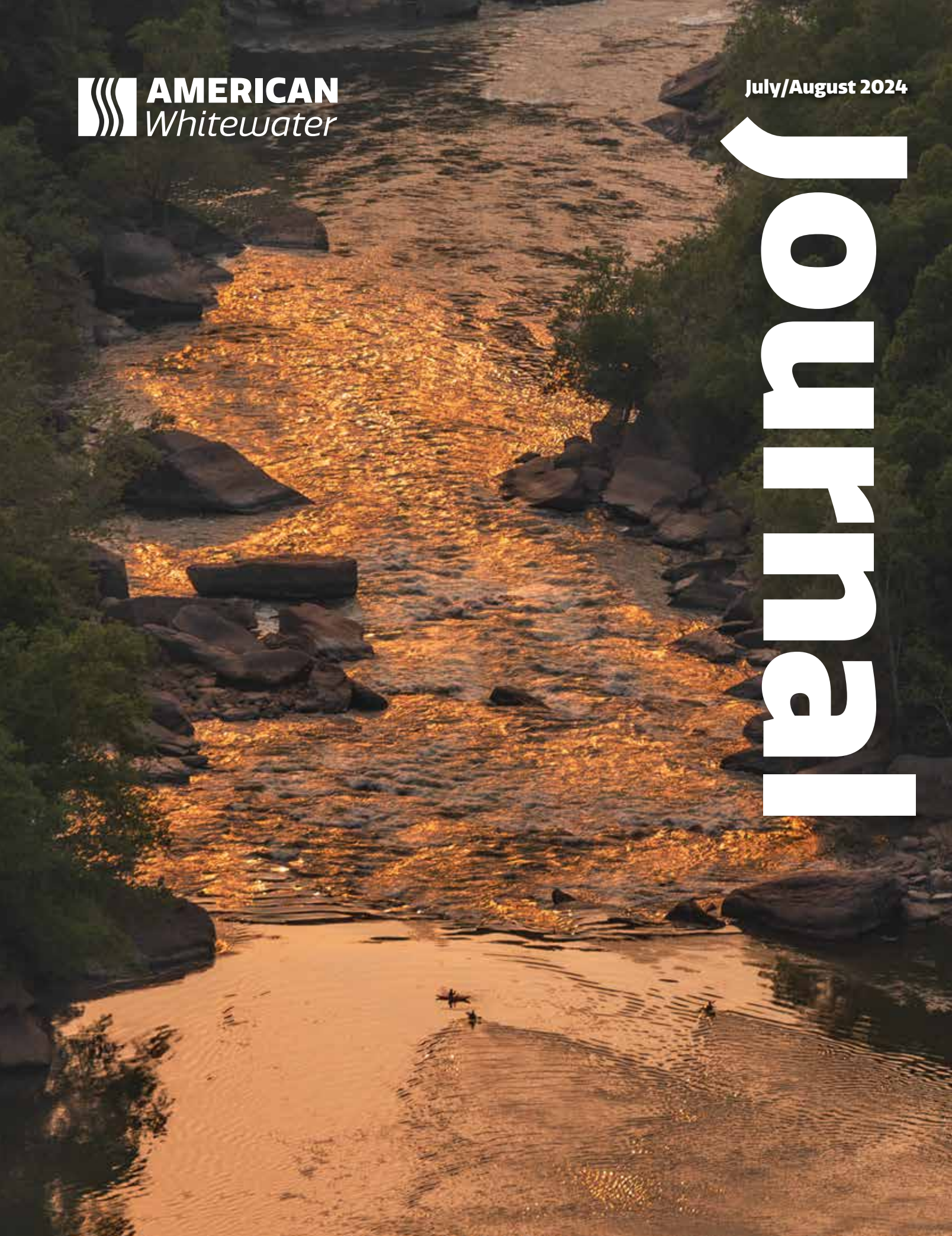




AMERICAN
Whitewater

July/August 2024

Journal





INDRA: WITHOUT LIMITS



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PADDLER PROVEN.**

SINCE 1988



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ASSEMBLED IN GREENVILLE, SC

AMERICAN
WHITEWATER
JOURNAL



A volunteer-driven publication promoting river conservation, access, and safety

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STEWARDSHIP

5 Horizon Lines

Clinton Begley

9 IMPACT REPORT 2023

American Whitewater Staff

46 Safety

Gauley Paddlers Encouraged to Step Up Safety

DEPARTMENTS

8 Community Voices

Ask AW: Rafting and Rescue Kit

33 Recipes

Riverside Peanut Thai Salad
Emerald LaFortune

34 Community Voices

Feeding The Rat
Roger Chao

36 Community Voices

River Sister
Suz Strazza

40 Community Voices

Women of Whitewater: The Coloring Book

48 70th Anniversary

Reflections on the Success of a Regional Stewardship Model and Coalition Building
Mark Singleton



Cover photo: New River (WV) by Justin Harris
This page: Justin Harris

MEMBERSHIP DRIVEN RIVER STEWARDSHIP SINCE 1954

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. American Whitewater is the national voice for thousands of individual whitewater and river enthusiasts, as well as over 85 local paddling club affiliates.

JOIN US! OUR RIVERS NEED YOU!

Become a member by going to americanwhitewater.org/join. Starting at \$35, our river stewardship work is only made possible through member support and being a member is the only way to receive the Journal delivered directly to your home.



Join the Enduring Rivers Circle to care for your favorite rivers in perpetuity. Created to honor and recognize people who have solidified the longevity of our river stewardship efforts through a gift to American Whitewater in their legacy planning. Contact Bethany for more information at bethany@americanwhitewater.org.

Affiliate Clubs: We have a network of over 80 Affiliate Clubs across the country that support the river stewardship work we do. Clubs are a great way to connect with other river enthusiasts. Check out our list of Affiliate Clubs to find a club near you! www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Affiliate/view/

