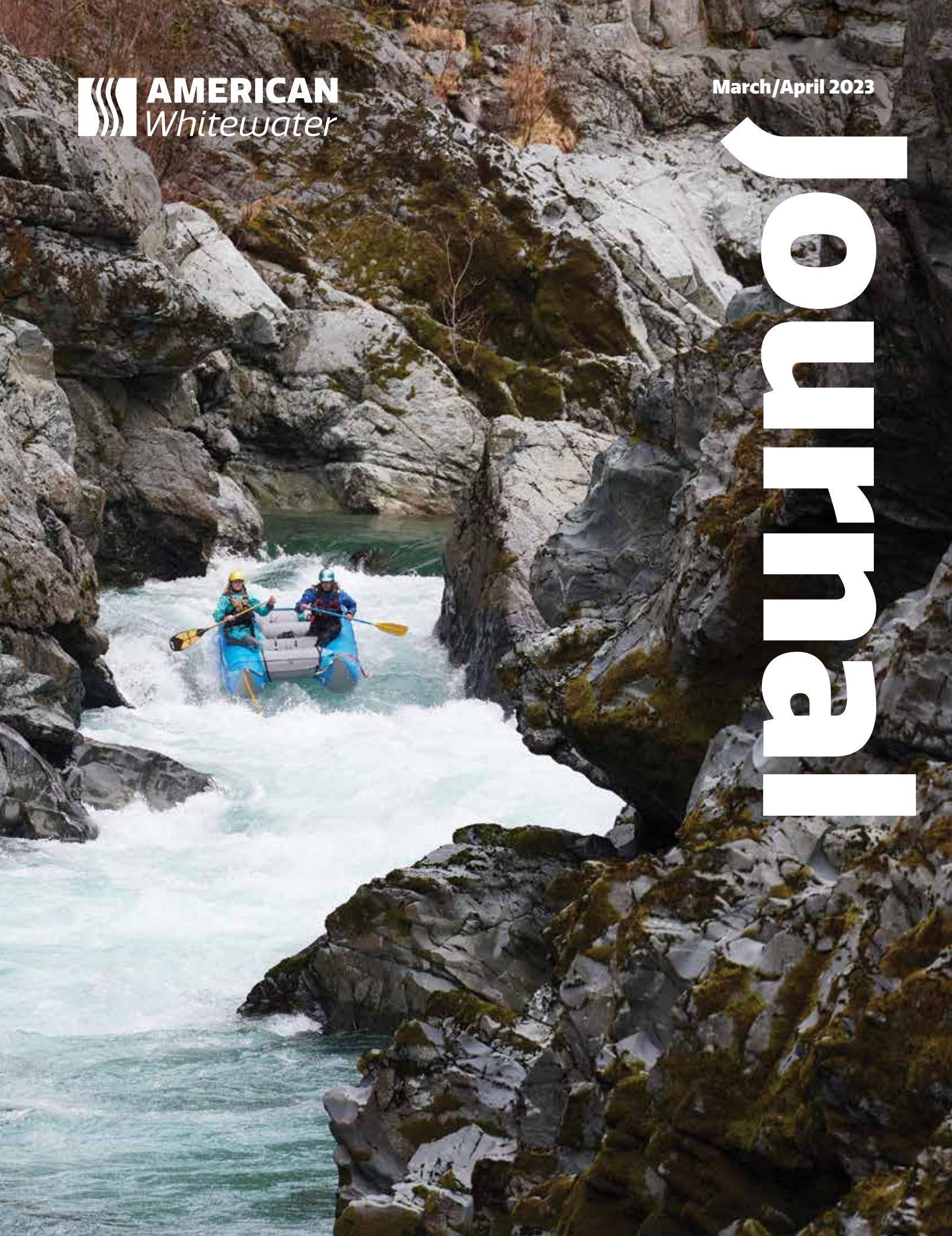




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promoting river conservation,
access, and safety

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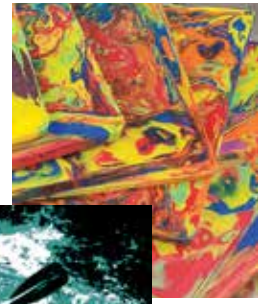
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On the cover: American Whitewater members Nicole Smedegaard and Sean Bowen in rapid #1, South Fork Gorge, South Fork Smith River (CA). Photo: Fontaine Rittelmann

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PURPOSE

RIVER STEWARDSHIP: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Our mission: "To protect and restore America's whitewater rivers 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.

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

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The opinions expressed in the features and editorials of *American Whitewater Journal* 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.

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, 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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Horizon Lines

Clinton Begley

THOSE FAMILIAR WITH THE NONPROFIT WORLD HAVE LIKELY COME across the three standard foundational components that are supposed to guide the work of any organization worth its salt: mission, vision and values.

I've been around long enough to know that, for many other organizations, these statements were developed by committee decades ago, are pro forma, and have little influence on the current day-to-day. Fortunately, that isn't true at American Whitewater. At the time of print I'll have been on the team a little over seven months. What I've witnessed here is a crew made of staff and board members who fully embody the written mission, vision, and values of American Whitewater in all they do on behalf of our community and our nation's whitewater resources. That is pretty unique.

What is also true is that no matter the written values of an organization, there are always unwritten, implicit, values that show up as products of dynamic influences, like who is a part of the team, how they are empowered to bring their voices to the table, and the evolving cultural norms and contexts of the communities they are working within to get the mission accomplished. Organizations are, and should be, living organisms that both influence and respond to their environment in this way. And, an outside observer should be able to intuit the written and unwritten values of an organization by observing what it prioritizes and how it achieves the mission. Integrity is experienced in the space between what we say we value, and what we actually do. It is within that space that trust is either built or broken and it is the crucible of culture.

One of the observable but unwritten values for American Whitewater is reciprocity. I've been a member for a long time, and one of the things that drew me to the

organization was the crystal clear simplicity of giving back to that which gives to us. The slogan "by boaters for boaters" used to grace the cover of this Journal and explicitly communicated one narrow facet of that reciprocity. Your voice, your volunteer hours, and your donor dollars continue to be returned many-fold through our work on access and flow restoration to get you more days on more of the rivers you love. The events we organize and support help build connection and culture across the paddling community to continue that cycle of reciprocity. The phrase, "by boaters, for rivers," would be just as accurate and reflect another co-equal facet of this implicit value. The reciprocity between boaters and the non-human members of our whitewater family is evident in your support for our work to advance the cause of wilderness and Wild & Scenic River Designations, influence national forest plans, advocate for natural water cycles on managed systems, stand up for the Clean Water Act, and to remove barriers for both paddlers and aquatic life on imperiled rivers across the country.

If all we cared about was gradient and waves, we might be the country's foremost advocate for the construction of artificial whitewater parks! But whitewater rivers give us a lot more than just a place to float a boat downhill. Our values as a community run deeper than that, and our work shows it. Whether it's the blooming magnolias along the Chattooga, or the views of snow capped Mt. Index over the Skykomish, context matters to our river experiences. No matter if we speak it or not, the value we hold as a whitewater community to be part of a complex natural system of reciprocity is deeply human. That common interest is also the foundation for another key value of our community: belonging. Paddling is one way to be connected in body and spirit to the natural world we yearn to experience. But you don't need to have a paddle in your hand to be in relationship with whitewater rivers, or to be a member of American Whitewater. If you share a love for whitewater rivers and a desire to give back to our community that supports them, then you belong here.

As you read this issue of the Journal, I would invite you to explore how these and other values show up in these pages, and in your own relationships to your local rivers, your paddling, and your crew.

Thank you for living out your values on and off the water by being a member of American Whitewater. I'll SYOTR soon!

Clinton Begley
Executive Director, American Whitewater

Letter to the Editor



Dear Editor,

I want to applaud Bethany Overfield's "Seeking Joy" article in the Winter 2023 AW Journal.

Bethany's article echoes the sentiments of so many of your readers. Championing the "everyman," Bethany questions her place within a whitewater community that no doubt exalts class V gnar drops and stories of international first descents. That being said, most American Whitewater members do not fit into this boater category. The average AW boater simply joins Bethany in a lifelong passion of dedication to running, loving, and protecting our rivers.

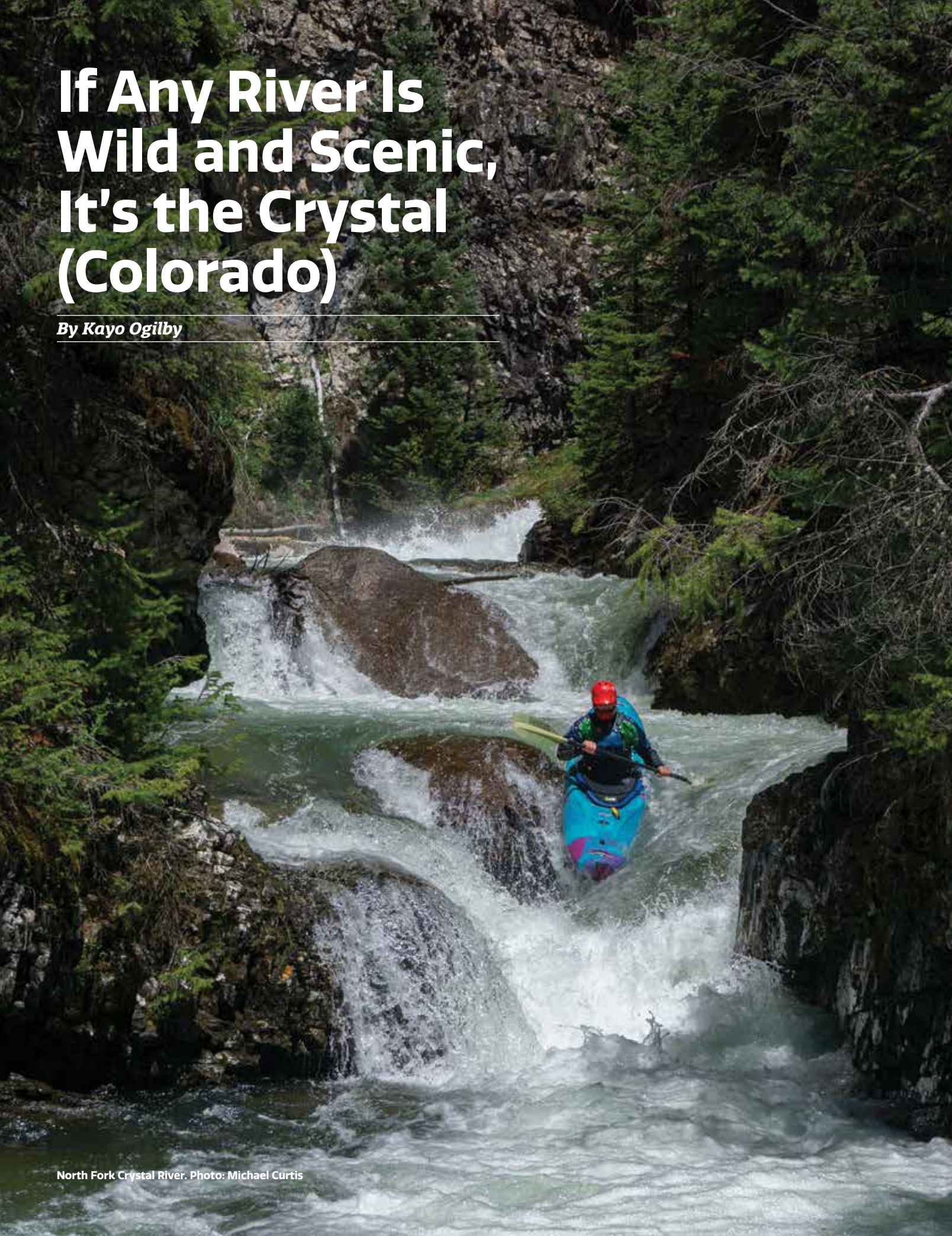
Personally, I have been boating for nearly three decades and may never hop out of my class IV comfort zone. But I am still on the river years after many of my cohorts have come and gone. Thank you for giving a voice to your average reader. And, of course, you can work for an organization such as American Whitewater and continue your goal of seeking joy just by spending time on the river. Even more so, as the Membership and Engagement Director, you are the perfect woman for the job!

Cheers, Bethany!

Kim Carson
Gypsum, CO

If Any River Is Wild and Scenic, It's the Crystal (Colorado)

By Kayo Ogilby



North Fork Crystal River. Photo: Michael Curtis

As American Whitewater familiarized itself with the push for a Wild and Scenic Crystal River designation, I quickly learned of four community pillars of that effort, one of whom is named Chuck Ogilby, river defender and owner of Avalanche Ranch Hot Springs. Later, at a board of trustees meeting in my community of Carbondale, a municipality that sits along and depends on the waters of the Crystal, I heard his son, Kayo, speak about the importance of a free flowing river with an eloquence that can only come from deep love and connection to a place.

