

*We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant you permanently  
within us,  
We fathom you not—we love you—there is perfection in you also,  
You furnish your parts toward eternity,  
Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul.*  
-Walt Whitman

## II. Background on the Ban on Whitewater Boating

On May 30, 1950 a regulation<sup>1</sup> went into effect closing all rivers and streams in Yellowstone National Park to boating. This regulation was designed to limit increased use of the rivers following World War II, which was leading to heavy fishing pressure and detrimental effects to the fishery resources.<sup>2</sup> In essence, the ban was implemented to address concerns for overfishing, rather than use of the rivers for whitewater recreation.

In 1982, a new *Natural Resource Management Plan* was approved for Yellowstone National Park. The river management portion of the Plan recommended the creation of an interdisciplinary team that would collect baseline data on the potential impacts of boating in the Park. In the summer of 1985, the Park Service established this staff team and began an inventory and environmental assessment of the Park's rivers. The team operated under the premise that: 1) only non-motorized boating would be considered, and 2) only whole rivers or major segments of rivers and streams within the Park would be evaluated; minor tributaries and stretches less than five miles long would not be analyzed. The team published a 110-page study in 1988 entitled, "*Boating on Yellowstone's Rivers: An Analysis and Assessment.*" The assessment recommended the continued restriction of all boating on rivers within the Park based largely on concerns for crowding and aesthetics. The Park Superintendent approved this conclusion on May 18, 1988.

Though recreational boating on Yellowstone's rivers was a traditional use prior to the 1950's, the complete ban on whitewater boating in Yellowstone continues today, and was not addressed in the *1994 Draft Backcountry Plan*. Yellowstone has over 400 miles of rivers and streams that are suitable for recreation. The *1988 Assessment* cites a study by Anderson in which he calculated that there were 2,373 miles of free flowing water, including 604 streams and 11 rivers. This is the most extensive system of legally inaccessible rivers within America.

American Whitewater met with Superintendent Michael V. Finley and his staff in June of 1995 and discussed the ban on whitewater recreation. American Whitewater agreed to draft a proposal regarding whitewater recreation in Yellowstone National Park. American Whitewater's proposal is contained on the following pages.

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1 36 CFR § 7.13.d.4.ii (1992)

2 See *Boating on Yellowstone's Rivers: An Analysis and Assessment, 1988*, p. 2.