Industry Partners: The work that we do at American Whitewater is greatly enhanced by a number of Industry Partners who support us with financial contributions and in-kind donations. These contributions propel our mission and can give your company exposure to a robust community of whitewater enthusiasts. *Become an Industry Partner* by contacting bethany@americanwhitewater.org

CONTRIBUTE TO THE JOURNAL TODAY!

The Journal is a volunteer driven publication that relies on our community to submit photos, essays, interviews, artwork, recipes, poetry and more. Be a part of the American Whitewater Journal, the leading voice for whitewater boaters nationwide. Reach out to our Member Content Editor Emerald Lafortune editor@americanwhitewater.org with contribution ideas or questions.

For more information visit our website: americanwhitewater.org

EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER

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

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Horizon Lines

Clinton Begley

IN MY FIRST “HORIZON LINES” PUBLISHED IN THE WINTER OF 2022, I wrote about roots. In that spirit, this Journal is the second in a 70th anniversary series featuring voices with unique perspectives on American Whitewater’s history. In this issue, we hear from the people who lived that history. Honoring the shoulders we stand upon and the first descents we follow has always been part of whitewater culture. Doing so gives us perspective on how far we have come together, takes stock of how the world and our work have changed, and cultivates the courage to go further.

Here are a couple of other things to look for this year as we celebrate our seventieth year conserving and restoring our whitewater resources and enhancing the opportunities to enjoy them safely.

By now, members should have received our Spring Stewardship Update in the mail. In the update, we have chosen to highlight those stewardship accomplishments from years past that have become so woven into the fabric of our community that it is easy to forget that they were hard-won. Releases in the Tallulah Gorge, access on the Middle Fork Snoqualmie, paddling in Yosemite: the ability to access these rivers didn’t just happen. American Whitewater and members like you fought for these wins and prevailed. The next time you’re enjoying one of these special places, make sure your friends know that history too.

