



# AMERICAN WHITEWATER

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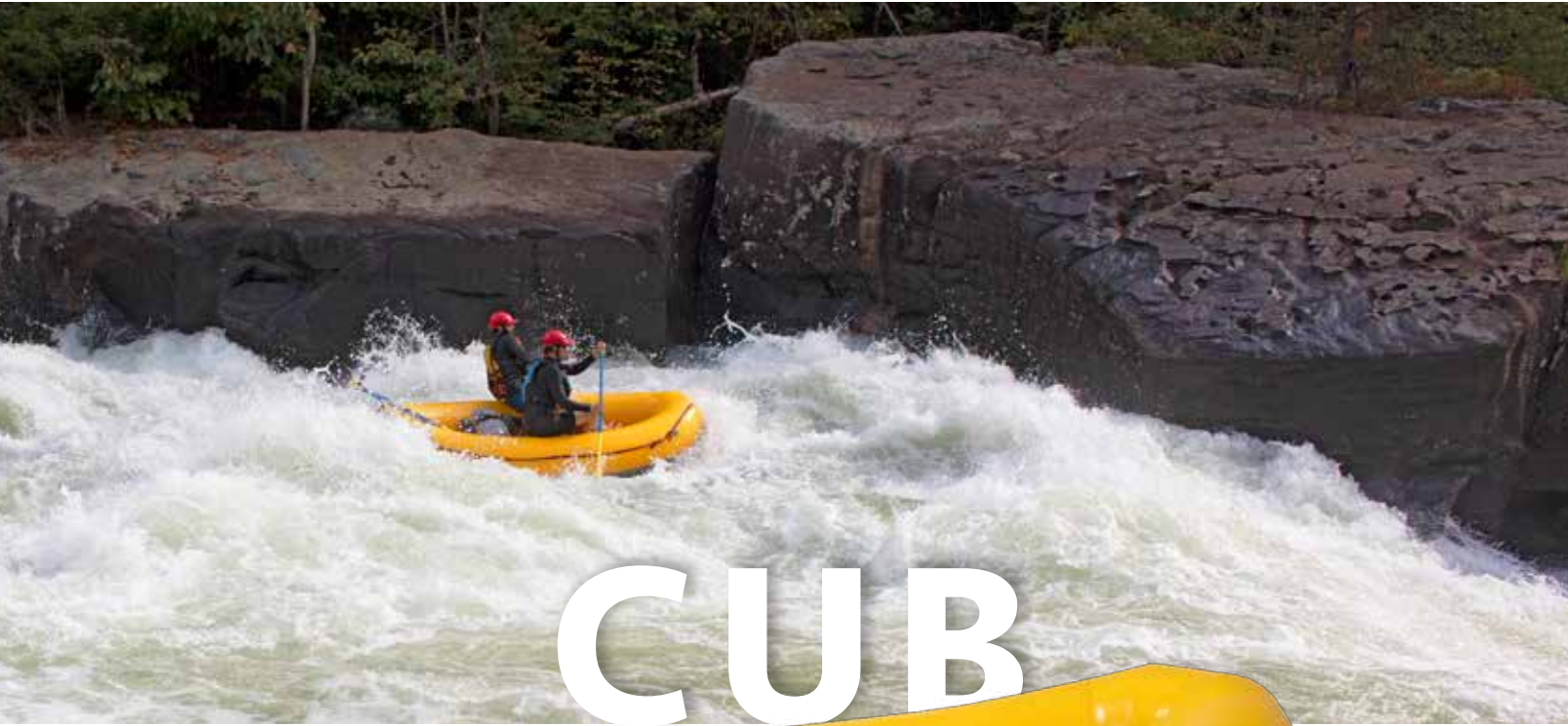
BY BOATERS FOR BOATERS  
Mar/Apr 2021

## AFTER 30 YEARS, A WIN FOR THE NOOKSACK



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# AMERICAN WHITewater

A VOLUNTEER PUBLICATION PROMOTING RIVER CONSERVATION, ACCESS AND SAFETY

## American Whitewater Journal Mar/Apr 2021 – Volume 61 – Issue 2

### COLUMNS

- 5 The Journey Ahead by **Mark Singleton**
- 32 Staff Highlight: Bethany Overfield by **Evan Stafford**
- 34 Remembrance: Memories of Stewart Greenleaf, Paddler and Legislator by **Charlie Walbridge**

### STEWARDSHIP

- 6 Middle Fork Nooksack River by **Thomas O'Keefe**
- 12 Water Rights to Keep Water in Colorado's Rivers by **Hattie Johnson**
- 14 Day-One Executive Actions and Whitewater Recreation by **American Whitewater Stewardship Team**

### FEATURE ARTICLES

#### WILDERNESS PADDLING

- 20 Wilderness Packrafting = Extreme Inner Tubings by **Lisa Ronald**
- 26 Exploring Saint Mary's River by **Adam Goshorn**

#### SAFETY

- 37 Logjam Rescue by **Julie Titone and David Hablewitz**
- 46 Whitewater Accident Summary July-December 2020 by **Charlie Walbridge**



*The Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act is working its way through Congress and will designate over 1,000 miles of new Wild and Scenic Rivers on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington and in California's Central Coast and Trinity Alps, and will also create landscape protections for Arizona's Grand Canyon and for public lands and rivers across Colorado, California, and Washington. The upper New River in Northern California (pictured) would be among those new designations, alongside a number of other new Wild and Scenic streams and land protections in the watersheds of this whitewater rich region.*

Photo by Scott Harding

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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.

### EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in the features and editorials of American Whitewater are those of the individual authors. They do not necessarily represent those of the Directors of American Whitewater or the editors of this publication. On occasion, American Whitewater publishes official organizational policy statements drafted and approved by the Board of Directors. These policy statements will be clearly identified.

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# THE JOURNEY AHEAD

EVERY TIME I send an email through my American Whitewater account there is a text block in the footer that reads, *"American Whitewater 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 restore and protect rivers."* But what does that mean?

The reason I use this language is it captures how I view our mission work here at American Whitewater. It means, first, that our national organization is the leading group in protecting whitewater rivers. Where are whitewater rivers located? In headwaters, where gradient is most likely to occur. Second, we represent the interests of human-powered recreational river users. It doesn't matter what you paddle. Yes, many of us kayak; but canoes, raft, SUPs, pack rafts, and river boards are all ways to connect with rivers. Hikers appreciate whitewater rivers too. If you paddle, you likely hike as well (who hasn't walked around a rapid, or simply viewed a rapid and gazed in awe). The important point is that we are human-powered in the pursuit of interacting with whitewater rivers. Finally, we use science-based data and the inherent quality of nature to support our work. Years ago, when we were just ramping up our program in the southern Rockies, I heard a story about a river manager who, after attending one of our town hall-style meetings on river flows, said, "Until you guys showed up, trying to get paddlers to agree on flow levels was like nailing Jell-O to the wall." No other group knows headwater rivers as well as we do and can collect and present solid social and scientific data on impacts to those places.

We've been through an era of increasing threats to rivers and their surrounding public lands. Our focus moving forward is to make sure the paddling public has access to rivers that are well managed for their recreational and ecological values. On each project we work on, we

seek land and water conservation, public river access, stream flow information, and flow releases that benefit the aquatic ecosystem, as well as recreation. We have a proven track record of success with each of these goals. These enhancements create a triple bottom line: They provide local communities a sustainable economic base, they result in healthier rivers, and they provide opportunities for healthy, nature-based recreation. Reconnecting people and communities with their rivers creates an enthusiastic and lasting constituency for rivers. We call this integrated approach to our mission river stewardship and pursue it in three tracks: Protect, Restore, and Enjoy.

## PROTECT

To protect rivers, we celebrate public lands, champion Wild and Scenic and other designations, defend rivers from dams and diversions, and advocate for clean water. We treasure wild rivers and celebrate the wildness inherent in all rivers. We believe that free-flowing rivers should stay that way.

## RESTORE

To restore rivers, we negotiate new and improved flows at dams and diversions, and work toward dam removals, where appropriate. We've proven that rivers are resilient and often bounce back from degradation far more quickly than predicted.

## ENJOY

To help the public enjoy rivers, we defend the right to paddle rivers, secure areas for public access to rivers, share information on rivers, host events, and encourage sustainable use and safety on the water through education.

As river lovers and paddlers, it's our ability to lean forward and tell compelling real stories about places and rivers that are important to us that enables our stewardship efforts. That ability to keep it real makes us a force; it's our unique superpower! As we move into the coming year, it is American Whitewater's

superpower to be leveraged fully as we advocate for the stewardship of rivers. You'll hear from us regularly on issues that affect the places you paddle, asking for your engagement through simple online tools that provide direct and meaningful comments to decision makers. It only takes a minute and your comment might just be the critical tipping point in a crucial issue affecting a whitewater river.

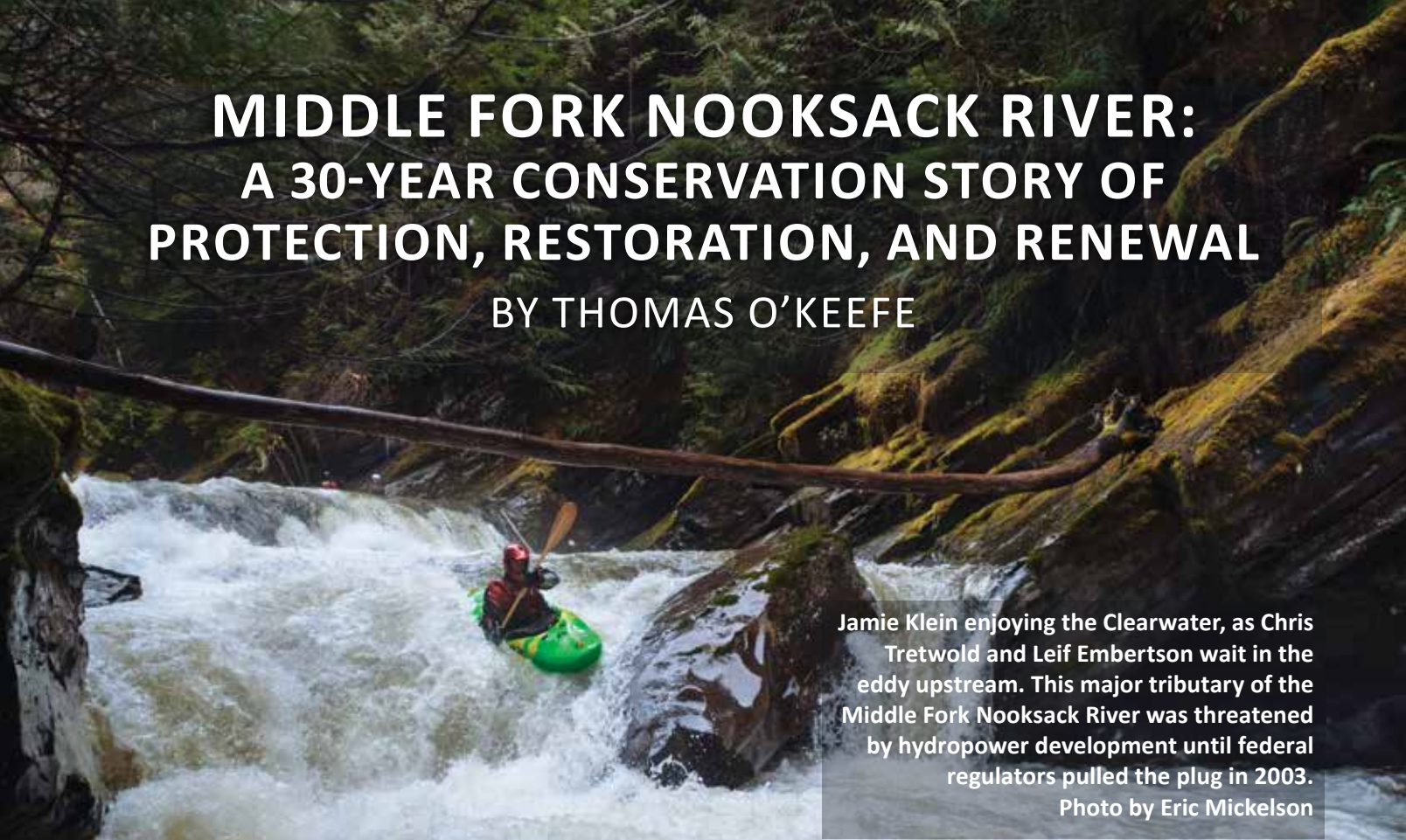
Next time you get an email from me and see the footer at the bottom, realize it's more than just words on your screen. It represents real, on-the-ground work to protect the places that are important to us.

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



# MIDDLE FORK NOOKSACK RIVER: A 30-YEAR CONSERVATION STORY OF PROTECTION, RESTORATION, AND RENEWAL

BY THOMAS O'KEEFE



Jamie Klein enjoying the Clearwater, as Chris Tretwold and Leif Embertson wait in the eddy upstream. This major tributary of the Middle Fork Nooksack River was threatened by hydropower development until federal regulators pulled the plug in 2003.

Photo by Eric Mickelson

**T**HE MIDDLE FORK Nooksack River is one of Washington's whitewater treasures, flowing through a dramatic gorge and brought to life during winter rain events. It's the kind of place that only attracts the most dedicated paddlers, willing to endure the hardships of cold weather, temperamental drysuit zippers, and flows that can be notoriously difficult to forecast. For those who make the commitment however, it is a magical place where forest health is improving and a dam has recently been removed. It's an opportunity to reflect back on some of the history over the past 30 years and our community's connection to this place.

## Hydropower Proposed

The early 1990s saw the subsiding wake of the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act of 1978 that fueled a veritable gold rush for independent power producers trying to stake a claim on sites for hydropower development. Dozens of sites were considered in the Nooksack River basin and dreams of putting this river and its major tributaries in pipes were hatched by those looking to profit from the new developer-friendly provisions that had been enacted

into law. The Middle Fork Nooksack Dam was among the sites identified for hydropower development.

Until 2020, the Middle Fork Diversion Dam on the Nooksack River in Washington was a 25-foot high, 125-foot long concrete dam built in 1961 to divert water to Lake Whatcom, the City of Bellingham's primary water supply. Dam construction did not include fish passage facilities, but STS Hydropower Ltd. had ideas for adding fish passage at the Middle Fork Dam and generating hydropower at the site as part of their Heisler's Creek Hydroelectric Project.

As planning for the project got underway, American Whitewater's then National Conservation Director Rich Bowers remembered it as the first time a developer reached out to the whitewater paddling community to inquire about instream flow needs for recreation. Through the advocacy efforts of American Whitewater, resources agencies, including the National Park Service and Washington Department of Ecology, were becoming increasingly aware of the need to evaluate instream flow needs for recreation. In a 1992

letter to the developer, the Washington Department of Ecology wrote, "...at our meeting last November, I emphasized the importance of ensuring that instream flows for your project protect not only flows for fish and wildlife habitat, but scenic and aesthetic values as well." The developer reached out to American Whitewater and Rich was tasked with assembling a team to investigate the Middle Fork Nooksack. Michael Deckert was volunteering on the Nisqually project that was undergoing relicensing at the time and agreed to go check out the Middle Fork Nooksack.

Michael's team, including Tom Wolfe, Gary Korb, and Shawn Wickstrom, set out to explore the river on May 29th, 1993. Michael can't say for certain if it was the first descent but "we didn't know anything about it." They put in near the Clearwater confluence and paddled down to the dam site where the river enters a dramatic gorge with one of the more challenging rapids on the run where the walls constrict the river; they named it Icebox Paradise. The take-out was at Mosquito Lake Road. On that exploratory trip they found breathtaking scenery and classic whitewater. Michael



# STEWARDSHIP

remembers that day, nearly three decades ago, reflecting, “that was a really great run.” The group returned for another run on July 11, 1993. Shortly thereafter, interest in hydropower development waned as the reality of the poor economic prospects of the project became apparent.

