability, with the 2021 total of 61,562 representing the period's peak. Southwest Colorado's rivers serve both the Durango tourism base and visitors to the Four Corners region. Water availability significantly affects this region, with drought conditions and agricultural water demands periodically reducing flows on rivers like the Dolores (which reported zero commercial use in 2018, 2020, 2021, and 2024).

Gunnison Basin Rivers: The various Gunnison River sections (Gorge, Upper, Escalante, Forks to Austin, Lake Fork) collectively served approximately 13,360 visitors in 2024. The Gunnison Gorge section, accessible through Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park area, provides the most consistent operations within this group with 5,057 visitors in 2024.

Year	Animas	Dolores	Piedra	Rio Grande	San Juan - Pagosa	San Miguel	Total
2018	28495	0	17	131	1012	2061	31716
2019	37553	360	249	0	5517	9778	53457
2020	33120	0	41	156	0	4899	38216
2021	52967	0	173	221	0	8201	61562
2022	36132	75	36	1469	4000	5547	47259
2023	37139	940	438	2415	9340	7173	57445
2024	30079	0	38	1304	4743	4152	40316

Rivers Showing Notable Patterns

Taylor River: Demonstrating remarkable consistency, the Taylor River served between 11,652 and 15,234 visitors across the 2018-2024 period, with 2024's total at 12,991 visitors. Located near Crested Butte and Gunnison, the Taylor serves a smaller but stable market of visitors seeking a more remote Colorado rafting experience.

Green/Yampa River System: Tracking for this river system within Dinosaur National Monument shows significant gaps, with "NR" (No Record) reported for 2019. Available data shows 5,636 visitors in 2024, comparable to recent years but well below the 15,645 visitors reported in 2018. Available data shows 5,636 visitors in 2024. 'NR' (No Record) was reported for 2019.

San Juan - Pagosa and San Miguel Rivers: These southwestern rivers show substantial volatility. The San Juan near Pagosa Springs served 4,743 visitors in 2024, down from 9,340 in 2023, with no commercial use reported for 2020 and NR for 2021. The San Miguel River similarly fluctuates, with 4,152 visitors in 2024 down from 7,173 in 2023. These rivers depend heavily on snowpack and runoff.

Colorado River - Westwater Section: This challenging whitewater section in Westwater Canyon served 3,884 visitors in 2024, recovering slightly from 2023's 3,550 visitors. Westwater typically requires multi-day trips and appeals to experienced rafters seeking wilderness whitewater.

Rio Grande River: Showing dramatic growth, the Rio Grande jumped from 131 visitors in 2018 to 2,415 in 2023 before declining to 1,304 in 2024. The Rio Grande in Colorado (distinct from the New Mexico sections) remains a smaller-volume operation relative to the state's major rivers.

Note on Data Gaps: The Piedra and Dolores Rivers have modest numbers, with 38 visitors and 0 visitors in 2024 respectively. The Rio Grande showed significant growth from 221 visitors in 2021 to 1,469 in 2022, peaking at 2,415 in 2023 before declining to 1,304 in 2024. The South Platte shows no recorded data (NR) across all years, suggesting either no commercial operations or data collection challenges.