This anniversary year isn’t only about honoring and reflecting upon the past. It is also about how we build upon this strong foundation to thrive in the years ahead. This summer we will be launching a community survey to better understand the whitewater community and what matters to you. The last member survey we conducted was in 2018—it’s time to check in again. Both American Whitewater members and non-members will be encouraged to participate and share valuable insights about how you engage with whitewater rivers and with us as an organization. We seek to understand how we can best serve our mission with your support. You don’t need a paddle in your hand to take the survey, just love for whitewater rivers and the joy they bring to your life. Look for this survey opportunity in your email or social media in the coming months, and please share it with your friends and family.

Lastly, this issue also includes our 2023 Impact Report. Next time someone asks, “*What has American Whitewater done for me lately?*” hand them this magazine. Then encourage them to become a member, because none of the work in this report happens without our members’ support.

Thank you for being a part of this community, and for all you do to restore and protect the rivers you care about. I hope to SYOTR soon.



Clinton Begley
Executive Director



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ASK AW

Rafting and Rescue Kit

Dear American Whitewater,

After years of money saving and gear research, I'm the proud new owner of a 16-foot self-bailing raft! I've got all the basics: frame, boxes, cooler, straps, oars, chicken-line, throwbag. With my new craft secured, I've been invited on an August, low-water Middle Fork of the Salmon trip. Our trip leader says I need a "raft rescue kit." What would you recommend I include? There's a high likelihood that we're going to fly into the secondary put-in, so I'd appreciate something that is functional but doesn't weigh us down or break the bank.

*Signed,
Avoiding a Rock and a Hard Place*

Dear Rock and a Hard Place,

Congratulations on your new raft! We hope you have many enjoyable years of boating adventures ahead. Your trip leader is correct, a rescue kit is a key element of a comprehensive setup. A disclaimer: The best way to build a great rescue kit is with the one-on-one help of a whitewater professional or other experienced boater. We welcome you to use this as a starting point, but highly encourage you to run through your equipment with a pro. Further, formal swiftwater rescue training will help you use your rescue equipment safely and efficiently.

First, any rescue kit should have a comprehensive backcountry first aid kit and a satellite phone, InReach, or other personal locator beacon (PLB). A rescue lifejacket or personal flotation device (PFD) with a rescue harness may also be helpful, but should be used only with swiftwater rescue training. A whistle and knife should always be stored safely within your PFD. You may also want to consider storing your PLB on your person.

Next, consider what you will do if your raft is damaged mid-trip. A raft repair kit should be tailored to the type of rubber you are running: Hypalon, PVC, or urethane. A typical raft repair kit will include rubber gloves, patch material, solvent, adhesive, repair tape, a valve wrench, sandpaper or abrading tool, scissors, pen or marker, spare pressure relief valve, duct tape, spare parts for oar rigs and an extra valve. Ensure someone on your trip is experienced in raft repair and/or study up on your raft brand's YouTube channel before your trip. Note that any chemicals or adhesives should be stored far away from any water or food products and in an air-tight drybag or container.

Then, you should construct what boaters call a "pin kit." Generally speaking, a pin kit helps you use mechanical advantage to pry your boat from a wrap or pin situation (aka being very stuck on a rock or tree). A typical pin kit will include four locking carabiners, two Prusik cords, webbing, three pulleys, and a static rope. In a pinch, a throwbag may also be used for the rope.

You must train in how to safely and effectively use a mechanical advantage system, otherwise, serious injury may occur. Do not make an already tough situation worse by creating an additional injury or further harming your equipment.

Both raft repair and pin kits can be constructed from scratch or purchased as a set from most boating retailers. Building your own will often result in a higher-quality end product at a cheaper price point. A set, however, is always better than nothing at all.

It's also important to think strategically about where to place your rescue kits in your raft. If the kit is located at the bottom of a gear pile or drybox, it may be hard to access when you need it most. Attaching your kit on top, however, runs the risk of losing it in a flip or wrap.

