



# AMERICAN WHITEWATER

Conservation • Access • Events • Adventure • Safety

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Winter 2021

## THE TOP TEN RIVER STEWARDSHIP ISSUES OF 2021

### CANOE ON THE ROCKS

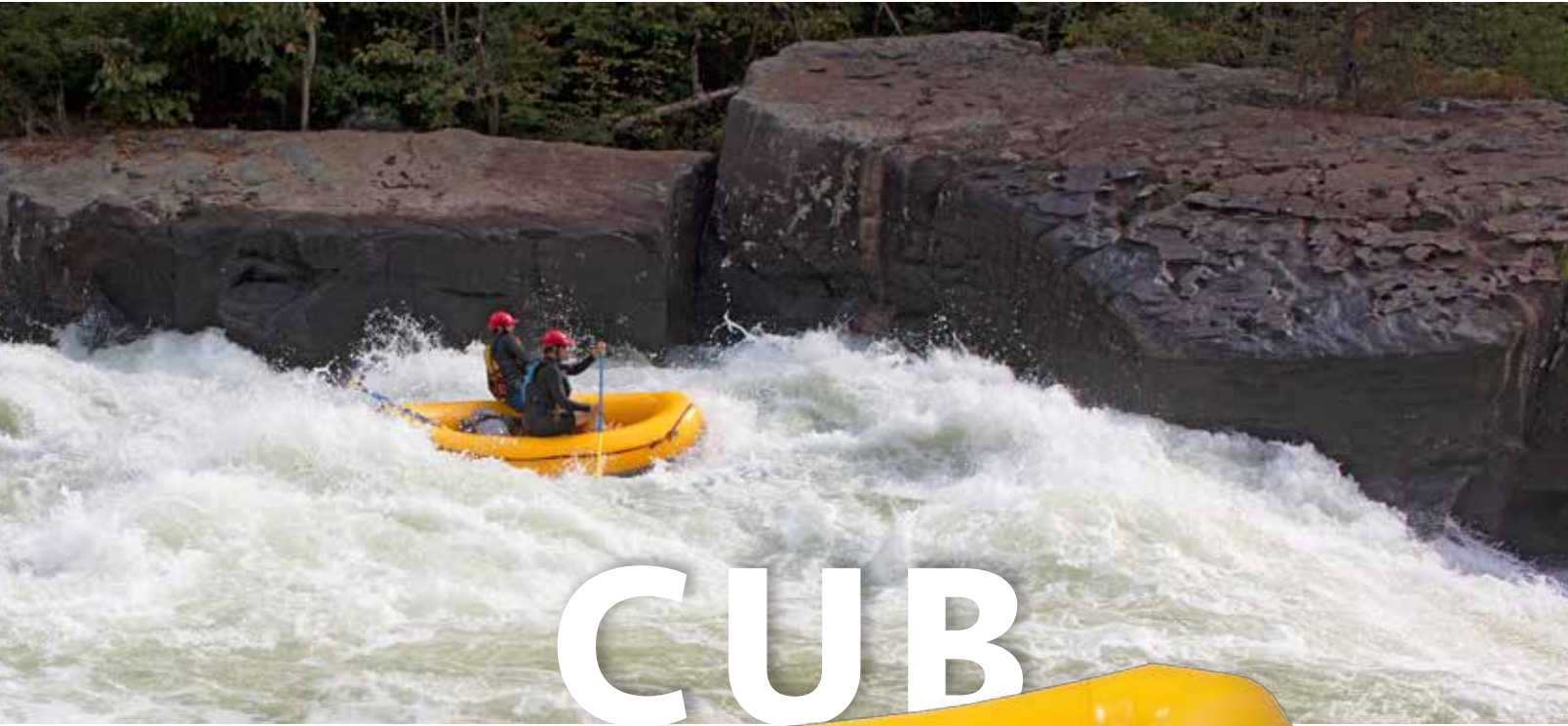
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# AW AMERICAN WHITEWATER

A VOLUNTEER PUBLICATION PROMOTING RIVER CONSERVATION, ACCESS AND SAFETY

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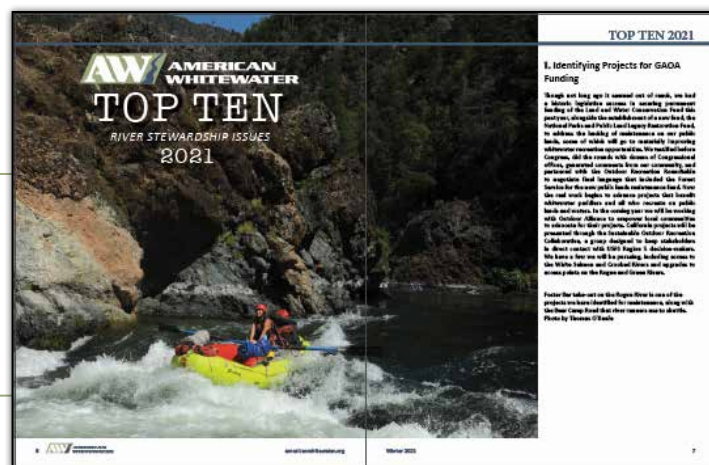
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The Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act passed out of the House twice in 2020, marking the first and second time the Wild Olympics legislation went to a vote in either chamber of Congress. A priority for the whitewater paddling community for more than three decades, the bill was part of a package of conservation bills aimed at protecting our public lands and waters including hundreds of other miles of new Wild and Scenic designations in California and landscape protections for the Dolores River (CO) titled the Protecting America's Wilderness Act, that was also linked to legislation that would expand protections for the Grand Canyon. Demonstrating robust community support for this legislation has been critical and will continue to be going forward as we work to pass this package in early 2021. Shown here, the Sol Duc River (WA), one of the candidates for Wild and Scenic designation on the Olympic Peninsula.

Photo by Chris Korbolic

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# PURPOSE

## RIVER STEWARDSHIP: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Our mission: "To conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely," is actively pursued through our conservation, access, safety and education efforts under the umbrella of River Stewardship. The only national organization representing the interest of all whitewater paddlers, American Whitewater is the national voice for thousands of individual whitewater enthusiasts, as well as over 100 local paddling club affiliates.

AW's River Stewardship program adheres to the four tenets of our mission statement:

**CONSERVATION:** AW's professional staff works closely with volunteers and partner organizations to protect the ecological and scenic values of all whitewater rivers. These goals are accomplished through direct participation in public decision-making

processes, grassroots advocacy, coalition building, empowerment of volunteers, public outreach and education, and, when necessary, legal action.

**RIVER ACCESS:** To assure public access to whitewater rivers pursuant to the guidelines published in its official Access Policy, AW arranges for river access through private lands by negotiation or purchase, seeks to protect the right of public passage on all rivers and streams navigable by kayak or canoe, encourages equitable and responsible management of whitewater rivers on public lands, and works with government agencies and other river users to achieve these goals.

**SAFETY:** AW promotes paddling safely, publishes reports on whitewater accidents, maintains a uniform national ranking system for whitewater rivers (the International Scale of Whitewater Difficulty) and publishes and disseminates the internationally-recognized American Whitewater Safety Code.

**EDUCATION:** AW shares information with the general public and the paddling community regarding

whitewater rivers, as well as river recreation, conservation, access, and safety. This is accomplished through our bi-monthly AW Journal, a monthly e-news, [americanwhitewater.org](http://americanwhitewater.org), paddling events, educational events, and through direct communication with the press.

Together, AW staff, members, volunteers, and affiliate clubs can achieve our goals of conserving, protecting and restoring America's whitewater resources and enhancing opportunities to safely enjoy these wonderful rivers.

AW was incorporated under Missouri nonprofit corporation laws in 1961 and maintains its principal mailing address at PO Box 1540, Cullowhee, NC 28723; phone 1-866-BOAT-4-AW (1-866-262-8429). AW is tax exempt under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Service.



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Founded in 1954, American Whitewater is a national non-profit organization (Non-profit # 23-7083760) with a mission "to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely." American Whitewater is a membership organization representing a broad diversity of individual whitewater enthusiasts, river conservationists, and more than 100 local paddling club affiliates across America. The organization is the primary advocate for the preservation and protection of whitewater rivers throughout the United States, and connects the interests of human-powered recreational river users with ecological and science-based data to achieve the goals within its mission. All rights to information contained in this publication are reserved.

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# THE JOURNEY AHEAD

WITH THIS ISSUE of the *American Whitewater Journal* we look ahead to the coming year. Our staff has a number of critical issues that are queued up in our Top Ten River Stewardship Issues of 2021, which starts on page 6. Even though these are top issues for this coming year, many of our projects have long timelines behind them. For example, efforts to designate over 450 miles of new Wild and Scenic River on the Olympic Peninsula (WA) has a 15-plus-year history of leadership from American Whitewater staff. We think we have a real chance of putting that effort to bed with final legislation in the coming year. Another example is the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). I have personally been involved in funding efforts for LWCF going back 20 years. The program is based on the simple notion of using revenues from the depletion of one natural resource—offshore oil and gas—to support the conservation of another precious resource—our land and water. Every year, \$900 million in royalties paid by energy companies drilling for oil and gas is put into this fund. While Congress authorized full funding of LWCF in the Great American Outdoors Act, just passed months ago, the Department of Interior recently released an order issuing changes to how the spending process would be implemented. The order gives state and local governments veto-like powers that were not part of the Act. American Whitewater is deeply concerned about this attempt at reinterpretation of the Great American Outdoors Act and have urged the Interior Department to change course.

It's hard for me to look ahead without acknowledging the challenges we faced in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. When COVID-19 hit, we shared guidelines for paddling during a pandemic, many of which have become norms for paddlers this year. We also made the incredibly difficult decision to cancel our in-person events and move to an online virtual format (not really knowing what that new format would look like). American Whitewater staff got

creative and focused our virtual events on driving membership and providing updates on our stewardship program. As a result, we grew our membership base beyond what we typically see with in-person events. It's our hope that we return to in-person events this summer, but if we can't we have a successful model for hosting virtual events in our repertoire. Our virtual event format will not replace the opportunity to gather at the river and exchange stories, but it does provide a connection to the stewardship work of American Whitewater.

What has become clear over the last year is that Americans love their public lands and rivers now more than ever. If there has been a silver lining to the pandemic it is the value Americans place on their ability to get outdoors and find solace in nature and on rivers. That urge has helped many of us find balance in trying times. Plus, it's made clear that protecting public lands and rivers and access to the outdoors are the bipartisan issues of our time.

It's never exactly clear how the political stars are going to align, but there are big opportunities ahead to work with our friends on both sides of the aisle and a new administration to rebuild bedrock environmental regulations that have governed how we manage our natural resources for the last 50 years. Rules like the Clean Water Act and National Environmental Policy Act experienced significant regulatory rollbacks that imperil public lands and waters. We have the opportunity in 2021 to arrest that skid and recognize the importance of public lands and waters for future generations. Our public lands and waters belong to all of us and we must keep them public, which includes rejecting calls to turn federal lands over to states or less accountable entities.

As we move into the coming year, the core of the American Whitewater River Stewardship Program is the understanding that conservation and healthy human-powered outdoor recreation are mutually dependent. Whitewater paddlers

appreciate natural landscapes, and those special places need conservation-oriented paddlers to help preserve and protect their treasured resources.

Take care of your paddling and rivers will take care of you,



P.S. If you happen to be looking for a way to deepen your connection with wild rivers, join me on the American Whitewater Rogue River trip on June 17-20, 2021. Thanks to support from Northwest Rafting Company, American Whitewater members have the opportunity to join AW staff on an exclusive four-day trip down Oregon's Rogue River. We invite you to come learn more about what we're up to while having a great time enjoying one of our nation's first Wild and Scenic rivers. The trip is fully outfitted by Northwest Rafting Company with professional guides, exceptional food, transportation to and from the put-in, and all group equipment. Participants will have the option of bringing their own boat, renting a boat, or joining as a passenger on one of the rafts.