Dreams of hydropower development die hard, and soon developers were at it again, exploring the potential of the Clearwater, a major tributary of the Middle Fork Nooksack for hydropower development. At the time, it was becoming one of the more popular creek runs in the Middle Fork Nooksack drainage. Planning for a proposed hydroelectric project was undertaken. Despite objections from the local tribes and the State Department of Natural Resources, which had adopted a new Habitat Conservation Plan to better protect the forest along the Clearwater, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission continued to move forward with an Environmental Impact Statement that recommended development of the project as a “dependable source of electrical energy” with “extensive environmental mitigation measures” that would “minimize or avoid impacts.” As the developer began to miss deadlines, it became clear that the whole effort lacked the necessary finances. American Whitewater worked with local tribes and state and county agencies, and then filed a Motion for Dismissal of the ill-advised project. A month later the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission indeed dismissed the project.

Having successfully defended the river from new hydropower development, it became apparent that we had an opportunity not only to protect the drainage, but to restore the river.

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*The Middle Fork Nooksack Dam (above) and the site shortly after dam removal (below), with channel restoration work underway in the summer of 2020.*

**Photo by April McEwen**

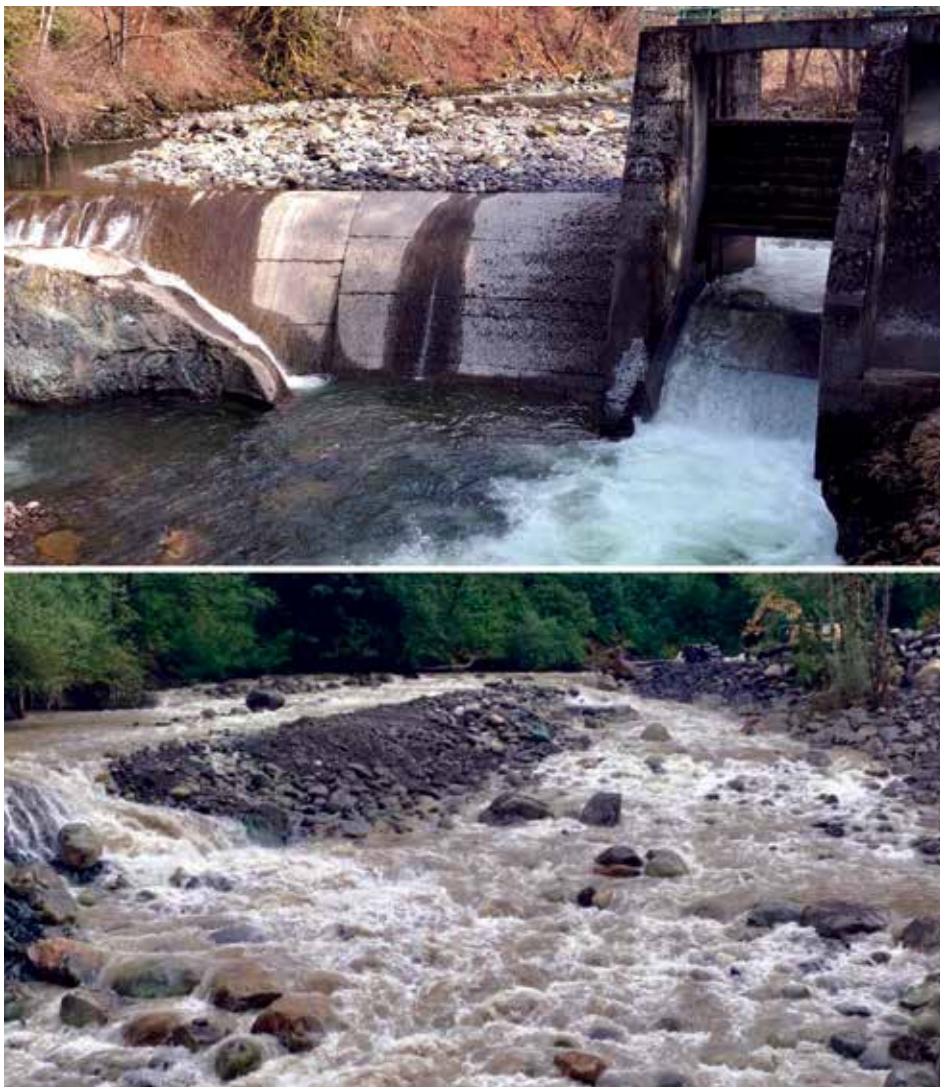
## It's Time to Remove the Dam

Since 2002, the City of Bellingham, WA and fishery co-managers had been seeking a solution to the dilemma of how to restore fish passage at the Middle Fork Nooksack Diversion Dam as a result of an agreement between the city, the Lummi Nation, the Nooksack Indian Tribe, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. American Whitewater joined the conversation with a letter to the city that same year. While we saw a conservation opportunity, the Tribes saw the river itself as a bridge to their ancestors. The Middle Fork Nooksack (Nuxwt'iqw'em) and its salmon relatives are a significant part of their cultural identity, and the river is recognized as a

Traditional Cultural Property. Removing the dam would open more than 26 miles of habitat for threatened salmon, steelhead, and bull trout but would also be a healing act for the river itself.

Various solutions were considered from 2002 - 2016, including fish ladder variations and building hardened infrastructure in the river channel at the dam site so that water would flow into the existing diversion tunnel by gravity.

American Whitewater and Conservation Northwest met with the city over several years in support of the effort to remove the dam as the Tribes and fish management











Evan Stafford enjoying the whitewater  
of the Middle Fork Nooksack in the  
gorge downstream of the dam site.  
Photo by Leif Embertson

# STEWARDSHIP



*April McEwen on the first descent of Six Amigas, the new rapid at the site of the former Middle Fork Nooksack Dam.*

**Photo by Wilson Survey**

agencies continued to push fish passage at the site. The City proposed a previous design alternative in 2016 for the Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration Program, a statewide program to fund large capital projects, through the Puget Sound Partnership. That funding application was ranked 11th in priority for a number of reasons, including proposed design and lack of expertise needed to carry out the project. Despite the fact that the project was the number one priority action in the Salmon Recovery Plan for the watershed, a design that would allow dam removal and maintain the city's water supply had not been yet developed. Despite years of meetings and conversations, it seemed the project would never get underway but it just needed the right spark to light the fire.

## **Paul Allen Takes a Personal Interest**

Patagonia has long supported American Whitewater and many other groups to prevent dams and remove those where environmental and social costs outweigh any benefits. Founder Yvon Chouinard made the initial investment that provided the resources for our engagement in hydropower licensing over 30 years ago, and in 2014 he produced the film *Dam Nation*, highlighting the impacts of dams

and opportunities for river restoration their removal presented.

Shortly after viewing the film, Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Paul Allen approached the team at his foundation to see what he could do to accelerate the pace of removal of outdated dams. He was inspired by the film and had a long interest in ocean health and Pacific Northwest ecosystems. American Whitewater joined a meeting with other river conservationists hosted by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation. In late 2016, American Rivers received a grant to hire a Project Manager and seed funding for technical planning work to begin on the Middle Fork Nooksack Dam removal project.

With funding in hand, American Rivers put out the job announcement and found the right person to start making things happen. April McEwen, an accomplished Class V kayaker who grew up on the famed Chattooga River in the Southeast, had put her career working on fish passage and dam removal in California on hold and had moved New Zealand to work for a year as a safety kayaker on the Rangitata River. As an interdisciplinary river scientist and project manager, April saw the job announcement and recognized the challenge to manage the project and build American Rivers' dam

removal program in the Pacific Northwest as a unique opportunity. She interviewed from New Zealand, accepted the job offer, and began work in Seattle on July 5, 2017.

April held a project kickoff meeting with American Rivers and City of Bellingham leadership a month later. At that time, the already aggressive project timeline proposed under the grant agreement was approximately eight months behind schedule. It was emblematic of a project that had languished for nearly two decades, despite being a top priority in the region. Skepticism among the original key partners was high that someone new to the region and new to the tight club of salmon recovery engineers and advocates could actually make the project happen after so many years of inaction. The project was high-profile with many stakeholders, and had real constructability challenges: it was located in a remote and hazardous Class V river setting and also required innovative river restoration and water infrastructure engineering and technology to meet coequal goals of providing fish passage and maintaining the city's water supply from the site. In addition, the new private foundation was investing in a new program area and required the project to reach implementation under a seemingly impossible timeline to achieve a national record for a project of this complexity. In April's words it was an "awesome challenge" that required evaluation of the socio-political and environmental factors to develop a well-informed project management plan. The adaptive strategies developed would effectively leverage new partnerships and their skill sets or funding to overcome major challenges in getting from stakeholder re-engagement and project initiation through a science based design process, federal/state/local permitting, and fundraising to reach project implementation and completion in less than two years.

## **Project Planning Underway**

The first step to getting the project underway was all about development:



developing relationships with original project partners, developing new relationships, and developing a project management plan that would guide the project in meeting its partner coordination needs, technical design and permitting timeline, and would make it highly competitive for public funding that could only be acquired in a certain timeframe with a fully supported and shovel-ready design status. As a scientist and kayaker who understood both the engineering work behind fish passage and the aesthetics of the Middle Fork Nooksack, April worked with the consultant design team to use a geomorphic-based design approach that would remove the dam and restore the river to a natural self-maintaining condition without the use of hardened engineered structures for fish passage. The City of Bellingham's Project Engineer, Steve Day oversaw development of the water supply aspects. In collaboration with the partner Design Review team, the project targeted more than fish passage but also innovative water supply infrastructure that would substantially reduce environmental impact to achieve environmental sustainability and allow for greater community and

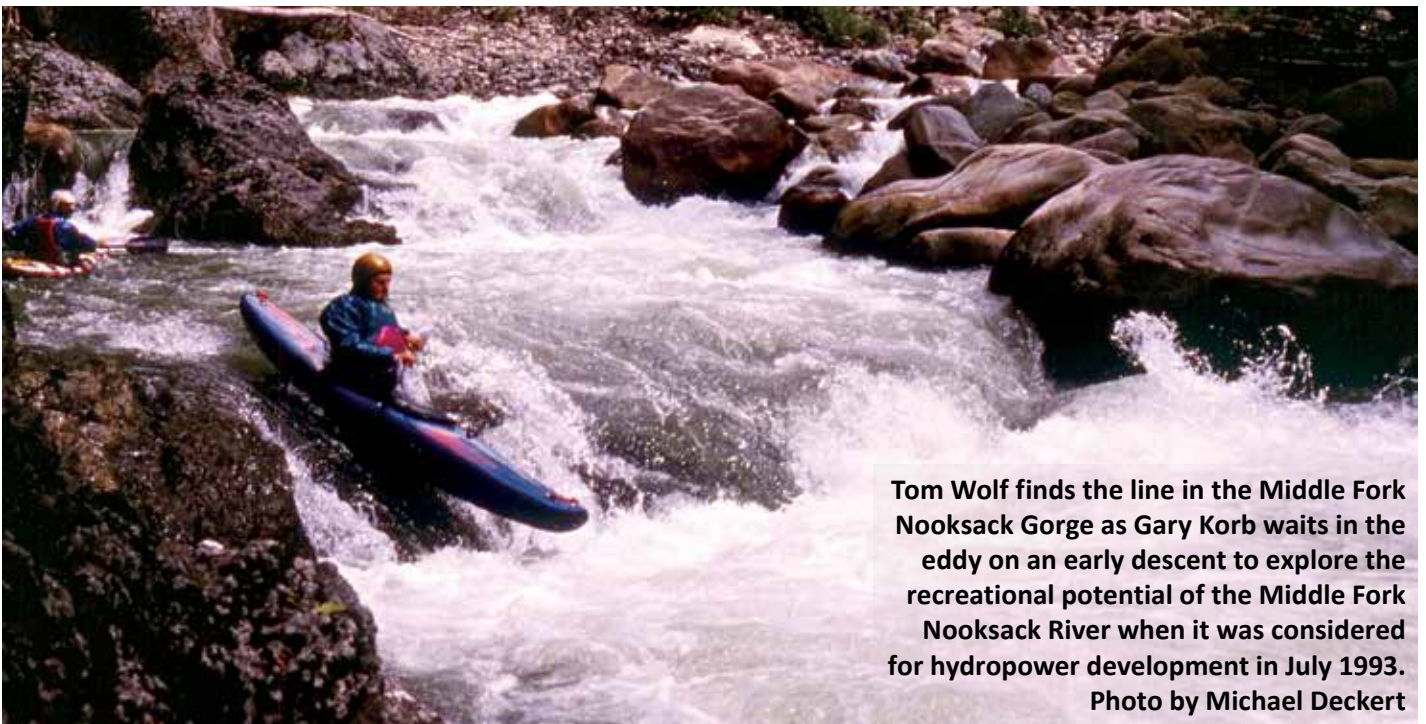
species resiliency. Ultimately, efforts were rewarded when the project was scored as the highest ranked Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration Fund capital project in Washington State to receive \$10.6 million. The seed funding of \$2.9 million from the Paul Allen Family Foundation was leveraged to secure salmon recovery dollars from state and federal sources, investment from the City of Bellingham, and to secure the \$23 million in funding required for the project to be completed. The dam was removed and the river restored by August 2020. In describing her relationship to the river, April stated "the [Middle Fork] river gives me beauty, happiness, adventure forever. All I have to do is use river logic, apply everything I have learned, and work with others to take the concrete out so she can be free forever."

Now that the dam is gone, April reflects back on an experience that is a testimony to the effectiveness of partnerships and commitment to the outcome so many folks wanted in "the most beautiful place I will ever get to work." The Middle Fork Nooksack is indeed a spectacular setting for whitewater kayakers, salmon and

steelhead, and the people of the Nooksack Indian Tribe and the Lummi Nation who have depended on the resources this river provides since time immemorial. Sadly, Paul Allen did not live to see the project completed, but this removal effort and his investment in watershed restoration that continues are part of his legacy to the region.

### **The Future: Wild and Scenic Proposed**

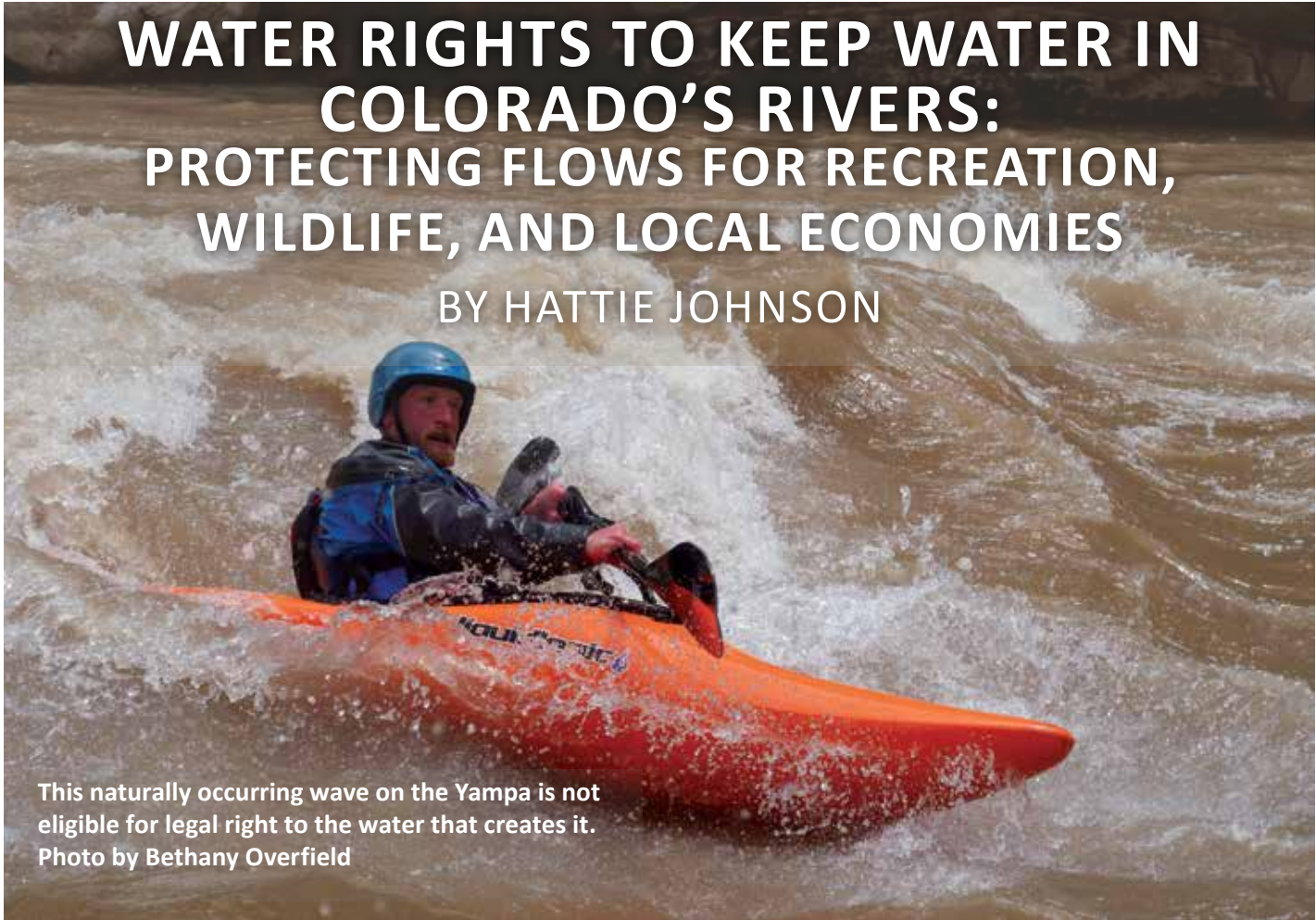
Looking to the future, American Whitewater has led an effort with American Rivers and local community members to permanently protect the Nooksack River and its major tributaries from hydropower development under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Our vision is a river system that can be protected and enhanced for its fish and wildlife, recreation, and community values. Our projects can take many years to complete, but we are proud of what we have accomplished in the Nooksack River watershed with our partners as we reflect back on our 30 years of involvement in these conservation and restoration efforts.