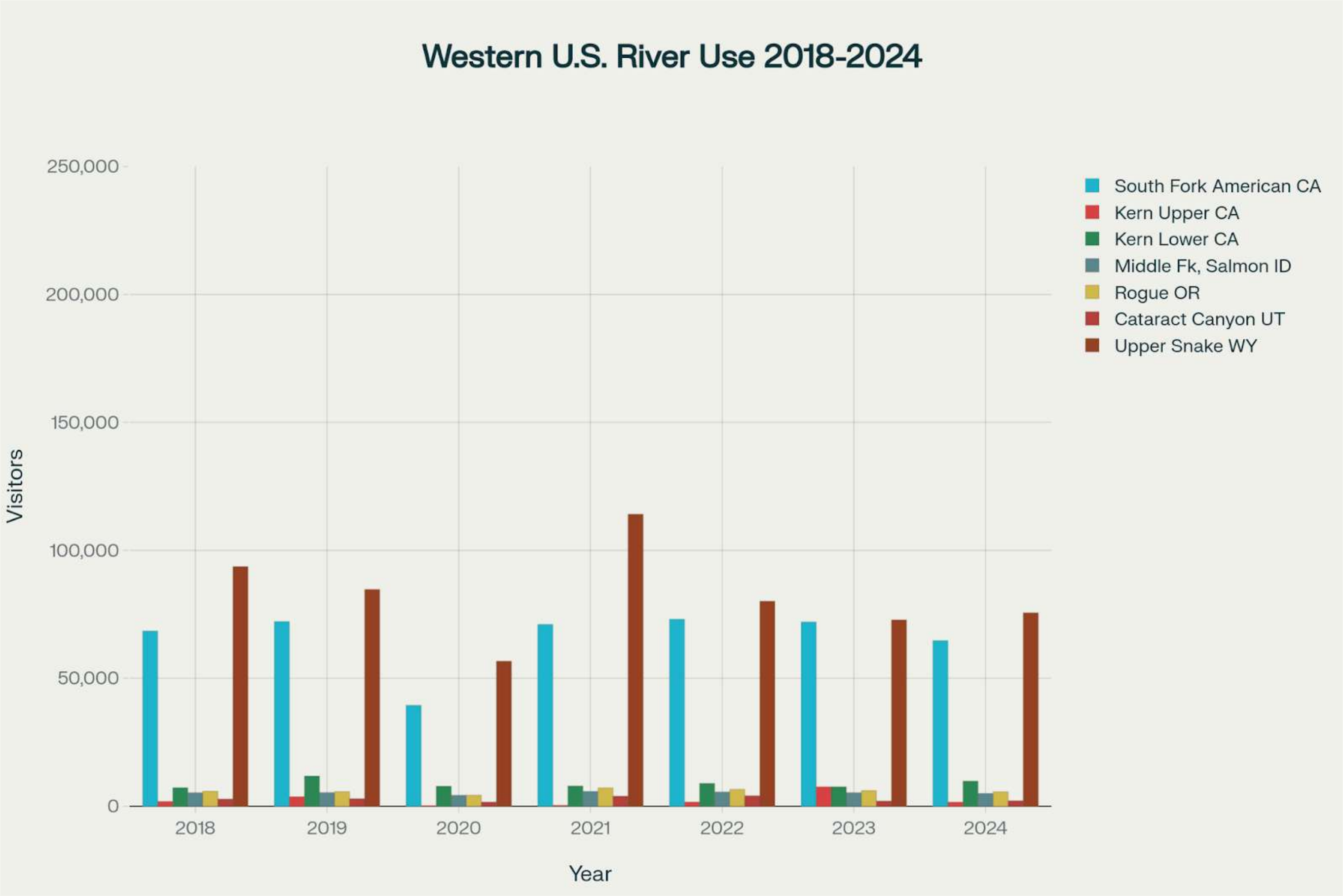
Western Commercial River Use

The Western region (excluding Colorado and Arizona, and many core commercially run rivers across other western states)) encompasses diverse river resources across five states, from California's high-volume Sierra Nevada operations to Idaho's wilderness rivers. The region served 164,633 visitors in 2024, down 5.1% from 2023 and 21.8% below the 2021 peak of 210,477 visitors.

Note: The data in this report does not track Colorado River trips upstream of Cataract Canyon nor the Grand Canyon. Nor does this dataset include many additional commercially run rivers of note across Western States, as previously noted.

Western U.S. Commercial River Use 2018-2024 (w/o Colorado, Arizona)

River Section	State	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Kern Upper	CA	1,867	3,708	245	371	1,665	7,591	1,633
Kern Lower	CA	7,241	11,775	7,832	7,915	8,939	7,614	9,849
South Fork American	CA	68,509	72,184	39,458	71,102	73,097	72,001	64,761
Middle Fk, Salmon	ID	5,300	5,345	4,297	5,816	5,591	5,312	4,987
Rogue	OR	5,921	5,760	4,346	7,206	6,599	6,160	5,667
Cataract Canyon	UT	2,814	2,963	1,644	3,943	4,086	2,025	2,119
Upper Snake	WY	93,624	84,735	56,730	114,124	80,139	72,838	75,617
Total Commercial Use		185,276	186,470	114,552	210,477	180,116	173,541	164,633



California Rivers

South Fork American River:Among California's flagship commercial rivers, the South Fork American served 64,761 visitors in 2024, making it the sixth-highest volume river in the nation within this dataset. Located approximately 50 miles east of Sacramento, the South Fork American benefits from proximity to the San Francisco Bay Area and Sacramento metropolitan regions. The river includes several distinct commercial sections—an Upper (Class II–III), a Middle (primarily Class II), and the popular Lower/Gorge section (Class II–III)—providing trip options for a wide range of visitors.

The South Fork American's flows are partially regulated through reservoir releases, providing more consistent and predictable conditions than purely snowmelt-dependent rivers. This reliability supports a longer operating season and allows operators to plan with greater certainty than on many other Western rivers. The 2020 pandemic restrictions severely impacted operations, with visitor numbers dropping 45% to 39,458. The river recorded 64,761 visitors in 2024, slightly down from 2023 (72,001) but generally back on trend with long-term averages.

It is important to note that this dataset includes only the permitted South Fork commercial sections and does not include operations on the Middle Fork American or North Fork American. The Middle Fork

American—while part of the larger American River system—operates under a similar regulated flow schedule and supports significant commercial use (primarily on its Class III–IV section), but those figures are not represented in this report.

The South Fork American's consistency makes it a cornerstone of Western-region commercial use in this dataset, typically accounting for 39–45% of the region's total.

Kern River System (Upper and Lower): The Kern River, draining the southern Sierra Nevada, provides two distinct commercial rafting experiences. The Lower Kern section served 9,849 visitors in 2024, its highest total in the tracked period, while the Upper Kern section served 1,633 visitors. Combined, the Kern system brought 11,482 visitors down its whitewater in 2024.

The Lower Kern, located near Bakersfield, offers accessible Class III–IV whitewater through the scenic Kern River Canyon. Although the section is dam-released and typically has water most years, its long-term use pattern has been strongly shaped by a 17-year period of dam repair work (2006–2022) that prevented the reservoir from fully filling. During these years, drought impacts were amplified, shortening seasons and creating significant year-to-year variability in commercial operations. The Lower Kern's longer season in full-water years (April through July, and in some years extending into August) and its proximity to major Southern California population centers support consistent demand when flows are reliable. The river saw substantial growth in 2019 with 11,775 visitors before pandemic-related declines and subsequent recovery in later years

The Upper Kern depends almost entirely on snowmelt, resulting in wide year-to-year variation driven primarily by water availability rather than demand. In higher-water years, the Upper supports robust spring seasons that taper quickly as runoff declines; in lower-water years, much of the commercial demand shifts downstream to the more reliably flowing Lower Kern, especially now that the dam repair period (2006–2022) has concluded. It is also important to note that the most heavily used stretch in the Upper Kern drainage—the in-town "Town Run"—is not a permitted commercial section and therefore does not appear in this dataset. The permitted Upper Kern sections included here reflect a smaller subset of overall activity on the river and should be interpreted within that context.