I was hoping to include a story about the Crystal River in this edition of the Journal and was ready to write one based on my own love of my backyard river. We are kicking off a robust discussion with stakeholders of all backgrounds this year to determine if a Wild and Scenic designation is feasible for the Crystal River. I felt it timely to share with our whitewater community about this special place. However, when I heard Kayo speak, I knew his story, and that of his family and students, could more thoroughly describe all that this wild river provides to those who play in it, learn about it, and depend upon it. Please enjoy as Kayo takes us on a journey down the Crystal Narrows at healthy flows, and meet his family and friends along the way.

Hattie Johnson
Southern Rockies Stewardship Director

DAPLED MORNING LIGHT SPILLS THROUGH THE LIGHTLY shivering cottonwood trees that tower over the main house of Avalanche Ranch as I turn in the steep gravel driveway and pull up in front of the reception desk and store. My nephew, Fisher Jacober, and another Colorado Rocky Mountain School (CRMS) student, Beck Jennings, are already in their kayak gear and grinning mischievous grins while making a display of looking at their watches as I pull in, always ready to rib me for being late. CRMS alumnus, whitewater aficionado, river steward, and former American Whitewater staff member Angus Harley soon pulls in behind with his signature grin that transcends the confines of his face. After a delightful reunion of hugs and introductions, boats are thrown in the back of the Jacober pickup and we make the quick bump up to Penny Hot Springs, the illustrious put-in for the Narrows section of the Crystal River.

This morning, like most mornings, bighorn sheep are grazing along the river directly across from the hot springs. This time of year the runoff has inundated the hot springs proper, but a glance upstream reveals the backlit steam escaping from the multiple hot vents of Filoha Meadows. This preserved nature park and open space protects this unique geothermal area at the base of Mt. Sopris and is home to unique plant species such as the Stream Orchid, as well as a vestigial pocket of firefly species whose genetic underwriting has agreed for millennia with the year-round warm wetland grasses in this geothermal pocket.

As we drag our boats down the embankment from the parking lot, Fisher and Beck, who are students in my geology class at CRMS, lob a question with the intent of tricking me into divulg-

ing the answer to the current field problem they are working on. I've asked them to determine whether or not Mt. Sopris, the icon of the lower Roaring Fork and Crystal valleys, is a volcano. Angus, who is on the other side of this geologic conundrum, slides me a sly glance. He knows that the constriction in the Crystal River canyon that creates the tumultuous freight train of classic Colorado roadside Class IV whitewater is there because of the river's attempt to incise through the 34 million-year-old granite of Mt Sopris. While the words written in those rocks speak a molten and igneous narrative, it is a story of a body of magma that cooled at depth rather than exploding onto the earth's surface. As much as it looks like one, Sopris is not a volcano.

Many students get tricked each year by the big black basaltic boulders strewn in and around the granite of Penny Hot Springs. These lava rocks are of human origin however, and were rolled into the hot springs by the angry landowner of Filoha Meadows in the 1980s in an attempt to obliterate the hot springs due to his dislike of naked hippies exposing themselves to his cows grazing on the other side of the river. There is no stopping scantily-clad hot water lovers, and soon the pools were re-excavated through the new debris and these boulders now provide a punctuated anthropogenic feng-shui to the Penny geothermal experience.

The explosive and tumultuous mayhem of whitewater that is the result of the acceleration of the Crystal River as it is forced through the Mt. Sopris constriction has its own eruptive signature. The group's geologic curiosity quickly dissipates as our senses are directed to the immediacy of the task in front of us. Paddling ahead, we are shot into the cataclysmic and explosive whitewater that is the Narrows proper. Intriguing surf ferries and boofs into boiling micro eddies that looked doable from our road scout suddenly become an ephemeral question mark. A combination of the wave size (waaaay bigger than it looked from the road), speed of the water (waaaaay faster than it seemed from the road), and the blinding white of morning backlit 48-degree snowmelt water all conspire to turn mapped out moves into small craft improvisation.

The improv reaches its crescendo in the Lower Narrows where the river widens into a labyrinth of pour-overs that put directional strokes and braces to the test. Eddies are almost completely absent through here, making swims long, abusive, and hair-raising. The boys do a fine job choosing their own lines and establishing quick, smiling visual check-ins as the group flies through this section Blue Angel style.

The river soon makes a sharp left turn which presents us with the first braided channel and we choose left. It requires an awkward move over a downed tree that has fallen from Tim and Cindy Cole's property. Tim, a giant bear of a man with a handlebar mustache is in the yard walking toward his blacksmith studio. After a lifetime as a coal miner in Redstone, he found peace in the journey of becoming a master blacksmith, most notably crafting Damascus steel jewelry, as well as find-

My dad can feel rivers... This journey led to a love affair with Western rivers, and a recognition, in the early 1970s, that they were threatened.



Crystal Mill Falls, North Fork Crystal River. Photo: Conrad Niven

ing ways to bring intricate and subtle detail to unlikely pieces of blacksmithed art. A steel rose sits in my parent's living room as an example of one of my favorite pieces of his work.

Just below their house, we float past the tributary of Avalanche Creek, our family's favorite low water fishing hole. As we float by, an image of Fisher, age 7 or 8, learning to drift a nymph with his new birthday fly rod under the tutelage of my dad, Chuck Ogilby, known as Papa to his grandchildren, finds its way out of the archives of my memory.

My dad is a nymph fisherman. He has always been a firm believer that flyfishing should happen below the surface, down where the big fish lurk and do the bulk of their feeding. He perfected this art long before the days of strike indicators. Learning from him was a task of learning how to manage one's line in a way that it could be kept taught enough to "feel" the difference between a strike and the bottom, all while maintaining a natural drift. As a young and aspiring, but impatient fly fisherman, I failed for years in my attempts to grapple with my dad's type of fishing. It was visceral and sophisticated and required a level of zen that eluded my teenage self. The visual cues that dry-flies and strike indicators provide were completely absent from his approach.

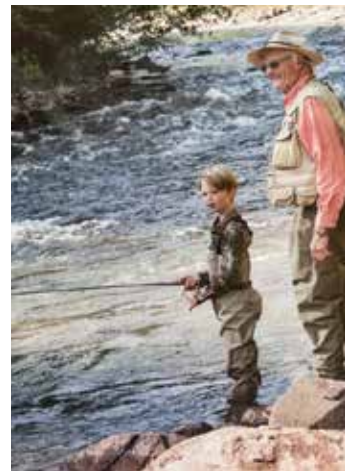
My dad can feel rivers. He can feel trout. He can feel the details of the benthic topography. And as a result, he could find fish that others missed, or simply didn't know existed. This journey led to a love affair with Western rivers, and a recognition, in the early 1970s, that they were threatened. And so began his path of fighting for them. Living in Vail at the time, he threw the bulk of his efforts at fighting trans-mountain diversions and the Denver Water Board from pulling water out of Western Slope rivers and piping it to the rapidly developing Front Range. His home waters then were Gore Creek and the Eagle River. Today they are the Crystal and Roaring Fork and the well-being of these rivers, specifically efforts to get the Crystal federally designated as Wild and Scenic, have become his primary battle fronts.

This type of fishing, and a passion for free-flowing rivers, would cross my path again many years later through the lens of another CRMS student, Martin Gerdin. Martin returned to CRMS as a resident glassblowing artist, where he would both pursue his own art and help teach the art form he had fallen in love with while attending the school. He started dabbling with blowing glass fish at about the same time that he discovered fly fishing. Martin is a visionary. He is one of those individuals who quickly sees beyond the confines of the convention of any given discipline and is soon charting his own path. The beauty of this is that he would never describe himself as a natural student.

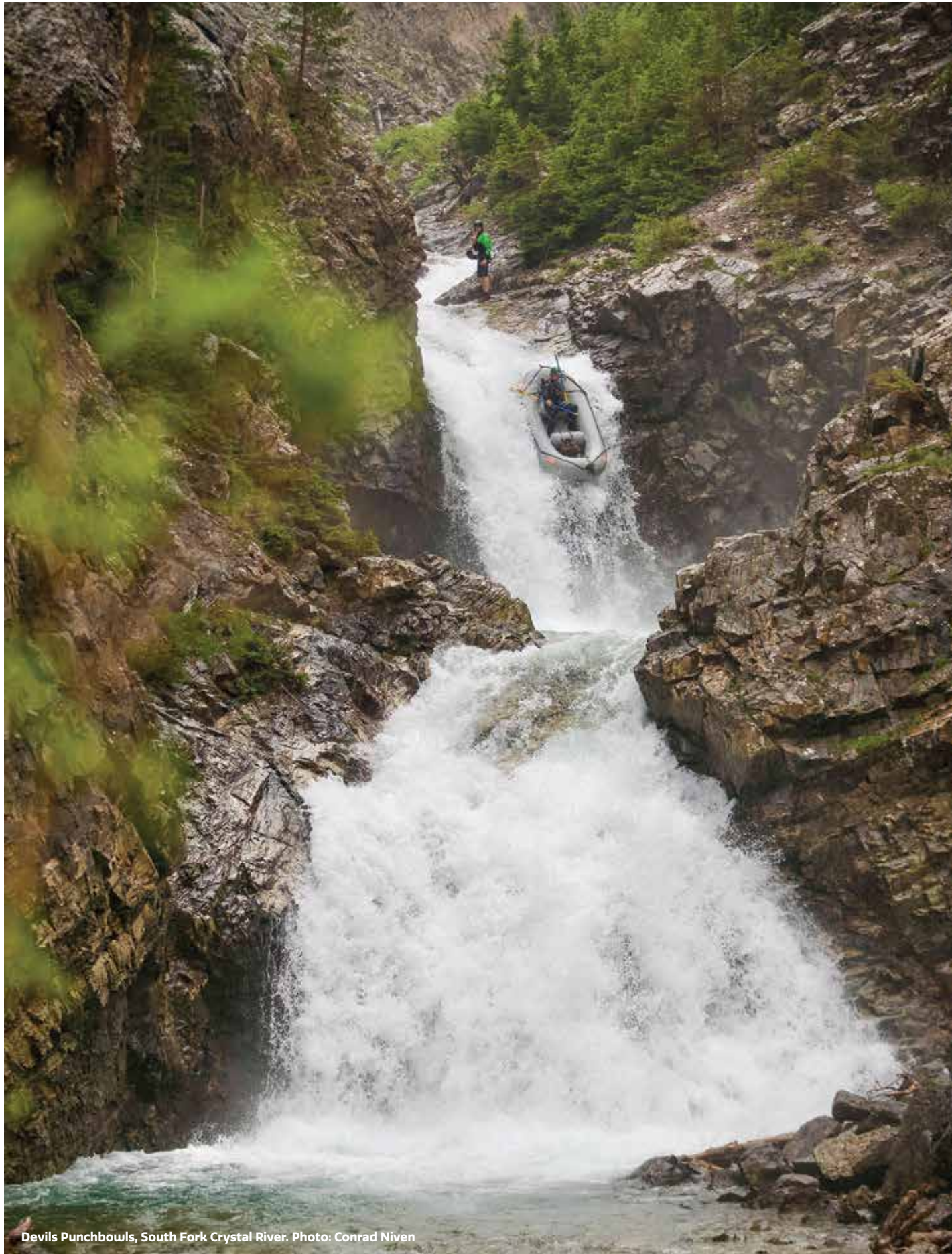
He was plagued with learning challenges and struggled in the classroom. He has become one of many reminders for me, as an educator, that success in a conventional learning space is not an indicator of intelligence, ingenuity, creativity, and drive. Once he started, Martin quickly became the best fly fisherman I have ever witnessed. And I have been surrounded by master fly fishermen my whole life.

He fished the way my father fished, below the surface. I once watched him catch 26 fish within an hour, his black lab splashing every which way, in the world-famous tailwaters below Ruedi reservoir on the Fryingpan River—waters that most fly fishermen find elusive and challenging. Fishermen who had traveled from far and wide watched this spectacle, asking him what he was using, which he would share with enthusiasm. He soon had us all using the same flies. I think I caught two fish that day, for which I was thrilled, but none of us could feel the water, the bottom, the fish, like Martin could.

He is the type of fisherman who invented his own system of fly-line and leaders, because there was nothing out there in the industry that quite fit what was in his mind's eye. In no time he was pulling fish out of the Crystal River that were encroaching on state records. At the same time, he began mastering his niche as a glass artist.