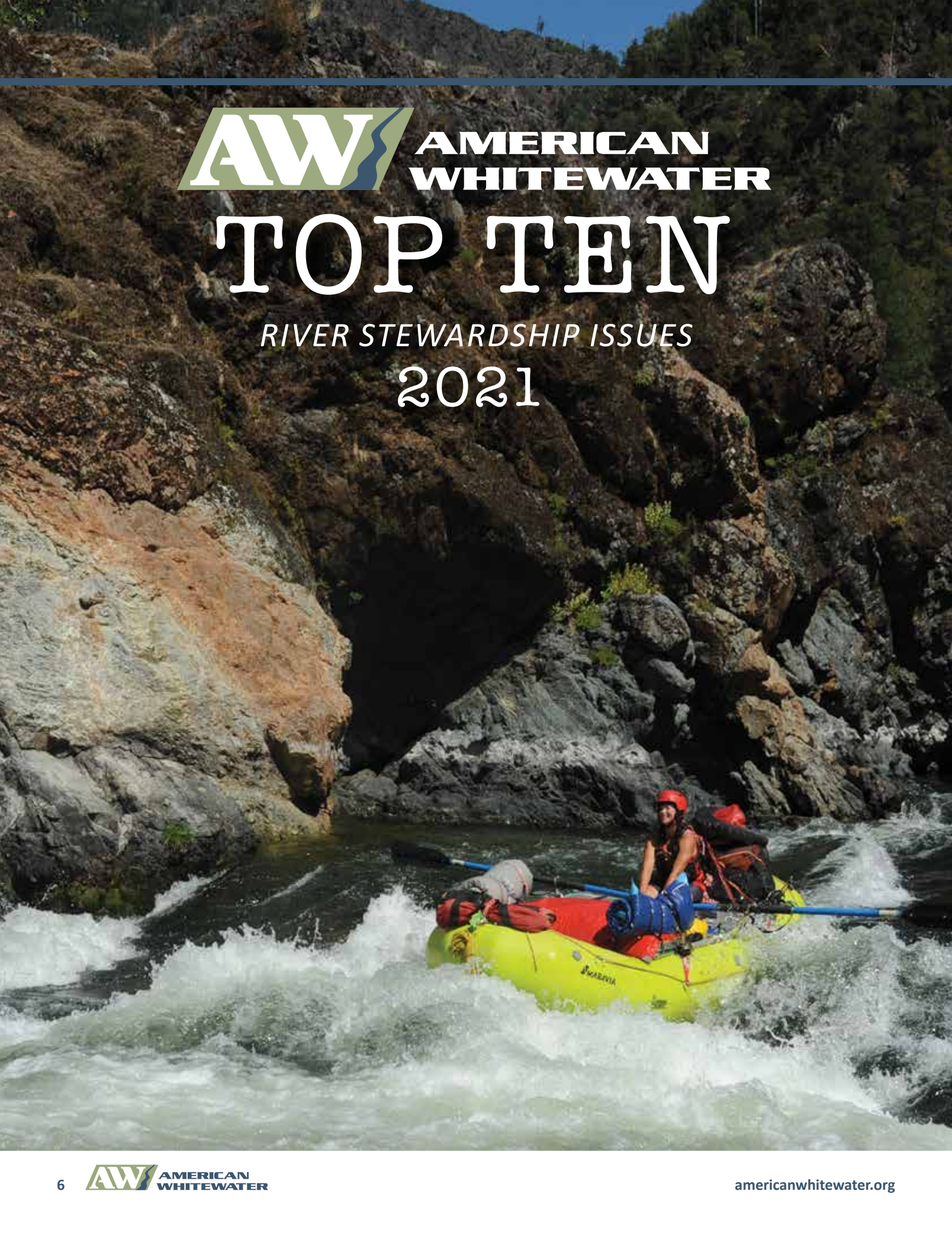




# TOP TEN

*RIVER STEWARDSHIP ISSUES*

2021





## 1. Identifying Projects for GAOA Funding

Though not long ago it seemed out of reach, we had a historic legislative success in securing permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund this past year, alongside the establishment of a new fund, the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund, to address the backlog of maintenance on our public lands, some of which will go to materially improving whitewater recreation opportunities. We testified before Congress, did the rounds with dozens of Congressional offices, generated comments from our community, and partnered with the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable to negotiate final language that included the Forest Service for the new public lands maintenance fund. Now the real work begins to advance projects that benefit whitewater paddlers and all who recreate on public lands and waters. In the coming year we will be working with Outdoor Alliance to empower local communities to advocate for their projects. California projects will be presented through the Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Collaborative, a group designed to keep stakeholders in direct contact with USFS Region 5 decision-makers. We have a few we will be pursuing, including access to the White Salmon and Crooked Rivers and upgrades to access points on the Rogue and Green Rivers.

Foster Bar take-out on the Rogue River is one of the projects we have identified for maintenance, along with the Bear Camp Road that river runners use to shuttle. Photo by Thomas O'Keefe

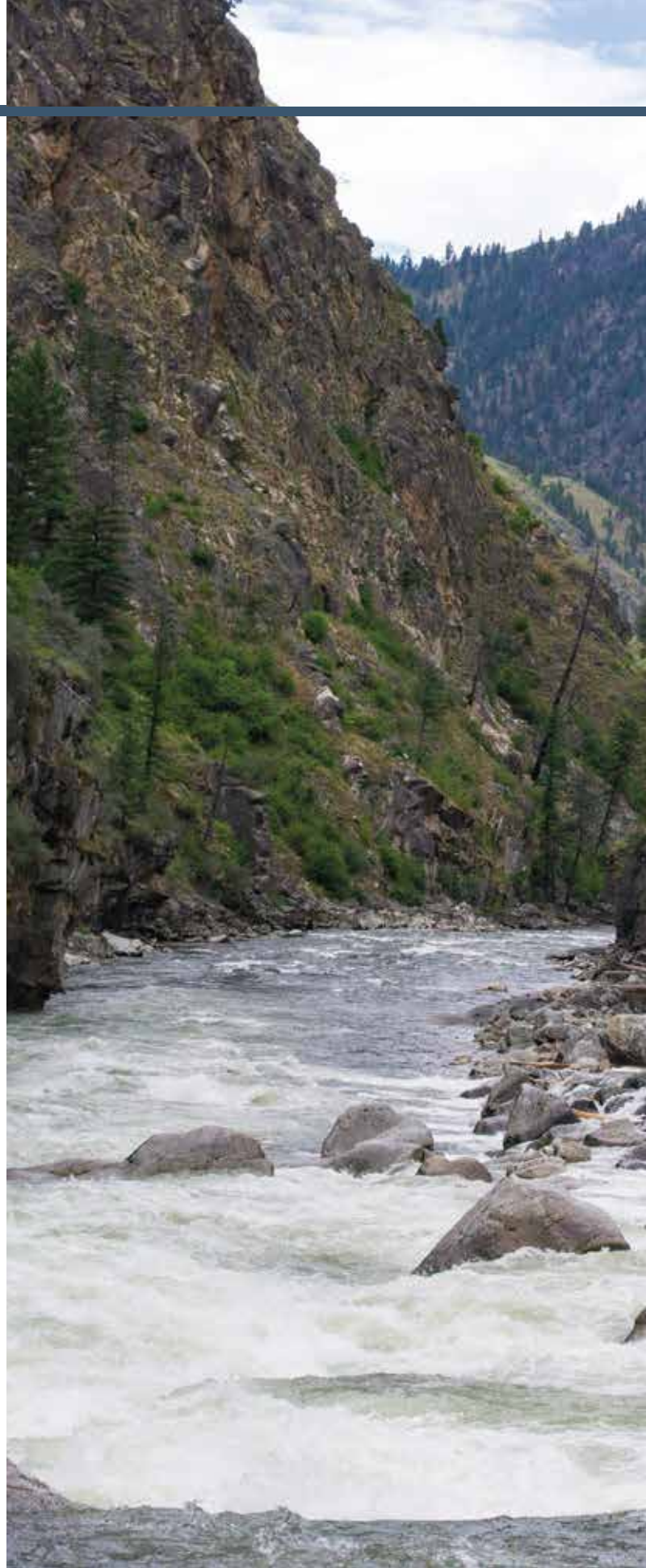


## 2. Idaho's Wild Rivers at Risk

In Idaho, the US Forest Service appears poised to duck its obligation to protect some of our nation's wildest rivers. In the headwaters of the Salmon River, the agency is considering a proposed massive gold and silver mine that would put the South Fork and Main Salmon rivers at risk, as well as key protected headwaters. The Forest Service is considering eliminating or ignoring river protections to pave the way for the mine. On the Lochsa, and other rivers to its north, the agency is considering a wholesale elimination of roughly 700 miles of Wild and Scenic eligibility protections in order to make resource extraction projects easier. We expect to need to challenge this decision in the coming year. American Whitewater will be pushing back on these threats to our community's whitewater paradise every chance we get in 2021.

New mining in the headwaters of the South Fork Salmon threatens water quality and recreational opportunities in the Salmon River watershed.

Photo by Evan Stafford













## 3. Klamath Dam Removals

American Whitewater has been engaged in the dialogue over the fate of four Klamath River Dams for the past two decades. This coming year will be a pivotal one as dam operator PacifiCorp, owned by Warren Buffet's Berkshire Hathaway, prepares to transfer ownership of their hydropower project to Klamath River Renewal Corporation, the non-profit formed for purposes of removing the dams, and to the states of California and Oregon. American Whitewater will continue working with the Klamath River Renewal Corporation, as well as resource agencies, tribes, whitewater outfitters, and the local boating community to ensure dam removal remains on track. We will also continue efforts to ensure the public will be able to access and enjoy the restored river once the dams are removed.

Wards Canyon, Klamath River.  
Photo by Scott Harding





## 4. Addressing Impacts to Rivers from Historic Wildfires

Last year's wildfires burned across the West on an unprecedented scale, affecting dozens of whitewater rivers and millions of acres of their watersheds. It is clear that the increasing scale of wildfires is impacting rivers in a variety of ways, including our ability to access and enjoy them, even long after the fires are out. Fire is an essential part of the ecosystem, and watershed health, fisheries, water quality, and streamflow all depend on the existence of a natural fire regime. Many areas that burned in 2020 fit within the bounds of what is ecologically beneficial; however, other areas burned at uncharacteristically severe intensity over large areas and are in need of ecological restoration. Some areas are inaccessible due to damaged roads, bridges, and other infrastructure and even more areas are off-limits due to expansive and long-term administrative closures of public land. We are currently working to address issues related to whitewater rivers that have stemmed from the 2020 wildfires, including closures that prohibit access to rivers, oftentimes in areas that did not even burn in the wildfires. While we are currently working on these immediate issues, we are also developing a programmatic approach for our future work related to wildfires and whitewater resources.

Shoshone, Colorado River.  
Photo by Charlotte Hanks







## 5. Pushing Wild and Scenic Legislation in Congress

The Wild and Scenic bills awaiting a fresh Congress in 2021 will protect a treasure trove of whitewater runs and represent many years of groundwork by American Whitewater and the paddling community. The Wild Olympics Bill will protect over 450 river-miles in Washington State, the Montana Headwaters Legacy Act focuses on over 300 miles of rivers north of Yellowstone National Park, the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act would protect over 400 miles of the Gila River watershed in New Mexico, and the Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would protect approximately 4,500 miles of Wild and Scenic rivers. And that is just the start. Other bills cover rivers in the Northeast, California, Oregon, and even Florida. We aim to make the next Congress one for the Wild and Scenic record books.

Indigo Creek is one of the spectacular tributaries of the Illinois River we are working to designate as Wild and Scenic.

Photo by Priscilla Macy







## 6. Another Spring Paddling in a Pandemic

We anticipate that navigating public access to rivers and recreational opportunities in a pandemic will continue through 2021. We will continue to work with partners like REI and Outdoor Alliance on the Recreate Responsibly coalition we helped form. Outdoor recreation is something we can all enjoy but with increased demand for opportunities comes additional stress on the agencies that manage these experiences. We will be working with land managers to ensure they have the funding they need to sustainably manage recreation, engaging with hydropower operators to provide or reschedule releases, and coordinating with our partners on joint education and messaging.

Long Draw Road (CO), Big South shuttle.  
Photo by Evan Stafford







## 7. Quantifying the Economic Impacts of Whitewater Recreation in Colorado

American Whitewater has had success in Colorado defining flow needs for recreation through planning processes outlined in the state's Water Plan. As water supply diminishes and demand increases, it is becoming necessary to better understand the value, both economic and cultural, of water use. With broad stakeholder engagement, we will be developing a tool to quantify the impacts of river recreation on the communities that rivers flow through, and working to develop policy solutions that could better protect flows for recreation. Our goal is to develop an approach to quantifying in-channel flows that can be utilized around Colorado and across the country. Colorado's rivers provide recreational opportunities from Class V gnar to Class I floating, splashing, and swimming that provide a growing economy and quality of life that is highly sought after. By better understanding what those economic impacts look like, we can better advocate for flows, plan for changes in use patterns, and help rural communities plan for their futures.

The Upper Colorado River provides vital economic benefits to multiple communities in central Colorado.  
Photo by Evan Stafford





## 8. Broadening the Base for River Stewardship

We'll continue our work in 2021 to ensure that our river stewardship work is inclusive. Engaging with diverse communities that share our mission will help us better protect and restore rivers, and enhance safe opportunities to access and boat them. We will work to expand recreational opportunities among diverse paddling groups and support efforts to increase access for those seeking to enjoy our rivers. In our hydropower licensing work, such as on the Klamath (see issue #5), we have joined, and will continue to work together with, tribes in settlement agreements to advance joint goals of restoring river health, which enhances the quality and quantity of whitewater opportunities, but we will also restore historic salmon runs, improve tribal water quality, and create access for tribal members. We are launching a project to educate the paddling community on indigenous history, knowledge, and use of rivers. We will add content to our website that

will include traditional place names and guidelines for river runners who enjoy river segments culturally important to indigenous communities. In our river access efforts, we're working with our partners with diverse experiences to ensure that access to public waterways is designed, developed, and managed in a way that is inclusive and inviting to a diversity of river users. For example, we're working to help establish a permit system for the Gunnison River through Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area aimed at protecting the quality of recreation experience on the water, while maintaining and enhancing equitable access to the river corridor.