California's three tracked rivers collectively served 76,243 visitors in 2024, accounting for 46% of the Western region total in this dataset. Wyoming's Upper Snake River (75,617 visitors) represents the region's single largest contributor.

Additional California Operations: While the three tracked California rivers represent some of the state's highest-volume commercial operations, California's commercial rafting industry encompasses extensive additional resources not captured in this dataset. Major Sierra Nevada operations include the Tuolumne River (Yosemite-area wilderness trips), Merced River (Yosemite gateway operations), Stanislaus River (Mother Lode region), Kings River (southern Sierra), Truckee River (Lake Tahoe area spanning California-Nevada), and the American River's Middle Fork and North Fork (beyond the tracked South Fork). Northern California operations include the Trinity River and Klamath River systems. These untracked rivers represent substantial commercial infrastructure and diverse experience offerings from family-friendly floats to expert-level wilderness expeditions. The three tracked rivers provide a representative sample of California's commercial activity but do not reflect the full scope of the state's industry.

Wyoming

Upper Snake River: A core Wyoming rafting destination, the Upper Snake accounted for 75,617 commercial visitors in 2024—making it the largest single contributor to Wyoming's commercial river use and a key anchor for the Western region's totals (45.9% in this dataset). Recent reporting confirms a consistent volume in 2024.

The river's integration into the Greater Yellowstone tourism economy may help support strong, sustained demand. Multiple sections (from Jackson Lake Dam through Jackson Hole to Palisades Reservoir) provide trip options ranging from gentle scenic floats to more challenging whitewater.

The Upper Snake experienced dramatic fluctuations during the pandemic period, dropping 33% to 56,730 visitors in 2020 before surging to a record 114,124 visitors in 2021—representing 54% of the entire Western region total that year.

The subsequent decline to 80,139 visitors in 2022 and 72,838 in 2023 reflects a return toward long-term averages. Because the Upper Snake is reported consistently for all years in this dataset, its year-over-year trend can be directly compared.

Idaho

Middle Fork Salmon River: an iconic Idaho wilderness river, served 4,987 visitors in 2024, continuing a gradual decline from 5,816 visitors in 2021. The Middle Fork represents a distinctly different product than high-volume day-trip operations, offering multi-day (typically 5-6 day) wilderness expeditions through the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

The Middle Fork operates under a strict federal permit system administered by the U.S. Forest Service, limiting total use (commercial and private) to protect wilderness character. This allocation creates a supply constraint regardless of demand.

The river's relatively stable numbers (ranging from 4,297 to 5,816 visitors over the seven-year period) reflect these permit limitations rather than market demand. The river's consistency provides important stability to Idaho's commercial rafting economy, even as absolute numbers remain small relative to day-trip operations in other states.

Additional Idaho Operations: The state's extensive commercial whitewater infrastructure includes significant operations not captured in this dataset, including but not limited to: the Main Salmon River (separate from the Middle Fork), which offers one of America's premier wilderness river experiences; the Lochsa River, known for worldclass *Big* Water; the Selway River, another permit-controlled wilderness resource; the Clearwater River system; the Payette River network (Main Payette, South Fork Payette, North Fork Payette) offering diverse difficulty levels and high popularity; the Teton River; the St. Joe River; and the Owyhee River spanning the Idaho-Oregon border. These rivers represent substantial year-round and seasonal commercial operations across varied geographic settings.

These Idaho figures reflect only the Middle Fork Salmon segment included in the dataset; other Idaho rivers with commercial use are not represented.

Oregon

Rogue River: A premier Oregon rafting destination that served 5,667 visitors in 2024, declining from 6,160 in 2023. The Rogue River offers multi-day trips through remote canyon country in southwestern Oregon (while day trips are also available along upstream sections, these were not included in the dataset).

Like the Middle Fork Salmon, the Wild section of the Rogue operates under federal permit allocations that limit commercial use. The designated Wild and Scenic River status protects the river's character but constrains growth potential. The Rogue saw its highest numbers during 2021 with 7,206 visitors, reflecting pandemic-era demand for multi-day outdoor experiences. The 2024 total of 5,667 visitors represents a return to more typical patterns comparable to 2018-2019 levels.

The Rogue's longer season (April through October) compared to snowmelt-dependent rivers provides operational advantages. The river's proximity to Interstate 5 and the Medford area offers better accessibility than many wilderness rivers, though the multi-day commitment and permit requirements limit market size relative to day-trip operations.

Additional Oregon Operations: Oregon's commercial rafting industry encompasses diverse river resources beyond those systematically tracked in this dataset. The Rogue River, one of the West's most iconic multiday wilderness rivers, offers commercial trips through remote southwestern Oregon canyons. The Deschutes River provides year-round commercial operations in central Oregon. Additional significant commercial resources include the McKenzie River (Willamette Valley), Hood River (Columbia River Gorge area), Clackamas River (Portland metropolitan region access), John Day River (north-central Oregon wilderness), Grand Ronde River (northeastern Oregon), Umpqua River (southern Oregon), and the Owyhee River (spanning the Oregon-Idaho border). These rivers–and others besides—represent varied difficulty levels, trip lengths, and seasonal patterns across Oregon's diverse geography.

The Rogue River recorded 7,283 visitors in 2024, consistent with recent years. This represents only the Rogue River segment included in the dataset; other Oregon rivers with significant commercial activity are not reflected here.