Kayo and his dad fishing the Crystal. Photos: Courtesy of Kayo Ogilby



Devils Punchbowl, South Fork Crystal River. Photo: Conrad Niven

He figured out how to blow glass fish with enough accuracy and detail to match species all over the world, something no one else was really doing in the glass world. He was constantly trying to figure out what technique would allow him to bring something like an accurate camouflage pattern to a brook trout. He would bring his fish into fly shops and trade them for fly fishing equipment. Word spread across the fly fishing world. If you wanted a masterful piece of glass art of your favorite home water fish, Martin was your guy. Now you have to get in line to get one of his pieces of art.

If it came down to choosing between fishing the Fryinpan or the Crystal on any given day, Martin chooses the Crystal. "It's a freestone river. It is not dammed at any point of its journey. This has become a rare thing for rivers in the West and the watershed therefore still holds on to some vestige of its original state. The very core of who I have become as an artist and fly fisherman is predicated on the well-being of this river."

Below Avalanche Creek, the Crystal widens and relaxes a little bit. We've dropped our guards in this stretch and swapped our vigilance with a playboating radar as each of us engages in the more playful decision-making process of whether to kickflip waves presented to us or catch a surf on the fly. There are plenty of micro eddies, holes to boof, and moves to make, as each paddler paints with their own pallet through this section.

We pass under the Avalanche Creek bridge and past Avalanche Ranch—the hot springs and lodge where my sister Molly and our parents have used the geothermal water associated with Mt. Sopris as a means of living. My dad endlessly oversees the hot water, my mom runs the antique and gift store, Molly manages the lodge and hot springs, and her husband Tai raises grass fed beef in pastures of the lower Crystal River Valley.

"It's a freestone river. It is not dammed at any point of its journey. This has become a rare thing for rivers in the West...The very core of who I have become as an artist and fly fisherman is predicated on the well-being of this river."

Tai is a believer that most landscapes have evolved with hoofed ungulates and, if done right, cattle grazing can enhance grass ecosystems rather than degrade them. He and his brothers, and now his two children Fisher and Phia, have chased that vision through their enterprise, Phoenix Ranching. They also use these cows as their source of meat for Fat Belly Burgers, a small farm to table burger joint on the west end of Mainstreet in Carbondale.

Fisher's grandmother, Francie Jacober, a retired lifelong teacher, manages the restaurant. When she is not doing that she serves as a Pitkin County Commissioner. It would not be many weeks after we paddled this stretch before I would witness Francie take the lead on presenting a comprehensive case to the Carbondale Town Council to get the town's support in fighting for the federal designation of the Crystal River as Wild and Scenic. Doing so would forever preserve it from potential future dams and diversions. It is in these underattended and quiet public meetings, and the time before and after, where the true labor of making a difference happens.

I am again reminded of this several weeks later as Chantel Hope and Gracyn Voorhees, the student leaders of the CRMS environmental club, organize a meeting at the Bluebird Cafe in Glenwood Springs to zoom with newly elected District 57 Colorado representative Elizabeth Velasco and state senator Dylan Roberts. They meet to discuss what environmental issues and bills the two representatives are advocating for this session of the state congress. The meeting is small—four or five other people beyond the club are there. I am inspired by this group of students' eagerness to engage and find their way into the political spaces where action can occur, which will culminate in a trip to the capitol in April to lobby senators on bills and issues that they are passionate about.

Why do we choose to live in the West? We were drawn to something raw and gritty. A free-flowing river and the way the morning light danced off its water grabbed our soul and wouldn't let go.



North Fork Crystal River. Photo Michael Curtis

On this night, the issue that catches my ear is Velasco's intention to take on water inequality that is felt by multiple trailer park communities which serve as critical employee housing in the ever more expensive housing crunch in mountain valleys. There are no processes in place to guarantee that this type of housing has safe water. It's the wild west in this regard, and it plays out as one more significant barrier for working communities—often communities of color—to navigate as they try to make ends meet across Colorado. It's a messy situation and the work is hard, slow, and complicated, and in desperate need of attention.

At these flows, it's not long before we eddy out at the marble slab. This is one of a multitude of marble blocks that were dumped into the riverbed from trains hauling marble down from the Yule Creek Marble Quarry in the mine's early history. This may be the only place on the planet where a kayaker can cartwheel or stern squirt a feature created by a slab of pure marble.

These marble dumps are now historical landmarks and the uniqueness of this stretch of river catalyzes conversation about the upper headwaters of the Crystal, as we float through some of the boogie water below. Fisher and I find ourselves comparing notes on our last backpacking trips upstream of the town of Marble. I had finished a 10-day wilderness orientation trip with a group of seven new CRMS students in Marble. Our route had started at Maroon Lake in Aspen and wove our way past Geneva Lakes, past Silver Creek, and into the upper reaches of the Crystal. The year prior Fisher had connected a route up Avalanche Creek, to Capital and Pierre Lakes, and out to Marble. That year CRMS had been unable to conduct its normal wilderness orientation because of Covid, so his parents just created an experience and route of their own. We soon are discussing our favorite nooks and crannies, geologic oddities, and new terrain we had seen on those trips.

Downstream of BRB Resort, the river opens up into a floodplain that cuts through glacial outwash terraces, recording the last four glaciations of the Pleistocene. These terraces provide the first significant agricultural space in the Crystal River watershed and with them the first irrigation diversions, in the form of wing dams. Late in the summer this stretch of water, just above the fish hatchery, becomes almost devoid of water. It is here where the big questions overtly and visually manifest themselves. The dance between human use and the well-being of a fluvial ecosystem is layed raw and exposed.

A few short months after that morning's spring paddle I would get an email from my sister Molly, directed to all of Fisher's

As more and more of us come to the West for the same reason, we run the risk of trammeling and losing the very treasure that brought us here in the first place. So we must find in our lives as Westerners a circular path.

teachers, letting us know that he would be late to school that day and she wasn't quite sure what time he would get there. He had shot his first elk, it had been an all-night journey of packing it out of the high country, and now they were in their kitchen shoulder-deep in butchering elk.

Why do we choose to live in the West? We, or someone in our family's lineage, were drawn to something raw and gritty. A free-flowing river and the way the morning light danced off its water grabbed our soul and wouldn't let go, an alpine meadow high in a cirque where the silence that hung along with the last of the alpenglow. Our access to these spaces feed us, both figuratively and literally. It's in these spaces where we make our art, draw our deepest connections with each other, and put our demons to rest. It is also in these spaces where we quite literally make our living. Ecologists would label these spaces as providing "Ecosystem Services." Without our protected, treasured, and preserved wild spaces, the paychecks in the West would quite literally dry up.

As more and more of us come to the West for the same reason, we run the risk of trammeling and losing the very treasure that brought us here in the first place. So we must find in our lives as Westerners a circular path. First, as Ed Abbey would say, "get out there and hunt and fish and mess around with your friends, ramble out yonder and explore the forests, climb the mountains, bag the peaks, run the rivers, breathe deep of that yet sweet and lucid air, sit quietly for a while and contemplate the precious stillness, the lovely, mysterious, and awesome space. Enjoy yourselves, keep your brain in your head and your head firmly attached to the body, the body active and alive." Then come back to work and sustain our families. And then find time to fight for the spaces we cherish, and in so doing, partake in this great experiment of democracy. Then, get back out there and play.

My dad, along with other dedicated river stewards, has been working to designate the Crystal River Wild and Scenic for years. It is time to finally provide this river the permanent protection it deserves. ■

The Seesaw Battle to Protect Clean Water Rages On

By Evan Stafford



Photo: Evan Stafford

WHY LOWERING NATIONAL PROTECTIONS FOR OUR FRESH

water drinking supply that millions of Americans rely on and recreate in is even on the table is a mystery to most people in this country. The public overwhelmingly supports protecting the quality of water in our rivers and creeks. A poll by Morning Consult released in September of 2022 reports that 95% of Americans say protecting the water in our nation's lakes, streams, and rivers is important, and 88% agree it's important that the EPA maintain its authority under the Clean Water Act. The poll also found 79% of Americans want to strengthen or maintain current clean water standards, while just 8% want to relax them.

The Waters of the United States rule (WOTUS), the law that governs which waters are protected under the Clean Water Act, has undoubtedly turned into a political football. This complicates the implementation of the Clean Water Act and threatens the water quality of our rivers. If this all sounds familiar, it's because this seesaw political battle over protecting our nation's water quality has been stamped by our community's willingness to continue the fight to maintain the spirit of the Clean Water Act. Three recent actions stand out in exemplifying the decades of punting over the federal government's ability to prevent pollution seeping into America's waterways: the late 2022 reinstatement of a more protective WOTUS rule after it had been repealed two years earlier, the early 2023 introduction of legislation to immediately repeal the reinstated rule, all overshadowed by the Supreme Court's acceptance of a case that could challenge the authority of the Clean Water Act to regulate the nation's water quality.

The Environmental Protection Agency released a new final WOTUS rule on December 30th, 2022. We celebrated the new rule to restore protections for many of America's wetlands and rivers that had lost coverage under the previous version of the rule. Desert and ephemeral streams were particularly big winners under the new rule, as protections for many of these rivers were lost under the prior rule and will now return. The new rule relies on science that is familiar to all paddlers, and tests that are robust enough to work across our hydrologically diverse nation, to determine which streams and wetlands are likely to carry pollutants downstream and thus require Clean Water Act coverage.

Unfortunately, less than a month later, before the new rule could even be instituted and in one of the first acts of the 118th Congress, House members put forth a resolution to repeal it under the Congressional Review Act. The resolution is unlikely to pass in the Senate, but may only need one or two more votes. We'd also expect the President to veto the bill, but this is all of our country's clean water supply and we'd like to see strong bipartisan support for the Clean Water Act that mirrors the public's support for this bedrock environmental law. It seems pretty basic, but Congress frequently needs a reminder from the public about the importance of clean water. We try to make sending this reminder really simple with our easy-action forms. Follow our social media channels or make sure you're



Photo: Fontaine Rittelmann

subscribed to our email BETA newsletter for the latest action opportunity and reach out to your representatives to let them know how important clean water is to you and your family.

On top of the status of the WOTUS rule itself, the Supreme Court, which takes up barely 1% of the cases it's presented with, has decided to hear a case with the narrow focus of the EPA's jurisdiction over one small property in Idaho that could impact water quality for the entire country. This pending Supreme Court case is set up in a way that the court could consider and severely reduce the bounds of Clean Water Act coverage nationwide, but the outcome will be unclear until the case moves forward. American Whitewater is among many groups who joined an Amicus Brief on that case, *Sackett v. EPA*, in support of maintaining the authority of the Clean Water Act. Whether the Court makes a landmark sweeping decision or a more narrow question of jurisdiction is up to the justices, but the ruling

will likely be challenged either way, and until Congress adds more clarity, the debate over the authority to regulate clean water will have real effects on our rivers and waters.