Ideally, you never need to use your raft rescue kit. But if you do, it will pay off to have an efficient, high-quality system that you are practiced in using. Enjoy your new boat and enjoy your summer of adventures!

Sincerely,
American Whitewater

 **AMERICAN**
Whitewater



IMPACT

REPORT

20
23



By many measures, 2023 was a remarkably

IN ADDITION TO THE PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

you will see in this report, we made some important investments in the organization you should know about. With over 7,000 members and growing, it is clear that continuing to grow membership sustainably is vital. Last October, we hired Sadie Mathison to the role of Membership and Operations Specialist. Sadie lives in Wisconsin and works closely with our Membership and Engagement Director Bethany Overfield. Together they are reviewing and evolving systems to ensure the personal touch you've come to expect with your membership remains rock solid.

Taking care of our paddling community means also taking care of our staff. At the beginning of 2023, we launched an employer sponsored healthcare plan. We have a ton of fun together,

but this is difficult and often stressful work. Ensuring that our employees and their families stay healthy and get the care they need has a financial impact. But in addition to being a strategic investment in the strength of our team, it is also the right thing to do.

We started the year with a new look and feel to the AW Journal. The Journal has been in publication since 1955—just one year after American Whitewater's founding. Through your member contributed articles, it has been a leading voice of the whitewater community for nearly 70 years and one of the key channels for engaging our membership to take action. We doubled down on keeping this a tangible print publication you can hold in your hands. Your stories deserve it. Plus, it's difficult to keep a digital PDF in the groover library.

MISSION

To protect and restore America's whitewater rivers and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely.

VISION


That our nation's remaining wild and free-flowing rivers stay that way, our developed rivers are restored to function and flourish, that the public has access to rivers for recreation, and that river enthusiasts are active and effective river advocates.



successful year for American Whitewater.

Last but not least, 2023 also saw American Whitewater play a unique role as a vehicle for the incredible outpouring of support and generosity directed at protecting the Big Sandy in West Virginia from threats of development. Over 117 people contributed to the effort last year, and you will see the impacts of that herculean effort in our financial reporting. Shortly before the new year, we secured the funding to purchase over four miles of the river-left bank, forever preserving access and the natural beauty it contributes to the character of the run. You will continue to see the impacts of that purchase in next year's financial report, as we transfer that property to the West Virginia Land Trust for ongoing stewardship.

Everyday we ask ourselves and each other as a community what we can do for the rivers we love. American Whitewater's primary focus has been, and will always be, the expression of that love through the mission-driven work we do. Thank you for being a part of it all. Our successes in 2023 are your successes. Celebrate these wins as your own! We couldn't do any of it without you.



Clinton Begley
Executive Director



Brent Austin
Board Chair

Member Profiles

ENDER CLUB MEMBER

Anastasia Adler | *Washington*

“For me, time on the river is time away from my job, bills, phone calls and the responsibilities of day to day life. When I put on the river with no phone and no obligations for a few hours just to be present and go play with my friends, it allows me to relax and reset. It is the joy and the gift of boating but I know that gift doesn’t come easily. My ability to drive up to the put-in, park, and hike down that trail all comes thanks to numerous meetings, phone calls, and lots of work I never see. AW does the work to protect our rivers and our access. My membership is my way of supporting that work and acknowledging how grateful I am for access to these beautiful places. I want the rivers to be there not just for me but for all the boaters in the future.”



LIFETIME MEMBERS

Amanda Burnham-Marusich, Macy Burnham, Azalea Burnham, Wylie Burnham | *Nevada*

“In the summertime, we spend all our free time on the river as a family. We fully support AW’s mission of securing access, negotiating reliable flows, and protecting the environmental integrity of the places we love -- and of all the new rivers we look forward to exploring. We have a ton of fun adventuring through wild multi-day river canyons and just paddling in our local play parks after work, and we want our kids and everyone else to have and always continue to have the chance to find their own joy on the water.”