**Tom Wolf finds the line in the Middle Fork Nooksack Gorge as Gary Korb waits in the eddy on an early descent to explore the recreational potential of the Middle Fork Nooksack River when it was considered for hydropower development in July 1993.  
Photo by Michael Deckert**

## WATER RIGHTS TO KEEP WATER IN COLORADO'S RIVERS: PROTECTING FLOWS FOR RECREATION, WILDLIFE, AND LOCAL ECONOMIES

BY HATTIE JOHNSON



This naturally occurring wave on the Yampa is not eligible for legal right to the water that creates it.  
Photo by Bethany Overfield

**A**S SOON AS the snow starts to melt in the spring, paddlers are eager to enjoy Colorado's technical creeks, high volume rivers, and desert canyons. However, as the climate changes and the state's population continues to boom, Colorado is faced with diminishing water supplies. The outstanding recreational opportunities flowing rivers provide are central to a vibrant and growing economy. Many Colorado communities are increasingly reliant upon the businesses, quality of life, and public health that are bolstered by healthy, flowing rivers.

Our water resources must be shared and protected for many important uses. In 2001, the state legislature recognized that recreation—whitewater paddling, specifically—was one of those uses and made it legally eligible for water rights.

This law made it possible to protect river flow by building a whitewater park, called Recreational In Channel Diversions (RICDs). However, tying water rights to these man-made features does not recognize existing recreation and building whitewater parks is economically infeasible for many communities. The current law needs an update to ensure there will be water in our rivers for future generations.

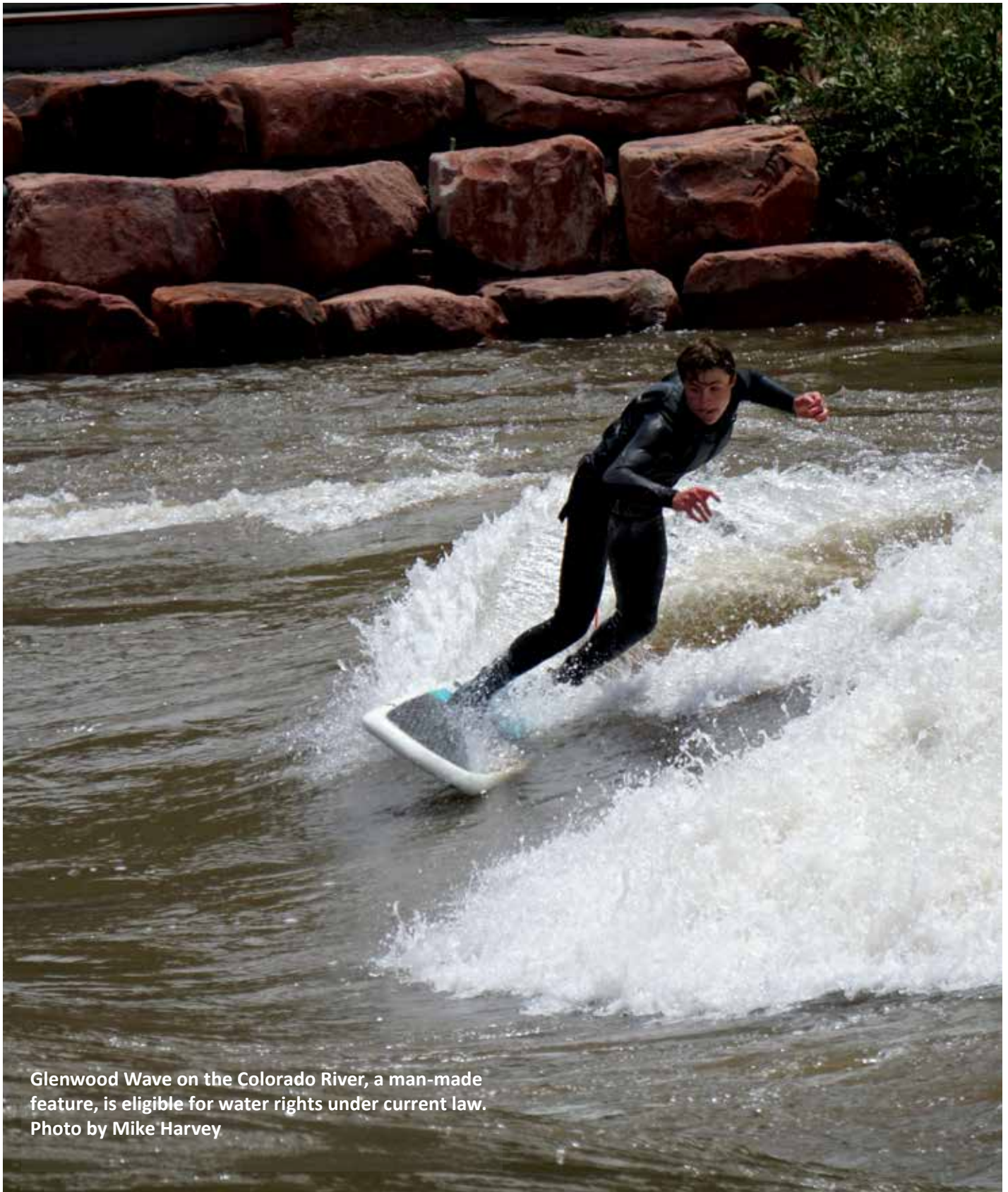
River recreation provides Colorado with nearly \$19B in economic output, \$2.7B in tax revenue, and provides 131,000 jobs<sup>1</sup>. There are 6.7M recreationists who provide key economic diversity to small communities around the state. The next evolution of RICD water rights would define naturally occurring features and rapids as "control structures" and provide communities with the ability to own water rights that would

protect recreational flows. Without that legal right to the water, future users of water could continue to deplete river flows.

Economies are shifting throughout Colorado as the country shifts away from extractive industries. Many communities are turning to their rivers as a sustainable resource and valuable alternative economic engine. Updating RICD water rights will allow for broader protection of recreational flows and create certainty that recreation can continue and support the local economy built around it.

<sup>1</sup>Business For Water Stewardship, & Southwick Associates. (2020). The Economic Contributions of Water- related Outdoor Recreation in Colorado (Tech.). Fernandina Beach, Florida: Southwick Associates





Glenwood Wave on the Colorado River, a man-made feature, is eligible for water rights under current law.  
Photo by Mike Harvey





# DAY-ONE EXECUTIVE ACTIONS AND WHITEWATER RECREATION

BY AMERICAN WHITEWATER STEWARDSHIP TEAM

The unbelievable water quality of the  
Chetco River's Magic Canyon (OR).  
Photo by Zachary Collier

**O**N JANUARY 20TH, the first day of Joe Biden's presidency, the new administration released a far-reaching decree, the "Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis." The order covers a number of priorities American Whitewater has been advocating for, including reinstating Clean Water Act protections, bringing back environmental reviews and public input in major federal projects, restoring national monument boundaries, returning power to states to regulate water quality below hydropower projects, and much more. The new administration's executive actions will affect whitewater recreation in a number of significant ways and we've decided to outline here these effects and what work will still need to be done to make sure they benefit boaters and people who love rivers.

## Restoring Public Input and Strong Environmental Reviews to Federal Projects

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is the essential law outlining environmental review for public lands and

rivers projects. Recent changes to rules governing implementation of the law significantly undermined the Act's efficacy. The previous administration released new Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) rules that shortened the time frame for completing environmental studies, limited the types of projects subject to review, and no longer required federal agencies to account for a project's cumulative effects on the environment, such as climate change. The rules, exempting a significant amount of projects from environmental review, not only led to worse ecological outcomes, but severely restricted public input on federal management decision-making. NEPA environmental reviews are the main opportunity for the public to find out about and comment on federal projects, even if their concerns are more shaped by recreation issues, such as maintaining access.

The new administration through the January 20th "Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis" has ordered a review of these changes to the CEQ NEPA regulations.

Some states and environmental groups have already challenged this rulemaking in court, however, this executive action has the power to restore public input in federal land management decisions and establish NEPA environmental reviews for projects where they should be required, in a more timely manner than the courts. Revisiting this rule guidance from the CEQ is a priority for American Whitewater and many other river stewardship, public land, and environmental justice advocates.

Projects with significant effects to whitewater rivers regularly are subject to the NEPA review process and this process, in many cases, is the main avenue in by which American Whitewater and our community can intervene. Projects like the recently halted Oro Vista dredge mining proposal near the put-in for the classic Numbers run on the Arkansas River (CO) are regularly altered through the environmental review process when there's an outpouring of concern from the public. Sometimes the agency reviewing a project may be unaware that boating is a valued activity on an affected river and public input can help detail not only how detrimental the



# STEWARDSHIP

potential effect of a project may be, but also enlighten them as to how cherished a river stretch may be for its myriad values, including recreation, scenery, solitude, wildlife, etc. Take the currently proposed gold mine in the headwaters of the South Fork Salmon (ID), for instance. With over 3,000 comments from the paddling community alone (over 10,000 all together) in their initial public input process, the Forest Service is now well aware of how significant a whitewater resource they are managing and of the potential impact were the mine allowed to go forward.

The NEPA review process is a critical law that must be applied broadly to federal management decisions. Adequate time frames for completing studies, robust guidelines for projects subject to review, and accounting for cumulative impacts to the environment, such as climate change, are in the boating community's—and the public's—interest. We hope that these rules will be reviewed and revised in short

order and that the implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act will be restored to its proper place as one of the main safeguards for our country's public lands and waters.

## **Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante Monuments on the Path to Restoration**

As a part of the day one executive order on “Protecting Public Health and Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis,” the new administration directed the Secretary of the Interior—along with the Attorney General, Secretaries of Agriculture and Commerce, the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, and Tribal Governments—to review the boundary changes made by the previous administration of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. A report will be provided to the President with recommended appropriate actions. This review and subsequent report will determine whether or not the original

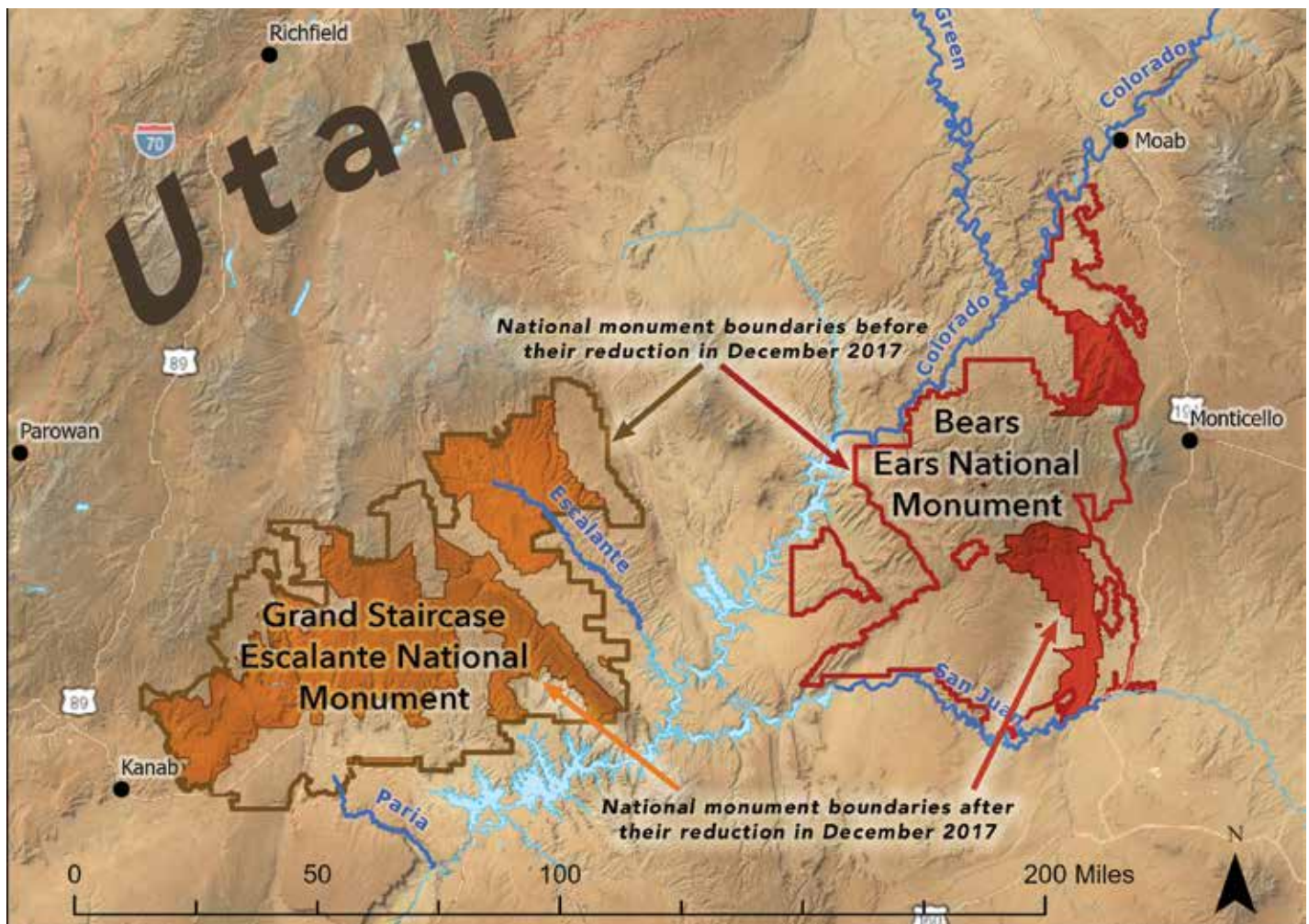
boundaries of both monuments should be restored.

In December of 2017, the previous administration shrank those monument boundaries by nearly 85%, just one year after their original designation. At that time, American Whitewater analyzed the number of river miles affected by this reduction. Bears Ears lost protections for 28.4 miles of the original 34 miles of the San Juan and Colorado Rivers in the change. In Grand Staircase-Escalante, all of the Paria River (5.5 miles) was removed from protection while all of the Escalante remained covered. This loss in protected river miles along with the loss of designated lands opened this incredible landscape up to resource extraction such as mining for coal and drilling for oil and natural gas. This map illustrates how the changes in monument boundaries affect whitewater paddling and other outdoor recreation.