The Act, responsible for the incredible recovery of our nation's rivers from a time when pollution was poorly regulated or completely unregulated, deserves better than this. Our community's voice can make a big difference in protecting clean water. American Whitewater was a panelist on an EPA roundtable devoted to the subject last year to speak up for the recreational and public health benefits of clean rivers. American Whitewater has a consistent track record of supporting a broad, science-based approach to the implementation of the Clean Water Act to benefit the rivers we enjoy and also protect our members and communities from the impacts of excessive pollution. You can count on us to not be leaving this battleground anytime soon. ■

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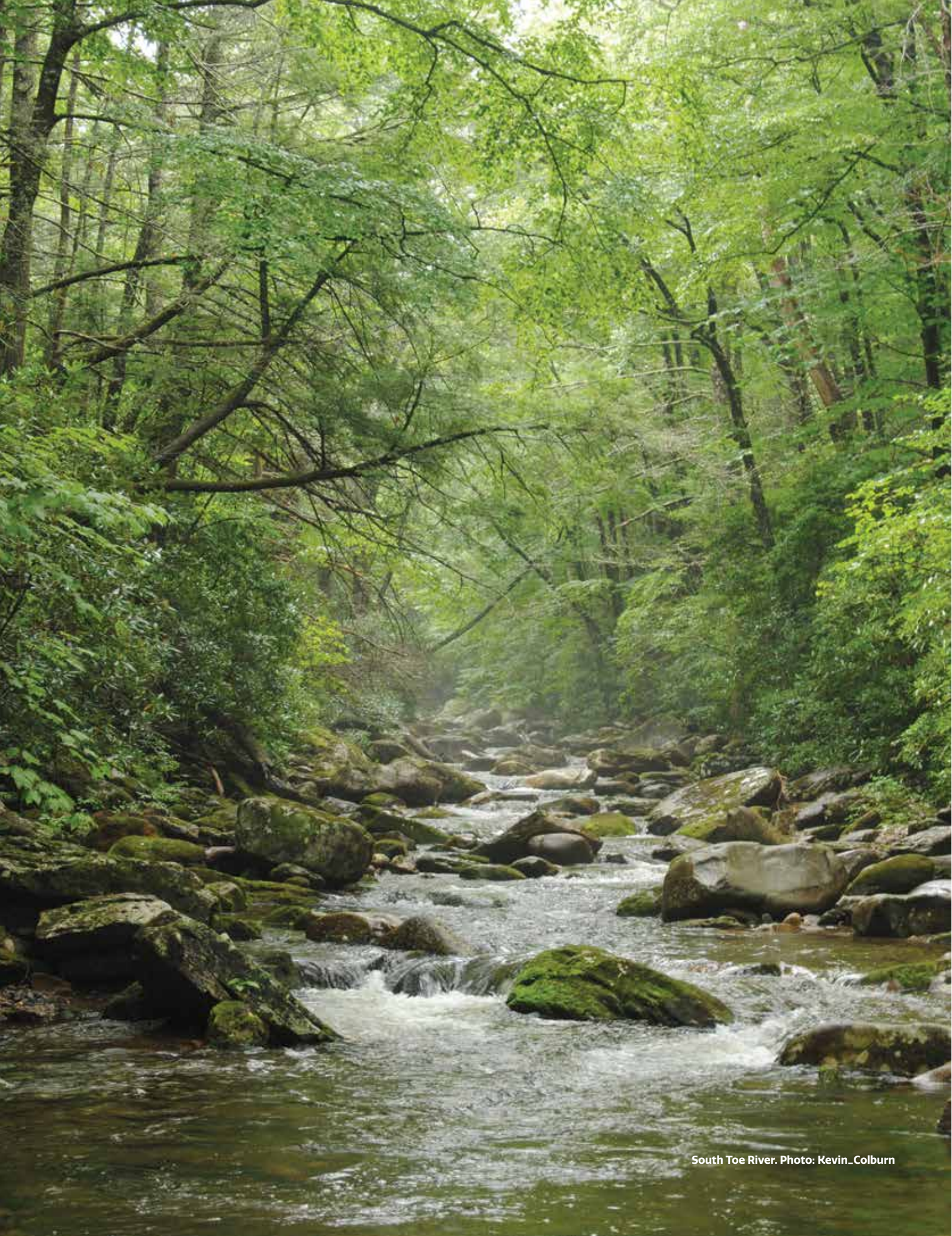
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South Toe River. Photo: Kevin_Colburn

New North Carolina Forest Plan Cause for Both Celebration and Disappointment

By Kevin Colburn

ON FEBRUARY 17, 2023, THE US FOREST SERVICE RELEASED their long awaited new management plan for the 1.1 million-acre Nantahala Pisgah National Forest, which will set the course of federal management of the area for the next two decades or longer. The Nantahala Pisgah Forest Partnership (the Partnership), a collaborative group of which American Whitewater is an active member, has spent the past decade developing recommendations for the plan to improve the management of the forest. The plan is both cause for celebration and for concern when it comes to the future of these special lands and the rivers that flow through them. While we'll be doing a deep analysis of the plan in the future, we have some early reflections to share.

The Pisgah National Forest is a biodiversity hotspot of global significance and a recreational treasure located in Western North Carolina. This landscape is resplendent with whitewater paddling opportunities thanks to staggering amounts of rainfall, the tallest mountains in the Eastern US, and diverse rock strata carved by frigid clean water into ancient bedrock riverbeds. This area is also the homeland of the Cherokee, and continues to play an important role in Cherokee culture. This National Forest has more visitors than all but a couple of US National Parks, and is a significant economic driver of the region. All of these factors contribute to the importance of this special place.

Wild and Scenic River Wins

A very bright spot in the new plan is the addition of nine outstanding rivers and streams that are newly protected in the plan based on fresh findings that they are eligible for Wild and Scenic designation. New protections total 46 stream miles and 14,720 acres of river corridors. This outcome doubled the number of eligible streams in the forest plan, and was one of American Whitewater's major goals. American Whitewater and the Partnership filed objections to the draft plan seeking additional streams, and were successful in securing new protections for the North Fork of the French Broad river through the objection process. Sadly the streams in Panther Valley were not found eligible. The newly eligible streams are: The North Fork French Broad River, Thompson River, Whitewater River, West

Fork Pigeon River, Flat Laurel Creek, South Toe River, Fires Creek, Santeetlah Creek, and the Cullasaja River. Paddlers will recognize these streams as some of the finest whitewater paddling and most beautiful streams in the southern Appalachians. A big thanks to all the paddlers and partners who helped earn protection for these streams!

Other Conservation Highlights

The plan includes a total of 49,000 acres of new recommended wilderness. While a portion of that acreage is already under congressional protection, roughly 34,000 acres are gaining new protected status. The plan also recognizes the special scenic and recreational values of the Craggy and Big Ivy area, albeit less acreage of that area than the public requested.

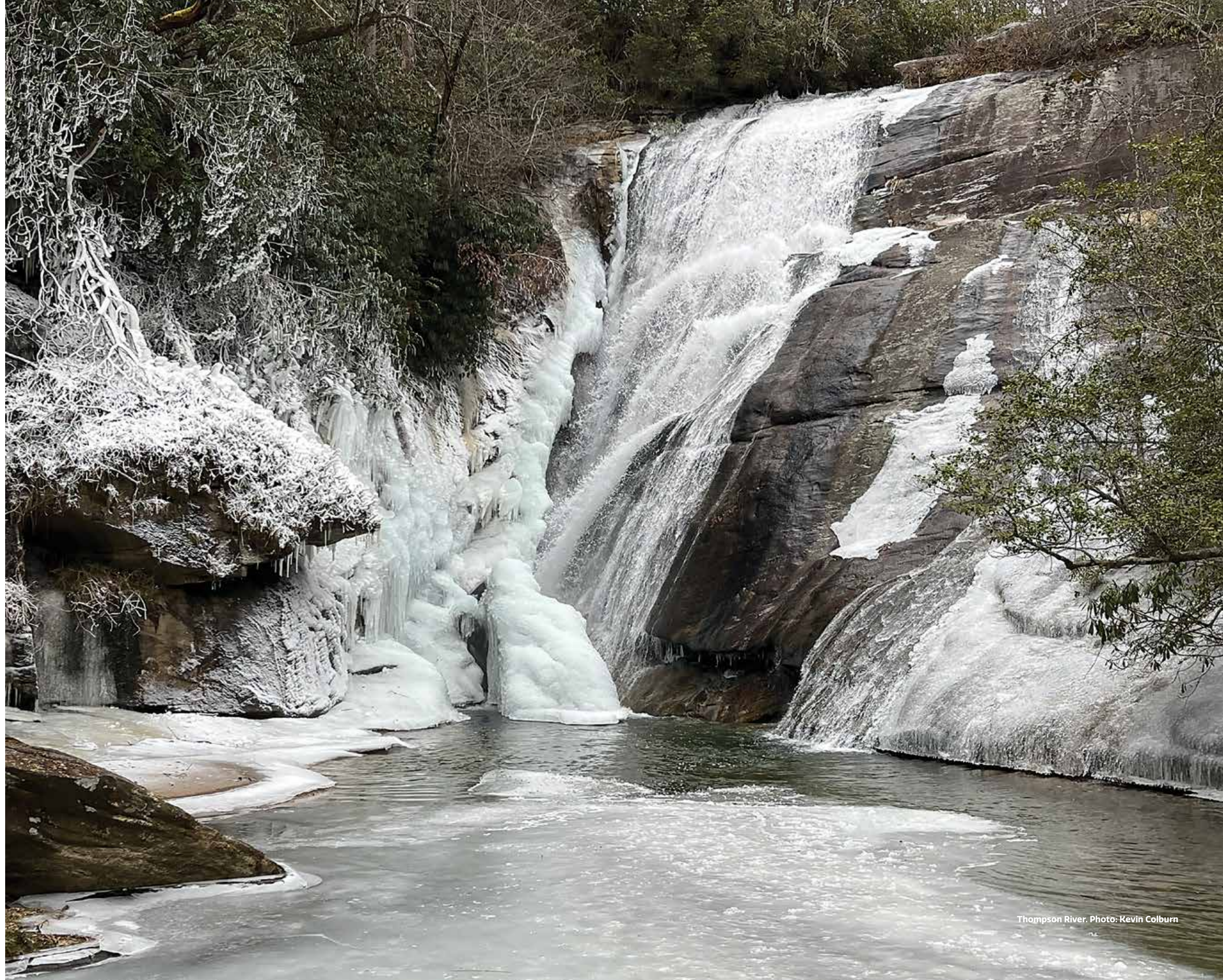
Consensus Approach Not Adopted

The Nantahala Pisgah Forest Partnership pitched the Forest Service an innovative set of recommendations that would have led to more interests being met on the forest more quickly and with less conflict. These recommendations included which lands should be open to active management like logging versus set aside for more passive management, how old growth and biodiversity can be best protected and restored, how to move multiple interests forward at a similar pace, and how recreation should be managed to be both inviting and sustainable. The Forest Service at best cherry-picked these recommendations, which is a disappointing response to such an intensive collaborative effort.

Recreation Results Mixed, Chattooga Limits Remain

The new plan does better on trail management, and offers trail users some opportunities for improvements. However, the Forest Service chose to ignore significant recreational opportunities, like easing the limits on paddling on the Upper Chattooga and improving rock climbing management guidelines. We would like to thank the many diverse groups on the Partnership for their universal support in easing Chattooga limits. It is profoundly disappointing that the Forest Service ignored this broad public support for easing the boating limits, especially considering that 11 years of monitoring data show no need for the paddling limits to be kept in place. Agency staff chose to

A very bright spot in the new plan is the addition of nine outstanding rivers and streams that are newly protected in the plan based on fresh findings that they are eligible for Wild and Scenic designation.



Thompson River. Photo: Kevin Colburn



Flat Laurel Creek. Photo: Kevin Colburn



Whitewater River. Photo: Stephen McGrady

The Forest Planning process showed that there is broad support for Wild and Scenic River protections in the area. American Whitewater is going to continue working with our partners and local communities to support congressional Wild and Scenic River designation efforts.

avoid the issue entirely in their analysis, yet included the old limits in the new plan.

What's Next?

One thing that the Forest Planning process showed is that there is broad support for Wild and Scenic River protections in the area. American Whitewater is going to continue working with our partners and local communities to support congressional Wild and Scenic River designation efforts. A similar effort is cued up to designate a broadly supported protected area in the Big Ivy watershed. Stay tuned for opportunities to support these efforts!

Another thing we've learned is that there are a lot of opportunities to keep collaborating on forest management in the area. This should translate to improved trails and river access areas, more creation of diverse habitat for wildlife, and more benefits for communities near the forest. The community of people that came together to support the forest planning process aren't going anywhere, and the common ground we've found will lead to better Forest management for decades to come.

Thank you to all the paddlers who spoke up for rivers during the planning process, and for all the other folks out there who supported paddling and rivers throughout the process! ■



Ouyhee Dreams

acrylic painting on canvas by Christina Russell.

Inspired by her many trips down the Ouyhee River in Eastern Oregon.

“The vibrancy of the geology and the exuberance of the place itself make the Ouyhee an incredibly special place and I’m so grateful for organizations like American Whitewater who are looking after our wild rivers. Rivers are my place to go when I need a dose of mother nature and humble pie. They remind me of the vastness of our Earth and how connected we all are through water. The playful otters remind me to play and the herons teach me to be patient and quiet, and comfortable in stillness. The whitewater is a constant teacher, reminding me to go with the flow but be strong in my direction. So much can be learned from our rivers. Through my art, I hope I can share the love I have for the rivers and inspire others to protect them.”

Christina’s lively art includes commissioned acrylic paintings, facemasks, prints, cards, stickers, and more and can be found at www.instagram.com/christinarussellart/ and www.etsy.com/shop/ChristinaMcKeownArt



How We Did It: Recycling Broken Boats Into Protecting Our Rivers

By Hannah Burr. Photos courtesy of Hannah Burr and Eric Adsit

Editor's note: This is the story of how Alex Barham and Hannah Burr, with the expert guidance and assistance from Kay Stroh, John Su and many others, have raised a sizable amount of support and funding for American Whitewater's river stewardship in the Northeast. Alex, who is one of the driving forces behind both the MooseFest and Beaver River Festival, events that take place on rivers with flows restored in large part by American Whitewater efforts, is a sponsored athlete with NRS and a longtime whitewater enthusiast. Hannah Burr is also an avid whitewater boat rider, medical student, and as partners and a fundraising team, they're an absolute force. Hannah runs the social media and sends all the packages, while Alex does the production and finishing.