ENDER CLUB MEMBERS

Kate and Bob Taylor | *Connecticut*

“Being members of AW has been incredibly rewarding in many ways. Their dedication to securing access and water releases has fostered a special environment where we’ve built strong, lasting friendships with people who share our passion for paddling rivers. Our love for kayaking goes deep—it was there for our initial meeting, engagement, marriage, and even our honeymoon! Supporting an organization that has such a positive impact on the health of our rivers, not just for today but for future generations, is important to us. Our involvement with AW reflects that commitment. We’ve been loyal members for many years. Bob worked for AW back during the time of the TEVA tour and also at the Gauley and Deerfield Festivals. We’ve volunteered for many years at the Deerfield Festival, and we look forward to many more adventures, friendships, and festivals to come.”



993

**NEW MILES FOREST SERVICE
WILD AND SCENIC PROTECTIONS**

- Tonto National Forest (AZ)
- Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests (NC)
- Sierra and Sequoia National Forests (CA)



LAWSUITS WON

- Defended Clean Water Act protections (CA)

3 LAWSUITS FILED

- Shawmut (ME) and West Canada Creek (NY) defending state's Clean Water Act rights
- Appeal in Somersworth dam surrender to force removal (ME/NH)
- Defending Wild and Scenic Protections (CA)

AMICUS BRIEFS

- Colorado Stream Access case - Hill v. Warsewa (CO)

290 PRO-BONO LAWYER HOURS

- Volunteer legal hours donated to American Whitewater



2 DAMS DEFEATED

- Little Colorado River dams (AZ)

DAMS REMOVED

- Copco 2 Dam, Klamath River (CA)

**3 NEW DAM REMOVALS
ANNOUNCED**

- Scott Dam and Cape Horn, Eel River (CA)
- Ela Dam, Oconoluftee River (NC)

CAMPAIGNS AGAINST NEW DAMS

- East Fork Virgin River (UT)
- Chehalis River (WA)
- Upper Verde (AZ)
- Big South, Cache la Poudre (CO)

958

**MILES NEW OUTSTANDING
RESOURCE WATERS
DESIGNATED (WA)**

- Green River (Toutle)
- Cascade River
- Napeequa River

2500+

**MILES WILD AND SCENIC
LEGISLATION INTRODUCED**

- Wild Olympics (WA)
- Northwest California Mountains and Rivers (CA)
- San Gabriel Mountains (CA)
- Central Coast Wild (CA)
- Smith River (OR)
- Montana Headwaters (MT)
- M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila (NM)



RIVER SAFETY

- 2 new river safety films
- New short form Safety Code
- Distribution of river safety sign guide

10

NEW RIVER ACCESS LOCATIONS

- Crooked River (OR)
- North Fork Skykomish River (WA)
- Catawba River (SC)
- Connecticut River (MA)
- Cispus River (WA)
- North Fork Feather River (CA)

6

RIVER REACHES RESTORED

- Great Falls, Catawba River (SC)
- Turners Falls, Connecticut River (MA)
- Upper Colorado River (CO)



**NATIONAL MONUMENT
DESIGNATED**

- Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni - Ancestral Footprints Grand Canyon National Monument (AZ)

**HEADWATERS PROTECTED FROM
NEW MINING**

- Thompson Divide Mineral Withdrawal (Oh Be Joyful and Ruby Anthracite Creeks, CO)

CLOSED ACCESS OPENED

- North Fork Skykomish River (WA)