Utah

Cataract Canyon: This section of the Colorado River, located in Canyonlands National Park upstream of Lake Powell, served 2,119 visitors in 2024. Cataract Canyon offers multi-day expeditions with significant whitewater—the biggest drops on the Colorado River system outside the Grand Canyon. The canyon's numbers show considerable volatility, ranging from 1,644 visitors in 2020 to 3,943 in 2021. The 2024 total of 2,119 visitors represents the second-lowest number in the tracked period.

Utah hosts multiple iconic commercial river segments beyond Cataract Canyon, including the Green River through Desolation Canyon and Labyrinth Canyon, the Gates of Lodore and Yampa River within Dinosaur National Monument, the San Juan River, and the Moab Daily and Westwater Canyon sections of the Colorado River. There is also some commercial activity on shorter runs of the Weber and Provo Rivers. These rivers vary widely in character—from high-use whitewater corridors like Desolation, Westwater, and the Moab Daily to lower-intensity scenic or flatwater stretches such as Labyrinth Canyon—but together represent a substantial share of Utah's guided river visitation.

Because current data inputs for this report do not include commercial use figures for these Utah rivers, the analyses presented here do not reflect the full scope of the state's commercial river recreation activity or the contributions of operators working outside the Cataract Canyon and Colorado River sections covered in this dataset.

Note: The following state summaries (Montana, New Mexico/Arizona, Washington) describe commercial rafting activity **not included** in this dataset. These states appear for regional context only.

Montana

Montana's commercial river operations are not systematically tracked in this dataset. Key commercially run rivers include the Flathead River system—particularly the Middle Fork and North Fork near Glacier National Park—along with the Clark Fork River west of Missoula and the permit-controlled Smith River in central Montana. The Bitterroot River supports primarily guided fishing and scenic float operations at a smaller scale. Together, these rivers offer day-trip and limited multiday opportunities across varied landscapes. Because current inputs do not include Montana data, these activities fall outside the scope of this tracking framework.

New Mexico & Arizona

New Mexico and Arizona commercial operations are not comprehensively tracked in this dataset. In New Mexico, the Rio Grande—including the Taos Box and other northern sections—supports well-established commercial rafting with a mix of desert whitewater and scenic floats. The Rio Chama offers permitted multiday trips under a coordinated BLM–USFS system with flows influenced by both snowmelt and upstream dam releases. In Arizona, primary commercial rivers include the Salt River Canyon, a major spring whitewater resource east of Phoenix, and the Verde River, which supports limited commercial trips during runoff or release-driven flow windows. The Colorado River through Grand Canyon—excluded from this dataset—is one of the country's most significant commercial river operations under the National Park Service's permit system.

Washington State

Washington State's Pacific Northwest commercial operations are not tracked in this dataset. Key commercially run rivers include the White Salmon River in the Columbia River Gorge; the Wenatchee and Skykomish Rivers in the eastern and western Cascade foothills; the Skagit River in the North Cascades; and the Green River in western Washington. These rivers support a mix of scenic floats and high-intensity whitewater, with seasons shaped by snowmelt, precipitation, and, in some cases, controlled reservoir releases. Proximity to major population centers in Seattle and the broader Puget Sound region—and to Portland for the White Salmon—provides strong markets for primarily day-trip commercial operations.