I CAN'T TELL WHETHER ALEX'S LOVE OF THE ENVIRONMENT or his love of whitewater kayaking came first. He actually went to college for environmental science at SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, which he picked for its proximity to the Inner City Strife wave on the Black River.

The Boats2Boards story starts with Alex becoming very close friends with the manager of our local kayak retailer. One day the two of them took a ride to the municipal dump in an attempt to recycle a pile of warranty kayak hulls that our manky New York creek boating had destroyed.

Most modern plastic whitewater kayaks are made from #2 plastic, the same material as bottle caps and milk jugs. In theory, they



should be able to be recycled as part of the regular municipal waste stream. The two of them spent hours explaining to the staff at the dump in a tiny Adirondacks tourist town that despite appearances, the broken hulls could be recycled. The staff just chuckled and put them on the pile destined for the landfill.

After this early disappointment, Alex began experimenting with different solutions for reusing and recycling broken boats. Early reuse attempts revolved around taking the outfitting from a modern broken boat and putting it into a classic 90s model to make it far more comfortable. Documenting and offering advice on how to do these refurbishments at home also earned him a YouTube following. Alex made road cones, toboggans for our friend's kids, and even some pretty cool wall art. All of those experiments still left scraps, which he was adamant to keep out of the waste stream.

I'm not entirely sure what possessed Alex to first try melting hull plastic, or whether he was even specifically trying to make a cutting board. I do know that the first prototypes started making their way out of the garage during the depths of COVID lockdown boredom. The very first board was an ugly, warped brick of red plastic, but that was enough of a proof of concept for Alex to start tinkering. At first he just made them to give our friends as fun, compact mementos of the kayaks they had lost in battle. The heat from the melting equipment was also a handy way to keep our garage warm while we were working

on other projects that winter, so he just kept making them and improving his process as long as there was plastic on hand.

Once Alex ran out of friends to give the boards to, he wanted to find a new market for them so he could keep reducing the environmental impact of our sport. For the last few years, Alex has been working very closely with Bob Nasdor at AW to renegotiate the FERC licenses for the dams on our home rivers—the Moose, Beaver, and Black rivers. These rivers are actually an interesting part of whitewater history. They were the very first recreational release agreements implemented as part of FERC licensing in the country, and the first that American Whitewater worked on. In many ways, the negotiation of those first agreements 40 years ago gave rise to American Whitewater's advocacy role that paddlers have benefited from nationwide. Alex's passion for securing and improving upon these agreements led to the idea to sell the boards as a fundraiser for American Whitewater.

Alex pretty quickly exhausted the supply of broken boats stashed in friend's garages around the Adirondacks. To get more plastic he reached out to John Su, a kayaker in DC who cuts old boats into hand paddles and sells them to raise money for Team River Runner. John agreed to save his scraps from the next few boats he cut up and send them up north to Syracuse with traveling kayakers.



I cannot emphasize enough how crucial our partnership with John has become. He has done all of the hard work of setting up a volunteer-driven transport network to centralize donations of broken boats from most of the East Coast. He sends us a couple big loads of plastic every year via his extremely dedicated volunteers. The scraps from his hand paddle process provide a variety of color we couldn't achieve any other way. Plus it's just great to know that every broken boat gets used for the maximum possible good, benefiting two awesome organizations.

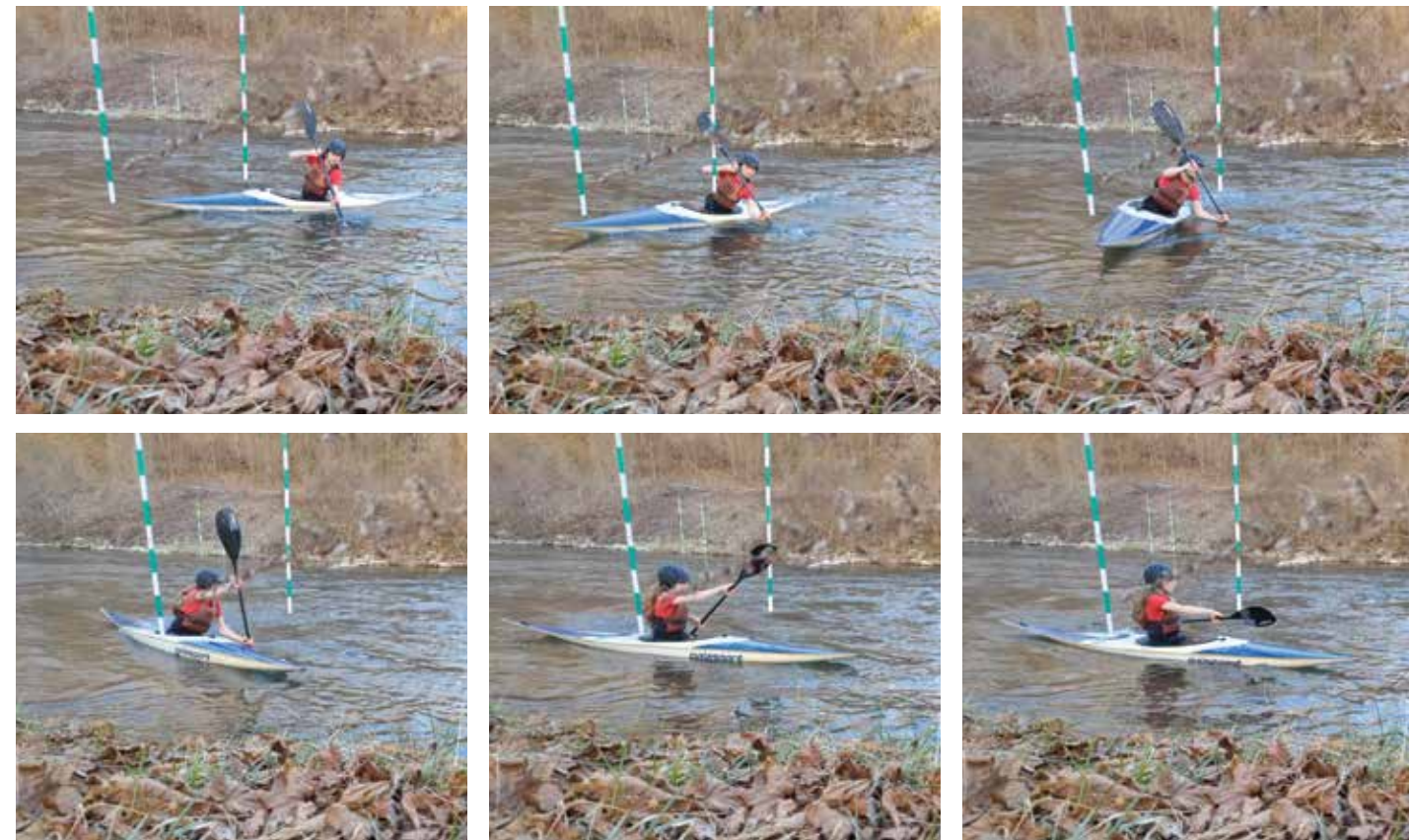
To thank John for his contributions, we gave him our first set of 20 reasonably well-finished boards to sell alongside his hand paddles as a test run. He was able to sell all of them on Facebook within only a few days for a higher than expected donation price, so we knew we had the market to go national. But first we needed to make more boards.

Once we had accumulated a big stack of boards we launched our own social media campaign in the fall of 2022, with the goal of selling boards as thoughtful holiday gifts for kayakers. Little did we expect that we would have trouble keeping up with demand, selling over 150 boards and raising almost \$12,000 in just three months! By my back of the envelope estimation, we have already repurposed over 550 pounds of plastic into kitchens across the world (The farthest we have shipped is Australia!). And there is no sign that demand is slowing, even after the holidays.

We have been humbled by the outpouring of support we have gotten for this project. We're excited to keep going with this and find new ways to partner with different parts of our community to raise money and awareness for river stewardship. To put it simply, the sport of whitewater kayaking would not exist in Upstate New York without the efforts of American Whitewater, so we feel it is our duty to support them in return. The fact that we can reduce the environmental impact of our sport in the process is just a bonus.

In terms of the actual process, there is a lot of artistry that goes into the production of the boards. It involves a potent combination of patience and power tools. Alex is also working on finding ways to reuse the waste plastic created in the finishing process.

Alex isn't making any money off the cutting boards. All of his time and tools are personally donated. To purchase a board, customers just have to send proof of a \$75 donation to AW or TRR and pay for shipping (Venmo and PayPal accepted). Alex is happy to make custom pieces with boat logos for an additional donation. Follow our social media to get updates when new stock is posted for sale! ■



Milo Duffek and the Stroke He Made Famous

By David Kurtz

MY FRIEND WILL PUT A WAGER ON MY RUNS AT THE Concord Slalom last May thinking the sequence of slalom gates to be too tight and difficult for my novice skills. Little did he know that I was learning from a foreign coach whose name was M. Duffek. The M stands for Milo and the description below is true and real.

Milo Duffek was probably the first to understand the mechanics of paddling, for he really had to. His kayak was slow and difficult to turn. You see this was in 1949, years before fiberglass resins, polyester, vinyl ester, and epoxy had been invented, so the kayak was constructed of wooden slats and a cloth cover. Note the photo of Duffek's real kayak as it hangs from the ceiling of his apartment today, decorated with plants. It was probably a Klepper. The longeron frame held a cloth covering. When in the water, the cloth parts between the longerons were pushed in so that the surface was anything but smooth. Compared with modern kayaks, turns were very slow and required a lot of muscle power.

Duffek understood the physical forces operating on a kayak in whitewater.

In these early days kayakers were just as excited about paddling whitewater as we currently are. However, their technique required a lot more muscle power and the moves were a lot slower.

At that time boaters used two techniques to put their kayak to shore from fast moving water. One way was to use a combination of low profile paddle strokes: the reverse sweep and the forward sweep. However, the reverse sweep, putting the back of the blade against the water, actually slowed the kayak down, working counter to what was desired.

The other method was to slide the kayak sideways using multiple reverse sweeps. The kayak attitude facing downstream was always maintained. In this way the boat slid mostly sideways while maintaining a stable position. Again this was a slow process.

Duffek must have liked a lot more action than the usual paddler. As well, he was interested in the slalom situation that was riskier, but quicker in returning the kayak to shore. He thus invented the bow draw stroke. The paddle was placed in the water in front of the paddler, but off to the side. At the same time the face of the blade was placed so that it caught the water.

Now, there are two situations where a bow draw stroke can be effective in turning the boat toward the paddle:

1. When the boat has a speed in the water, that is, when the boat is moving forward faster than the current, the blade in this position will be effective in turning the boat towards the paddle.
2. When entering an eddy, the blade again will be effective in moving the boat towards the paddle. (Note: the eddy can be in the middle of the stream found below a big rock there, or along the shore). The eddy, by definition, has current moving upstream.

While the first situation is effective in moving towards either shore when being driven faster than the current, the second is really effective in slalom situations.

The sequences of photos show the direction of the kayak moving into an eddy with the subsequent turning of the kayak upstream. This is accomplished by Duffek's stroke.

In these situations where the eddy is on the stream left, the kayak is turned to the left and if paddled correctly, eventually is turned upstream after a 180 degree turn.



In Duffek's time, paddlers would use a reverse sweep on the left and a bow forward sweep on the right to accomplish the same turn more slowly and with more effort. Duffek noticed that the reverse sweep part actually slows the boat down since the weight of the water is on the back side of the paddle. He reasoned that the kayak need not be slowed down simply by putting in a bow draw stroke on the left side. When properly done, the kayak would be increasing its speed in the turn.

He clearly showed the speed of this stroke in slalom races at the time and developed a reputation as a top paddler in doing so.

It is possible that, in addition to a slightly faster turning execution, he may have leaned the kayak in such a way as to further increase the turning speed. The longerons bottom-shape may have aided the turn and aided the forward speed of the kayak.

When I talked to him on July 13, 2019, he emphasized that there was a correct way of holding the paddle for this bow draw stroke. The paddler still observes the river ahead while looking under the upper arm, which is to say the paddle is kept at a forehead height.