American Whitewater is partnering with Diversify Whitewater to provide opportunities for new paddlers to enter whitewater sports.

Photo by Evan Stafford





## 9. Expanding Whitewater in New York

From the Delaware River to the Adirondacks, American Whitewater is working to expand whitewater boating throughout New York. Downstate, AW expects to significantly expand releases on the Mongaup and is seeking to restore boatable flows to the natural river reach. American Whitewater has been working across the Adirondacks to restore and improve river flows for aquatic ecosystems and to improve recreation opportunities across the region. More than 50 hydroelectric dams in New York are either in, or going into, relicensing to get new 30- to 50-year federal licenses, creating a once-in-a-generation opportunity to

improve river conditions. On West Canada Creek, we completed flow studies at Prospect Falls and Kast Bridge that provide paddlers with a buffet of boatable falls, scenic chasms, and instructional opportunity. This year, we begin the relicensing of more than 20 hydropower dams on the Black, Beaver, and Moose rivers and will be pushing to restore flows to dewatered river reaches, improve existing flows, enhance public access, and benefit communities throughout the region.

West Canada Creek flow study.  
Photo by Rob Griffiths









## 10. State Level Protections for Rivers

Under the Clean Water Act, states have an important role in river conservation and we will be working to ensure this authority is available and used in the coming year. Under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act, states have the authority to deny or condition activities requiring a federal permit. In our work, requirements for water quality and quantity (i.e., instream flows) for federally-licensed hydropower projects can be imposed by states, but recent administrative actions threaten this authority. We have joined several states and colleagues in the Hydropower Reform Coalition to challenge new regulations in court. States also have the authority under the Clean Water Act to designate Outstanding National Resource Waters, the highest quality waters of the United States. This designation offers

special protection for waters that are of exceptional recreational, ecological, and other significance, and we will be exploring use of this conservation tool in the coming year. In Colorado, working with a coalition of recreation and conservation organizations, we have identified over 25 streams that may be eligible for Outstanding Waters designation and in 2021 we will be working to gather stakeholder support and prove the water quality of these streams for the state's review.

The South Fork Feather River benefits from flows negotiated through state level protections under the Clean Water Act that new regulations threaten to make more challenging to exercise in the future.

Photo by Priscilla Macy.



# TOP TEN 2020 RECAP

## 1. Defending the Clean Water Act

In 2020 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) replaced the Clean Water Rule with a much narrower definition for which waters are protected, including removing Clean Water protections from a huge swath of whitewater rivers. We'll be advocating incoming EPA officials hard to return to the 2015 Rule and to maintain the spirit of the law as it was intended.

## 2. Forest Planning

We worked in forests in California, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and North Carolina in planning processes in 2020. Forest Planning offers a unique opportunity to secure Wild and Scenic protections for thousands of miles of streams through individual Forests' inventories for Wild and Scenic eligibility. Many of these processes were delayed but we made progress in identifying eligible streams across the country. In 2021, we'll continue to ask the paddling community to speak up for the rivers you love to paddle.

## 3. Hydropower Realignment

Last year, working with other conservation organizations and members of the hydropower industry, we developed a bold plan to evaluate the US hydropower fleet, reconfigure it to meet the country's energy needs, and remove projects that are old, unsafe, and don't fit in a carbon-free future. This roadmap outlines our shared task to chart hydropower's role in a clean energy future in a way that also supports healthy rivers. We're now developing an action plan for dam removals and to increase the safety and environmental performance of our remaining dams to become a part of legislation as early as 2021.

## 4. Pacific Northwest Wild and Scenic

We made significant progress towards protecting more wild rivers in the Pacific Northwest. Our Wild Olympics legislation twice passed the full House of Representatives. Senator Wyden introduced new Wild and Scenic Oregon legislation late in 2020 and Senator Merkley introduced legislation to protect the headwaters of the Smith River.

## 5. Nolichucky Wild and Scenic

We continue to help push the Nolichucky River towards permanent protection with a Wild and Scenic designation. We made significant progress in gaining local support from business and other stakeholders and hope to have a bill introduced in 2021.

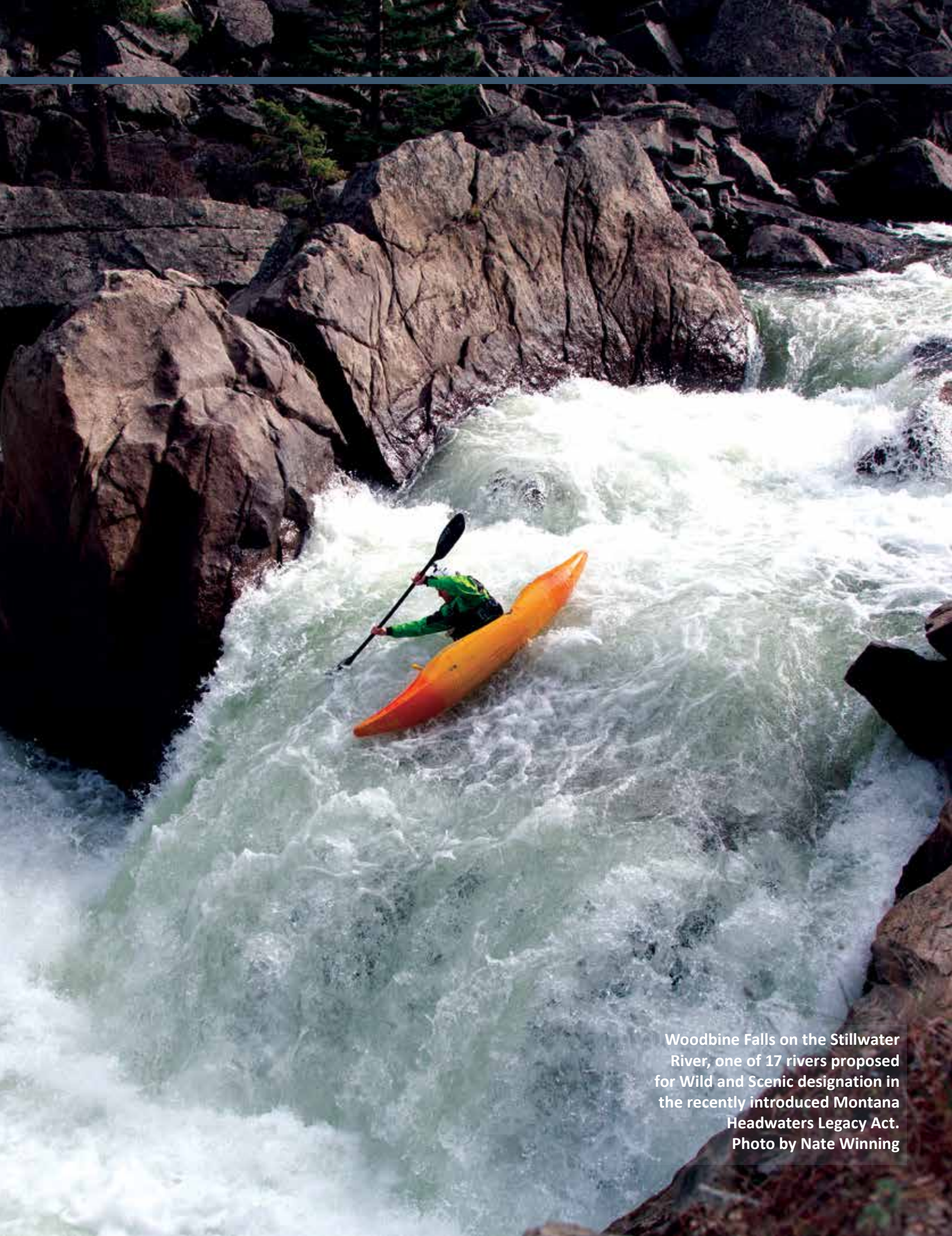


Nolichucky Wild and Scenic  
designation full speed ahead!  
Photo by Jack Henderson









Woodbine Falls on the Stillwater River, one of 17 rivers proposed for Wild and Scenic designation in the recently introduced Montana Headwaters Legacy Act. Photo by Nate Winning



## 6. Gila and San Francisco Wild and Scenic

In a big win for the Gila and San Francisco Rivers, the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (S.3670) was introduced in the Senate in May 2020 and American Whitewater submitted written testimony to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in support of the bill in September. American Whitewater has been working closely with our local partners to refine the bill's language and ensure that it moves smoothly through Congress and we'll be working hard to ensure that the bill continues to move forward in 2021.

## 7. Montana Wild and Scenic

On November 30, 2020, Montana Senator Jon Tester introduced the Montana Headwaters Legacy Act, marking a major milestone in the ongoing and momentous journey towards designating many of the state's most renowned waterways as Wild and Scenic rivers. The Montana Headwaters Legacy Act (MHLA) would protect 336 miles on 17 rivers and streams in the Greater Yellowstone and Upper Missouri Headwaters systems as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

## 8. Access to Our Rivers

American Whitewater worked on several access initiatives over the past year, including guidance for river managers in partnership with the River Management Society and the National Park Service. The global COVID-19 pandemic first closed some river access, and then as river access began to open, river managers were faced with unprecedented demand that overwhelmed resources. Several utilities moved to cancel whitewater releases; we took a balanced approach based on

guidance from local health departments and worked to reschedule missed opportunities. We helped found a new Recreate Responsibly coalition, under the leadership of REI and our partners at Outdoor Alliance, to coordinate discussions and outreach. In New Mexico, we have built a groundswell of support in a case in front of the State Supreme Court to protect access to public waters. Finally, we continued our work on individual projects like the Klamath River where we are developing a plan for river access once dams are removed.

## 9. Adirondacks Restoration

The Adirondacks River Restoration Campaign to restore and improve river flows for aquatic ecosystems and to improve recreation opportunities across the region is a long-term commitment we're only just beginning. The work to protect and expand whitewater releases during the relicensing of the more than 20 dams in the Black River Basin is advancing, and we're confident we'll see success down the road in sustaining and improving whitewater opportunities in the Adirondacks, including for the epic whitewater runs on the Beaver, Moose, and Black rivers.

## 10. Cache la Poudre River Flows

The spring of 2019 was the first runoff season at the new whitewater park in Fort Collins. It was also when the future of prime flows for the feature were being decided as local permits for a new water supply project were heard by the county. With an impressive response from our members, we provided the commission a compelling argument to protect this new amenity. We are continuing to study the economic impact and community value of healthy river flows.



We'll continue working in 2021 to make sure that access to our public lands and rivers remains open for paddling and other forms of recreation. Photo by Thomas O'Keefe



# STEWARDSHIP

## GRAND CANYON STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

BY HATTIE JOHNSON AND KESTREL KUNZ

The Grand Canyon  
Photo by Evan Stafford

### Permits and Access

Even the Grand Canyon was unable to escape the wrath of 2020. Multiple, half-baked dam proposals had us raising the alarm to protect this iconic landscape. Those completing winter trips emerged to a new virus and a changed world. Lottery ticket holders for the spring and summer unpacked their drybags and ate out of dutch ovens in their backyards, instead of on iconic Canyon beaches.

COVID-19 cases were rising at an alarming rate in late winter; when the river was closed to trips on March 24th, the US was seeing over 10,000 new cases and over 150 related deaths each day. Indigenous peoples and rural communities, many of which surround the Grand Canyon, have been disproportionately affected by the virus and are located on travel routes frequented by visitors driving to the Park from out of state. Opening back up June 14 meant that this was the longest the Park had ever been closed to river trips.

This closure greatly impacted the local economy, Park operations, and permit holders. American Whitewater's Affiliate Club and the primary advocate for boating

in the Grand Canyon, the Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association, worked closely with the National Park Service to improve COVID-19-related management and to increase opportunities for boaters. American Whitewater will continue to track the permit situation and will provide updates on any significant developments. Whether you make it to the Grand Canyon or not during this time, please remember to recreate and travel responsibly.