57

MEETINGS WITH LAWMAKERS

- In-person advocacy in Washington, D.C

2,137

COMMENTS FILED

- Comments sent to Congress and river managers

1,296

PERMIT SURVEY RESPONSES

- Working to improve river permit allocations on federally managed rivers

Our Community

CHAMPIONS 100+

Board members
Key volunteers
Regional coordinators

PATRONS 2,300+

Major donors
Upper-tier partners
Affiliate Clubs
Enduring River Circle
Members

CONTRIBUTORS 4,600+

Members and
small donors
Contributing partners
Volunteers
Web contributors

ENDORSERS 44,500+

Newsletter subscribers
AW web user accounts
Action takers
Event attendees

FOLLOWERS 150,000+

Social media followers
Unique website visitors

MEMBERS: 7,056

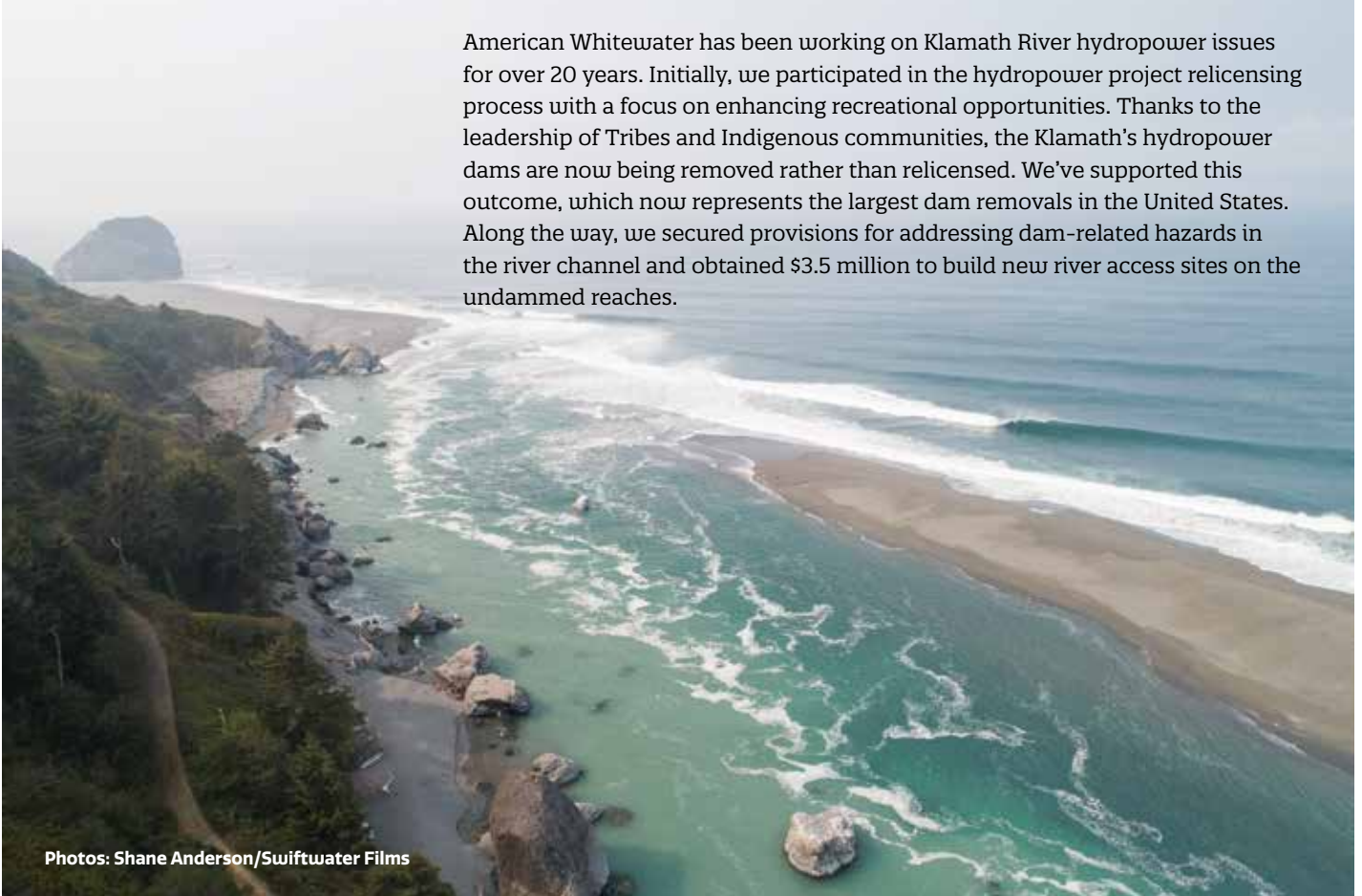
SUPPORTERS: 72,000

AFFILIATE CLUBS: 80

NATIONAL



American Whitewater has been working on Klamath River hydropower issues for over 20 years. Initially, we participated in the hydropower project relicensing process with a focus on enhancing recreational opportunities. Thanks to the leadership of Tribes and Indigenous communities, the Klamath's hydropower dams are now being removed rather than relicensed. We've