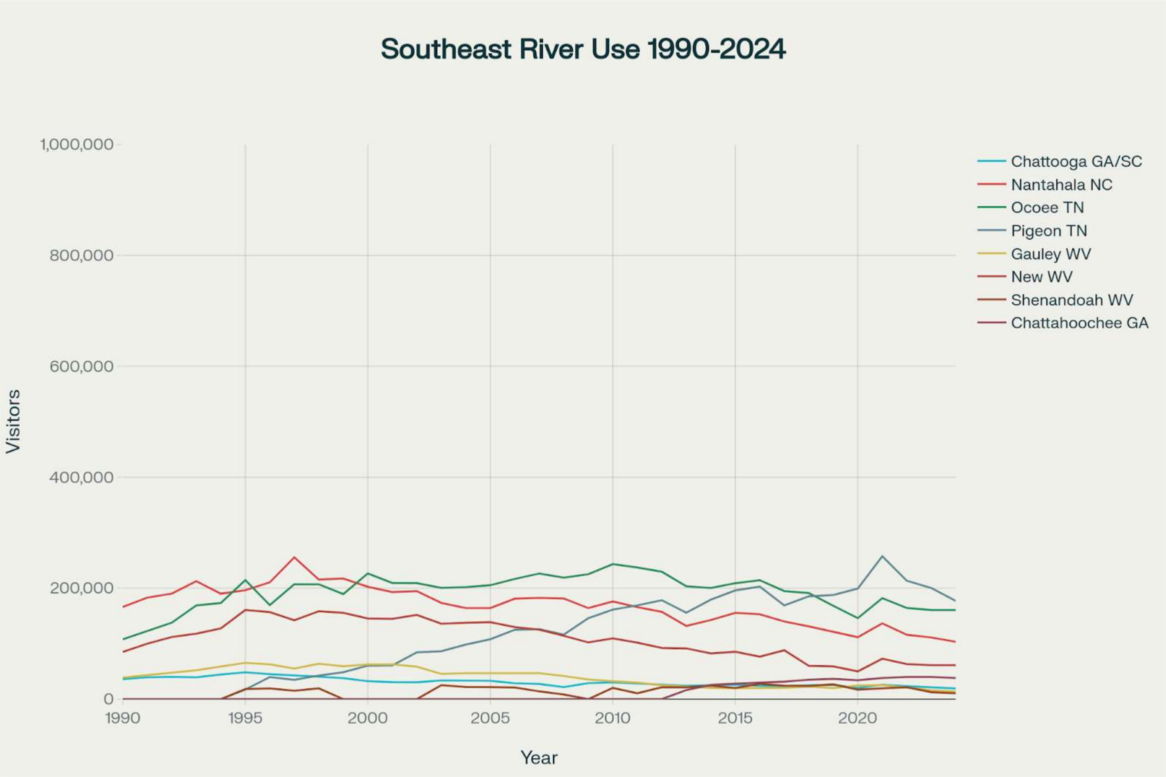
Southeast Commercial River Use

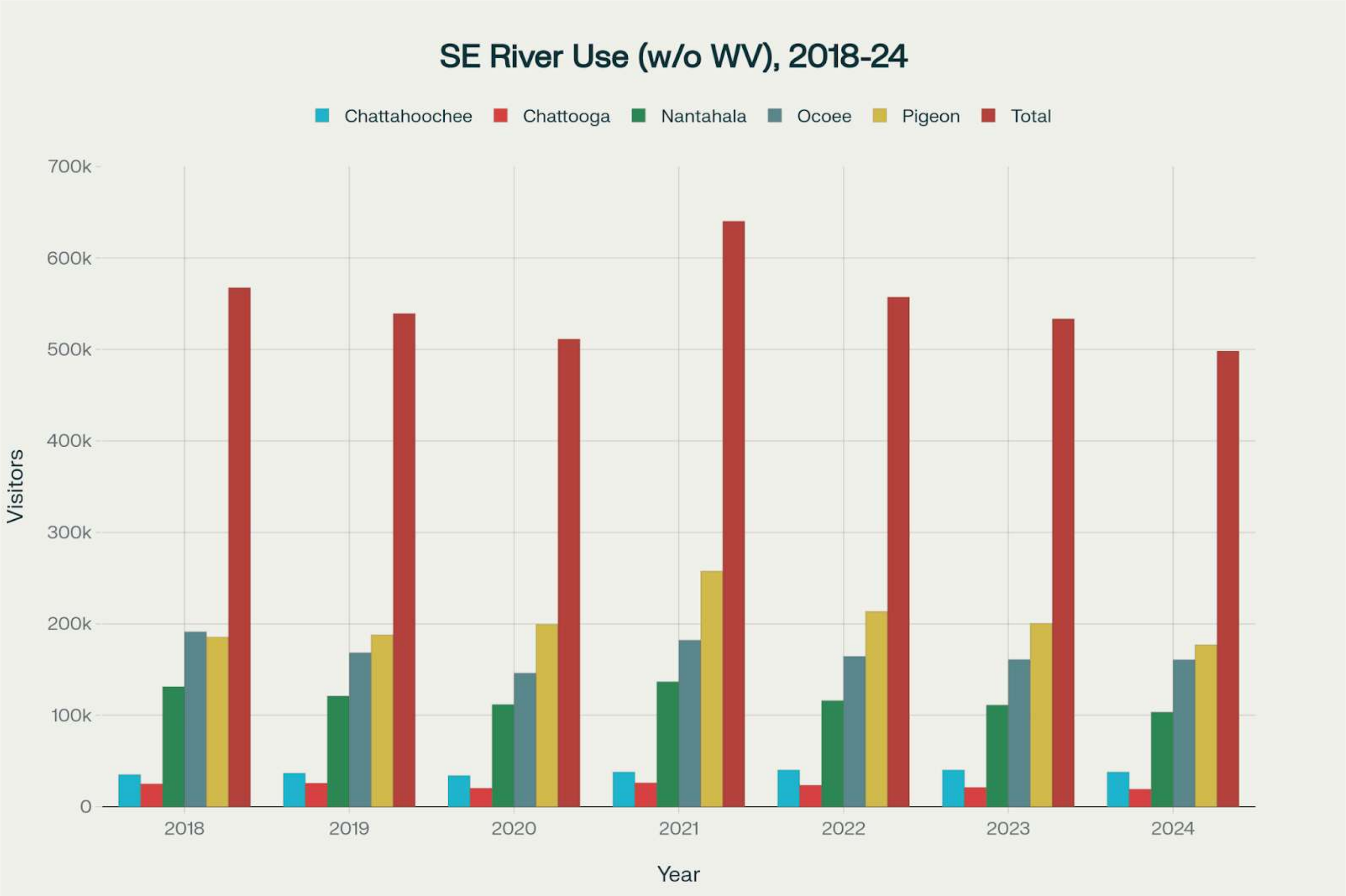
The Southeast region served 583,412 commercial visitors in 2024, the highest total of any region represented in this dataset. Operations in this region span Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia and include several of the most heavily used rivers tracked in this analysis.

Southeast U.S. Commercial River Use 2018-2024

River Section	State	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Chattahoochee	GA	35,000	36,500	34,000	38,000	40,000	40,000	38,000
Chattooga	GA/SC	24,960	25,714	20,194	25,986	23,475	21,132	19,194
Nantahala	NC	131,052	121,064	111,610	136,611	115,997	111,111	103,330
Ocoee	TN	191,157	168,213	146,039	182,073	164,286	160,703	160,556
Pigeon	TN	185,376	187,784	199,385	257,589	213,426	200,399	176,982
Gauley	WV	22,556	19,845	24,588	25,390	20,990	16,027	13,586
New	WV	59,987	58,983	50,023	72,907	63,250	61,292	61,214
Shenandoah	WV	23,841	26,717	17,057	19,439	21,466	12,439	10,550
Total Commercial Use		673929	644820	602896	757995	662890	623103	583412

Note: The figures shown represent only the Southeast river segments included in this dataset. They do not capture all commercial rafting activity in the Southeast and should not be interpreted as comprehensive state or regional totals.