### Little Colorado

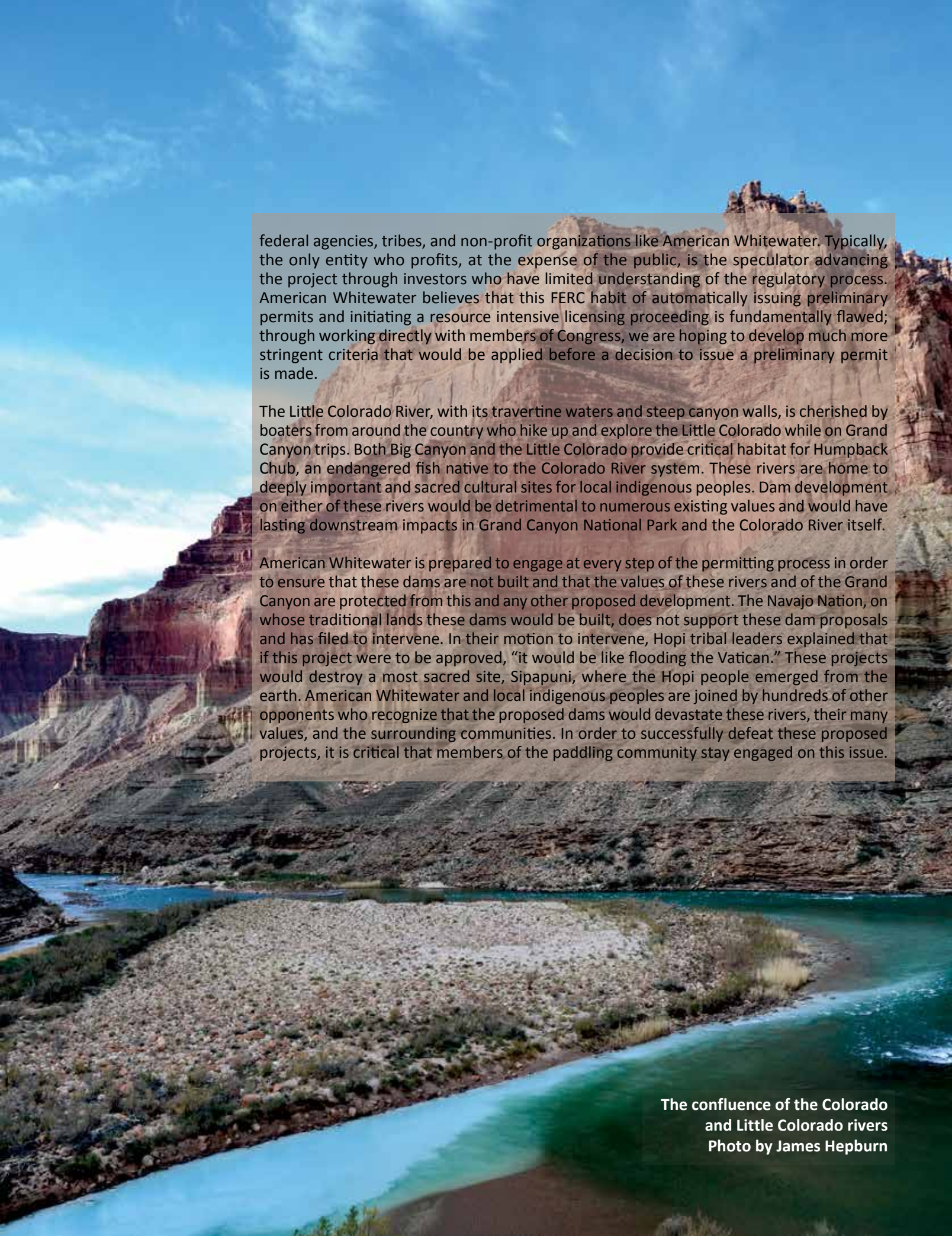
If you are lucky enough to visit the Grand Canyon on the Colorado River in the coming months, be sure to soak up the majesty that is the Little Colorado River. At the confluence of these two rivers, turquoise water cascades down travertine ledges and intertwines itself with the muddy Colorado in a mosaic of merging currents. The area is sacred to the Hopi, Navajo, and Zuni, and it's unfathomable that anyone would even entertain draining the water from this holy place. And yet, not far upstream, the Little Colorado is under threat to be dammed and pumped.

Over the past year, American Whitewater has fought against multiple dam proposals upstream from Grand Canyon National Park

from the same developer. The Phoenix-based proponent, Pumped Hydro LLC, has filed for multiple Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) preliminary permits for dams on the Little Colorado River and its tributary, Big Canyon. Preliminary permits do not allow for construction but they do initiate the process for completing feasibility studies and give the project proponent the sole ability to apply for a license within a four-year period.

American Whitewater and many of our members filed comments and Motions to Intervene opposing both the Little Colorado and Big Canyon preliminary permits. Unfortunately, Pumped Hydro received preliminary permit approval for the Little Colorado in May. A decision has yet to be made on the proposed Big Canyon project. FERC almost always approves preliminary permits, stating which issues identified by project opponents would preclude project construction and will need more extensive evaluation during the subsequent feasibility phase when various studies are conducted. The resulting effort to participate in a formal licensing proceeding that typically includes dozens of meetings and multiple studies over a two- to three-year period wastes time and resources for state and





federal agencies, tribes, and non-profit organizations like American Whitewater. Typically, the only entity who profits, at the expense of the public, is the speculator advancing the project through investors who have limited understanding of the regulatory process. American Whitewater believes that this FERC habit of automatically issuing preliminary permits and initiating a resource intensive licensing proceeding is fundamentally flawed; through working directly with members of Congress, we are hoping to develop much more stringent criteria that would be applied before a decision to issue a preliminary permit is made.

The Little Colorado River, with its travertine waters and steep canyon walls, is cherished by boaters from around the country who hike up and explore the Little Colorado while on Grand Canyon trips. Both Big Canyon and the Little Colorado provide critical habitat for Humpback Chub, an endangered fish native to the Colorado River system. These rivers are home to deeply important and sacred cultural sites for local indigenous peoples. Dam development on either of these rivers would be detrimental to numerous existing values and would have lasting downstream impacts in Grand Canyon National Park and the Colorado River itself.

American Whitewater is prepared to engage at every step of the permitting process in order to ensure that these dams are not built and that the values of these rivers and of the Grand Canyon are protected from this and any other proposed development. The Navajo Nation, on whose traditional lands these dams would be built, does not support these dam proposals and has filed to intervene. In their motion to intervene, Hopi tribal leaders explained that if this project were to be approved, "it would be like flooding the Vatican." These projects would destroy a most sacred site, Sipapuni, where the Hopi people emerged from the earth. American Whitewater and local indigenous peoples are joined by hundreds of other opponents who recognize that the proposed dams would devastate these rivers, their many values, and the surrounding communities. In order to successfully defeat these proposed projects, it is critical that members of the paddling community stay engaged on this issue.

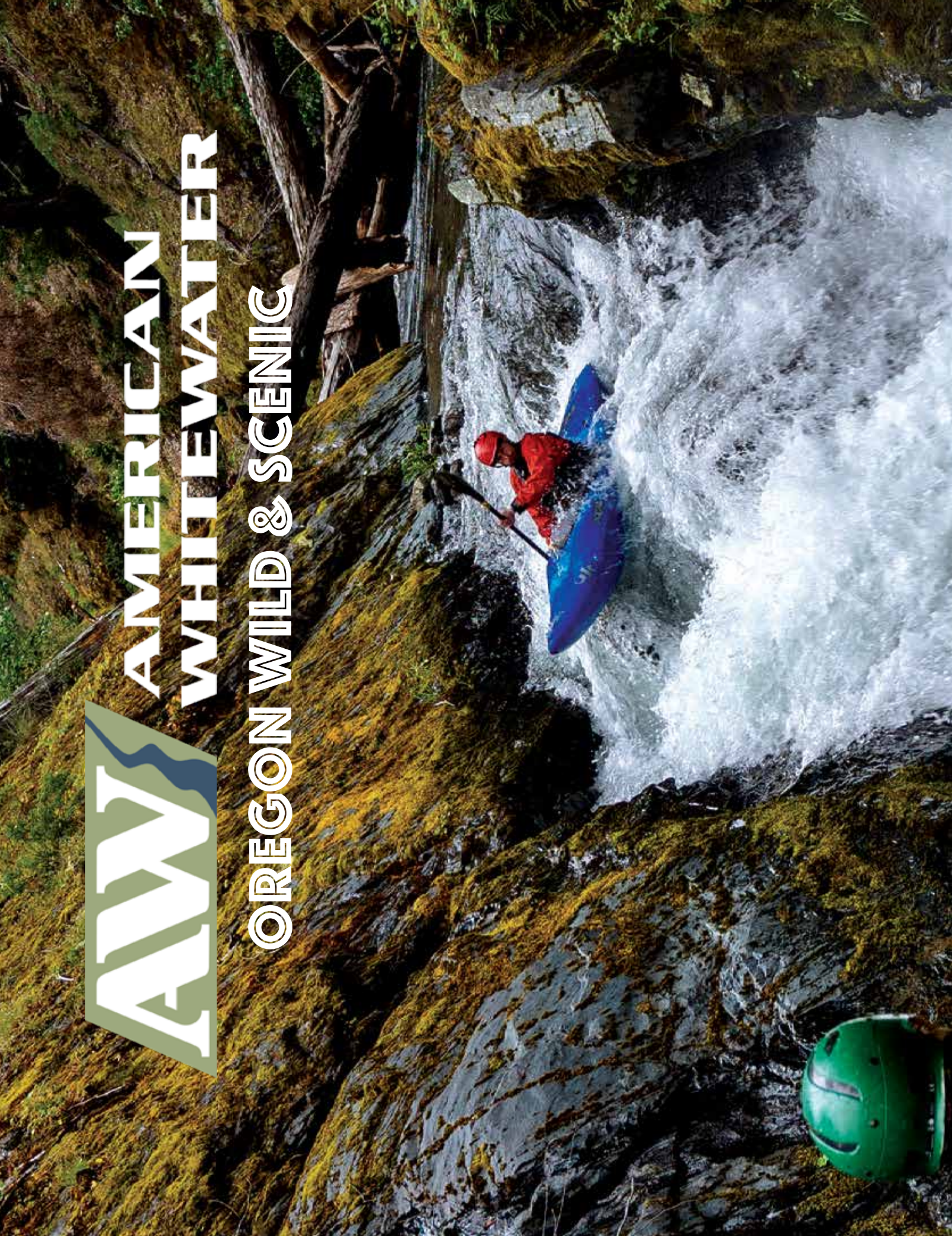
**The confluence of the Colorado  
and Little Colorado rivers  
Photo by James Hepburn**





**AMERICAN  
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**OREGON WILD & SCENIC**







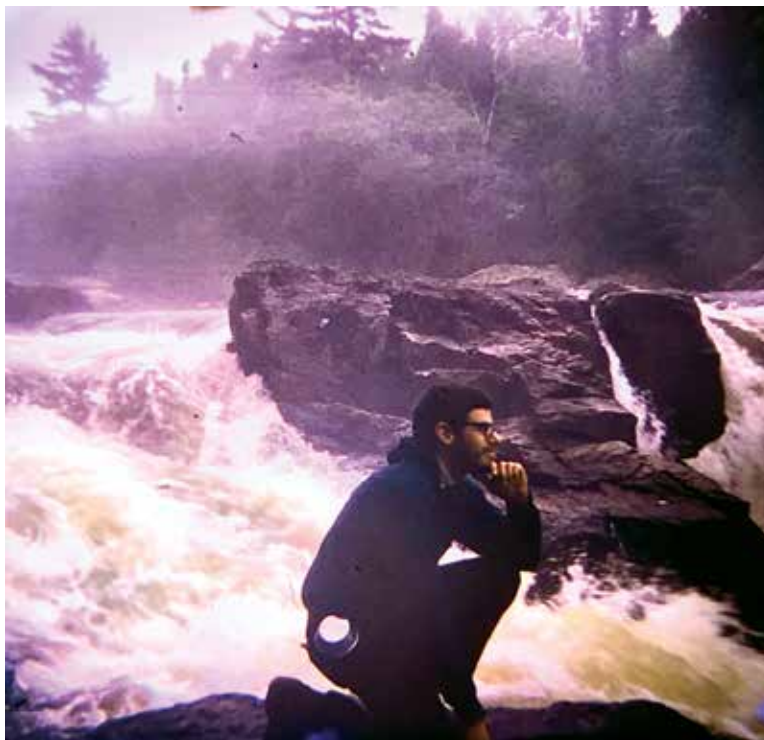
Indigo Creek is one of the spectacular tributaries of the Illinois River we are working to designate as Wild and Scenic. When Senator Wyden called for nominations for additional rivers to designate under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the whitewater community responded to the appeal to protect more of Oregon's outstanding rivers.  
Photo by Zachary Collier



# WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

## CANOE ON THE ROCKS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL OSTROV



*The author, trusting Sierra cups on his belt, contemplating the beauty of the river*

**T**HE ALGOMA CENTRAL Railway train stopped to let us off in the middle of nowhere. Our rough and ready group of 15 young men and boys jumped down from the freight cars we had been riding like hobos and unloaded our five canoes, hauling them down the cinder slope from the tracks to the scrub-brush-covered riverbank. It was still early on a warm July day when we arrived at this remote spot on the White River in northern Ontario. We were trippers with our teenage campers at the sole wilderness outpost camp in the region between Wawa and Thunder Bay. It was 1970 and, without exception, our hair was long, our beards (those of us who could grow them) were bushy, and we were wearing the de rigueur plaid flannel shirts. Most of us had wire-handled, polished-steel Sierra cups dangling from our belt loops, the better to scoop up and drink the crystal-clear water right out of

the lakes. A restless energy surged within me as I looked out across several hundred feet of fast-moving water to the wooded far shore. The whole group seemed attuned to this wavelength as our camp director, Mike, hardly needed to say a word before we had the canoes lined up on the river's edge, packs stowed, life jackets donned, paddles at hand and were ready to launch into that living, relentless current.