Notice that the upper arm is held no higher than the head and the body is turned toward the direction movement of the kayak. "This is the strength position," Duffek explained to me. In addition, body movement turning towards the direction of the kayak movement also aids in seeing where one is going to go. If the upper arm is moved above the head in any way, strength is lost. (Ed. Note: Caution: If the arm is higher than the shoulder, there is a much greater risk for a shoulder joint dislocation). ■



The Duffek Cold War Politics, Secret Weapons, Subterfuge, and a Life-Changing Race Maneuver:

Alton Cheuning

MILO (PRONOUNCED MEE-LO) DUFFEK WAS BORN IN Czechoslovakia in 1928. After World War II, the nation was enveloped in the communist sphere of influence by Soviet Russia. Milo was born into an affluent family and wanted to become a doctor like his father, but at that time the communist rulers frowned on bourgeois society and impeded his chances of higher education. Milo determined athletics were his best path forward. Throughout his life, Milo excelled at various sports but skiing and ski racing were his early passions. He became interested in paddling while marching alongside the kayak team in a May Day parade in Prague. He excelled “rapidly” at canoe slalom, but despite his obvious skill, the governing boards did not allow him to compete in international events. In 1949, he accompanied the Czech flatwater team to Geneva and saw his first whitewater race. At age 22, he converted to whitewater slalom racing, and in 1951, as the best Czech racer, Duffek was allowed to compete in the Internationals in Austria. He again excelled, and by 1953 the stage was set for Duffek to exhibit his remarkable skills on an international level in Merano, Italy...and to debut his secret weapon.

As Bill Endicott, noted writer, racer, and coach tells the story, Duffek’s innovation came while practicing high brace rolls. Duffek started to tip over and caught himself with a high brace. He found he could subtly alter the angle of the supporting blade and change boat direction while bringing the boat closer to the paddle.... At Merano, in 1953, this promised to be a game-changer.



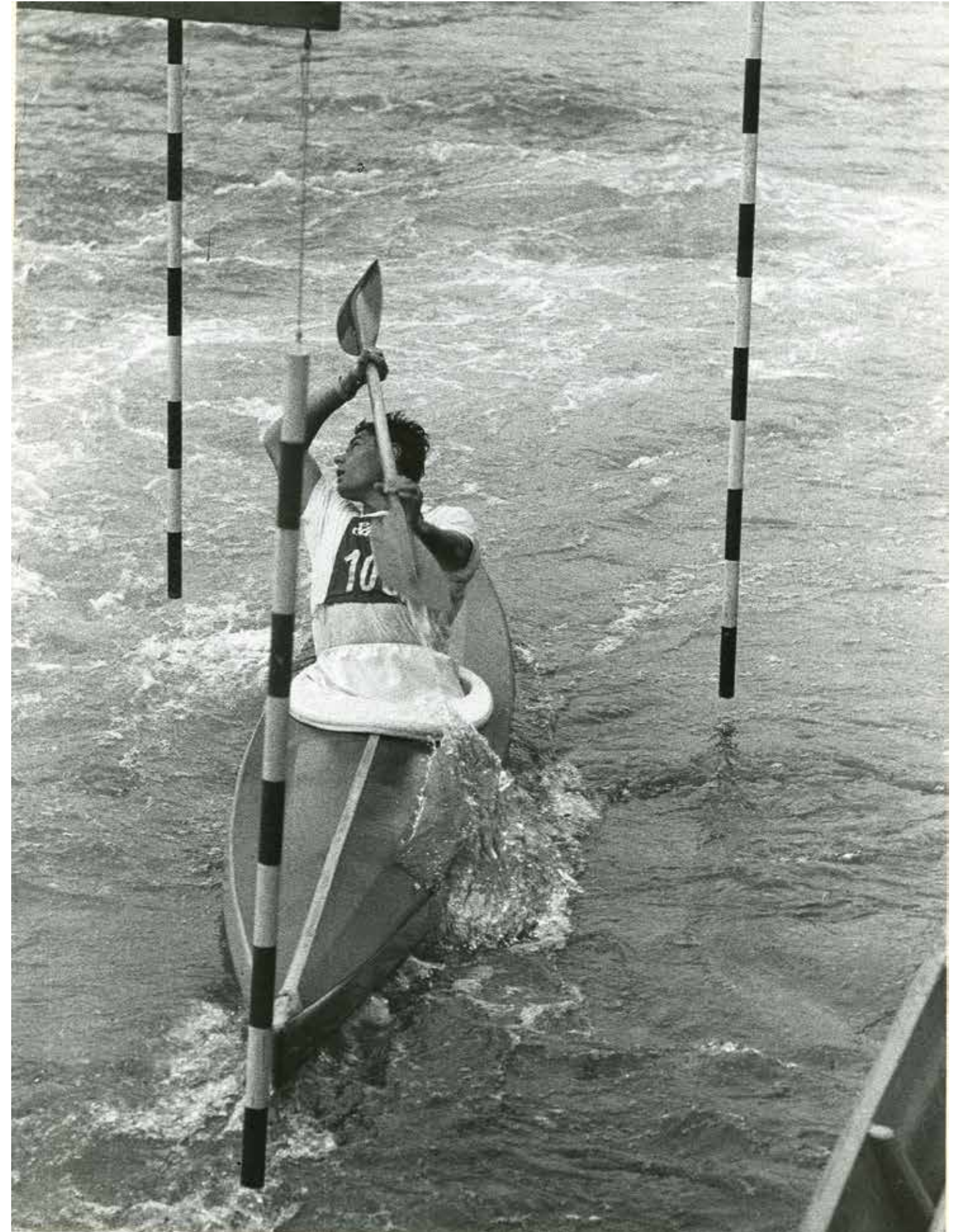
The International competition in 1953 took place in a river town, Merano, Italy, where German is spoken more than Italian. Bill Endicott beautifully describes the setting of the 1953 Championships:

“The Passer River flows right through the middle of the town and it is possible to sit high above the river at a café while watching the antics below. An ancient Roman bridge, the Ponte Romano in Italian, spans the river, providing a spectacular setting for the championships of one of the most colorful of sports. Flower gardens abound in the area close to the river and in the distance one can see the mountains that are such an attraction during the ski season.”

As Endicott tells the story, Czech authorities were reluctant to allow Duffek to compete in Merano in 1953, for fear of his attempting defection. Apparently Duffek was displaying an independent spirit at the time. To humble Duffek the communist organizers said he could only compete if he beat the East Germans in the preliminary races. The East Germans were the elite K1 paddlers of the time but Duffek persevered and won, frustrating the authorities but gaining a position on the team for the International Championships. His participation came with a catch: Milo would be accompanied at the competition by a guard who would spend every minute, night and day, with him.



Czech authorities were reluctant to allow Duffek to compete in Merano in 1953, for fear of his attempting defection. Apparently Duffek was displaying an independent spirit.



***What happened to Duffek,
a mental lapse, a lack of concentration?
Or did he have another angle on the race?***



***In this breathtaking scenery and tight security,
Milo's secret weapon was unveiled...
the consensus was Duffek
would win the event handily.***

In this breathtaking scenery and tight security, the Duffek stroke—Milo's secret weapon—was unveiled. In the practice runs, competitors from other countries saw Duffek and other Czech paddlers using a series of moves that allowed quick turns around gates.... The Duffek stroke and its variations are fairly advanced and no doubt other racers experimented with it in the time before the race; however, the consensus was Duffek would win the event handily.

Now we enter the shrouded reasoning of Milo's mind. He was a gifted athlete who had dedicated his life to success in his sport. Duffek had met political resistance and persevered. He was on the world's largest stage and was set to make history, not only for his prowess in paddling, but also for his innovation in technique. He had beaten the Austrian and East German racers considered the best in the world. Surrounded by all these glorious possibilities, in the final run of the competition, Duffek failed. He placed fourth or was it 27th?

The Duffek mystery fogs the recorded history of the event. But, in any event, he lost. How? Duffek, on approaching Gate 14, a relatively easy flatwater gate, brushed it with the bow of his kayak, resulting in a then-standard 100-second penalty.

Why did this happen? Duffek was known to be somewhat careless in his paddling at times, of displaying nonchalance to the outcome once his superior skill was evident. As Endicott noted, "Milo was a flashy racer, capable of brilliant moves, but he lacked consistency; some said concentration." Later, in the 1959 Internationals, Milo was significantly ahead of the competition, when he simply missed the last gate, going right past it. So, in Merano, in 1953, was this what happened to Duffek, a mental lapse, a lack of concentration? Or did he have another angle on the race?



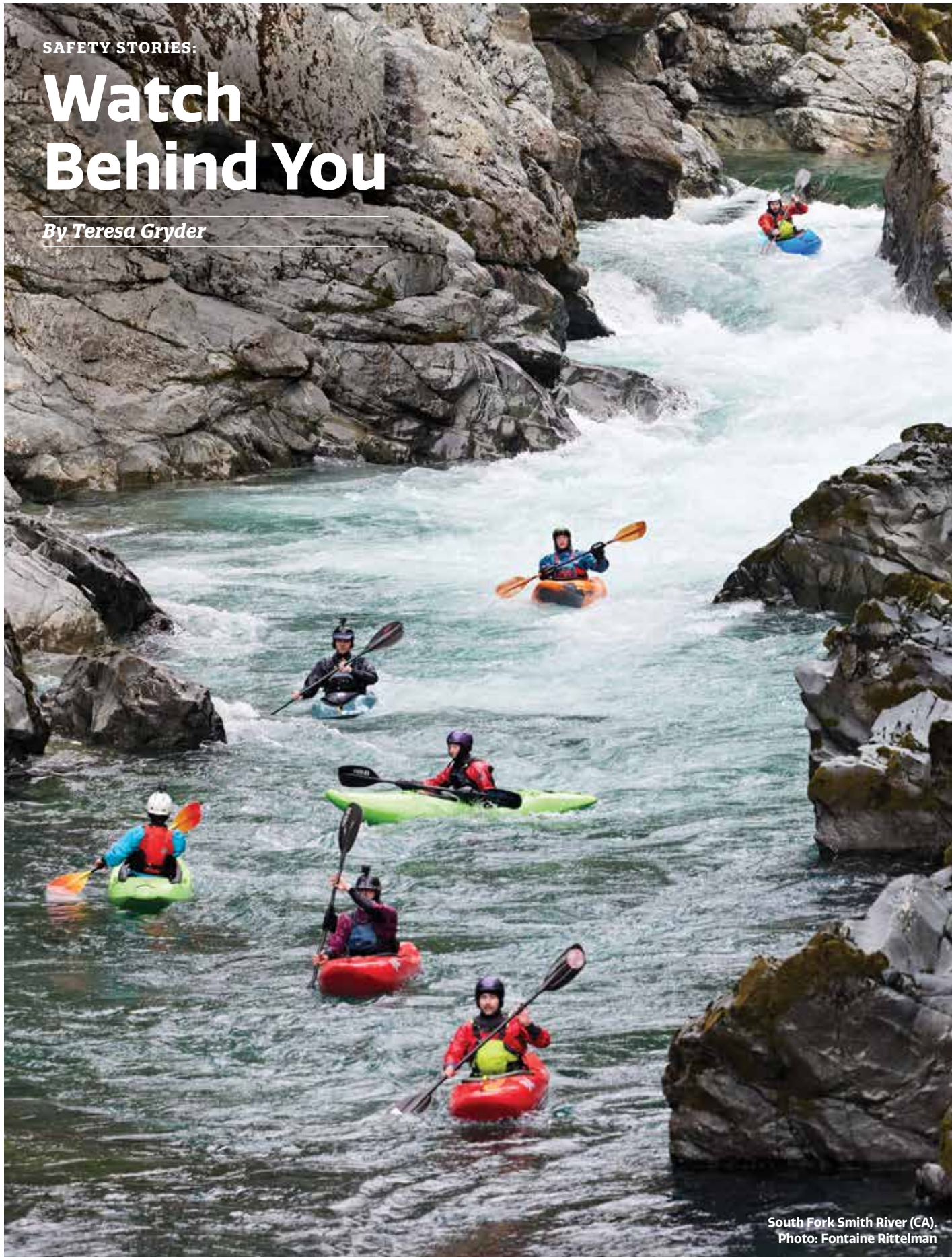
Milo had spent time considering other plans beyond unveiling his new stroke or winning the international competition. Years later Milo said he felt winning his division would draw too much attention, making his new plans of escape to the West more difficult to realize. So, if he is to be believed, the Duffek maneuver, the Duffek deception led to the Duffek "Duffection."

Some versions of Milo's throwing of the race have him missing the final slalom gate and continuing to paddle on to Switzerland and freedom. Considering the gate he missed was number 14 and not the last, and that the Passer River flows into the Adige River, which empties into the Adriatic Sea in northwestern Italy, Milo could not paddle on to freedom. His departure, his Duffection, came soon after the concluding festivities. By now, Milo's bodyguard was invested in Milo's success, acting not only as an overseer but also as an assistant, helping him move boats and other gear. The guard took Milo's defeat to heart and during the celebrations drank morosely and liberally. As the story goes, Milo excused himself, went to the men's room and escaped from a bathroom window. Milo hid with the Swiss racers and left with them to begin his new life in Geneva. The fate of the bodyguard is not recorded. ■

SAFETY STORIES:

Watch Behind You

By Teresa Gryder



South Fork Smith River (CA)
Photo: Fontaine Rittelman

ONE DAY, I SWAM OUT OF A KAYAK AND WHEN I SURFACED, there was no one there. I was on a trip with 17 other paddlers, but I was alone.