Tennessee Rivers

Tennessee's two tracked rivers, the Ocoee and the Pigeon, together served 337,538 commercial visitors in 2024, representing 57.9% of all Southeast-region use in this dataset.

Ocoee River: The Ocoee hosted Olympic whitewater events during the 1996 Atlanta Games on its upper section. That history continues to shape the river's visibility and branding, but the visitation figures reported here reflect only commercial rafting use as tracked in this dataset. Serving 160,556 visitors in 2024, the Ocoee remains one of the highest-use rivers in the Southeast dataset. Located near the Georgia border, the Ocoee flows through Cherokee National Forest and operates primarily as a day-trip destination. The Ocoee's commercial use declined from 191,157 visitors in 2018 to 168,213 in 2019, a change that predates the pandemic. After a peak of 182,073 visitors in 2021, use decreased to 160,556 in 2024, remaining below the 2018 baseline.

Pigeon River: Tennessee's second river in this analysis, the Pigeon served 176,982 visitors in 2024. Located near the Great Smoky Mountains region, the Pigeon supports a large volume of day-trip commercial rafting. Like the Ocoee, the Pigeon's flows are regulated through dam releases, providing operational predictability. From 2020 to 2021, Pigeon River use increased from 199,385 to 257,589 visitors, a 29% single-year increase within this dataset. After the 2021 peak, Pigeon River use declined to 213,426 visitors in 2022, 200,399 in 2023, and 176,982 in 2024. The 2024 total is approximately 4% below the 2018 level of 185,376 visitors but remains above the 2020 baseline.

Additional Tennessee Rivers: Tennessee's commercial river activity extends beyond the Ocoee and Pigeon to include the Hiwassee River, which provides family-oriented Class I–II trips in southeastern Tennessee, and the Nolichucky River, a Class III–IV run spanning the North Carolina–Tennessee border. The Obed Wild and Scenic River also offers advanced whitewater, though commercial use there is limited compared to other regional rivers. These waters represent additional Southeast river resources that fall outside the scope of this dataset.

North Carolina

Nantahala River: Serving 103,330 visitors in 2024, the Nantahala recorded the third-highest commercial use total in the Southeast region among the river segments included in this dataset. The Nantahala's flows are regulated by scheduled releases from Nantahala Lake. The river features primarily Class II–III whitewater, including the well-known gorge section and lower eight-mile run.Nantahala River use peaked at 127,018 visitors in 2021 and then declined to 103,330 visitors in 2024. This represents a 19% decrease from the 2021 peak and remains slightly below the 2018 total of 112,427 visitors.

Additional North Carolina Rivers: North Carolina's commercial river activity extends beyond the Nantahala to include the French Broad River, whose commercially run sections are located in western North Carolina; the Nolichucky River, which begins in North Carolina and flows into Tennessee; and the Tuckasegee River, a family-friendly commercial resource in the western part of the state. These rivers provide additional commercial opportunities that complement the state's highest-volume Nantahala operations. These other rivers are not included in this dataset, so statewide commercial rafting activity is underrepresented in the figures reported here.

Georgia and Georgia/South Carolina

Chattahoochee River: The Chattahoochee served 38,000 visitors in 2024, consistent with its use levels across the past several years in this dataset. Across all reported years, Chattahoochee River visitation remained between 34,000 and 40,000 visitors, with a modest net increase from 35,000 visitors in 2018 to 38,000 visitors in 2024. These values reflect only the data submitted for this analysis.

Chattooga River: The Chattooga, a National Wild and Scenic River on the Georgia–South Carolina border, recorded 19,135 visitors in 2024. This represents a decrease from 24,960 visitors in 2018 but an increase compared to 2022 and 2023. The Chattooga's federally protected Wild and Scenic River corridor shapes how commercial use is allocated and managed. (These management requirements are noted here for context and do not bear on the visitation totals used in this dataset.)

West Virginia

West Virginia's three tracked rivers — the New River, Gauley River, and Shenandoah River — served a combined 72,813 commercial visitors in 2024. These totals reflect only the segments included in this dataset and do not represent complete statewide commercial rafting activity.

New River: The New River is West Virginia's highest-use river in this dataset, serving 47,643 visitors in 2024. The New River Gorge was redesignated as a National Park and Preserve in 2020. New River commercial use has remained relatively stable across the period tracked in this dataset, ranging from 39,615 visitors in 2020 to 55,721 in 2021. In 2024, the river recorded 47,643 visitors. The New River's highest recent use occurred in 2021, with 55,721 visitors. By 2024, visitation had returned to 47,643, which is approximately 8% below the 2018 level of 52,087.

Gauley River: The Gauley served 13,586 visitors in 2024. Commercial use on the river is shaped by its scheduled release season, which concentrates operations during specific periods of the year. Gauley River use declined from 22,556 visitors in 2018 to 13,586 in 2024, a decrease of approximately 40%. Gauley operations are concentrated around the scheduled Summersville Dam release season.

Shenandoah River: The Shenandoah is the lowest-volume tracked river in West Virginia's dataset, serving 11,584 visitors in 2024. This represents a 56% decrease from its 2019 peak of 26,717 visitors. The Shenandoah's decline from 23,841 visitors in 2018 to 11,584 in 2024 is the steepest among West Virginia's tracked rivers. The 2024 total is slightly less than half the 2018 level.