For several summers, the White had loomed large in Mike's imagination, almost to the point of becoming an obsession. A physically and psychically powerful man with a penchant for throwing out challenges, Mike had decided to pit himself against the river, if not to tame it, at least to ride it high and enjoy the hell out of the ride in the bargain. At 18, I desperately wanted to find a way to break out into the world more boldly, to somehow shrug off

my frustratingly hesitant, quiet demeanor. After working for two summers at this camp, I had distilled the formula for this transformation to one simple rule: "be like Mike." In short, I made shooting the White my obsession too. Carefully plotting it out on our topo maps, we could see that the White was appropriately full of stretches of whitewater. To the best of our knowledge, except perhaps by the native tribes more than a hundred years earlier, the White had never been run.

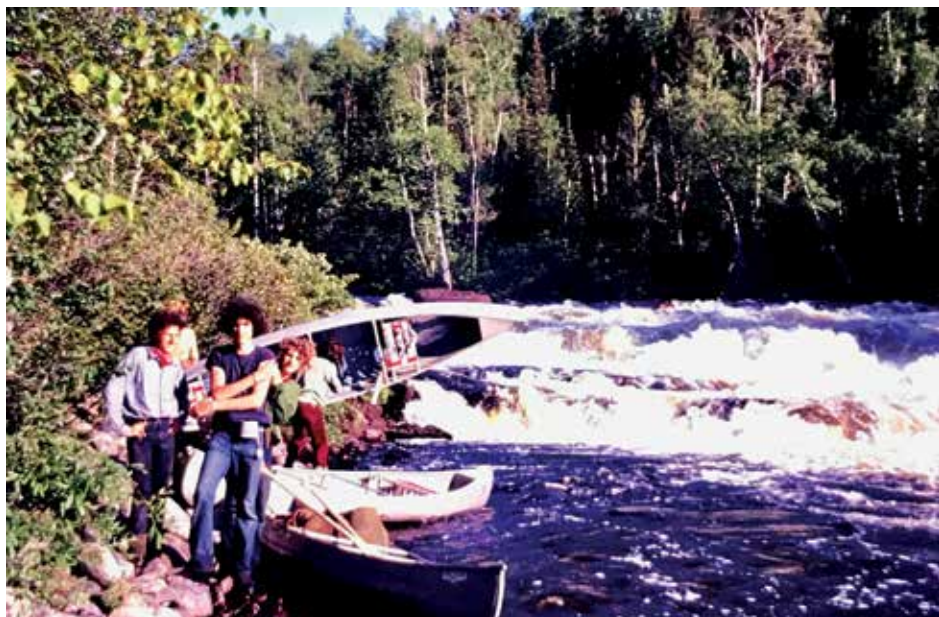
Earlier that summer, Mike had glared at us with his fierce, dark eyes, deeply set above his curly black beard, looking like it came right off an ancient Persian relief. With an expression that conveyed challenge combined with a self-aware half joke, he had volubly proclaimed that this summer we would canoe the White. Now, that day had finally come.



Each canoe had one tripper taking up the sbtrtern, two campers, and two giant Algonquin packs, not unlike the ones used by the Voyageurs of old during their trips across Canada for the Hudson's Bay Company—their birch bark canoes piled high with bales of furs. With a big grin on his face, Mike raised his arm and brought it down as if at the start of a race, called out, "Move out, you bushwhacked Wawanians," as we launched our canoes.

At first, the paddling was easy in the smooth, strong current—more steering than stroking. Bobbing along with the dense white pine, Douglas fir, and paper birch studded forest piling down darkly to the river's edge and the fragrance of evergreen wafting out to us, I looked around and experienced an ineffably delicious feeling: in this moment, I would rather be here than anywhere else in the world.

Having paddled hundreds of hours by that time in the camp session, I felt unconsciously adept at handling the Alumacraft canoe. Here, at least, was one concrete thing I felt confident in and competent at amongst all the social nuances that I found so elusive. Watching the land's contours, I thought I saw a dip up ahead. Then, we were all pointing and



*Pulling over after rugged whitewater.*

shouting as we heard a low rumbling sound waft back to us from downstream. Mike's face lit up and he ordered us to pull over to the bank. "We're in the soup now boys. Wag it and shag it," he hollered. Drawing nearer, we heard the sound become a reverberating roar, filling the forest with a deep, elemental power. That sound came right up through my canoe seat into the pit

of my stomach. Here goes, I thought, with a mixture of excitement and dread.

One by one, we pulled up and saw what we had been dreaming about for weeks, only worse. Ahead lay an everlasting stretch of frothing, roiling whitewater strewn with boulders. For the next several hundred yards, the river was a minefield, dropping down over rock shelves and small falls until, still going strong, it disappeared around a bend. Yelling to each other over this whitest of white noise, we worked out a route through the treacherous maze. "We should take the first chute on the left," shouted Josh, the only one of us with any whitewater experience. "Let's not get caught by those overhanging branches," hollered Larry, pointing them out. "See those standing waves just before the bend? Watch out for rocks just beneath the surface," warned Dave, pointing far downstream. Looking to Mike for guidance as I tended to do without thinking, I observed his expression as he listened to each person's advice and scanned the scene. Then, voice booming with the supreme confidence that was his

*A day of big lake canoeing ahead of us.*





# WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

signature and that always stirred me to action, he shouted, "Eric, you go first. I'll take up the rear. The rest of you wait for my signal." Eric, our sharp and lively assistant director, had a pursed-lips smile fixed on his face as he and his two campers launched their canoe into the first chute and were quickly swept downstream. The force of that river was monumental, but Eric, paddling deftly while yelling commands to his campers, somehow made the canoe zigzag through the right places, negotiating around boulders, eddies, and drop-offs before going out of sight around the bend. I let out a pent-up breath knowing it would soon be our turn.

I had been a camper at this camp two summers before. As the oldest boys, we were taken on an exploratory trip up into

Canada to see if the camp could establish a wilderness outpost. The leaders of our main camp in Michigan were keenly aware that a camping craze was sweeping across America and were determined to be in the vanguard. They believed taking teenagers into the wilderness would encourage more kids to sign up, a strategy that hit the mark for me. I came back from that trip madly enthusiastic about our weeklong adventure canoeing, and portaging down a chain of lakes deep in a wild country I never knew existed before. A sense of restlessness for more deep woods adventure percolated within me all during the school year, when I felt myself, once again, to be the quiet, reticent person I so desired to leave behind. The next summer, I was accepted as a counselor's aide and found out that during the off season, the camp had been able to

acquire property on a lake 200 miles north of the Canadian border. I was overjoyed to be chosen by Mike from among our group of aides, perhaps because of my buoyant eagerness, to help open an outpost camp on the new land.

The experiences of the next summer taught me the skills of primitive camping and only served to heighten my love of that wilderness. Mike was a big part of this. In his 20s, he was a confident, larger-than-life character and like my father, prone to anger. But Mike also possessed an exuberantly gleeful streak. I learned from him how strength could be used to create something potent and fresh, not only in the service of discipline. I was smitten with his way of being in the world and sought to bathe myself in his aura.



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*Colorado River, Grand Canyon. | Photo: Evan Stafford*



After Eric's canoe made the turn, Mike gave the signal and the next canoe leapt into the melee. Not being so fortunate, halfway down the rapids, the canoe capsized, spilling out packs and passengers. They bobbed along downstream in their life jackets, disappearing in the sunlit mist spraying up at the bend. Yelling strategic pointers, Mike indicated that we were to go next. I swore to myself that we would do better. Engulfed in a blur of swirling water, I remember the canoe banging off rocks, my screaming at the campers to sweep, draw, and fend off, and feeling the jarring vibrations shooting up my arm as my paddle rammed the river bottom in unexpected shallows. Somehow, we managed to stay upright through that crazy ride, making it around the bend into the next set of rapids, where the river widened, became a bit shallower, and the boulders emerged higher out of the water.

We did not have any role models for camping in this distinct environment because, at the time, there were no other tripping camps in that part of Canada. Fisherman were the only ones who came into the backcountry and they camped on islands in the lakes. On their favorite islands, they left behind giant piles of beer cans, tin cans emptied of their hash browns and beans, whiskey bottles, and cigarette butts along with charred fish skeletons in the firepit. Coming upon these garbage dumps reinforced the idea that our vision of camping emanated from a new place. At the time, we naively expressed it as pure, leave-no-trace camping for its own sake, a notion that arose within the return-to-the-land, counter-culture context of the time. Yes, there were the Boy Scouts, but their mindset was from a 1950s good-deeds mentality, whereas in 1970 we were jamming off the "wild" side of wilderness. The oldest amongst us being in our twenties, we vaguely understood that

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**Top:** Carefully crossing at a falls.

**Middle:** Heading out from last night's campsite for another day of paddling.

**Bottom:** A simple dinner being cooked up after canoeing and setting up camp.





# WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

we didn't have the life experience of our elders, yet our generation was convinced that something new was "blowin' in the wind," something ignored or purposely bypassed by previous generations. Literally inhaling the spirit of the hippie culture, we felt driven, in a laid-back way of course, to create intense, "natural" experiences of a sort that had not been valued by our parent's generation.

My father grew up during the Depression, fought in WWII and built, like his compatriots, with great energy, discipline, and sacrifice, an orderly life consisting of hard work and occasional sedate celebrations. Taking the family out once a year to How Kow, the local Chinese restaurant, was what he thought of as celebrating. Jaunts out in the woods to sleep in a tent were not on his docket, and "bucket lists" were still forty years in the future. He made it clear, with no hint of condescension, that he judged "tenting out" to be a fine way for kids to play. To do this as part of a grand scheme, a philosophy with a seriousness of purpose, to create experiences for teenagers that would set

their course in life, this would have been laughable to him.

For my generation, on the other hand, the violence accompanying the Civil Rights movement, the fiasco of the Vietnam War, and the dawning understanding of the destructive effects of pesticides and pollution following the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, led us to believe that we needed to create deeply different paths.

Growing up in the bosom of the newly minted, affluent middle class, we possessed a surfeit of confidence and a conviction that we should and could take action—action that went beyond marching in protests. In the same way that we had decided getting high was way cooler than getting drunk, we had determined that letting our creative juices run freely, much more so than we believed our parents had, would be a good thing for our generation's collective future. In that secluded, simplified mini-world of our outpost camp, a 14-hour bus ride north of the main camp in Michigan and well out of reach from what we saw as its hierarchical constraints and cloying

tradition, we implicitly felt that we had the opportunity and the freedom to do something crazy and new, something literally "outta sight."

Up to that point, our camp sessions had been going smoothly. We plotted our trips on an array of large-scale topo maps taped together and tacked to a four- by eight-foot sheet of plywood we had nailed to the wall studs in our staff cabin. This map revealed the boundaries of our world, filled as it was with innumerable lakes and rivers, set within the dense forest known as the Canadian Bush. Our early trips had been down chains of lakes with portages between in the rugged style, we flattered ourselves, of the eighteenth century French Canadian Voyageurs. We camped on rock outcroppings, battled swarms of black flies, mosquitos, and "no-see-ums," set up our tents beneath the giant virgin pines, and shared stories around the campfire under the dark canopy of a sky filled with what looked to be a million stars. Some nights, we hooted in appreciation as the purple-green northern lights danced across the heavens. Even the dehydrated food packets that we boiled for our meals tasted good.

**Pontoon plane flight over Ontario lakes in planning for future trips.**







*Taking in the last of the daylight.*

We led “trust circle” activities with the campers to quickly neutralize typical group inhibitions and help us all bond. This was in the early days of the human potential movement when we were riffing on those games. The time, place, and rush of new paradigms synergized, to use a word of the day, created a powerful experience for the campers. By the end of a four-week session, we would see remarkable changes in them, from soft, privileged suburban kids to (mostly) trustworthy campers.

Typical of the irreverent humor of the day, Eric created our unofficial camp motto, “Home for the physically insane.” And the trips really were tough. But Mike was always concocting grander plans for us. He would gather us around the big board and, in a low voice, as if at a top-secret meeting, let us in on his schemes. He cooked up hiking trips through the bush along rivers that ran down to Lake Superior, canoe trips on Superior itself, where we could only

safely paddle when the swells grew smaller around dawn and dusk, and survival trips, where the campers were taught to build lean-to’s and forage for edible, wild plants, like fern fiddleheads. Creating the feel of a secret society, we color-coded past trips as green, yellow, and red to reflect their level of difficulty and gave them nicknames. The toughest one had been given the appellation “cosmic death march.”

None of this was casually done, as Mike was an intolerant stickler for detail. He directed us to make long lists of what needed doing on little spiral notebooks that he handed out at the beginning of each session and affectionately became known as “brain damage pads.” “Think of everything that can possibly go wrong,” he challenged us, which, although I thought was overdoing it, figured he did from hard-won experience.

I remember how his anger flared during the big day of the all-camp, “color war”

games. A camper got stuck on a cabin roof because the human pyramid one team built, climbing on top of one another to get the camper up there, had collapsed, and they couldn’t seem to make the next one high enough to get him down. Seeing the problem, Mike scowled in disgust, his gritted white teeth shining out from within his dark beard. He ordered us with barely contained rage to get a real ladder from the tool shed for the rescue. “You wusses! Call off the other teams from the cabin-roof challenge,” he ordered as he theatrically stormed away.