The failure in our safety system is a mundane one that happened for an unusual reason. I was left behind because I am a competent boater. Folks know that I have a good roll, and that I rarely get into trouble. They say to themselves “she can take care of herself.” I wasn’t left so far behind, but no one was watching, so I get to tell you what happened.

There were boats in the eddies below when I started the rapid. I was in the middle of the group, not lagging behind or holding anyone up. We were playing our way down. I caught an eddy in the rapid and there was this lovely fast wave in front of me so I slid onto it and got a great ride. Nobody was lined up to catch this wave because there was no way to access it from the bottom of the rapid. People continued to filter downstream.

I rode the wave for less than a minute. When I came off the wave I went for an eddy on the left and flipped over. I tried to roll four times, alternating sides. The boat seemed very heavy. I barely got a breath each time before going back down. I didn’t have nose plugs on, so my head filled with water. I ran out of air. After four tries I was desperate enough to wet exit. I was in slow water and easily swam it all into an eddy upstream from a giant rock that blocked my view. My paddling buddies were somewhere on the other side of that rock. I caught my breath sitting in the eddy then set to the project of emptying the boat. Finally another boater came into view and I was so glad to see him. I indicated with a pat to my head that I was OK and he disappeared again. My throw bag came downstream, and I grabbed it. I hadn’t clipped it back in (a mistake) after our recent extraction of a canoe from a tree.

It took me a while to get put together. I was shaken. I had trouble with my sprayskirt. My rubbery arms couldn’t get it on. I couldn’t stop thinking about what had happened, how and why.

After this swim, I have been repeatedly told to consider what I did wrong. I make plenty of mistakes; I am as human as anyone. I did not practice a roll in that unfamiliar kayak. I rushed my roll, because I am afraid (from experience) of hitting my head, and want to get out of the water ASAP. Before all that, I flipped over. Some might say that surfing that wave for a whole minute was a mistake, but I don’t think so. That wave was part of the reason that I love kayaking. Maybe paddling with a club was a mistake, but I am still doing that, and learning how to do better.

I was told that I should not have been in the rear of the pack. I was told that it is my job to stay ahead of the sweep boat. I was told that, when you are last, you take extra precautions not to get into trouble.

The implication is that I deserved what happened, or what could have happened, because I was last. The implication is that all those people who went downstream without looking back were not expected to care. I beg to differ.

Nobody deserves to be left behind because they catch a surfing wave. If you have an issue with someone’s pace for any reason, talk to them about it. Don’t ditch them. If you don’t like them, don’t boat with them anymore, but don’t ditch them. We all deserve to have someone looking out for us. At least if you are watching the person behind you, you’ll know where to go to fetch them if something goes wrong.

Every second that a paddler is in the water, whether upside down or swimming, is a higher risk second than those spent upright in the boat. So much can happen.

Blame could be laid on the designated sweep. I am certain that this particular individual is a true heart and won’t do that again. But I want everyone to watch out for the back of the pack. It is everyone’s responsibility to look out for the boater behind them. Everyone’s.

This rule is not part of the AW safety code, but it could be the most important safety rule for group paddling: You keep an eye on the person behind you. You don’t leave them behind. You notice when they are having trouble. If they get into trouble you help them as best you can, you attempt to alert others ahead of you. It sounds really basic but it falls apart on both club trips and trips with big egos. Everybody needs help sometimes, and when you paddle with other people you are both hoping they’ll help you, and implicitly offering your help too. If this isn’t true for you, then I, for one, don’t want to boat with you.

Every second that a paddler is in the water, whether upside down or swimming, is a higher risk second than those spent upright in the boat. So much can happen. I know it in my gut. I have lost people to the river. Not that long ago I watched as the blue body of a man I'd laughed with that morning was pulled dead from the river, watched as the rescue squad cut his dry-suit off and did CPR, making his belly balloon up rhythmically. He'd gotten stuck on a log and we had not been able to get him out. I have lost a lover to the river, found days later head down under an undercut rock. This is personal. If you keep paddling long enough, you will see statistics happen. You could be a statistic. Statistics happen everywhere, not just on Class V water. On a recent kayak self-supported South Fork Salmon trip we had just come through the final set of big rapids (Fall Creek Rapids) and were floating through a long straightaway of Class II+ toward camp. Our group was a pack of lifetime whitewater paddlers. I was second from the front of the pack, eager to get to camp, but I hit an eddy and looked back to make sure everyone was coming. A quarter mile behind me was a pod of three kayakers, chatting as they floated toward me. Behind them was a lone green boat.

While the three chatted the guy in the green boat got stuck in a nasty little pour-over, swam out, walked back upstream and pulled his kayak out of the hole, and dragged it up on a rock to

empty it. When I told them "Kent swam!" they were surprised. They weren't worried about him in that Class II section. But things can go wrong anywhere. Heart attacks happen, strainers are sometimes in bad places, and not every paddler gets to go home every day.

When we launch together, we are making a pact to finish together. We look out for each other as if our lives depended on it. Because sometimes they do.

That is why I say keep an eye on the paddler behind you. Please. Thanks.

Originally written August 15, 2016, this was not printed. I was traumatized not by the swim but by the fact of being left alone. It took a while to trust my fellow paddlers again, and to this day I am more selective about who I go with, and more aggressive about setting the tone. I continue to hear stories from people frustrated with the obliviousness or selfishness of some paddlers. Who you boat with matters. Take care of each other; it is the right thing to do. ■

What to get for the paddler who has everything?

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Photo by Cara Giannone

SAFETY

AW Accident Summary

July – December 2022

By Charlie Walbridge, AW Safety Editor

AFTER A BUSY FIRST SIX MONTHS ON THE WHITEWATER safety front, the second half of 2022 was considerably quieter. The 24 U.S. deaths reported to American Whitewater included only 16 paddling deaths. The eight tubing fatalities reported are a lot more than usual. Inner tubes are not considered "boats" by state agencies, so tubers are classified as swimmers and reporting is hit or miss. For now, it's just a tragic anomaly, rather than a trend. These tubing accidents were all distressingly similar: no one wore a life vest, and they all fell off their tubes and disappeared underwater. I won't be discussing these accidents individually, but brief accounts are available in the AW Accident Database. Additionally, in five kayak and rafting accidents, the victim was not wearing a PFD. The lack of life vests in over 50% of reported accidents reflects the inexperience of many new users drawn to river sports during the Covid pandemic.

In other moving water boating accidents, we had one whitewater kayak, three recreational kayaks, two packraft, one SUP, four commercial and four private rafts, and one IK. The four commercial rafting deaths were in the East; the six private inflatable-related fatalities were out West. Oregon led the accident count with five. There were no canoeing accidents reported in the US, but we will share information on one that occurred in Canada. The total fatalities reported to AW this year, 49, is slightly above the average for the last 20 years.

Kayaking Accidents

Tennessee's Little River runs along the western boundary of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It's a Class III run with several more difficult drops. Midway through the run is a big Class V+ ledge called The Sinks, and the two Class IV rapids above it are known as The Meanies. These drops are full of undercut rocks and sieves and were the site of a previous fatality in 2012. Carl Keaney, 61, an experienced kayaker, was paddling with friends on December 16th when he flipped and swam in the First Meanie. He was next to his boat as he was swept into the second Meanie and pushed under a large boulder on river left below the drop. His boat and paddle washed free, but he did not. After a thorough search, the group called for help. A search team including National Park Rangers and local rescue squads found his body the next day. The other three kayakers who died were boating alone. On August 7th a 25-year-old man was seen kayaking the Wenatchee River without a life-

jacket when fell off his kayak near the Leavenworth KOA and disappeared. Swimmers in the area tried to save the man, and managed to get him to shore, but he could not be revived. On August 23rd Brian Lizer, 46, flipped while trying to cross Alaska's Knik River and sank beneath the surface. Again, no life vest was worn. His body was found three miles downstream. Then on August 27th the body of a lone kayaker was pulled from the Lower Madawaska River in Ontario, Canada. There were no witnesses, so no one knows what happened. Finally, on September 3rd, a 68-year-old man was found in the Salmon River near Twin Bridges, Idaho. His kayak was spotted later that day after he was reported missing, and his body turned up a few days later.

Canoeing Accidents

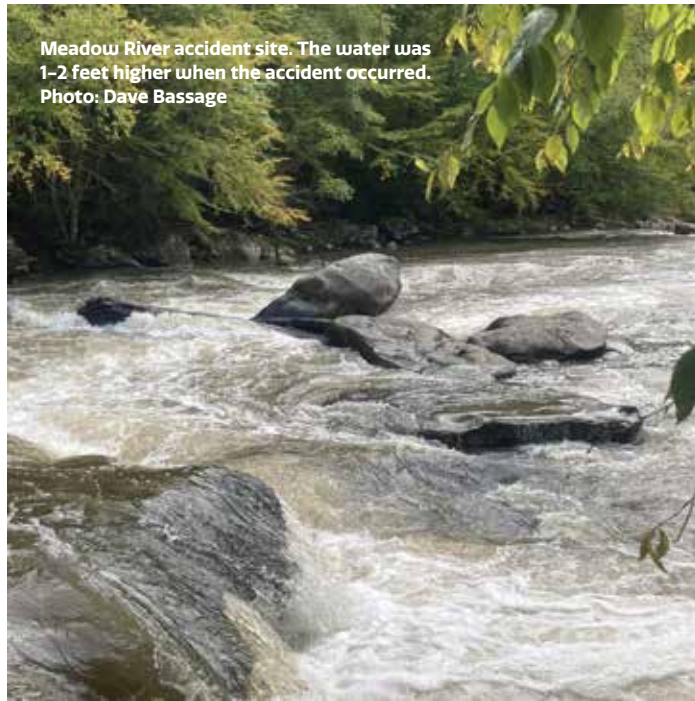
There were no U.S. canoeing fatalities reported, but there was one on a Class III stretch of the Du Nords River northwest of Montreal, Canada. Sabine Bernal, 58, was paddling ahead of her group when she flipped and swam in a small rapid. She was carried downstream into a partly submerged tree where she pinned and drowned. The tree was a well-known hazard and it's not clear why Ms. Bernal, a paddler with extensive experience, was unable to avoid it. By the time her group arrived it was too late.

Rafting Accidents

There were two rafting deaths in West Virginia's Gauley River drainage on Saturday October 3rd, during a high water period that locals refer to as "Hurricane Week." Mike Edwards, an expert rafter and river guide, was running the Upper Meadow River in an R-2 at 2,700 CFS. This is a high flow. The raft pinned in a rapid below Natural Weir, dumping both paddlers out. Mr. Edwards, 46, did not resurface. His partner and a safety kayaker searched for him, then notified authorities. The water dropped over a foot from the previous day, exposing rock jumble with a log broached among them. His body was found there the next day.

The other death that day occurred on the Lower Gauley River, which was running 12,000 CFS. An unidentified commercial rafting guest fell out of his raft at the top of Upper Stairsteps Rapid and swam all the way to the bottom of Lower Stairsteps. This was a very long swim though very big Class IV water. He was recovered in the last eddy on river left, just above Roller Coaster, and CPR began. A second guided trip arrived five minutes later and helped out; Park Service rangers came on scene approximately 20-25 minutes later with an AED. The man was loaded onto the Park Service cataraft; a guide continued CPR as they ran down to the Sugar Creek access where EMS was waiting. He did not survive.

There were two commercial accidents, both on eastern rivers. The first occurred on Pennsylvania's Youghiogheny River on August 13th after a raft flipped at Dimple Rock. Julie Moore, 50, was caught in a foot entrapment downstream in an area guides call the Poop Chute. She was under water for 40 min-



Meadow River accident site. The water was 1-2 feet higher when the accident occurred. Photo: Dave Bassage

the river. They deployed a two-person packraft to recover the body. On November 11th Tim Wiley, 61, was paddling an oar-rigged cataraft on Virginia's James River. He was last seen on a beach near Balcony Falls. This is a Class II stretch of river, and Balcony Falls is an easy Class III. Water levels were high, but reasonable. When his empty boat was found floating downstream, a search began. He was boating alone, and not wearing cold water protection. Although we don't know what happened, local paddlers speculate that his boat washed off the beach, and he ran out and swam after it. There's lots of wind and current here, so it's possible he couldn't catch the boat and was overcome by the icy water.