Additional West Virginia river resources outside the scope of this dataset notably includes the Cheat River, which supports limited spring commercial rafting.

Note: The following summary describes commercial rafting activity **not included** in this dataset. These states appear for regional context only.

Kentucky/Tennessee Border Region

Outside the scope of this dataset, the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River—located within the National Park Service's Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area—supports limited, flow-dependent commercial rafting in both Tennessee and Kentucky. Other nearby rivers, including Kentucky's Red River, are primarily used for non-motorized recreation such as paddling and are not part of the region's established commercial rafting sector. These areas are presented here for regional context only.

Southeast Regional Patterns and Trends

The Southeast region declined from 673,929 visitors in 2018 to 583,412 in 2024 (13.4% decrease). Six of eight tracked rivers show declines over the period.

Five of eight Southeast rivers in this analysis operate according to dam releases that provide flows. The Ocoee and Pigeon rely on Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) releases. The Nantahala uses Duke Energy releases. The New River and Gauley use reservoir-augmented flows.

Southeast rivers are located within established tourism regions including the Smoky Mountains, New River Gorge, Shenandoah Valley, and the Atlanta area. Most Southeast rivers are accessible within a few hours' drive from major population centers including Atlanta, Charlotte, Nashville, Charleston, and Washington D.C.

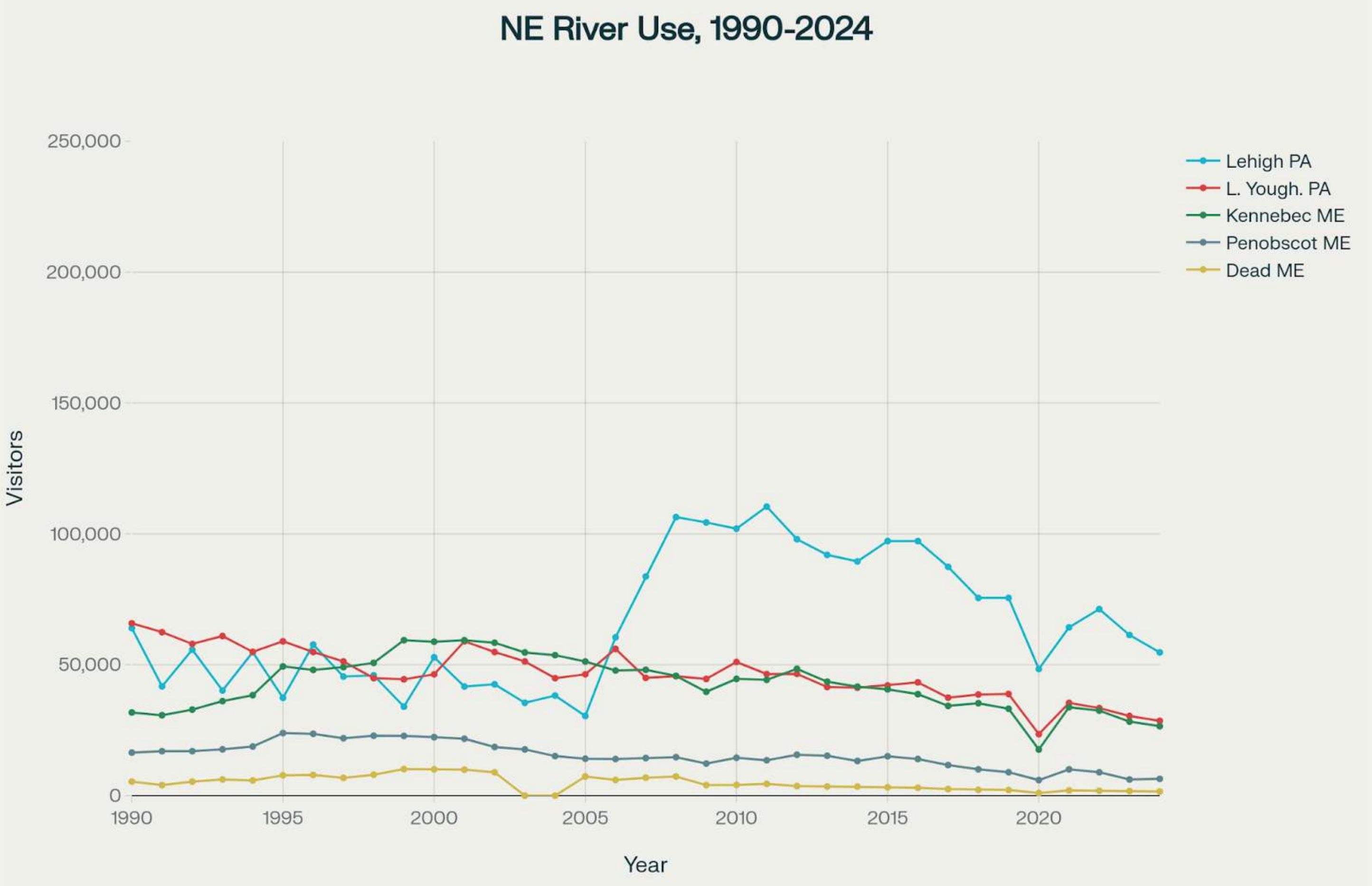
Northeast Commercial River Use

The Northeast region, represented here by rivers in Pennsylvania and Maine, served 117,822 commercial visitors in 2024. This is the lowest total in the period covered by this dataset apart from the 2020 pandemic year. **These values reflect only rivers included in the dataset and do not represent all commercial rafting in the region.**