Despite all the new trips, Mike had a megalomaniacal idea of still wanting to take things up a notch. “We’ve got to tackle that baby,” he mused as he traced his finger along the White on the board one evening. “Who’s coming with me?” he

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# WILDERNESS WHITEWATER



asked, directing an intense stare toward each of us in turn. Again, as so many times before, I leapt at the opportunity and became one of his chosen. "Atta boy, Astro," he said rewarding me with his most charming smile.

In the camp's lodge, we had a small collection of wilderness books including one detailing whitewater paddling techniques. Determined to yet again become competent at a new skill, I leafed through its pages looking at the cartoon-like river diagrams with arrows indicating the direction of the current and little canoes angled one way or the other. Sometimes the angle made sense, but at other time, it was counterintuitive. I tried to imagine myself in the middle of such a river, wondering if I would get it right.



Prepping for the trip, all the food and gear was tightly packed in waterproof bags to be carried within our Algonquin packs. I well remember my first encounter as a camper with one of those voluminous, dark green, heavy-gauge canvas packs. Our trippers had explained that the long, leather strap tumplines were to be wrapped across our foreheads so that we could carry the 60-pound-plus loads on portages by using our neck muscles in addition to our back muscles via the shoulder straps. One tripper informed us that ancient travelers had used them to carry loads heavier than their own body weight, as had the Voyageurs, so we should be proud to follow in that tradition. As it turned out, without those tumplines, we would have literally fallen over backwards.

Looking at the lay of the land on the topo maps, we could see little crosshatches indicating rapids and more level spots



**Top:** Getting ready to put in to shore and set up camp.

**Middle:** Campers wading out to rock island campsite on Lake Superior.

**Bottom:** Relaxing by a waterfall after a day of hiking through the "bush."



we could use for camping. The river was particularly remote with only the Algoma Railway tracks nearby enough for a canoe put-in. We arranged to load the canoes into box cars and had the engineer stop and let us off where the tracks passed along the river. Looking back at the complexity and daring that this trip entailed, I marvel at our youthful self-assurance.

As we came around the bend, I saw, not 50 yards ahead, Eric's canoe pinned, bow and stern, against two boulders, perpendicular to the river, tons of water rushing through it and spilling over its downstream gunnel. Five campers and staff were gathered round. A question flashed through my mind. Where was the sixth person?

Seeing the group tightly clustered around the pinned canoe, we quickly tied our canoe's bowline to a tree along the bank and rock-hopped and floated down to them. Eric was waist deep in the water with his arms around that sixth person, a camper, Gary, whose chest was being pressed by the strong current against the upstream side of the canoe, his head and neck barely visible above the rushing water. He was holding onto the gunnels with both hands and we quickly learned that one of his feet was wedged fast between two rocks, deep under the canoe. Eric held him under his armpits and, turning his head, was looking back at us with an anguished expression I had never seen cross his usually upbeat and sunny demeanor. He told us how, rounding the bend, his paddle blade had wedged between two rocks and the shaft had snapped. As he lost his steering control, their canoe had quickly turned sideways and crashed into the two rocks.

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**Top:** The author (left) and a co-tripper in mock disagreement about which direction to go.

**Middle:** Campfire performance after a trip

**Bottom:** Shooting the small standing waves in good form.





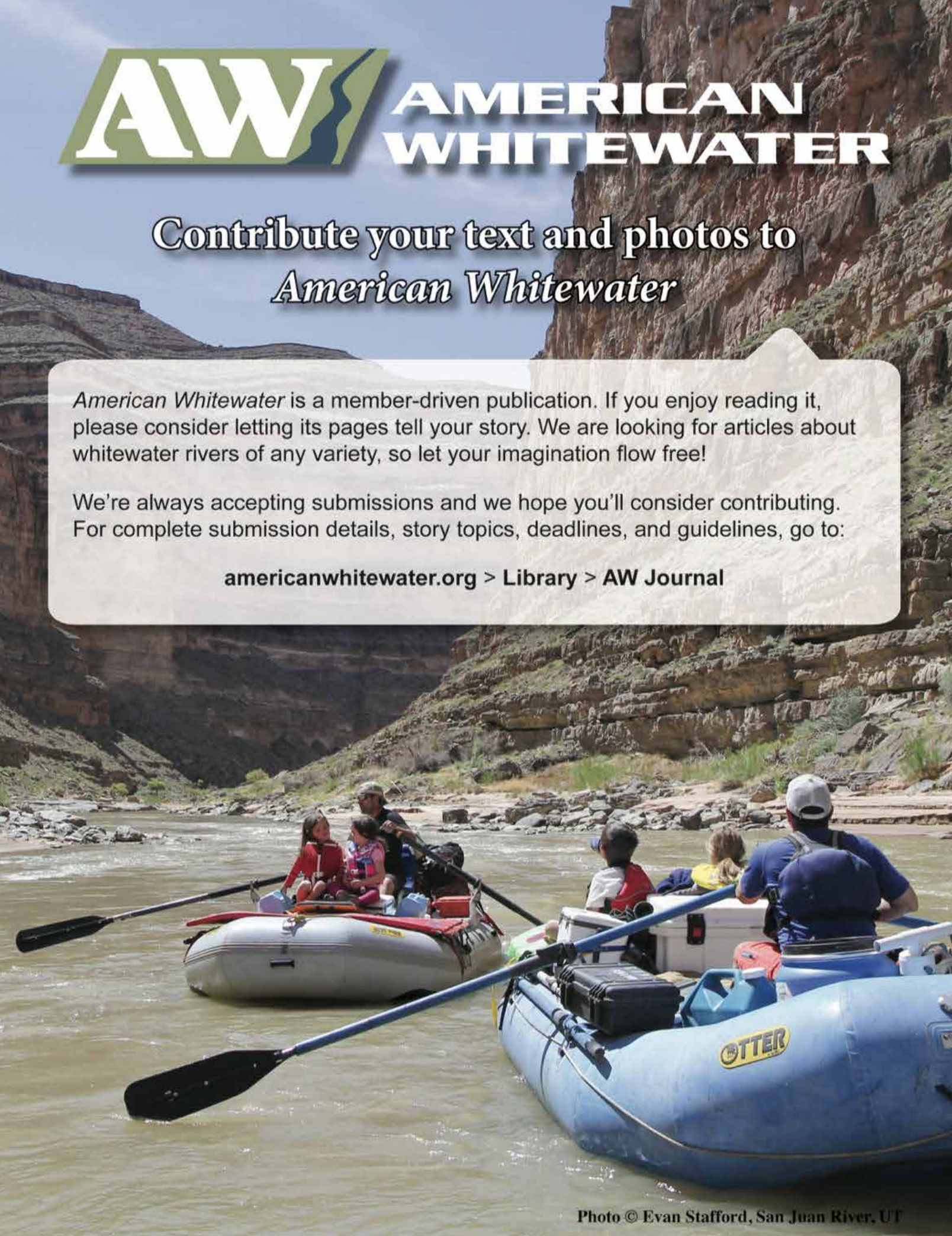
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# WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

We learned the personalities of these teenagers as we brought them into our small society. Some were cocky and headstrong, some cunning, always angling to figure out ways to get out of the endless tasks that camping entails, and some, like Gary, were fun-loving and docile, seemingly already having decided that they would be taken care of in life and needn't really worry about anything. When, in preparation for this trip, we had instructed the campers how to float downriver on their backs, feet forward and using their hands to steer, Gary, as usual, was barely paying attention. The thought now crossed my mind: Was that how he had ended up under that canoe?

A minute later, another capsized canoe came down with its occupants floating alongside. Everyone was able to get their footing in the shallower spots and rushed over to help. A few minutes after that, when Mike came around the bend, Eric waved at him using large, dramatic gestures. Mike understood immediately that something was seriously wrong. He literally threw his canoe on shore and, bearlike, leapt across rocks and bounded down to us. As he arrived, it took only seconds for him to understand the dire situation. Gary's strength was ebbing, and in spite of the life jacket, his face was now almost underwater. Mike sprang around to the downstream side of the canoe and barked at Gary in mock anger, "You animal! How the hell did you get yourself into this fix?" Gary squirmed with embarrassment, but Mike's poke had the desired effect of bringing a rueful smile to his face. "Hold on buddy. We'll have you out of here in no time," Mike said, massaging Gary's shoulder. Then he pulled us staff a few yards to the side and rapidly grilled us on what we had tried thus far. Ropes? Yes, but no help. Pulling Gary's foot free? Yes. We had held Josh's legs as he dove under the middle of the canoe and tried to free Gary's foot. Lifting the bow and stern. Yes. Wouldn't budge. "What else

haven't we thought of?" Mike demanded and I could see the question was aimed more at himself than at us. "There must be something," he said as his eyes rapidly darted over the scene. Then, in a voice so low I could hardly hear him, he said, "Eric, spot me. I want to try something."

They rushed to the bow, and bracing himself, Mike grabbed Eric's arm as he ducked underwater. He disappeared for fifteen seconds then came spluttering up, his chest heaving and his gaze unfocused. As if speaking in tongues, he coughed out the phrase, "A space under there...hold me tight." Eric and several others held him as he went under again. Nothing for an eternity. Then, not believing our eyes, we saw the canoe tremble and suddenly Mike's muscled neck and shoulders began

to emerge from under the bow, raising it up as he stood up from a crouch. Like a colossus, he was, unfathomably, lifting the canoe against the rushing torrent. I saw, as if in slow motion, the force of the river grab and then tumble the canoe and float it downstream. Gary was pulled forward into the vacuum, his foot coming free. Not wanting any more mischief, we grabbed him and pulled him upright before he could float away.

We all let out animal-like howls, releasing our pent-up terror. We surrounded Mike, thumping his back and shoulders as, Poseidon-like, water dripped off him. The expression on his face was of one who had gone a long way off and had still not quite returned to the present. A tremor ran up from his legs and he shook himself like



*Heading out for a day on a chain of lakes trip.*



# WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

a dog coming out of the water. Then he seemed to refocus, his eyes shining, and a broad grin erupted on his face. The grin was not for us. It was a pure manifestation of his being acutely alive, of acknowledging to himself that he possessed a life-force that erupted from within and could, if the need arose, move heaven and earth. He had known that it was he who was responsible, and it drove him to literally go berserk in the instant it was needed.

Looking around, I let my consciousness float above that scene of a small pack of people within an immense, oblivious environment. Blissfully, I felt the gears of the universe

mesh back into alignment. Even so, I still felt the chill on the back of my neck of the tragedy that had not materialized. A warning voice rose from deep inside me to not let myself get so close to going over the line again. Not that he had done anything wrong, but I knew in that moment that no longer could I remain hell-bent on making myself into a pale imitation of Mike. Who was I? Of course, I still didn't know and pushed that troubling question out of my mind. I only knew that I would have to find my own way.

We abandoned the rest of our trip, gathering up all our downstream gear and canoes and

making our way back to the tracks. In the weeks ahead, back at camp, we returned to our usual levels of adventure, still a bit demented, but with a barely perceptible, new element of circumspection. As the summer floated by, every time I came down to the waterfront and saw the dents in that canoe, the image of the river scene would flash before me and a quiver would run through me. Later, when we asked Gary if he had been worried, he drawled unconcernedly, "Nah, I knew you would rescue me." Mike, for his part, never sent out another White River trip again.

**Canoeing along the Superior shoreline cliffs near Indian pictographs.**





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# NEWS & NOTES

## AW ROGUE TRIP 2021

BY MARK SINGLETON



**F**OR THE PAST several years, the staff of American Whitewater has joined with a number of our members to participate in a four-day float trip on the Rogue River in Southern Oregon. This trip has been a great opportunity to connect with members in ways that build a lasting understanding of the role of recreation in fostering a stewardship ethic. As one of the original eight Wild and Scenic rivers in the country, the Rogue is an outstanding classroom for American Whitewater's river stewardship program. Staff members share current projects, their challenges and successes, as well as highlights of national policy work that affects Wild and Scenic rivers like the Rogue. The trip is made possible through the support of Northwest Rafting Company. They provide professional guides, exceptional food, transportation to and from Galice (the put-in), and group equipment.

In June 2021, American Whitewater members will again have an opportunity to join American Whitewater staff and board members for this exclusive trip on the Rogue. We invite you to come learn more about what we're up to while having a great time enjoying one of our nation's first Wild and Scenic rivers. You will have the option of bringing your own boat, renting a boat, or joining as a passenger on one of the rafts. The price for the trip will be \$1095, with a portion of the trip proceeds going to American Whitewater to support our work.

The trip, which will take place June 17-20, 2021, will be fully outfitted by Northwest Rafting Company with professional guides and all group equipment. The trip is suitable for all skill levels. Last year we had paddlers representing the full range of skill levels from experts who are out every weekend, to folks who had not been in a boat for

a while, and some who were just getting into an inflatable kayak or raft for the first time. Everyone is welcome on this trip—the only experience you need is a love of rivers. One of the most important concepts the Rogue trip will reinforce is what we all know firsthand—it is our common love of whitewater that makes us such passionate defenders of rivers. Oh yeah, and the food is excellent and the camping superb. Last year, we had a full trip, so make your reservation soon to ensure a spot on the Rogue trip with American Whitewater this summer.