supported this outcome, which now represents the largest dam removals in the United States. Along the way, we secured provisions for addressing dam-related hazards in the river channel and obtained \$3.5 million to build new river access sites on the undammed reaches.



Photos: Shane Anderson/Swiftwater Films



SOUTHEAST

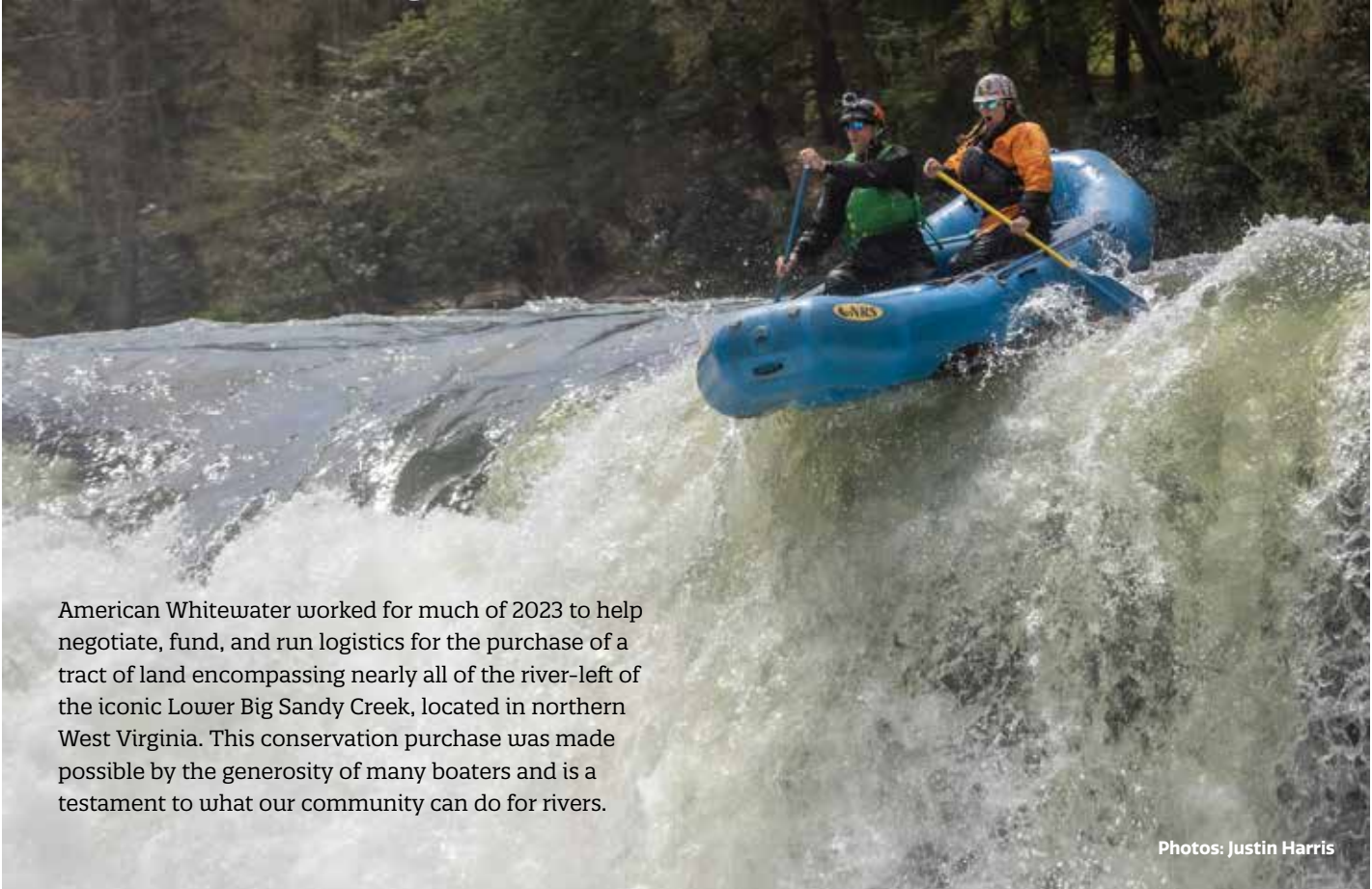
Significant flows were restored to the Great Falls of the Catawba in 2023 based on an over 20-year effort in which American Whitewater played a leading role. These 24/7 flows, several new access areas and trails, and an innovative man-made white-water channel that allows people to paddle from the reservoir to the river below mark a sea change for a river that had been dewatered by a hydropower dam for over a century. American Whitewater also wrapped up a decade-plus forest planning effort on the Nantahala Pisgah National Forest in 2023. Thanks to our advocacy and participation by the paddling community, these whitewater-rich public lands now have nine additional rivers that are protected as eligible for Wild and Scenic designation. 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.



