

Wounded Women Veterans to Raft the Colorado River

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Photo by Western River Expeditions

The Pentagon reports that more than 155,000 U.S. troops have post-traumatic stress disorder, and 75 percent of them are combat veterans.

In recent years we've seen dramatic growth in outdoor recreation programs that serve as therapy for wounded veterans. ([Click here to read the *Outdoor USA* piece, "More and More Veterans Walking Off the War: Wounded Veterans Find Solace and Camaraderie Through Outdoor Programs"](#))

But there are relatively few outdoor programs designed specifically for the growing numbers of female veterans suffering from PTSD, including PTSD that stems from Military Sexual Trauma.

So, we were encouraged to hear that on May 12, 26 women veterans who have experienced emotional or physical trauma will take a four-day Colorado River rafting trip through Utah's Cataract Canyon with [Western River Expeditions](#).

“You take people down this river, and they go through a real transformation,” says Frederick Solheim, who is coordinating the trip through his organization Warriors on Cataract (www.warriorsoncataract.org). “There’s some real healing that takes place.”

Solheim has been organizing river trips for veterans for four years, but this will be his first outing for women, and he’s making certain adjustments. For one thing, all of the veterans will be women, and Solheim will be the only male among a team of guides and helpers who are volunteering their time to lead the trip.



“Because many of the female wounded warriors were victims of rape, sexual assault, and other violence by male soldiers, I felt that having mixed sexes would have a chilling effect upon the women, and deter some from joining us on the river,” says Solheim.

While the support crew will include a therapist, veterans trips don’t usually involve formal therapy sessions, says Solheim, explaining, “The veterans tend to form their own support group and spend time talking with each other about their issues. And the support groups spontaneously formed with other combat

soldiers goes beyond what the VA can accomplish with their therapy and pharmaceuticals.”

Solheim says the costs for each veteran are covered by his organization and other donations, and Western River Expeditions is providing its services at a fraction of the normal cost. If you would like to donate, visit www.warriorsoncataract.org.

This spring and summer, Warriors on Cataract will also host river trips for Special Operations Forces and wounded warriors from veterans’ hospitals in Cheyenne, Wyo., and Salt Lake City.