Make your reservation directly through Northwest Rafting Company's website today at [www.nwrafting.com/rogue](http://www.nwrafting.com/rogue) and selecting the June 17-20 trip with American Whitewater under "Dates and Prices." We hope to see you on the Rogue River this June!



# REMEMBRANCE

## ROWING ON: REMEMBERING HERM HOOPS

BY CODY PERRY



Herm rowing on one of his last trips, toucan hat and all.  
Photo courtesy Herm Hoops collection

Herm Hoops. Dedicated river runner, historian, advocate, and general pain in the ass passed away at his home in Jensen, Utah on Monday afternoon, November 23rd. I like to think that as he pushed off this last time, the Green River inexplicably swelled to flood stage. A final gesture to an old friend. Let the following be a humble tribute in grief and love, waving farewell to this unforgettable character in the toucan hat.

Herm grew up as a rough-and-tumble farm kid in tri-state New York. The Hoops family had a small but notable operation raising horses and cows and producing hay. It's here where Herm molded his adventurous spirit with plenty of open spaces and the oars of a little row boat to pull around the farm pond.

His first introduction to the wide West was through the window of a 50s station wagon during a family road trip. That trip, the scale of it all, left an indelible impression on the Hoops family; but it's clear that for Herm it was the beginning of something altogether different.

Herm learned to love running rivers in Vermont, but nothing could have prepared him for the seductive labyrinths of the Colorado Plateau. These were the 1970s, the halcyon days of early river running. Rafting wasn't near as popular, pedestrian, or middle class as it is today. The boats, the gear, even the river access were far more primitive. With no crowds and no permits necessary, Herm fanned out, running rivers in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and Idaho. But there seemed to be a special chemistry, a kind of destiny with one canyon in particular: Desolation.

I came to know of Herm as a guy who did a ton of trips through the Green's Desolation Canyon. He always seemed to be on the river. I saw his name credited in every book I could get my hands on about Deso, from the Belknap Guides to James Aton's classic, *The River Knows Everything* to many, many more. There's a solid chance any given river guide in Desolation or Dinosaur either knew, loved, tolerated, or was terrified of Herm Hoops. An imposing grizzly of a man, Herm was always introduced as a legend and was known to wear a toucan hat—and little else—on the river.

Herm was mercurial. He was serious, obsessive, and could dig in with no intention to budge. He was also a hopeless romantic; he was reflective, self-deprecating, and FUNNY! Herm somehow managed to be an outlaw and a sheriff in the river community all at once, and he did that across decades. He knew the owners and operators of major inflatable boat manufacturers and, maybe more importantly, every bartender at Ray's Tavern in Green River.

I can speak for the river community that we've lost an elder and an icon. His absence will be felt in the circles of average river rats, federal water managers, congressional staffers, and anyone foolish enough to let Herm Hoops get hold of your email address. It's been a single day and I can feel the immense undertow of his absence...and an empty green parrot hat.

A few years ago, I was returning some borrowed gear to Herm and we sat down for a moment in his garage to catch up. You

---

*Opposite: At the Snake River*  
Photo courtesy Herm Hoops collection





*Herm and Valerie's riverside tradition*  
Photo courtesy Herm Hoops collection

have to imagine this space, a two door bay with a boat in some stage of repair. The walls are covered in river memorabilia: posters, stickers, maps, photographs, and gear. All of it is well used and organized, "Hoops" stenciled on every ammo can. We looked out over the fields toward the Green River and suddenly, Herm told me he had been diagnosed with cancer. Not knowing what to say, I asked him if he wanted to go down Deso.

Herm's love for rivers wasn't unusual, but his lifelong dedication to their conservation was. Years of participating in the mundane

public comment process, attending countless late-night water meetings across the region, drafting letter after letter to all levels of decision-makers. Herm did all this—he made a difference. He made worthy friends and adversaries.

He straddled a time before and after standardized western river regulations were developed, before designer life jackets and Facebook forums. Herm led generations of boaters toward his own brand of a conservation ethic before river conservation was an assumed pillar of rafting culture. Herm understood that



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Tallulah Race 2016. | Photo: Emrie Canen



# REMEMBRANCE

threats came from not only oil and gas, or water development, but also unchecked recreation along these treasured rivers. When it came to protecting a place, Herm never stopped pushing the rafting industry, the boating community, or stirring the pot.

Herm's passion went beyond the deep canyons of the Colorado Plateau and into the arms and support of his loving partner Valerie. Herm met Val while he was working as a ranger in Dinosaur National Monument and, lucky for him, convinced her to come on a river trip. Val is beautiful, quiet, and shy. Herm was large, bellicose and gregarious. Like a swirling eddy, they balanced each other. Herm and Val had a tradition of conducting a romantic dinner on the banks of the river. Herm looking dapper in a formal military mess dress uniform and Val dazzling in a black mini skirt cocktail dress. They'd set out a table complete with candles and champagne,

toasting their union, enveloped in majesty around them, enveloped in each other.

Herm loved being a father to his two kids: Hatteras and Gillian, introducing them both to the river as toddlers. At the put-in, Herm would place young Gill in the truck with her foot on the gas and Herm would run back to blow up the boat with a hose of engine exhaust. Herm told his kids there was never any room for a tent, they'd have to sleep under the stars. There was no room for hot cocoa, only coffee, no room for Hatt's Walkman, either. Herm instead suggested they indulge themselves with the sound of water dripping off the oars and the song of the canyon wren. Hatt and Gill may not have understood it at the time, I wouldn't have either, but Herm was weaving the river into his kids' very being. He made sure that the river would flow from within.

By nature, all rafters have river families, and Herm was no exception. The canyons

were sacred, like a key to the universe for Herm, and more than anything he loved the intoxicating joy of sharing these places with his river family, people like his sister Brenda Hoops Rouse, Michael Dean Smith, Tamsin McCormick, Pamela Derby, Leif Johnson, Scott Warthin, Daniel Earth, and many others.

That day in the garage, when I asked Herm if he wanted to go down Deso, it wasn't to escape the fact that death comes for us all. It was about completing a circle. Coming back to where one started. You see, Herm rowed boats into places he fell in love with, but he also kept rowing boats into a realization that social and environmental justice won't happen on their own. He rowed boats into the hearts of people he loved. He still rows boats in the hearts and minds of many. So we set out to tell Herm's story, one we all need more now than ever. You can find a free piece of it on Vimeo by searching "The Salad Days" by Rig to Flip.



**Herm in his element**  
Photo courtesy Herm  
Hoops collection



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# REMEMBERANCE

Not long after that last Deso Trip with Herm and Val, Hoops sent me a letter containing a skeleton key, and with it, some advice:

"Take this Brother, a key to the Rivers, may it serve you well... Proceed with caution, there are many distractions. Befriend bureaucrats but know they don't report to the rivers. Stick up for the little guy with a cheap boat and little money, they are the future protectors. Read, ask questions and from time to time, throw yourself on the sword."

-Herm Hoops, editor-in-chief of the Utah Utardian.

-Herm Hoops, 2019 River Runner Hall of Fame inductee.

-Herm Hoops, NPS Admin & Ranger at Dinosaur National Monument.

-Herm Hoops, RMS, Outstanding

Contribution to River Management.

-Herm Hoops, Inflatable Boat Historian and Author.

-Herm Hoops, River Runner, Mentor, MFA quicksilver ballet.

-Herm Hoops, The Outlaw Sheriff.

-Herm Hoops, husband, father, brother and friend.

There will never be another like you.

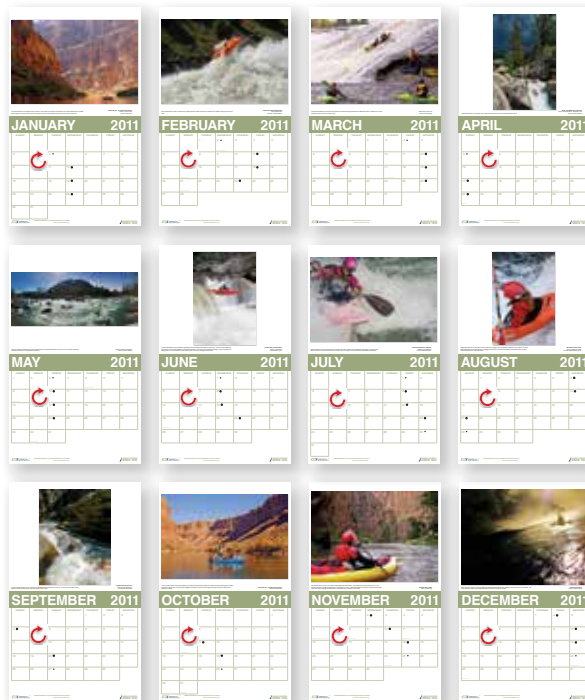
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*Row on, Herm*

Photo courtesy Herm Hoops collection



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# STAFF HIGHLIGHT

## ANGUS HARLEY – NATIONAL EVENT AND SOUTHERN ROCKIES STEWARDSHIP INTERN

BY EVAN STAFFORD



*Young Angus Harley brings youthful exuberance, a good sense of humor, and a passion for river stewardship to the AW team.*

**Photo courtesy Angus Harley**

### **How did you get introduced to paddlesports?**

I was super lucky to get into kayaking during my sophomore year of high school!! I went to this small, hippy high school in Carbondale, Colorado that had a whitewater kayaking program. I started when I was 15 and it took me a while to get the hang of paddling. I remember there being a lot of swims and not being fond of learning the basics (catching eddies, ferrying, attainment, etc.) but really enjoyed crashing through wave trains. I was definitely a pretty loose unit in my earlier days. During my junior year of high school, I joined the kayaking team and jumped into the sport a bit more. I spend a lot of time learning to playboat and it was a great way to build the fundamentals and learn to use edges and get my roll. I did a few freestyle rodeos, slalom races, and downriver events during my time on the team and even managed to snag a win during a wildwater race my senior year. I remember early on being very infatuated with river running. I knew that one day I

really wanted to be a creek boater and luckily also got to spend a lot of time on Class III learning to run rivers. But my high school program was about as great a way to get into kayaking as I can imagine. All the gear was provided, my coaches were great, and I made lots of friends. I really think we need more programs like it to get kids and adults into river running and help break down some of the barriers to entry in the sport. I can't imagine how I would have started kayaking without it.

### **What's your most embarrassing paddlesports moment?**

I've definitely had my fair share, but one of my best was during my sophomore year of college. I go to school up in Squamish, British Columbia, and there was this super fun local event called the Cheakamus huck fest where all the local paddlers meet up at this 20-foot waterfall called Balls Falls and have a big party in the woods while having a friendly freestyle waterfall competition (competition being a very generous term).

This waterfall is probably the friendliest and least consequential 20-footer in the world and is a great place to learn waterfall tricks. For anyone who has spent time paddling in the Sea to Sky corridor, you know that the local kayaking scene is quite impressive and the region is home to some of the best kayakers in the world, many of whom were there. On top of that, a bunch of my friends, including a girl I had a pretty big crush on, had come out to watch the huck fest. This year was the swan song of the event as the organizers (understandably) didn't want to keep taking on the liability, so I wanted to go out with a bang. I had learned to do freewheels on this waterfall the year before and just thought, "You know, I should try a back freewheel and try to impress everyone. It can't be that hard. It's probably even easier than doing them forwards." I proceeded to paddle backwards to the lip, miss the stroke entirely, fall flat on my head, pop my knee out of the stirrup, and swim in front of the entire local paddling community, all of my friends, and worst



# STAFF HIGHLIGHT



Angus demonstrating his ritual after running an intimidating rapid for the first time  
Photo courtesy Angus Harley

of all, my crush. That one stung for a little while but I can laugh about it now.

## What's your ritual before running an intimidating rapid for the first time?

Sitting in the eddy above the rapid I like to close my eyes and take three deep breaths to let go of the nerves, then take a moment to visualize my line in my head. Then I'll splash some water in my face, and finally I have a loonie (Canadian one-dollar coin) that one of my best friends gave me before moving up to Canada that I always keep in my PFD for good luck. I'll give it a dunk in the river and a quick kiss and put it away and then peel out before I have a second to think about it too much. I'd say I have a roughly 85% success rate with this ritual.

## Who has influenced you the most in your paddlesport career?

Oh God, that list could go on for ages. First and foremost, Peter Benedict and

Kayo Ogilby are two of my favorite people to kayak with; they both taught me how to paddle in high school. They're getting pretty old but are still super stylish paddlers and can still kick my butt all up and down the river. It's always such a treat to kayak with them whenever I get the chance these days and I hope I'm charging like they are when I'm their age (lots of gratitude to both of you if you ever end up reading this).

Also, all of my friends who helped me grow to become a better kayaker and encouraged me to step up. Russell Davies for the opportunities to work with him in Idaho and for helping me gain some confidence on bigger drops and for being one of the stoutest people alive. All of the old studs in Colorado who take me kayaking and share their whitewater wisdom, you know who you are. And everyone at American Whitewater for being incredible mentors and friends on and off the river. You guys all inspire me in lots of different ways. I'll leave it there for now but I've been fortunate to

have a lot of great people help and inspire me in my paddling over the years, so thank you to everyone.