Upper Colorado River near  
Dotsero, Colorado.  
Photo by Evan Stafford

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Those lucky enough to float the Goosenecks of the San Juan know how stunning this river is. The petroglyphs and ancient dwellings provide a small glimpse into the lives of a people who lived by the ebb and flow of this amazing river. For many of the members of the Bears Ears Tribal Council, these archaeological sites are sacred, and provide a source of food and medicine and a direct connection to their ancestors. Lasting, permanent preservation of these rivers and lands is not without conflict. Utah leaders have long opposed protection of these landscapes, however, recently local governments have supported and asked the Biden Administration to reestablish the original boundaries.

American Whitewater will remain engaged and supportive of the restoration of these

national monuments. We will keep paddlers informed of the review process and how you can speak up for these rivers.

## Protecting Whitewater Releases Under State Water Quality Standards

Clean water advocates are buoyed by the recent Executive Order, issued on the first day of the new Biden administration, which revokes a prior executive order that resulted in regulations limiting the ability of states to require that hydropower dams meet state water quality standards. The new Executive Order ("Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis," issued January 20, 2021) revokes Executive Order 13868 ("promoting Energy Infrastructure and Economic Growth," issued April 10,

2019) that began a rulemaking process under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. We are actively working to encourage the administration to begin a new rulemaking process that would rescind the recent EPA Section 401 regulations and restore the vital role of states in protecting our rivers.

The Federal Power Act requires that hydropower projects seeking federal licenses first obtain certification from the state that its generation will meet state water quality standards. Recent EPA regulations that went into effect on September 11, 2020 limit the ability of states to prevent hydropower dams from harming aquatic habitat, recreation, and other resources. These new regulations seek to undermine landmark Supreme Court decisions affirming the critical role



Reinstating the original boundaries  
of Bears Ears National Monument  
in Utah would protect significantly  
more of the San Juan River and its  
incredible surrounding landscape.  
Photo by Evan Stafford





# STEWARDSHIP

of states in protecting water quality at federally-licensed energy projects.

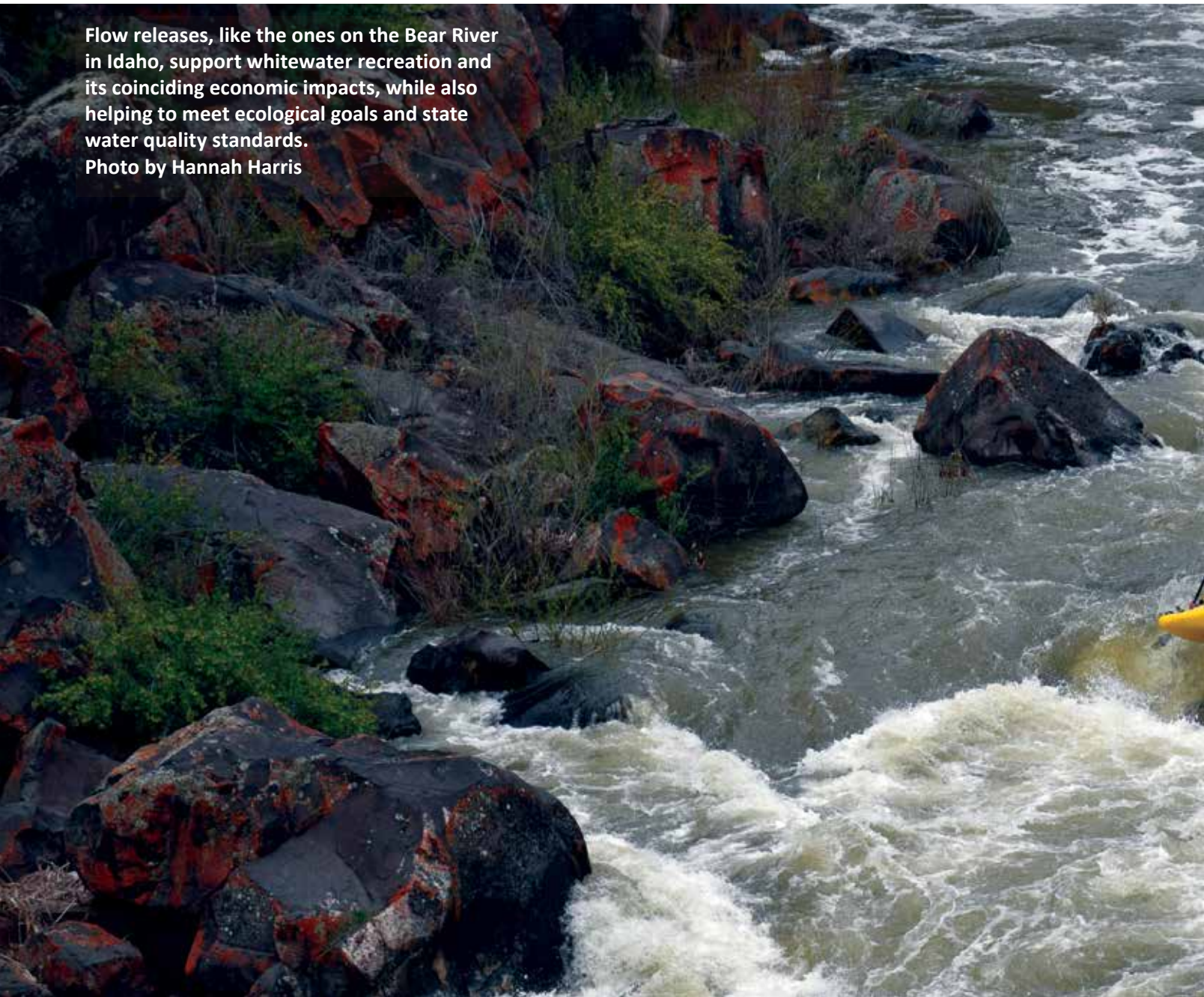
American Whitewater is spearheading efforts to protect our rivers from harmful impacts from hydropower dams by advocating for measures that protect aquatic habitat and recreation opportunities, including scheduled whitewater boating releases on scores of iconic whitewater runs. These efforts have resulted in healthier rivers with sufficient flow and public access throughout the 30- to 50-year license term.

AW, along with other environmental advocates, tribes, and 21 states and territories, filed suit against the Environmental Protection Agency in July, challenging the new regulations under the Clean Water Act and other laws. Industry groups, including the National Hydropower Association, joined the EPA in defending the new regulations. The EPA is currently in the process of reviewing the recent 401 regulations and we expect that it will seek to restore the critical role of the states in protecting our rivers from harmful effects of hydropower dams.

## **Clean Water Act Headwater Protections On Path to Restoration**

Within its day-one executive orders, one of the first things the new administration did was to start the process of restoring more robust Clean Water Act protections to our nation's rivers that were weakened under the prior administration, which is good news for rivers and paddlers. This first-day executive order signals that a new rulemaking is coming that will restore protections to many headwater and desert streams, in particular, which will certainly

**Flow releases, like the ones on the Bear River in Idaho, support whitewater recreation and its coinciding economic impacts, while also helping to meet ecological goals and state water quality standards.**  
Photo by Hannah Harris





restore protections for many downstream river reaches and their communities, too. Rulemaking often takes two or more years and has multiple opportunities for public input.

The Clean Water Act regulates pollution discharges into waterways in order to protect public health, recreation, and the environment. It is largely responsible for boaters being able to paddle rivers without fear of pollution harming our health. While most people agree that the Clean Water Act covers large rivers, there is debate over

whether and which headwater streams and wetlands are covered. Court decisions have caused as much confusion as clarity over the years, Congress has failed to resolve the matter, and administrations are left to fill the void with rules that take years to produce and are then replaced by the next administration.

American Whitewater has a long track record of supporting science-based implementation of the Clean Water Act that accomplishes the goals of the Act. As a nation, we are committed to a vision

of rivers that any American can paddle, fish, and swim in without fear of pollution poisoning decades ago. We've largely accomplished that goal while allowing all the industry and economic growth we enjoy in our country today. The Clean Water Act is as important today as ever, and headwater streams need basic protections restored.

We'll be tracking this issue and keeping paddlers informed so that we can speak up for the incredible value of the clean healthy rivers we all know and love.





# WILDERNESS PACKRAFTING = EXTREME INNER TUBING

STORY BY LISA RONALD  
PHOTOS BY BEN SCHUBERG

Start of the Meadow  
Creek Gorge



# WILDERNESS PADDLING



Youngs Creek offers views of Montana's largest wilderness

**"**IF IT WASN'T for the adrenaline and the giggle-factor, I'd be freezing," my boyfriend and paddling partner said, as we made our way down the White River, deep in the heart of Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness. The temperature was dropping, and it was raining steadily. My numb hands weren't sure they still held the paddle, but as each ice-cold, milky wave splashed over my bow and right down my middle section, I giggled and shrieked with the unbridled glee of a teenage girl on a rollercoaster. Extreme inner tubing is the only way I can describe this wilderness packrafting adventure.

A remote, continuous Class II run, the White River's milky turquoise water, colored by limestone, joins the South Fork Flathead Wild and Scenic River as its largest tributary. Our journey had actually started several

days earlier at the headwaters of Youngs Creek, which forms the South Fork Flathead at its confluence with Danaher Creek.

In 1965, American Whitewater organized its first trip down the South Fork Flathead River (AW members can search our online archive at: [americanwhitewater.org/content/Journal](http://americanwhitewater.org/content/Journal) for page 9 of the Spring 1965 issue). Unlike back then, when 30 horses carried a 300-pound, 10-man raft, three lighter rafts, and four foldboats, modern packrafters can access the South Fork Flathead River if they're simply willing to shoulder a heavy pack for several days of hiking. Use has increased so much in recent years that the U.S. Forest Service is currently considering permits and regulations to reduce impacts during the short summer season. Even so, this river is hard to get to, requiring an 18-plus-mile

hike to reach its floatable headwaters. In late June, at what is still considered high water for this drainage, Youngs Creek is floatable for about five miles. This truly natural stream—sinuous and woody with upwellings, rocky constrictions, and log jam portages—flows through two distinct past burns that afford expansive views of Montana's largest wilderness. It's impossible not to feel small in this place.

The lower reaches of Youngs Creek float by the massive hole-in-the-wall escarpment and then through the lower gorge. Its remoteness and possibility of wood make the lower gorge a fast Class IV scouting-required section raging between rock cliffs. The trail running all the way along Youngs Creek and the South Fork Flathead provides easy access to portage this whitewater section.

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[ surj ]

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# WILDERNESS PADDLING

Once Youngs Creek joins Danaher Creek, the South Fork Flathead Wild and Scenic River officially begins. Later season boaters must trek all the way here for water deep enough to float, but later season fishing for cut-throat and bull trout is considered optimal.

Add to natural wonder the rich historical significance of the area. Three historical cabins are still used by the Forest Service. Big Prairie Historic Ranger Station was established in 1904 and moved to its current location in 1912. It is accessible only by trail or water and serves as a work center for summer crews that continue to maintain trails using crosscut saws and pack strings. Rangers and volunteers happily give a 15-minute tour of the existing historical buildings.

After passing Big Prairie, the White River joins the South Fork Flathead via a large, braided cobblestone floodplain. A six-mile hike up the White River provides lofty views of Needle Falls, a unique waterfall with underground channels that cause eerie intermittent bellowing to echo against the canyon walls as the water builds and flushes within the channels. Runnable only in the early season, the lowest four miles of the White River, from the confluence with its south fork to the confluence with the South Fork Flathead, was a rowdy, splashy highlight of our trip.

Additional side hikes include Big Salmon Lake, the largest lake in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and Mud Lake Mountain Lookout. For only the most adventurous of cavers, and for the rest of us who might only watch this sort of thing on YouTube, the Tears of the Turtle cave entrance sits

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*Above: Big Prairie Ranger Station, a fixture in the Bob Marshall Wilderness since 1904*

*Middle: The South Fork Flathead offers seasonally excellent fishing opportunities*

*Below: The White River is the SF Flathead's largest tributary*





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# WILDERNESS PADDLING

high above the river's edge. At nearly 1,700 feet deep, it is the deepest limestone cave in the United States.

This trip began with a lot of hiking and ended with, well, more hiking. Approximately three miles above the Meadow Creek Trailhead, which is the first access point when exiting the wilderness, is the beginning of the

Meadow Creek Gorge. Runnable at very high or very low flows, the river narrows to less than four feet wide in places and has undercut rocks, potential river-wide logs, steep drops, and powerful hydraulics that make scouting difficult. Most packrafters choose not to run this section and instead hike out along a well-used stock trail. While this entire trip is doable in five days, our

eight-day trip left ample time for side hikes, as well as blister recovery and an unplanned inclement weather layover. Both of the latter are always possibilities in Montana's backcountry, but the wet, splashy giggles of extreme backcountry inner tubing are a certainty.



Crossing Youngs Creek near the end of the hiking



# EXPLORING SAINT MARY'S RIVER

BY ADAM GOSHORN



Adam Goshorn running Saint Mary's Falls on Saint Mary's River.  
Photo by John Howard

**W**E WERE IN trouble. Brandon missed the eddy and started getting worked in a hole. Not knowing what was around the next bend, I started to head for shore, thinking I should get out my rope. Just then, he flipped again, and as his boat surfed upside down in the hole, his head popped up five feet downstream. I frantically peeled out to give chase as he washed out of sight around the corner in continuous, pushy water. I paddled hard, trying to catch up. I knew a badly placed log could be dangerous for both of us, but to do anything else would be to leave Brandon to fend for himself.

Saint Mary's Wilderness Area is composed of the entire watershed of the Saint Mary's River, which drains the western slope of the Blue Ridge Parkway in central Virginia. Because it is just over the ridge from the classic North Fork of the Tye run, it had been marked on my topo map for years. However, it wasn't until I had completed a couple of scouting hikes with my girlfriend

at the time (now wife) that my interest was really piqued. First, we hiked upstream from the bottom of the valley and made it as far as Saint Mary's Falls. The section we had seen included several slide sequences, a few boulder gardens, and the falls itself. It also seemed clear that hiking up from the bottom with boats would not be the best option. After getting a tip from a friend, the second hike was much more fruitful. From the parkway, an easy two-mile, downhill hike along Mine Bank Creek brought us to its confluence with the river and the two miles between there and the falls looked really promising. Saint Mary's River had just moved to the top of my exploratory list.

In September 2006, as Virginia was getting pounded by heavy rains, Brandon Hughett and I drove late into the night, arriving at my parent's house around 2 a.m. After a few hours of sleep, we got up early, hoping to take full advantage of this biblical rain event. At this point, I got a little greedy. I talked Brandon into going to run another

probable first descent on our way to Saint Mary's. The East Fork of Elk Creek was shorter, less difficult, and had easy access. It didn't take us long to complete the run, but the result was that we didn't even start hiking in to Saint Mary's until around 1 p.m.

When we arrived at the river, it was clearly high. In front of us was a torrent of water moving quickly downstream with few eddies. The level was much higher than we expected and we had no idea what it would be like downstream where the river squeezed between the walls of the gorge. Since there were no exposed rocks or river banks, we had to smash our boats down on top of bushes just to launch. Despite this section of the river having relatively mild gradient, it moved us quickly downstream with its fast currents and wave trains. After dodging a few trees, we managed to eddy out on the left at the entrance to the gorge. We bushwhacked through the rhododendron to scout the first few larger rapids and it wasn't



# WILDERNESS PADDLING

looking good. There were huge holes with impressive backwashes, surging eddies of floating debris, and no end in sight. So, the portaging began and we hadn't run many rapids by the time we reached Saint Mary's Falls.

The falls itself was raging and we were in the edge of the water, getting sprayed in the face as we passed our boats down to a ledge on the right. It was an intimidating spot, but the only option seemed to be: slide into the runout of the falls, punch a hole, and paddle hard for the left bank, assuming there would be an eddy just out of sight around the bend. I went first and it turned out to be easier than we expected. I got out of my boat and walked back upstream to signal Brandon and watch him make the same move. From there, we paddled downstream, skirting holes and moving one eddy at a time—that is, until Brandon's beatdown became a swim.