Northeast U.S. Commercial River Use 2018-2024

River Section	State	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Lehigh	PA	75,552	75,550	48,377	64,286	71,263	61,369	54,715
Lower Youghiogheny	PA	38,635	38,848	23,495	35,452	33,471	30,419	28,590
Kennebec	ME	35,308	33,211	17,637	33,783	32,480	28,286	26,523
Penobscot	ME	10,057	8,939	5,942	10,053	8,939	6,170	6,421
Dead	ME	2,212	2,163	1,002	1,997	1,881	1,777	1,573

Note: Beginning in 2006, approximately 25% additional visits were added to Lehigh River data to reflect estimated use increases resulting from improved flows and use on lower sections outside Lehigh Gorge State Park. This methodological adjustment affects comparisons with pre-2006 data.



Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's two tracked rivers served 83,305 visitors in 2024, accounting for 70.7% of the Northeast totals in this dataset.

Lehigh River: The Lehigh served 54,715 visitors in 2024, making it the highest-use river in the Northeast dataset. The Lehigh is located within driving distance of major population centers, including Philadelphia, New York City, and the Lehigh Valley. The Lehigh's flows are regulated through dam releases from the Francis E. Walter Reservoir. Managed releases shape the river's commercial season and provide dependable whitewater conditions during summer periods. Lehigh River commercial use peaked at just over 75,500 visitors in 2018–2019. By 2024, use had decreased to 54,715, a decline of about 28% from this peak.

Lower Youghiogheny River: Commonly known as the "Lower Yough," the Lower Youghiogheny served 28,590 visitors in 2024. This represents a 26% decline from 38,635 visitors in 2018. Located in southwestern Pennsylvania near the Maryland border, the Lower Yough's flows are influenced by releases from the Youghiogheny River Lake. These releases help define the timing and consistency of the river's primary commercial rafting season. The Lower Yough recorded 35,452 visitors in 2021, an increase from 23,495 visitors in 2020 but still below the 2018–2019 range of 38,635–38,848 visitors.

The Lower Yough's decline parallels the Lehigh's pattern, with visitor numbers declining steadily throughout the tracked period, with brief exception for the 2021 pandemic-recovery period.

Additional Pennsylvania Operations Not Included in This Dataset: The Stonycreek River near Johnstown supports limited but established commercial rafting during scheduled release days from the Quemahoning Reservoir. Although significantly smaller in scale than the Lehigh and Lower Youghiogheny, the Stonycreek represents an additional commercially used Pennsylvania river not captured within this dataset's reporting framework.

Maine

Maine's three tracked rivers served 34,517 visitors in 2024. These totals reflect the characteristics of rafting operations in the state, including shorter commercial seasons and remote locations, and represent only the river segments included in this dataset.

Kennebec River: The Kennebec served 26,523 visitors in 2024, making it the highest-use river in Maine within this dataset. Flows on the Kennebec are regulated through scheduled releases from Harris Dam, which define the core commercial rafting season.

Kennebec River use decreased from 35,308 visitors in 2018 to 26,523 visitors in 2024, a decline of approximately 25% over the period. Use fell sharply to 17,637 visitors in 2020, rebounded to 33,783 in 2021, and then declined again through 2024.

Across the period tracked in this dataset, Kennebec River use has ranged from 17,637 to 35,308 visitors annually. Despite year-to-year fluctuations, the Kennebec continues to account for the majority of Maine's tracked commercial rafting activity.

Penobscot River: The Penobscot served 6,421 visitors in 2024. Commercial rafting occurs primarily on upper river segments north of Bangor, where operations depend on the flows and release schedules applicable to those sections. The Penobscot's remote location and shorter operating season contribute to its lower annual totals relative to other tracked rivers.

Dead River: The Dead River served 1,573 visitors in 2024. Its commercial use varies based on a small number of scheduled high-water release days, which are fewer than those on other Maine rivers.

Additional Maine Rivers and Northeast Region Expansion

Additional Maine and Northeast Commercial Rivers (Not Included in This Dataset): Beyond Maine's tracked Kennebec and Penobscot rivers, the Rapid River provides limited but notable commercial opportunities during rare, scheduled release days.

Across the broader Northeast, commercial rafting occurs on several regionally significant rivers not captured in this dataset. In Massachusetts, the Deerfield River supports the state's primary commercial rafting through regular dam-release schedules, while the Millers River and Concord River offer occasional, flow-dependent commercial trips. Vermont's West River has historically supported commercial rafting during release events, though these opportunities have become infrequent in recent years.

In New York, commercial operations include the Hudson River in the Adirondacks, the Sacandaga River near Lake Luzerne, the Black River near Watertown, and the release-dependent Moose River. These rivers primarily serve regional day-trip markets and fall outside this dataset's systematic tracking framework.

Northeast Region Characteristics and 2024 Data

The Northeast region served 117,822 visitors in 2024, based on the rivers tracked in Maine and Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania's rivers are located within driving distance of major population centers, while Maine's commercial rafting operations occur in more remote areas with shorter operating seasons.

Maine's rivers rely on natural flows during spring runoff and on limited scheduled release days, whereas Pennsylvania's Lehigh and Lower Youghiogheny Rivers operate primarily on regulated flows that support a longer rafting season.

Flow management practices vary across the region. Some rivers, such as the Lehigh, Lower Yough, and Kennebec, use scheduled releases, while others—particularly in Maine—are dependent on seasonal natural flows.