IKs and Packrafts

There were two deaths among inflatable kayakers. On July 14th, a 49-year-old man drowned after his rented inflatable kayak rolled in the Slide Hole rapid on Oregon's Rogue River. This is just below Casey State Park. He was not wearing a life jacket. Fellow rafters attempted to throw him a life jacket, but they were unsuccessful and he disappeared down river. On August 12th, Mason Hayes, 60, died on the Rogue River in Oregon. This happened at Coffee Pot rapid on the Wild and Scenic section, in a narrow gorge with lots of boils and swirly water. It's a nasty place to swim, even with a PFD, and a heart attack may have been involved.

Adventure racer Peter Jolles, 46, was reported overdue at the Bugaboo Creek takeout in British Columbia, Canada on July 3rd. He was visiting BC for an adventure race and stayed afterwards to continue exploring the region. He was wearing full personal protective equipment (dry suit, PFD, helmet), but like many wilderness packrafters, he was paddling alone. The water level was high. Rescue personnel recovered Mr. Jolles packraft but had to discontinue the search due to high water conditions. His body was found on October 1, after the water had receded.

On July 16th Christopher Robey died after his packraft flipped in the Tsina River east of Valdez, Alaska. Rescuers searched the area for about three and a half hours and located the body hung up on a rock in the river. They deployed a two-person pack raft to recover the body.

Stand-up Paddleboards

A stand-up paddleboarder drowned on July 29th while trying to help two struggling tubers on the Sacramento River near Fair Oaks, CA. Joshua Crane, 30, was not wearing a life vest when he was swept into a mild rapid downstream and disappeared. The two women he was trying to help eventually made it ashore.

Near Misses and Rescues

We have accounts of two well-executed waterfall rescues; the first of which was at West Virginia's Kanawha Falls on September 19th. A report by Tyler Thornton reads as follows: "A group of three kayakers ran the falls in the early afternoon. The first person was safety, second was me leading a first timer and setting safety after I dropped. The newbie flipped, swam, and

was pushed right into the dangerous "pocket," which was the scene of a miraculous night rescue last Fall. Fortunately, Carson Wright had installed several bolts and a chain there to facilitate rescue. The swimmer was able to grab hold and wait for help.

"After one or two attempts to ferry her out on the back of my boat, we decided we would need to lift her out. I sent the other safety kayaker up top to help set up a z drag while I stayed with the swimmer. Our first priority was to get her out of the water. The water was low that day; the ledge was a foot or so above the water line and the bottom of the chain was barely in the water. It was impossible for her to pull herself up onto the ledge by herself.... A z drag was set up top using the anchors but we felt we didn't have enough equipment to safely get her out.

"I decided it would be a better idea to clip the working end to the chain and use it as a step to get the swimmer out of the water and on the ledge. Someone made a trip to the parking lot to get river rescue gear and a climbing harness.... We set up a z drag and a separate belay rope to catch a fall. Two people held onto each line with another man belayed off the tip of the rock with the two anchors close together. I could see and talk to him, so everyone was on the same page.

"The climb out was pretty difficult. There were at least two to three times she slipped and was caught by the rope, and just as many times the z drag was used to pull her up a few feet to get a good hold on the rock. An issue we ran into was that the rope and knot kept getting stuck in a notch at the top of the rock. We remedied this by adding a vector from the rope to the single guy rappelled out on the edge of the rock. We finally got her over the top of the drop.

"Getting the boat out was much more difficult and time consuming than the swimmer. I struggled a lot trying to unpin the boat and get it hooked to the rope."

Curtis May reported a very close call during a descent of the Agua Azul in Chiapas, Mexico on December 18th. His account on YouTube reads as follows: "The climax of this section consists of five waterfalls called the Five Kings. At the third King my approach was too far right and I dried out at the lip in about three inches of water. I lost my speed and dropped behind the curtain of the waterfall. For the next 75 minutes I made multiple attempts to escape and repeatedly blew my whistle in an attempt to let my friends know that I was still alive. My friends acted swiftly to begin rescue operations. I was the last of us to run the drop so the other five boats were all downstream of this waterfall AND a 60-footer below it.

"There is no access to the river between the 35-foot drop and the 60-foot drop, so Issac and Wesley hiked their boats back upstream and ran the 35-footer again to get into position. I could not see or hear anything beyond the curtain of the waterfall and they could not see or hear me. Issac and Wesley made many attempts to gain access behind the curtain, both

Kanawha Falls undercut hazard and safety chain. Photos: Brent Samples.



Ledge that was under the curtain.



Bolt anchors above chain.



Chain anchor at ledge.

with ropes and their bodies. After about 60 minutes with no success and sunset fast approaching, Wesley decided to try to paddle behind the curtain through a small gap on river right. Both Wesley and Issac were able to get behind the curtain and stash their boats before launching a heroic live bait rescue behind the curtain. It wasn't until Wesley was about 30 feet from me that we were finally able to hear each other. This was their first indication that I was still alive.

"After over an hour of failed attempts to escape and zero contact with anyone I was beginning to lose hope. Then I first heard another voice, and knew my friends were still working to get me out. We couldn't see each other because there was a rock wall between us. . . . I had no idea that he was just around the corner from me until I saw him while making another attempt to paddle through the curtain. When I saw Wesley floating there, I felt a level of relief and joy that I had never experienced in my life.

"At this point it had been well over an hour and I was exhausted. Every attempt to paddle through the curtain zapped my energy and it took a few minutes to recharge between attempts. I retreated back to my point of safety and gathered my strength for a moment to make the ferry around the corner to where Wesley was waiting. When Wesley reached me he gave three blasts on his whistle and Issac started pulling us both along the undercut wall back to safety. They saved my life on this day and I will forever be grateful."

To see an excellent video of this rescue, search for "Trapped behind a 35' waterfall" on YouTube.

We have two reports of very close calls on Section IV of the Chattooga in Georgia on July 14th and 17th. The river level in both cases was 1.6 feet. Two guided rafting guests, 12 and 17 years old, fell out of their boats in Jawbone rapid, then washed and pinned on Hydroelectric Rock. This is a known danger spot, with a tunnel going underneath the rock. In both instances, Safety was set there, but guides could not pull them out upstream and were forced to push them out under the rock. Both women needed resuscitation, but recovered quickly.

James Malek reported a near drowning on the Kennebec River in Maine on September 10. The level was 8,600 CFS. A kayaker flipped and swam in Big Mama, spent over a minute underwater in a hydraulic, and lost consciousness. When he got to her, she was showing no signs of alertness or movement, but was breathing and had a pulse. She slowly began regaining consciousness, and began to move, but she faded in and out several times.

While she was being treated for shock, the group devised an evacuation route. Because this incident occurred in the upper Kennebec Gorge, in the wilderness of Maine, evacuation was a challenge and cell phone service was nonexistent. They loaded her into a raft and paddled downstream. Before Magic Falls, she began throwing up water and fading in and out of consciousness. They decided that taking her through the rapid would be too risky, so they got her on land, and two people walked her through the brush to a path.

Mr. Malek kayaked down to the take-out, found a satellite phone, and called emergency services. Then he and several other people moved upstream to help bring the woman to safety. The longer she walked, the better she got, and she was almost completely recovered by the time she reached the parking lot. Please note: It's always a good idea to take near drowning victims to an ER to be checked out at, even if they feel OK. The experience may cause serious electrolyte imbalances which can be fatal.

You can help!

American Whitewater needs your help to gather accident reports for us to share with other paddlers. First person accounts from experienced paddlers, newspaper articles, and on-line posts are all important. Since media articles are often inaccurate or incomplete, clarifying comments from paddlers familiar with the area are really useful. And while serious incidents involving skilled whitewater paddlers are quite rare, they often teach us important lessons, help us avoid trouble, and show how to better manage emergencies. Accurate accounts of these accidents also keep malicious rumors from at bay, something to consider in this age of Internet gossip.

To report a whitewater accident, near miss, or serious injury, please go to the Safety page on americanwhitewater.org, click "report an accident", and enter the information. Or you can email me at ccwalbridge@cs.com or message "Charlie Walbridge" on Facebook. Feel free to share newspaper articles, chat room posts, YouTube Videos, or even rumors! I'm not an investigator, but I often follow up sketchy on-line reports to find out what happened. I can also help you prepare an accident report, if needed. ■



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Photo by Austin Seback

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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 to square your club membership away!

AMERICAN WHITEWATER AFFILIATE CLUBS

SUPPORTING AFFILIATE CLUBS

Alaska

Fairbanks Paddlers, Fairbanks

Arkansas

Arkansas Canoe Club, Little Rock

Colorado

Dolores River Boating Advocate, Dolores
Colorado Whitewater Association, Denver

Georgia

Georgia Canoeing Association Inc, Winston

Massachusetts

Appalachian Mountain Club, Boston

New York

KCCNY, Brooklyn

North Carolina

West Asheville Canoe and Kayak Organization (WACKO), Asheville

Ohio

Keelhaulers, Cleveland

Oregon

Oregon Kayak and Canoe Club, Portland

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 CLUBS BY STATE

Alaska

Nova River Runners Inc., Chickaloon

Alabama

Coosa River Paddling Club, Wetumpka
Huntsville Canoe Club, Huntsville

Arizona

Outdoors Unlimited, Flagstaff

California

Redwood Empire Paddlers, Santa Rosa
River City Whitewater Club, Sacramento
Smith River Alliance, Crescent City
Wildflower Sacramento River Trip, Sacramento
Cold Country Paddlers, Placerville

Colorado

Diversify Whitewater, Fort Collins
Friends of the Yampa, Steamboat Springs
High Country River Rafters, Wheat Ridge
Rocky Mountain Outdoor Center, Buena Vista
Royal Gorge River Initiative Org, Canon City
San Miguel Whitewater Asso, Telluride
Team Colorado Whitewater Racing Club, Longmont,
Upper Colorado Private Boaters Assoc.,
Glenwood Springs

Delaware

AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Oaks (PA)

Idaho

Idaho Whitewater Association, Boise

Indiana

Hoosier Canoe Club, Brownsburg

Iowa

Iowa Whitewater Coalition, W. Des Moines

Kentucky

Elkhorn Paddlers, Lexington
Bluegrass Wildwater Association, Lexington

Maine

Penobscot Paddle & Chowder Society, Freeport

Maryland

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

Minnesota

Northland Paddlers Alliance, Duluth
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 Mexico

Adobe Whitewater Club of New Mexico,
Albuquerque

New Hampshire

Merrimack Valley Paddlers, Merrimack
New England Canoe and Kayak Racing
Association, Contoocook

New Jersey

AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Oaks (PA)

New York

Zoar Valley Paddling Club, East Aurora

North Carolina

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

Ohio

Friends of the Crooked River, Akron
Columbus Paddling Club, Columbus

Oregon

Lower Columbia Canoe Club, Portland
North West Rafters Association, Roseburg
Oregon Whitewater Association, Portland
Willamette Kayak and Canoe Club, Corvallis

Pennsylvania

AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Oaks (PA)
Canoe Club of Greater Harrisburg,
Lehigh Valley Canoe Club, Lehigh Valley
Three Rivers Paddling Club, Bridgeville

Tennessee

Appalachian Paddling Enthusiasts, Jonesborough
Chota Canoe Club, Knoxville
Clean Water Expected in East Tennessee, Sevierville,
East Tennessee Whitewater Club, Oak Ridge
Tennessee Scenic River Association, Nashville
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club, Knoxville

Texas

Houston Canoe Club, Inc., 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

Northwest Whitewater Association, Spokane,
Spokane Canoe & Kayak Club, Spokane,
Yakima River Runners, Selah

Washington, DC

Canoe Cruisers Association

West Virginia

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

National

Team River Runner

CANADA

Ontario

Kawartha Whitewater Paddlers

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 \$25/year Affiliate Club Member option online at www.americanwhitewater.org/join.

A list of Affiliate Clubs can be found on our website under the Community/Clubs tab. If you notice your club missing from our list, please encourage club leaders to renew their club membership or join American Whitewater as a new Affiliate Club.

Your Club's membership and your personal membership enable American Whitewater Staff to be active and engaged in the process of river stewardship across the country. Your membership support helps to meet the many challenges whitewater rivers face. If you have questions about the Affiliate Club membership, please reach out to Bethany Overfield at membership@americanwhitewater.org.

JOIN AMERICAN WHITEWATER AS A CLUB AFFILIATE! 10 REASONS TO JOIN AW AS AN AFFILIATE CLUB:

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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 bimonthly *American Whitewater 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:

membership@americanwhitewater.org

...or sign-up on line: www.americanwhitewater.org/membership.

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