I paddled hard to keep Brandon in sight. He disappeared into a steep, river-wide hole about 40 feet in front of me. I drove all the way right and managed to ramp up on the wall to boof over the hole and as I landed, he resurfaced downstream. Thankfully, a recirculating eddy on the right reunited us and allowed us to get out of the water. The trail was on our side of the river at the moment and we used it to hike downstream as we looked for for Brandon's boat. A quarter mile later we were able to recover his boat from a pair of logs spanning the river. With nightfall approaching quickly, we decided to stay on the trail and hike downstream as fast as we could, just using our boats to cross the river when necessary. It was getting darker and

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*Above: John Howard on one of the many low angle slide sequences on the successful, low water, second attempt.*

**Photo by Adam Goshorn**

*Middle: Adam Goshorn squeezing by the boulder at the bottom of You Go First*

**Photo by John Howard**

*Bottom: Adam Goshorn on his second run of St Mary's Falls that day*

**Photo by John Howard**








# Wild

# Olympics

WASHINGTON

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The Wild Olympics Wilderness & Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would permanently protect the Dosewallips River (pictured) and 18 other rivers and their major tributaries for a total of 464 river miles on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State. The bill was recently reintroduced in the House and is expected to be packaged with other Wild and Scenic legislation in a big push for new river and public lands protections this Congress.

Photo by Chris Korbolic

**AW** AMERICAN  
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# WILDERNESS PADDLING



Brandon Hughett running Finders Keepers on the successful, low water, second attempt on Saint Mary's River. Photo by Adam Goshorn

darker, almost too dark to see. I was setting my boat down to dig a headlamp out of my drybag when I saw the moonlight reflecting off Brandon's truck, parked less than fifty yards away. We were out.

After being flooded out on our first try, Brandon and I talked frequently about going back at a more reasonable water level. Six months later, in March of 2007, we got our chance. Most of the river gauges in the region had peaked the day before, so we were confident we would have lower water this time. Now we just hoped for enough water to run most of the rapids. Joined by Dustin Bunch and John Howard, our party of four met, hiked in, and arrived at the river before noon. It was a much different scene from the previous attempt. Brandon and I agreed that the water level at the put-in seemed to be at least a foot lower than last time, a difference that likely translated to multiple feet in the constricted gorge downstream. This flow was going to be minimal, but we were there, committed, and just happy to be putting back on this beautiful river. We worked our way downstream through some

low-angle slides and boulder gardens. Soon the walls began to tighten and we reached the four-foot ledge that signaled the beginning of the gorge. Just downstream of what we dubbed "Entrance Ledge" was a sweet 10-foot drop I couldn't resist calling "Finders Keepers," in honor of the time and effort that went into finally getting to run this river. After a few more rapids, we came to an interesting slide that tried to squeeze the paddler under an overhanging boulder at the bottom, earning it the name "You First." Soon we arrived at the main event, Saint Mary's Falls. After scouting, I decided to give the left side a try, even though it almost certainly involved an off-angle reconnect on the way down. The bounce sent me over the handlebars and I landed upside down at the bottom, disorientated and floundering on a shallow shelf. I pulled the skirt and stood up. Embarrassed, I passed my boat back up the river right side of the falls in the same spot Brandon and I had passed our boats down on our first attempt. On my second run, I angled a few degrees further right as I went over the lip. The reconnect still pitched me onto my left

side at the bottom, but this time I braced up and paddled away, all smiles.

Below the falls we continued to enjoy the slides and boulder rapids that remained. We took special note of the rock that likely formed the hole where Brandon swam, as well as the slide into a deep pool that had created the enormous hole he swam through while I was chasing him. Brandon was quick to point out that he was in front at that rapid, while swimming, so he had the perfect name. "I Hope I Go Deep," he said, "because that was exactly what I was thinking." From there the walls of the gorge began to recede and after negotiating a number of logs in the runout, we made it to the end. This was a special day, on a special run, in a remote and rugged place. We had hiked two miles, paddled four miles, portaged a number of trees, and run all of the drops. Upon reaching the take-out there were smiles and high fives all around. Then, as is all too often the case with paddling friends, we had to hit the road and drive away from our river lives and back to our jobs and responsibilities... hoping to be reunited by the next rain storm.



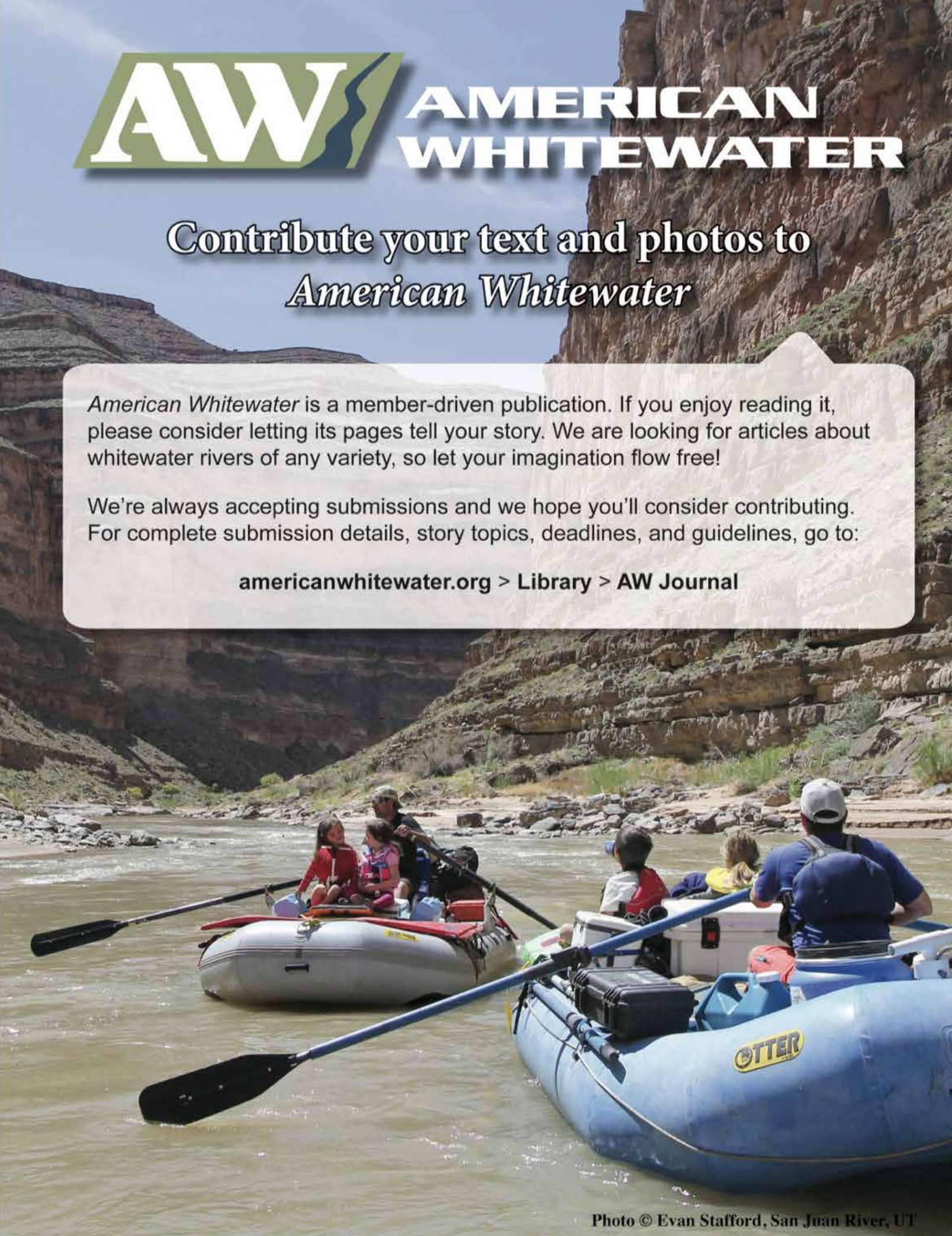
# **AW** AMERICAN WHITEWATER

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# STAFF HIGHLIGHT

## STAFF HIGHLIGHT BETHANY OVERFIELD MEMBERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT DIRECTOR BY EVAN STAFFORD



*Bethany enjoying some quality river time with the rest of the AW crew on the Yampa.  
Photo by Thomas O'Keefe*

### How did you get introduced to paddlesports?

I didn't start kayaking until I was 30 years old. I was feeling lost—my mother had just passed away the year before and I had just emerged from a long relationship that wasn't fueling me. I'd always been an outdoor enthusiast but hadn't spent much time on whitewater. I saw a flyer for a clinic on the Nolichucky River and for roll sessions at a local pool to prep students for the clinic. I didn't know a soul but just showed up and the rest is history. I didn't miss a roll session for months after that and spent the next few years traveling every weekend to kayak. It was a glorious release for me. It was the fuel I needed.

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

I can think of so many people. I prefer not to single one person out but each of my heroes share similar traits that encompass

a love for moving water regardless of the difficulty and a keen eye for observation. I love paddling with folks who will stop with me to check out rocks and bugs and flowers and trees. Rivers are natural highways through stunning landscapes—there are so many things to observe!

### River craft of choice?

I've had multiple shoulder dislocations and a shoulder surgery, so my kayaking has suffered a great deal from recurring injuries. At this point, I don't have a craft of choice, I just love being on the water. It is fun to try brand new modes of river transportation after kayaking for many years—taking an OC-1 down an easy stretch makes a familiar river seem new, which is always super fun. I mix it up now more than I used to.

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

I'm terrified of balloons.

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

My most embarrassing moment is also one of my favorites. I was at a swiftwater rescue training on the Russell Fork River and we were doing strainer exercises in fast moving water. I properly got on the correct side of the strainer and was holding on but my neoprene shorts were stripped away by the current, the result of which was me bare-assed in front of the whole group. There wasn't a whole lot I could do about it but laugh.

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

I visualize where I want to go and come up with a plan. Just kidding—I find a place to poop!



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

I did a lot of volunteer work for the National Paddling Film Festival and was the Director for a few years. The focus of NPFF is to highlight the best in paddlesports videos and still images but it's also a significant fundraiser for organizations like AW that are dedicated to river conservation and access. During my work with NPFF, I developed a great relationship with Mark Singleton. NPFF wasn't technically an AW project but it opened the door for me to peek inside of the organization.

### Favorite river snack?

Peanut butter on anything.

### How long have you worked for AW?

For just over two years. I was a research geologist for around 17 years and decided to mix things up quite a bit in my professional life when I saw that AW was looking for a new Membership Director. I genuinely love working with people, and after talking mainly only to rocks for so many years, the transition seemed like a fun idea. And it has been!

### What's something you wished more people knew about AW?

We have a small but mighty staff of 13! I'm always so amazed at the amount of work we get done. Lots of folks don't know that we have volunteers who help propel much of our work. From grants to IT to festival parking lot help—we couldn't do what we do without our super volunteers!



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Member #: 007  
Renewal Date: 01/01/2099

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



# REMEMBRANCE

## MEMORIES OF STEWART GREENLEAF, PADDLER AND LEGISLATOR

BY CHARLIE WALBRIDGE



FIRST MET STEWART Greenleaf at a Philadelphia Canoe Club meeting in the fall of 1976. I'd been given the file built up by several PCC members who were trying to arrange whitewater releases on Tohickon Creek, a wonderful Class III-IV run. The river was dammed upstream, creating Lake Nockamixon, so the potential was there. I wrote letters to the Director of State Parks, who managed the lake, dam, and river access. They denied my request, citing various fisheries issues in late spring and early fall and insufficient water in the summer. I wrote again, asking for a single weekend in late March and early November. I never got an answer, and my phone calls were not returned. I was bemoaning this to a fellow club member who said, "I need to introduce you to Stew Greenleaf. He's just been elected to the legislature!"

Stew was at the meeting, and was very interested! "Send me a proposal," he said. I took what I had written for State Parks, polished it up, and sent it in. A week later I was contacted by Eric Pauley, Stew's legislative assistant. "Stewart has a few questions." I wrote out the answers and sent them in. These was in the bad old days (snail mail; no email, no faxes, even!). And I waited.

Three weeks later I got a phone call from Stew. "We're going to get the releases," he said. "State Parks wants to send two guys to scout the area, and I want you to go along with them to make sure they don't start making things up."

"Stewart," I exclaimed, "How did you do it?"

"Well, I wasn't getting answers," he said, "so I went to the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee and we put a hold on the State Park budget." This is a useful tactic for dealing with stonewalling bureaucrats, and it got him a meeting with the Director of State Parks and his key people. Stewart assured them that the release could be done safely. They were skeptical, but agreed to allow it.

A week later I met those DNR conservation officers. We visited a golf course owner who was asked if he was worried about the releases. He was not, but his problem was that during big rains the dam kept the creek dry and a flooded side creek across from the 16th hole was flushing across the dry streambed and eroding the shoreline. When was the State going to pay to reinforce the shore? Then we spoke with



a roadside homeowner, asking if he was worried about increased traffic. He wasn't, but he wanted to know when the State was going to fix a drainage problem that ran water off the highway into his basement. That was enough! The first scheduled whitewater release on Tohickon Creek was in November 1977, and these releases have continued to this day, except during extreme droughts.

A few years later a Pennsylvania Fish Commission Waterways patrolman started harassing Philadelphia Canoe Club members running Flat Rock Dam on the Schuylkill River. Club members knew the dam well and had been paddling it without incident for over 25 years. I was at Stewart's Willow Grove office for a rather testy meeting with the officer, who was pretty uncooperative. But Stew didn't give up! The following New Year's Day, a flotilla of PCC paddlers was approaching the dam when the stealthy patrolman popped out of the bushes to stop the run and issue tickets. To his surprise, Stewart was there. He pulled out a special use permit and presented it to the ranger. After some back and forth and study of the permit, the ranger reluctantly waved everyone through. We weren't the only people this troublesome lawman harassed, and he was eventually sent to another part of the state.

Years later, Stewart turned his attention to Francis Walter Dam, above the Lehigh River Gorge, a popular Class II-III whitewater run in the Pocono Mountains that he really enjoyed. The situation there was frustrating. The dam had been built with a road across its upstream face, just above summer pool level. It flooded whenever the operators tried to hold back water, angering local residents who needed to use it; however, not holding back water cut storage capacity to almost nothing. The Philadelphia Corps of Engineers was extremely uncooperative, cancelling spring releases with little warning or releasing water all week and cutting it back on weekends. Paddlers weren't the only ones affected. Once, the Corps decided to "test

the valves" by releasing 8,000 cfs the day after the river had been stocked with trout!

Stew worked with the area's congressman to sponsor a federal bill to relocate the road to the top of the dam, greatly increasing its capacity hold extra water. Then he worked with the area's state and federal representatives to make the Corps of Engineers more responsive. This allowed more consistent flows for the fishery and more reliable whitewater releases in late spring, summer, and fall. Using "project purpose" legislation passed a decade earlier but previously ignored, he was able to work out a summer release schedule. The river is just two hours from New York and Philadelphia, so these release days became extremely popular. They also revitalized a commercial rafting industry badly hurt by unpredictable flows.

Stewart was a practical, results-oriented Republican who knew how to get things done. He served in the Pennsylvania House and Senate for 40 years, sponsoring 490 bills that later became law. Discussing his strategy with me, he said he always focused on the issues and never, ever let a political fight get personal. "You never know when you'll need to get that person to help with something else," he said. As a legislator, he wanted to assist anyone who came to him looking for help, but there were limits to what he alone could do. Some things took time; others were so controversial that nothing could be done. Building support often takes time and persistence and, I might add, help from an experienced legislator who knows the ropes!