## Tell us something that few people would know about you.

I was born and lived in Australia until I was eight years old. Also, I'm a Leo.

## Favorite river snack?

Maté at the put-in, Clif bar on the river, apples and peanut butter at the take-out.

## What's on your bucket list for an AW achievement?

I would love to spearhead a Wild and Scenic River designation, especially in my home state of Colorado, as there are so many beautiful and unique watersheds in the state. And even though it's a little vain, I would also love to speak to Congress on behalf of American Whitewater and our nation's beautiful and valuable rivers.

## What was the first AW project you engaged with?

The first AW project I really engaged with was this summer, writing a motion to intervene to the Federal Energy Regulation Commission (FERC) on a project to develop Big Canyon, a tributary of the Little Colorado River in the Grand Canyon watershed. This was a really cool project to be able to work on and I was largely given the reigns to research and write it on my own. It felt really cool to have my name on something I worked so hard on, alongside Kestrel and Kevin, and to submit it to the FERC. I know in the grand scheme of things it was very small but it's also a project I'm really proud of.

## River craft of choice?

Always a kayak. I love being in a creek boat but my favorite days on the river are mellow and fun slice laps in my RPM.





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# AFFILIATE CLUBS

## AW'S ORIGINAL PURPOSE

BY BETHANY OVERFIELD

American Whitewater's original purpose since 1954 has included distribution of information among its Affiliate Clubs. We have over 100 current AW Club Affiliates and they are all doing great work on your behalf; if you don't belong to a club, consider joining one.

American Whitewater has two levels of Affiliate Clubs - a Supporting Affiliate Club or an Affiliate Club. Affiliate Clubs that choose AW's \$100 annual level are recognized in the AW Journal, on our website club page, and in our annually published Honor Roll. In order to be recognized at this level, a Club needs to maintain an annual \$100 contribution.

Affiliate Clubs that choose AW's \$400 Supporting Affiliate Club annual level are recognized in the AW Journal, on our website club page, and in our annually published Honor Roll as well as being listed as sponsors of an AW stewardship presentation each year. In order to be recognized at this level, a Club needs to maintain an annual \$400 contribution. A Supporting Affiliate Club can revert to the \$100 Affiliate Club annual level at any time.

An Affiliate Club that is already being recognized as an AW Lifetime member is recognized in the annual Honor Roll as a Lifetime member. They do need to contribute either at the \$100 or the \$400 level annually to be recognized as an Affiliate Club in the AW Journal and under the Affiliate Club heading of the published Honor Roll. Is your club missing from this list? It might have expired. Contact me at [membership@americanwhitewater.org](mailto:membership@americanwhitewater.org) to square your club membership away!

## Supporting Affiliate Clubs

### Alabama

Coosa River Paddling Club, Wetumpka

### Alaska

Fairbanks Paddlers, Fairbanks

### Arkansas

Arkansas Canoe Club, Little Rock

### Colorado

Colorado Whitewater Assn, Denver  
Dolores River Boating Advocate, Dolores

### Georgia

Georgia Canoeing Association Inc, Winston

### Kentucky

Bluegrass Wildwater Association, Lexington  
Viking Canoe Club, Louisville

### New Jersey

KCCNY, Flanders

### North Carolina

West Asheville Canoe and Kayak Organization (WACKO), Asheville

### Ohio

Columbus Outdoor Pursuits, Columbus  
Keelhaulers, Cleveland

### Oregon

Oregon Whitewater Association, Tigard

### South Carolina

Footfalls Paddling Club, Greenville  
Palmetto Paddlers, Columbia

### Washington

Paddle Trails Canoe Club, Seattle  
Washington Kayak Club, Redmond  
Washington Recreational River Runners, Renton

## Affiliate Club by State

### Alaska

Nova River Runners Inc., Chickaloon

### Alabama

Huntsville Canoe Club, Huntsville

### Arizona

Outdoors Unlimited, Flagstaff

### California

Chico Paddleheads, Chico  
Gold Country Paddlers, Placerville  
Redwood Empire Paddlers, Santa Rosa  
River City Whitewater Club, Sacramento  
Shasta Paddlers, Redding  
Smith River Alliance, Crescent City

### Colorado

Diversity Whitewater, Fort Collins  
Friends of the Yampa, Steamboat Springs  
Rocky Mountain Outdoor Center, Buena Vista  
San Miguel Whitewater Asso, Telluride

Team Colorado Whitewater Racing Club, Longmont  
Upper Colorado Private Boaters Asso, Glenwood Springs

### Connecticut

Housatonic Area Canoe & Kayak Sq, Lakeville

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AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Oaks (PA)

### Indiana

Hoosier Canoe Club, Brownsburg  
Ohio Valley Paddlers, Evansville

### Iowa

Iowa Whitewater Coalition, W. Des Moines

### Kentucky

Elkhorn Paddlers, Lexington

### Maine

Penobscot Paddle & Chowder Society, Freeport

### Maryland

Baltimore Canoe & Kayak Club, Baltimore  
Blue Ridge Voyagers, Rockville

### Minnesota

Rapids Riders, Eagan

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Missouri Whitewater Association, St. Louis  
Ozark Mountain Paddlers, Springfield

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Beartooth Paddlers Society, Billings

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Kuyahora Valley Paddlers, Middleville  
Zoar Valley Paddling Club, Machias

### North Carolina

Carolina Canoe Club, Raleigh  
Landmark Learning, Cullowhee  
Mind Body Play, Asheville

### Ohio

Friends of the Crooked River, Akron

### Oregon

Lower Columbia Canoe Club, Portland  
Northwest Rafters Association, Roseburg  
Oregon Kayak and Canoe Club, Portland  
Willamette Kayak and Canoe Club, Corvallis



## **Pennsylvania**

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Benscreek Canoe Club, Johnstown  
Canoe Club of Greater Harrisburg, Harrisburg  
Conewago Canoe Club, York  
Keystone Canoe Club, Mertztown  
Lehigh Valley Canoe Club, Lehigh Valley  
Mach One Slalom Team, State College  
Philadelphia Canoe Club, Philadelphia  
Three Rivers Paddling Club, Bridgeville

## **Rhode Island**

Rhode Island Canoe and Kayak Association,  
Hope Valley

## **Tennessee**

Chota Canoe Club, Knoxville  
Clean Water Expected in East Tennessee,  
Sevierville  
East Tennessee Whitewater Club, Oak Ridge  
Eastman Recreation Club, Kingsport  
Tennessee Scenic River Association, Nashville  
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club, Knoxville

## **Texas**

Houston Canoe Club, Houston

## **Utah**

High Jim and the A.S.K., Salt Lake City  
Utah Whitewater Club, Salt Lake City

## **Vermont**

Vermont Paddlers Club, Montpelier

## **Virginia**

Blue Ridge River Runners, Lynchburg  
Canoe Cruisers Association, Middlebury  
Coastal Canoeists, Richmond  
Float Fishermen of Virginia, Roanoke

## **Washington**

Spokane Canoe & Kayak Club, Spokane  
The Mountaineers, Seattle  
Yakima River Runners, Selah

## **Washington, DC**

Canoe Cruisers Association

## **West Virginia**

Dbl Z! Whitewater Club, Fayetteville  
Mason Dixon Canoe Cruisers, Bolivar  
WV Wildwater Assn, S. Charleston

## **Wisconsin**

North East Wisconsin Paddlers, Inc., Neenah  
Rapids Riders, Egan  
Sierra Club/John Muir Chapter, Madison

## **Wyoming**

American Packrafting Association, Wilson  
Jackson Hole Kayak Club, Jackson

## **Ontario**

Guelph Kayak Club, Elora  
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## **National**

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A list of AW Affiliate Clubs can be found on our website at <http://americanwhitewater.org/content/Membership/join-AW/>. If you do not see your Club listed here please encourage them to renew their Club membership or to join AW as a new Affiliate Club. Your Club's membership and your personal membership enable our staff to be active and engaged in the process of river stewardship. When you join or renew your membership your support is helping to meet the many challenges whitewater rivers face.

If you have any questions about the Affiliate Club membership, please contact me. I can be reached at 866\_BOAT-4AW or [membership@americanwhitewater.org](mailto:membership@americanwhitewater.org).

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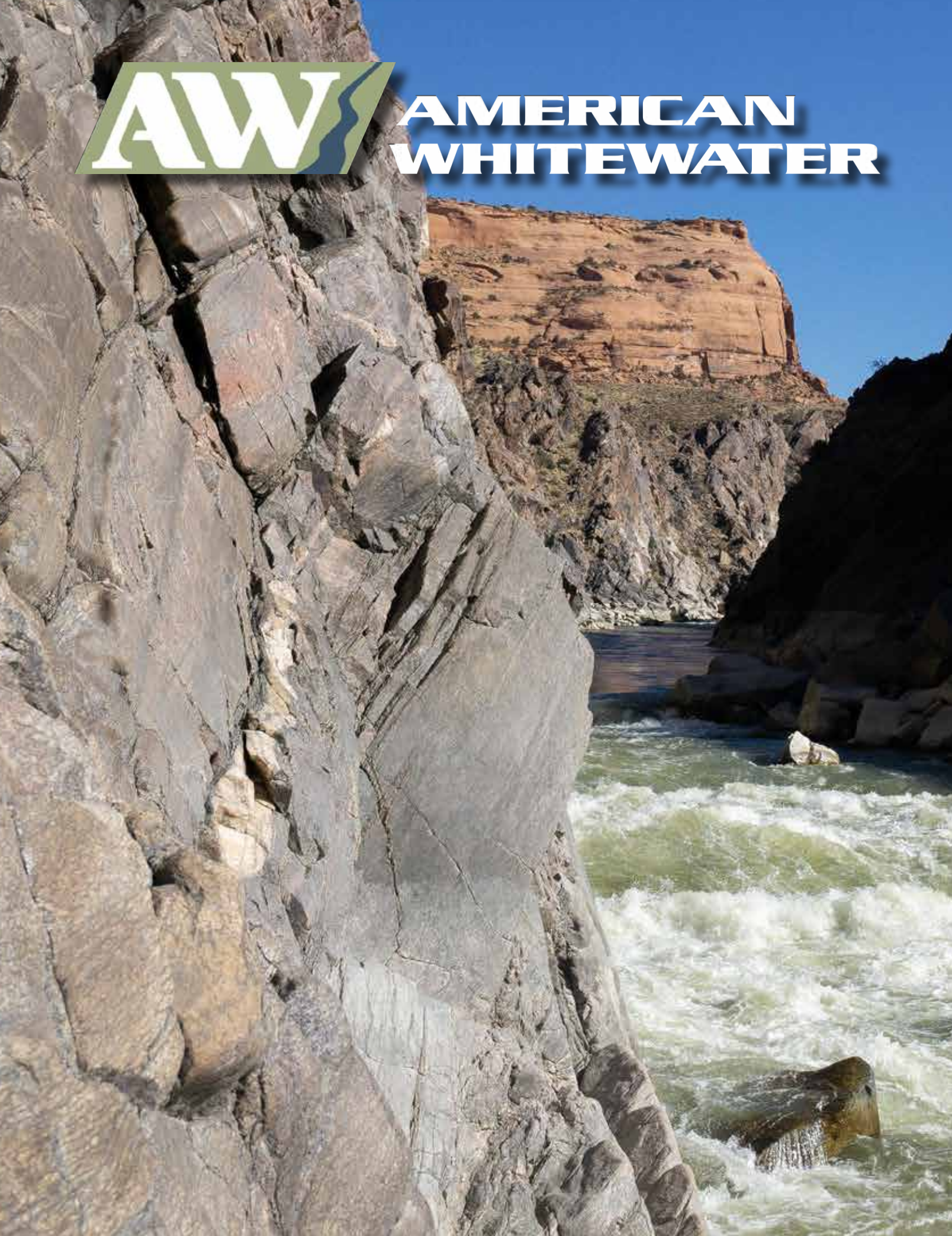
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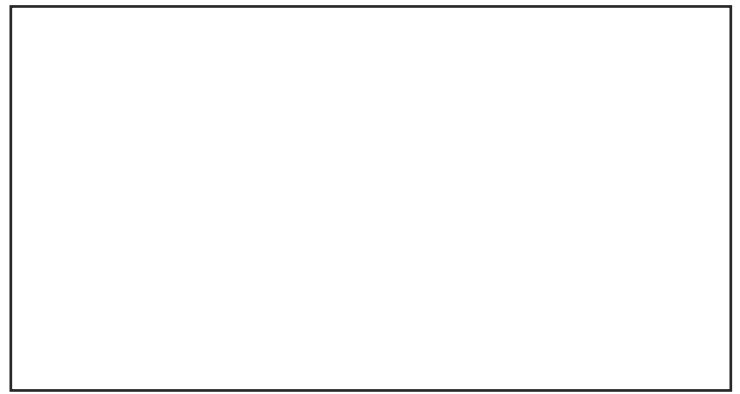


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