Stewart and I enjoyed many runs down the Tohickon together and a few trips to West Virginia on the Cheat and New. He was dedicated to his legislative career, and as time passed, his paddling time diminished greatly. I later got to paddle with his sons, which was a special treat! He passed away on February 9th, 2021. Paddlers lost a special friend who will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

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## LOGJAM RESCUE BY JULIE TITONE

**The logjam on the Lower Sauk River, Washington, shown at lower water than the incident**  
**Photo by Julie Titone**

**W**HERE WOULD YOU prefer to die? I'm a longtime canoeist, so the question brings to my mind a place like Washington's Sauk River. I imagine the sound of rushing water, and final breaths of clean, cool air. I let go of life quietly, beneath snow-capped mountains, on the riverbank – definitely on the riverbank.

But even though it could happen on a river, never would my end-of-life preference involve drowning, which was a real possibility one sunny June afternoon on the lower Sauk.

My new inflatable kayak had slammed into a house-sized logjam, leaving my torso pinned against a slick, centuries-old log. The current tugged at my legs, intent on pulling me into a complex underwater trap. It was a paddler's worst-case scenario.

A moment before, kayaker David Hablewitz had passed me. But he stayed river right

while the main current carried me toward river left.

"Watch out for the logjam!" he shouted. But I was either too far into the current or too inexperienced with the inflatable to stay out of harm's way. Before I knew it, my boat was rushing toward a tangle of timber and brush. Then I was up against it. If the logjam had been a house, I could have been looking into a second-floor window.

The kayak slipped out from under me and boogied downstream. My left hand clawed at the slick top of the log and my right hand grabbed, with a better hold, the stub of a branch. I was pinned to a textbook "strainer."

Along with my fear of the trap, I felt dismay for not avoiding it. During 25 years of paddling canoes, I'd always steered clear of this hazard. But when it came to blow-up boats, I was a newbie. My only experience in a so-called rubber duckie

had been during a commercial rafting trip 20 years earlier, and it didn't take long to figure out that inflatables aren't so easy to maneuver. I'd taken the most daunting unplanned swim of my life that day. But since then, the best brands of duckies have been so improved that they deserve a better nickname. Inflatables, AKA IKs, usually bounce safely through waves, so I decided to try again. With retirement on the near horizon, I thought that adding an inflatable to my paddle boat collection might extend my years of enjoying Class II-plus rivers.

"Help me!" I yelled. "Somebody, help me!"

I knew no one could hear me above the rush of water.

I assumed David would circle back when I didn't emerge past the logjam. But I didn't know how far he might have gotten, how long it would take him to reach me, or if I could hold on until he did. The other



# SAFETY



*Julie Titone's inflatable kayak on its maiden voyage on the Sauk River, June 2018.*  
**Photo by Julie Titone**

kayak and raft in our group were farther downstream. A few paddlers in the party already had gotten off the river, after the most exciting waves had petered out. We'd seen no one else on the river since launching at Clear Creek. I wish I could see a video or a picture of my predicament. Could I have worked my way along the log, hand over hand, and gotten to the end of the pile – found a place to put my feet, or a place to dive away from the danger? At the time I didn't even think of trying. I was afraid to let go of my precarious hold. My short legs swung uselessly. The best I could do was kick against the current.

Part of my former journalist's brain was writing the news report of my demise, picturing the heavy equipment that would retrieve my body, the first responders with their ropes and litter making the most of lingering summer-solstice daylight to carry out their sad mission. One of them would grimace and say, "Third river fatality this year."

How many minutes I hung there, I don't know. Five, maybe? Ten?

Suddenly David was looking down on me, his feet just above my head. He was surprised to see me. He'd fully expected me to be under the jumble of logs, not clinging to it.

"Take my wrist," he said. I grasped it with my right hand. With his help, I inched along the logjam. I finally pulled my chest high enough to rest; my arms were no longer bearing most of my weight. Oh, the surge of sweet relief. "I'm safe now," I said. But David urged me on, coaching me through getting my feet onto a submerged log and hoisting myself to the top.

What did I say? I hope, "Thank you! You saved my life!" I was beyond grateful. I do remember saying, "You got here quickly."

"I'm glad you think so," he responded. Clearly, it hadn't felt that way to him.

Then I expressed concern about the fate of my expensive new paddle. David looked puzzled. He must have thought I was nuts—given that I'd just narrowly escaped death—to be thinking about something so replaceable.

He walked over the logjam, back toward its downstream end where he'd parked his kayak. I followed, at first scooting along on my derriere, afraid of losing my balance if I stood. I didn't want to escape drowning only to break a leg.

When I caught up with David, he was looking down at my inflatable and the paddle that floated beside it. A strap in the boat had caught on a branch. He managed to work the boat free, then held it while I climbed down into it. He told me to paddle to a midstream island. I parked there while he retrieved his red kayak. Meanwhile, I heard three whistle blows from a companion downstream. I didn't know the signal to tell the others "all is well," so there was no need to work their way upstream to help, so I just blew three times back. And got three more blows in return.

Someone asked me later how cold the water was that day. After all, the Sauk is fed by snow in the North Cascades. But I wasn't aware of the water temperature. I was wearing a drysuit with fleece tights underneath. The air temperature was in the 70s. Blue sky framed Whitehorse Mountain. It was a beautiful day for anything but buying the farm.

I'd gotten my equipment right: the immersion suit, helmet, PFD, whistle, spare paddle. And I'd gone out with experienced paddlers. The first responders I had imagined would not have been able

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*Opposite: Julie Titone smiles for a selfie shortly before her altercation with the logjam.*

**Photo by Julie Titone**



to intone for reporters, “Boaters should always wear life vests.”

What I’d gotten wrong was getting swept into the main current. Paying too much attention to the scenery, and not enough to what lay ahead. And, maybe, taking a new craft for the first time down that stretch of river past Darrington, where American Whitewater cautions about logjams. Up until I ran smack-dab into one, I’d had no trouble avoiding them – even though I didn’t find that inflatable kayak easy to steer. Mostly, the inflatable bounced through the Class II waves. It was great fun, until it wasn’t. I might have stayed out of trouble by back-ferrying out of the current – a common maneuver in a canoe. It could be that I tried the technique. I don’t remember.

The incident gave me a mild case of post-traumatic stress. Hours later, back at home, my heart started racing. For a solid 24 hours, I couldn’t focus on much of anything. David had trouble sleeping, too.

Three weeks later, I took the inflatable kayak on a river less littered with logjams.

All went well, but of course I was hyper-vigilant – which is obviously what a paddler must be. Especially in a boat not easily steered with pries and sweeps.

When I think of my close call, I contemplate how anatomy is destiny. What if David weren’t fit and able to scramble across the logjam to help me? If I had longer arms, could I have pulled myself out? Though if my legs were longer, there would have been more surface for the current to grab and pull me under....

More pertinent, I think, is that human connection is destiny. David and I only met that day, when I decided to take a first outing with folks from the Washington Recreational River Runners. The two of us carpooled. We got acquainted on the drive to the river, and we debriefed on the drive home. He now holds a special place in the pantheon of paddling pals who have had my back over the years.


So I gained a friend and learned some lessons. What I still haven’t learned is an accepted number of whistles to signal “everything’s all right.” Boy Scouts are

told two blasts. A mushroom-picking friend says her hiking crowd uses one blast, and the American Canoe Association doesn’t seem to have any guidance on the matter. The best bet would be to agree on a signal before your party launches.

If I had died that day, it would have been a sad irony. The outing was a memorial, and we had just stopped so that two young people could fling the ashes of their father, Chris Herman, into the river. Chris was a beloved river rat with a fondness for yellow butterflies. As I was paddling to the takeout, a swallowtail flew alongside me, skimming the water until it rose into the trees.

*Julie Titone is a writer and paddler who lives in Everett, Washington.*





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# SAFETY



David Hablewitz on the  
Sauk, June 2018.  
Photo by Julie Titone





# SAUK RESCUE

## BY DAVID HABLEWITZ

**I** YELLED “PADDLE! PADDLE! PADDLE!” as I watched Julie’s inflatable kayak wash sideways into the massive logjam, flip upstream, and dump her into the current. She disappeared under her boat and into the logjam.

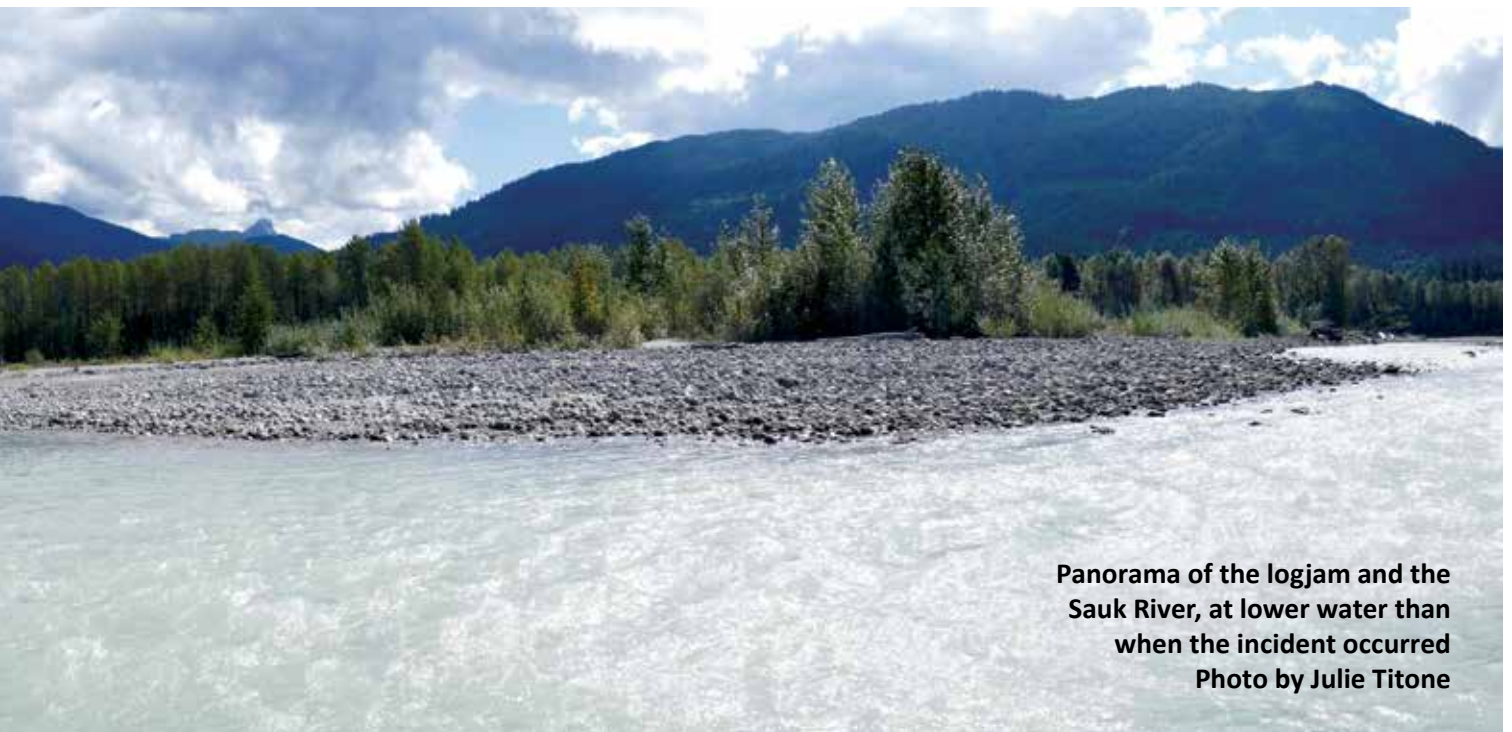
Such a terrible feeling pierced my heart as I feared what was happening to her underwater among the logs. The current was swift and there was no place I could climb out onto the logjam. It was stacked over 10 feet high and covered the left bank for hundreds of feet as the river made a broad, sweeping bend to the right. The tangled maze of enormous logs—some as much as three feet in diameter—reached 30 feet out into the river from the left bank. No one else was around to help. The rest of the paddling group had gone down one of the other channels that the river had cut through the gravel bars. I was alone and

Julie was flushed into this epic strainer. I thought, “Julie is under there! This is bad. This is REALLY bad!”

It was late June and we were making a very special river trip on the Sauk River, Washington. Louie and his sister Michelle had put this trip together to celebrate the life of their father, Chris, a whitewater fanatic who passed away from pancreatic cancer. We gathered to paddle one of his favorite rivers and release his ashes into the Sauk. The day was uneventful through the rapids on the Class II river. As we neared the end of the trip, the rapids were behind us. The final few miles were just swiftly flowing water that weaved channels around immense gravel bars as much as a quarter mile long and eight feet high, a product of the floods of spring snow melt.

At one split, the main current went right and the group took that branch. I looked back and noticed Julie was near the left bank, drifting into the left channel by herself. At this point she would not be able to make her way over to the main channel in her IK. Not wanting to leave her paddling alone, I scrambled to get over and go down the left channel with her. As I got around the gravel bar that split the current, the scene was revealed. The river curved back to the right. In the center of the channel, a boulder split the current. Immediately downstream was an epic log jam at least 10 feet high and hundreds of feet long, created at high water when the flow was many thousands of cfs higher. The current flowed straight through the logjam. I stayed far to the right.

Looking upstream I saw Julie was still way over to river left. Perhaps the subdued



**Panorama of the logjam and the Sauk River, at lower water than when the incident occurred**  
Photo by Julie Titone



# SAFETY

nature of the river for the past few miles, combined with what was a long day on the river, contributed to her complacency. I started yelling for Julie to paddle. But there was no chance she could paddle her boat against the current that was sweeping to the outside of the bend, directly into the logjam. She washed sideways into the structure, flipped, and disappeared.

My mind switched into “rescue mode” and my training took control of me.

I raced downstream, scanning the debris pile that engulfed the entire left bank as I paddled, searching for a place I could grab on and jump out of my kayak without getting caught myself. I found a spot maybe

100 yards downstream from the head of the logjam. I jumped out and started blowing three short whistle blasts over and over as I climbed up on top of the twisted pile of bark-stripped logs. Then with almost reckless abandon, I ran across the logs, weaving my way toward the head. I kept repeating to myself, “Not on my watch! Not on my watch!” I remembered how I used to joke with paddling friends, “Don’t do anything to get yourself on the six o’clock news.” This time it wasn’t funny.

As I reached the head of the logjam, I looked down over the precipice of logs. I expected to see nothing. My heart jumped when I saw Julie in the water 10 feet below me. She was facing downstream, her head

just above water. Her chest was against a log about 10 inches in diameter that was protruding from the pile and suspended just above the water; her arms were wrapped over the top of it. She was hanging on to keep from getting swept into and under the pile. I called her name so she knew I was there and kept talking in a reassuring voice as I climbed down.

“That was fast,” she responded in a calm voice. “I knew you would get here.”

I had her grab my wrist. From my lifeguarding experience, I know that wrist-grasping is much stronger than grasping hands. I couldn’t pull her up onto the log because of the force of the current. So we

David’s GPS track, showing his movements before, during, and after the rescue.  
By David Hablewitz





At lower water, David Hablewitz revisits the Sauk River logjam where he rescued Julie Titone  
Photo by Julie Titone



worked together to maneuver her under the log she was clinging to, then rolled her up onto it from the downstream side. Now she was facing upstream with her chest on top of the log. I kept giving instructions in a calm but commanding voice, helping lift and guide her through the branches and logs until she was able to get free. We climbed together to the top of the wood pile.

I assessed Julie's condition to ensure she was OK and not in shock, then went to retrieve her gear. Amazingly, one of the thigh straps of the inflatable kayak had snagged on a branch just a few feet from where I had found her. I was expecting her paddle to be gone, but it was hung up in the same branches, hiding under the capsized IK. What great fortune! I jumped in and paddled her boat to where my kayak was parked. Julie scrambled over the logjam to meet me there.

As we paddled away, Louie came running up on the island on river right. He had heard my whistle blowing. The entire event was out of sight from the group, obstructed by the island between the channels.

In events like this, everything seems to slow down as your mind captures every detail around you. But my Garmin GPS activity tracker verified it was only three and a half minutes from the time she flipped until the time I had her safely out of the water.

The day offers plenty of lessons. It makes me very thankful for the training and experience I have had. While the situation was bad, everything about the rescue went perfectly. As a lifeguard in Florida years ago, I made many rescues, but nothing was as complex or intense as this. And I have made many river rescues, but none in which the threat was quite as obviously imminent. It was all on me. Had I not been there, had I not made that conscious decision to join Julie going down the other channel, and had I not reacted quickly, the outcome would almost certainly have been different. Her calmness in the situation also made a big difference.

Finally, if you paddle the lower Sauk near Darrington, realize that it is a Class II river with potential Class V consequences.

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## WHITEWATER ACCIDENT SUMMARY JULY-DECEMBER 2020

BY CHARLIE WALBRIDGE, SAFETY EDITOR

IN THE SECOND half of 2020 AW received reports of six kayak, two canoe, and six rafting fatalities for a total of 14. There were two commercial rafting deaths and two incidents in “miscellaneous craft” (a small fishing cataraft and a stand-up paddleboard). The trends noted in the first six months continue. Recreational kayakers were used in four of the six kayak accidents; 11 of the 19 accidents reported occurred on Class I or II whitewater; eight saw no life vests in use, and seven were solo or one-boat trips. Many thanks to Charlie Duffy for preparing the graphs that accompany this article.

The year as a whole saw 48 deaths, which is well above average. Although fatalities among skilled paddlers declined, those involving inexperienced boaters increased sharply. This was almost certainly part of the Covid-19 outdoor recreation growth spurt. Kayak and canoe dealers sold out quickly, and lots of people got on the water for the first time. This is probably the start of a significant growth period for paddlesports generally. It will be a

real challenge for the boating community to educate these newcomers so they can paddle rivers safely.

### Whitewater Kayaks

Two reported deaths involved very experienced kayakers. The first occurred on November 3rd, in the fourth canyon of Mexico’s Rio Santa Maria. This is a tough Class IV/V section filled with undercuts and sieves. There are several very tough rapids here that many paddlers choose to carry. Dan Braly, a respected Texas kayaker, was on a guided trip with eight other paddlers. He failed to make an eddy and washed downstream into a terrible sieve, where he flipped and pinned. The group responded quickly; ropes were deployed, and they were able to keep his head above water for a few minutes. Sadly, Mr. Braly, 58, was pulled under after a desperate struggle. The group was later able to extricate him and attempt CPR, but it was too late.

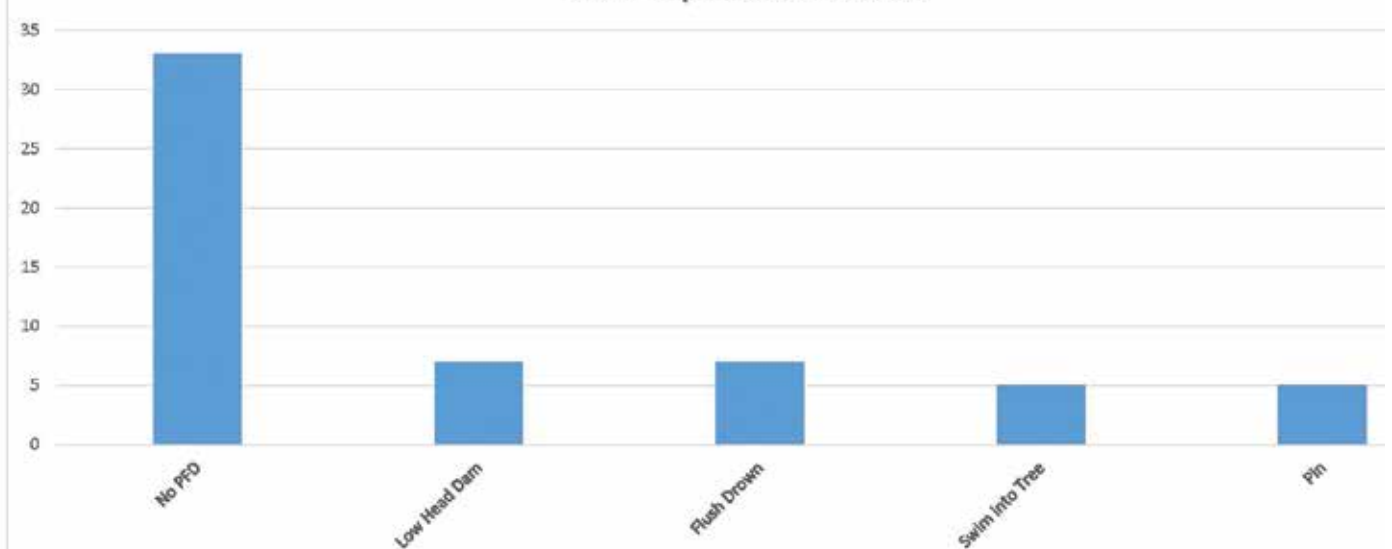
The second death occurred in Washington State on November 15th, when Canyon Creek of the Lewis River was running high

after a heavy rain. A group of three local experts who knew the river extremely well attempted what would be a very pushy Class V run. Paddling cautiously, they ran a number of big rapids without incident. Suddenly things went bad, as this report from Orion Junkins explains:

“Our plan was simple. Drive off Champagne...(then) run Hammering Spot direct and regroup in the river right eddy which is present regardless of flow. We... opted for 5 second staggers in between our peel outs so if any of us did get surfed, the other two would be close enough to offer help. I went first, carrying my speed off Champagne all the way into the eddy below Hammering spot.... I turned around just in time to see Thomas skip in just behind me. (Blaine Davis, 20) followed shortly after.... He was further left leaving him less room to pull a stroke. He still got a boof, but his tail was in the curtain just enough to catch.”

“As soon as I saw him ender, I jumped out.... He (Mr. Davis) gave a solid fight in his boat.... He pulled his skirt and went deep. After a

2020 - Top 5 Accident Causes





few seconds he popped up in the river left eddy near the wall.... He had a handhold on the wall for a moment, but suddenly started drifting back upstream. At the top of the eddy he hit the hole again and went deep.... He surfaced at the bottom end of the eddy and...swam hard against the eddy to the left shelf. Again, he began to slip back upstream, slowly at first but picking up speed. He was visibly exhausted so I used my bag but missed.... He was pulled into the hole again, going deep for the third time.”

“Blaine popped up further out in the middle of the hole and disappeared again, this time for a long time. Frantically we waited for him to surface.... After far, far too long, Blaine popped up, this time below the boil line.... He was limp and facedown. Both of us jumped back in boats immediately and chased him.... I got through the run out just in time to watch him tumble over Toby’s.... I got to him just as the rapids flattened out, pulled my skirt and dove on top of him, dragging him onto the bank.” The group attempted CPR; one of them paddled to the take-out to activate a Personal Locator Beacon while the other continued resuscitation efforts. Rescue squads arrived and took over a short time later.

Both groups prepared detailed first-hand reports which are available in the AW Accident Database.

## Recreational Kayaks

The four accidents in this group involved inexperienced paddlers, mostly without life vests. Those who don’t use PFDs often drown in conditions that would be quite manageable otherwise. On August 22nd Cleve Loney, 69, flipped his kayak in a mild rapid on Montana’s Missouri River. He was not wearing a life vest and disappeared underwater after a brief struggle. A few days later, on August 30th, Brandon Chiles was trying to help another kayaker on Virginia’s Rappahanock River when his boat flipped and he slipped beneath the surface. Again, no life vest was in use.

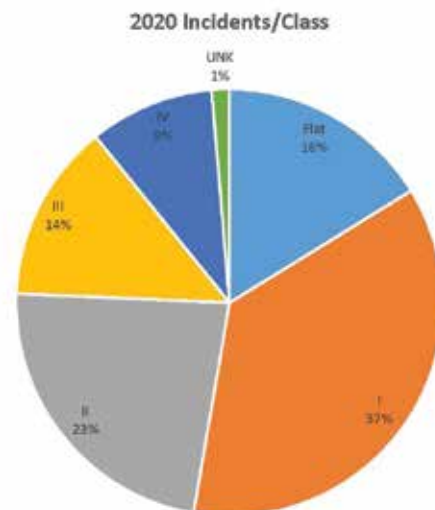
Two other incidents involved solo paddlers, so we don’t know exactly what happened. On July 7th Sage Adams, 10, was kayaking with his father on Washington’s Class II-III Skagit River. His father flipped and swam, but young Sage continued on alone. His father searched, couldn’t find him, and notified authorities. His body was found along the river several months

later. On November 17th, Robert “DJ” Young disappeared on a Class I section of Tennessee’s Lower Chickamauga Creek. A woman dropped the 26-year-old man off at a boat access; when he failed to appear at the take-out she called 911. Other paddlers found his kayak, but his body wasn’t recovered until the next day. I suspect, but don’t know for sure, that neither of these two paddlers used life vests.

## Open Canoes

Both reported open canoe deaths involved strainers in easy whitewater. The Resurrection River near Seward, AK is glacier fed, cutting a meandering channel through an unstable gravel riverbed. A river guide described it as a Class I river with Class V consequences, dangerous log jams strewn at random along its course. On August 22nd Richard Hoverstein, 52, did not arrive at the take-out as planned. The next day he and his canoe were found jammed in a strainer.

A second incident occurred on Arkansas’ Caddo River, a Class I-II stream where several liveries operate. According to a brief newspaper article in the Glenwood, AR Herald, Rebekah Ann Bryan, 18, was paddling the river below Caddo Gap when she washed into a strainer and pinned underwater. Few other details were provided. Rescuers were called, but arrived too late to save her.



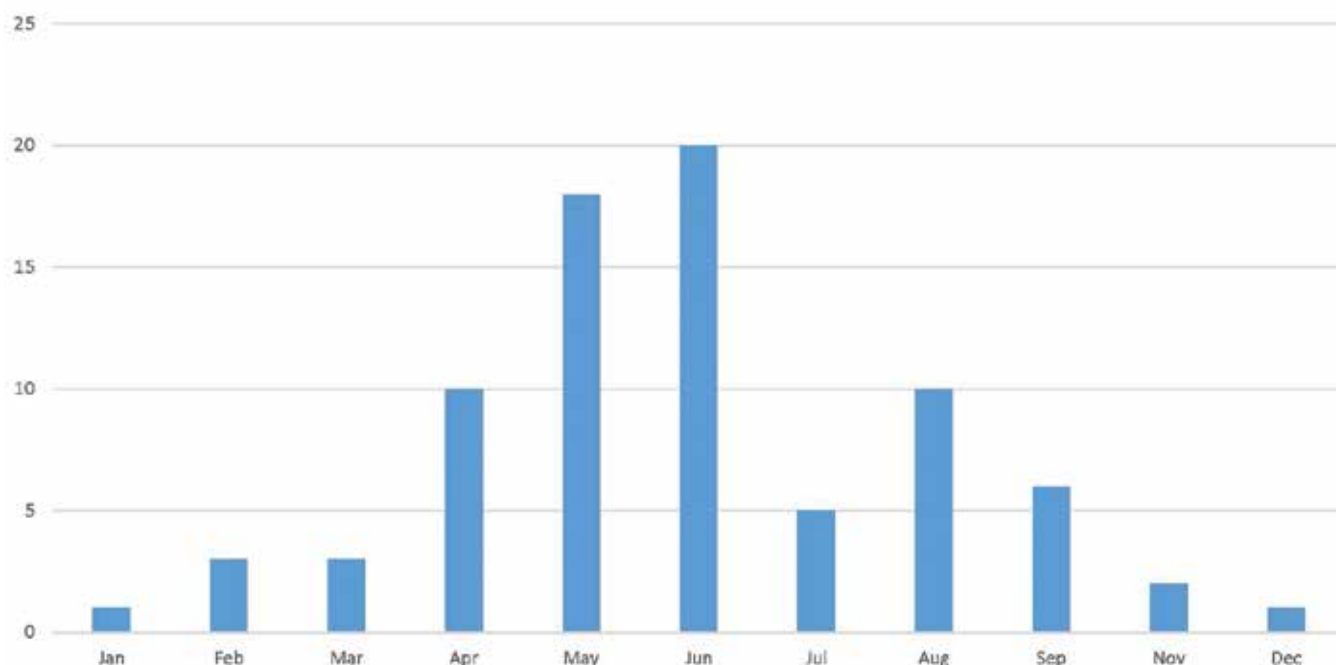
## Rafting

There were two commercial rafting deaths in the latter half of this year, both the result of long swims in big water. On July 11th Maine Fisheries and Wildlife, which regulates commercial rafting, reported that Emily Fournier, 33, was unresponsive when pulled back into her raft after a tough swim in the big Class IV rapids of the Kennebec Gorge. A second death occurred on September 13th after the Nolichucky Gorge rose to over 2,000 cfs. The sweep boat of a guided trip flipped in Quarter Mile Rapid and Louvella Yelton, 64, washed downstream into a nasty hole called Hungry Jack. She recirculated several times and was unresponsive when a downstream raft pulled her aboard. Guides performed CPR and carried her up the tracks where first responders pronounced her dead.

Three of the four private rafting fatalities this past summer and fall told the same sad story: a lone raft on easy to moderate whitewater, and a swimmer with no PFD. On the evening of July 7th Richard Ross, 40, was using a small raft to ferry camping gear across Montana’s Middle Fork of the Flathead when he flipped and was swept downstream. His body was found the following day. Then, on August 6th, Michael Marquand was rafting with his family on Oregon’s Deschutes River when his boat hit a rock and capsized in Boxcar Rapids. Although he had four decades of



2020 Incidents/Month



experience he wasn't wearing a life vest! His group found him downstream, floating face down. Finally, Steve Polumsky, 62, was floating a Class I section on Idaho's Selway River below the falls on August 25th. Part way down the run he waded out in the river to retrieve a capsized raft, lost his footing, and disappeared underwater. A half hour later a deputy joined staff from the nearby Three Rivers Resort to search for Mr. Polumsky. He was found under eight feet of water.

The final rafting accident was unusual and tragic. On September 29th Armani Alicia, 28, was rafting Tennessee's classic Middle Ocoee with his fiancé just two weeks before their planned wedding. Halfway down the run, his paddle blade hit a rock and the T-grip was shoved into his neck hard. The impact ruptured his carotid artery and caused a massive basilar stroke. He was airlifted to a hospital where he died several days later. As a canoeist, I've been hit hard in the face a few times by my paddle, but I've never heard of an injury this serious caused by a paddle. Let's stay alert out there!

## Paddleboards

Two stand-up paddleboarders perished in another accident involving strong currents, a strainer, and a snagged paddleboard leash. David Schenderlein, 60, and his daughter Sarah, 17, were on Oregon's Willamette River in Glenwood, OR when the accident occurred. No one saw what happened on December 23rd, but photos show a large river with bouncy Class I-II rapids. According to the Eugene, OR Register-Guard, a passerby saw the paddleboards jammed into a strainer and called authorities. The boards were recovered with the paddlers still attached by their ankle tethers. Tethers lacking a foolproof quick release system have been implicated in a number of paddleboard drownings in the past few years. No system is foolproof, but ankle tethers are often impossible to reach in emergencies. Tethers attached to the accessible quick release on a rescue PFD are a better choice.

## Pontoon Boat

A fisherman was killed on the North Fork of the Flathead River, which runs along the edge of Montana's Glacier National Park. According to the Park Service, the accident occurred on August 30th. Ronald

Newton, 62, was on the water when two small pontoon boats pinned on a rock. Mr. Newton, in a third boat, was helping out when his own cataraft capsized, throwing him into the water. He was not wearing a life vest or helmet and he quickly lost consciousness. A friend pulled him onto a nearby gravel bar and tried to revive him, without success.

## The Midnight Miracle

There was a truly remarkable rescue in New River Country on September 21st. It began in late afternoon when kayaker Sam Davis missed his line during a solo run of Kanawha Falls, a 15-foot ledge located just below the confluence of the New and Gauley Rivers. He ended up trapped behind the falling water for nearly eight hours! His boat flushed out and Felisha Coyner, a fisherman, saw it floating in the pool below the Falls. She had also noticed a lone van with racks in the parking lot with a note on it. She dialed 911 (twice), then called the phone number on the note and spoke with a drone photographer who had taken footage of Mr. Davis' first falls run. She posted pictures of the kayak on the West Virginia Whitewater Facebook page, and this drew the attention of Corey Lilly, a



local expert kayaker very familiar with the falls. Mr. Lilly decided that he knew exactly where the paddler might be trapped. Even though it was 10:00 p.m. he rallied several local paddlers to join him in searching the falls.

They arrived at Kanawha Falls just as Search and Rescue was calling off their search. Steven Wright picks up the story:

“We knew of a spot that would be hard to access or see for non-kayaking rescue personnel: the river right undercut wall and ‘cave’ next to the landing of the High Flow (main drop) falls at Kanawha.... We paddled out to the island.... I was last to the island, and heard the other guys yelling, ‘He’s here! He’s alive!!!’ He was somewhere behind the curtain of the falls, but we could clearly hear him yelling. We texted our contacts on shore to let them know.

“The falls is a high-volume waterfall around 15 feet tall. The river right half of the outflow pushes into the undercut right wall where a number of other kayakers have unintentionally gone and successfully swam out of. There is a cave or crack in the river right upstream corner, where there is usually a calmer spot of approximately 20 square feet. Many people who swim out of the wall wash back upstream into that cave, where they can be rescued by a raft or other kayakers. This is where we hoped to find the missing kayaker. At the flows of [the night of the rescue] (close to 9,000 cfs), there was water pouring over the entire lip all the way into the cave/crack. This completely blocked it from our line of sight, and it was from behind the curtain of water there that we could hear Sam yelling for help over the roar of the falls.

“...We first tried to establish contact with Sam by tethered wading out to a high point of the lip of the falls...(but) this proved to be impossible....it would be impossible to get a raft or motorized rescue inflatable to where he was—there was just WAY too much current flowing in the undercut wall.... The only options for evac would be a 15-20-foot vertical extraction up the crack and onto the island.

“...a kayaker with a phone could seal launch the calmest part of the falls into a very small ‘calmer’ eddy next to the cave.... It was dark, and we only had two headlamps. Corey volunteered to run the drop, as he had run this line before at these flows.... He was confident that he could safely handle the water here, having hundreds of runs under his belt.... He successfully ran the falls into the eddy, but due the mist, wind, dark, swirly and powerful currents...

## No more renewal notices!



### Sick of renewal notices in the mail?

Sign up for auto-renewal on your AW membership and you'll never get another. Your membership won't lapse and you'll be helping us save our limited funds and trees!

### New and renewing members:

[americanwhitewater.org/join](http://americanwhitewater.org/join)

### Current members:

1-866-262-8429





# SATETY

he was prevented from seeing Sam, or communicating with him. He quickly peeled back out and paddled around the undercut wall to regroup....

"We determined that the only option for rescue would be to lower a rope through the curtain of the falls into the crack, and pull him vertically out. We needed more than four of us to do this. Corey and I paddled back to shore to gather more volunteers.... On arrival, we found there were nearly 30 vehicles there with a ton of rescue personnel.... Matt Jackson managed to mobilize the paddling community and many private rafters and kayakers had arrived.... We needed at least 10 bodies on the island to lift Sam up and out. Several rafters, kayakers, and a few rescue personnel came out quickly with us to attempt the extraction. This was around midnight.

"...I set up our largest diameter spectra throw rope with a locking carabiner to lower through the falls into the crack for Sam. I attached my headlamp to the carabiner in the hopes that he'd see it. Sam grabbed the rope almost immediately. We couldn't talk to him over the roar of the river, so it took a number of tries pulling

before he understood that we wanted to him clip in to the rope with his rescue PFD.... Our group pulled on the rope over the edge of rock.... After a few stop-and-goes, I saw one arm and the top of his head come up through the curtain of falls in the corner of the crack. Slowly, he managed to climb, wiggle, and be pulled up and over the lip! WHAT A RELIEF!!!!

"After cheering, hugging, and doing our best to quickly warm him up a little, a few rescuers helped him walk down to the rescue boat and he was taken back to shore to an ambulance...we could hear the roar of the crowd that had assembled on shore cheering for his safe return."

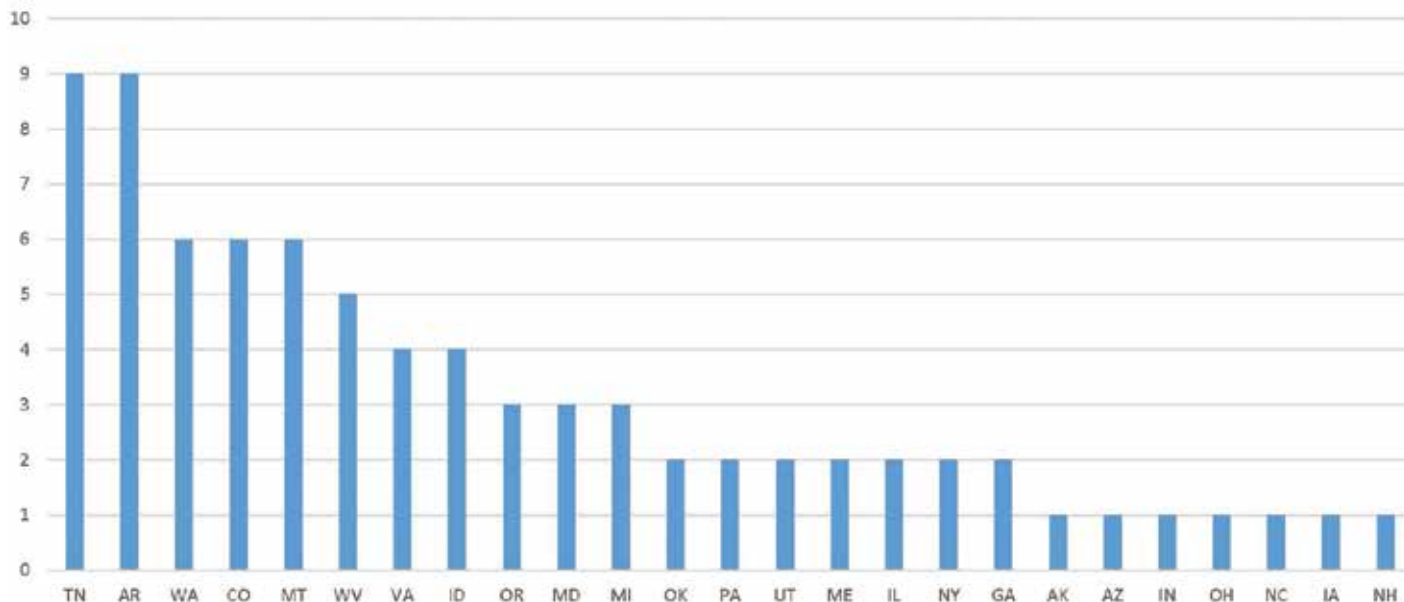
This was the most spectacular rescue I've encountered in 50 years of paddling! The full report, along with links to other accounts and photographs, can be found on the AW Safety Page.

American Whitewater needs your help to gather accident reports to share with our community. First person accounts from experienced paddlers, newspaper articles, and on-line posts are all useful. Since media articles are often inaccurate or incomplete, clarifying comments

from paddlers familiar with the area are really useful. Accurate accounts benefit everyone! While serious incidents among skilled whitewater paddlers are quite rare, they teach the rest of us important lessons to help avoid future trouble, and to better manage emergencies. These reports also keep malicious rumors at bay, which is vital in this age of irresponsible Internet gossip. They also help American Whitewater maintain a good grasp of the overall river safety picture.

To report a whitewater accident, near miss, or serious injury, please go to the Safety page on [americanwhitewater.org](http://americanwhitewater.org), click "report an accident," and enter the information. Or you can email me at [ccwalbridge@cs.com](mailto:ccwalbridge@cs.com) or message "Charlie Walbridge" on Facebook. Feel free to share newspaper articles, chat room posts, or even rumors! I'm not an "investigator," but I often use sketchy reports as leads to find out what happened. I can also help you prepare or edit an accident report if needed.

2020 - States in Order



*Leave a lasting legacy to the  
special places that made  
a difference in your life.*



Become a member of the American Whitewater Enduring Rivers Circle, created exclusively to honor and recognize people who have helped to continue our river stewardship efforts through a gift to American Whitewater in their estate plans.

*For more information about making a bequest to American Whitewater*  
CONTACT Bethany Overfield: 1.866.262.8429 or [bethany@americanwhitewater.org](mailto:bethany@americanwhitewater.org)





# 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 York

KCCNY, Brooklyn

### North Carolina

West Asheville Canoe and Kayak Organization (WACKO), Asheville

### Ohio

Columbus Outdoor Pursuits, Columbus  
Keelhaulers, Cleveland

### Oregon

Oregon Whitewater Association, Tigard

### South Carolina

Foothills 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

### Delaware

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

### Missouri

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

### Montana

Beartooth Paddlers Society, Billings

### Nevada

Sierra Nevada Whitewater Club, Reno

### New Hampshire

Ledyard Canoe Club, Hanover  
New England Canoe and Kayak Racing Association, Contoocook

### New Jersey

AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Oaks (PA)

### New York

ADK Schenectady, Schenectady  
Kuyahoor 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

AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Oaks (PA)  
Benscreek Canoe Club, Johnstown  
Canoe Club of Greater Harrisburg, Harrisburg  
Conewago Canoe Club, York

Keystone Canoe Club, Mertztown  
Lehigh Valley Canoe Club, Lehigh Valley  
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  
Yakima River Runners, Selah

#### **Washington, DC**

Canoe Cruisers Association

#### **West Virginia**

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

#### **Wisconsin**

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

#### **Wyoming**

American Packrafting Association, Wilson  
Jackson Hole Kayak Club, Jackson

#### **Ontario**

Guelph Kayak Club, Elora  
Kawartha Whitewater Paddlers, Toronto  
Ontario Voyageurs Kayak Club, Otonabee

#### **National**

Team River Runner

## **DISCOUNTED AW MEMBERSHIP FOR AFFILIATE CLUB MEMBERS**

AW offers a discounted Affiliate Club membership of \$25, a \$10 savings. If you are renewing your AW membership or joining as a new member, select the Affiliate Club Discounted Personal Membership online at <http://americanwhitewater.org/content/Membership/join-AW/>. Or, if you are renewing or joining by mail or telephone just mention the name of the Affiliate Club you belong to and you can take advantage of the \$25 membership.

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).

## **JOIN AMERICAN WHITewater AS A CLUB AFFILIATE!**

### **10 REASONS TO JOIN AW AS AN AFFILIATE CLUB**

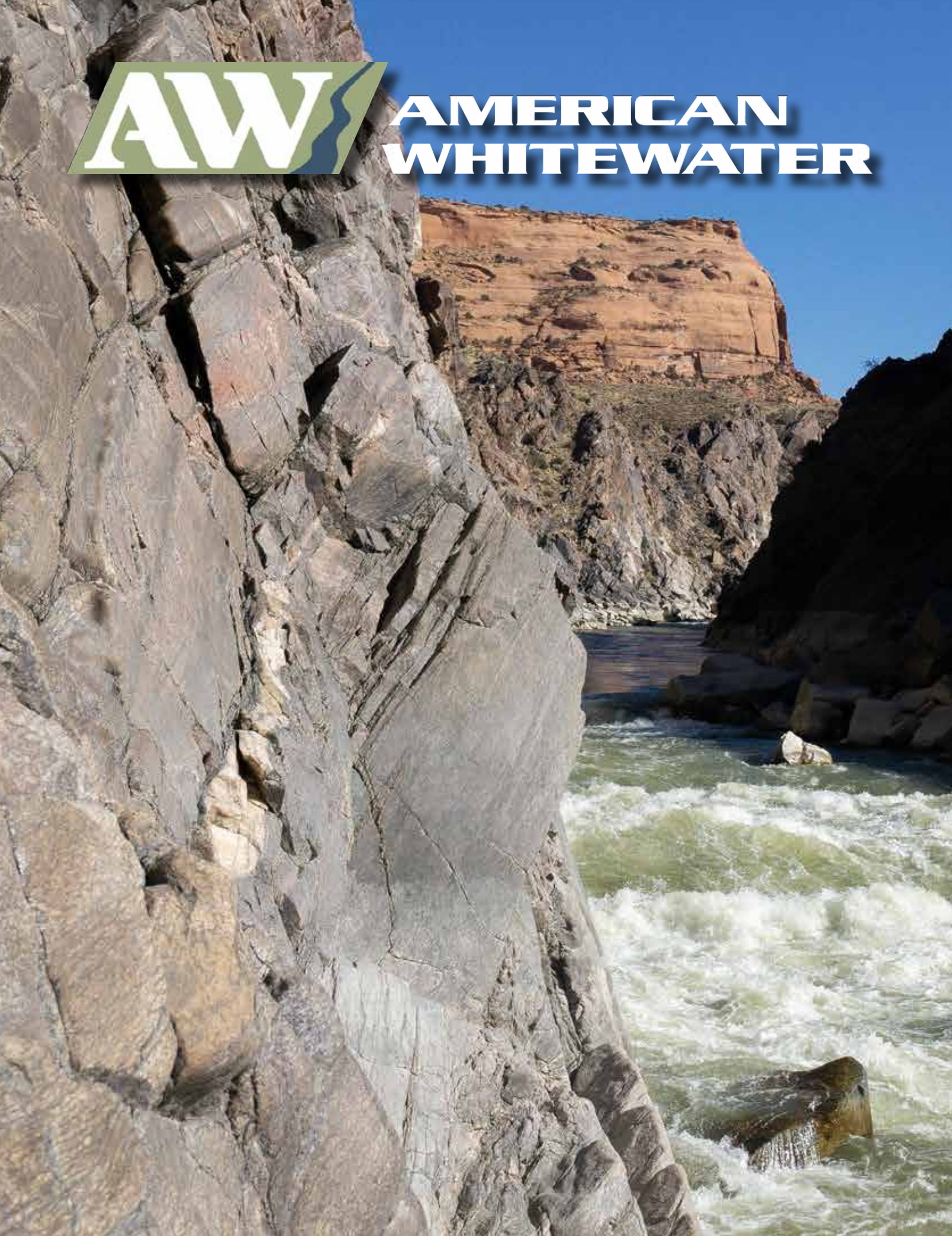
1. Support river access and restoration through the AW River Stewardship Team.
2. Be part of a national voice for the protection of the whitewater rivers your club values.
3. Tap into the professional expertise of AW staff for river issues that come up in your backyard.
4. Your club's members can become AW members for \$25. A \$10 savings!
5. Receive the American Whitewater Journal, the oldest continually published whitewater magazine.
6. Your club is recognized in the list of Affiliate Clubs posted to the AW website.
7. Recognize your club in the list of Affiliate Clubs noted in each bi-monthly AW Journal.
8. Post Club information on the AW Website to help paddlers find you.
9. Gain Club satisfaction from lending support to AW's stewardship efforts.
10. Improve your club members river karma.

For more information, contact Bethany Overfield at [membership@americanwhitewater.org](mailto:membership@americanwhitewater.org) or sign-up on line at [www.americanwhitewater.org/membership](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/membership).





**AMERICAN  
WHITEWATER**





# The Strength of Our Voice is Your Membership

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Family w/AW Journal	\$50
Ender Club w/T-Shirt	\$125
Platinum Paddler w/Hoodie	\$250
Explorer w/Watershed Bag	\$500
Lifetime	\$1,000
Steward w/\$400 Kokatat Gift	\$2,500



\*Incentive gifts change from time to time, please check the website for the latest rewards.

Join @ [americanwhitewater.org/join](http://americanwhitewater.org/join)

Donate @ [americanwhitewater.org/donate](http://americanwhitewater.org/donate)





Membership Driven River Stewardship  
[americanwhitewater.org/join](http://americanwhitewater.org/join)

# Whitewater River Defenders

Since 1954

Salmon River, ID – By Evan Stafford