Photo: Trip Kinney



MID-ATLANTIC



American Whitewater worked for much of 2023 to help negotiate, fund, and run logistics for the purchase of a tract of land encompassing nearly all of the river-left of the iconic Lower Big Sandy Creek, located in northern West Virginia. This conservation purchase was made possible by the generosity of many boaters and is a testament to what our community can do for rivers.

Photos: Justin Harris



Photo: Brad Walker

NORTHEAST

American Whitewater signed final settlement agreements restoring flows and recreation opportunities on the Connecticut River at Turners Falls in Massachusetts in 2023. The agreement will restore flows to a three-mile dewatered section below the dam; provide fish passage; guarantee scheduled whitewater flows; and protect climbing, biking, and hiking at the project under an agreement with the dam owners, conservation groups, and agencies.

Photo: Zach Dewell

NORTHERN ROCKIES

American Whitewater and our partners secured reintroduction of our flagship regional Wild and Scenic River legislation in late 2023, the Montana Headwaters Legacy Act. This legislation would designate 384 miles of 20 outstanding rivers north of Yellowstone National Park. The legislation is supported by over 80% of Montanans and we continue to push for its passage.

SOUTHERN ROCKIES

In July 2023, after years of American Whitewater advocacy and support for a Tribally led campaign, Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni - Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument was officially designated. The new monument in Arizona protects over one million acres of land and water north and south of Grand Canyon National Park. Management will be shared with the Tribes that have been connected to these lands from time immemorial. Baaj Nwaavjo means "where Indigenous peoples roam" in Havasupai. I'tah Kukveni means "our ancestral footprints" in Hopi. This is an incredible win for Tribes, secures protections for the watersheds that feed the Grand Canyon, and supports Arizona's outdoor recreation industry. Thank you Grand Canyon Tribal Coalition for leading the way, and thanks to our many members that spoke up in support!

American Whitewater also pushed back hard in 2023 on a new ban of the use of "vessels" at Colorado State Wildlife Areas and got the decision reversed at all sites with boat ramps, such as multiple sites in the Roaring Fork watershed and at the Ruby Horsethief put-in on the Colorado River. The Parks and Wildlife Commission approved new regulations in 2023 that required all boat users to be actively hunting and fishing; however, before final regulations were adopted we were able to exempt specific sites with river access.

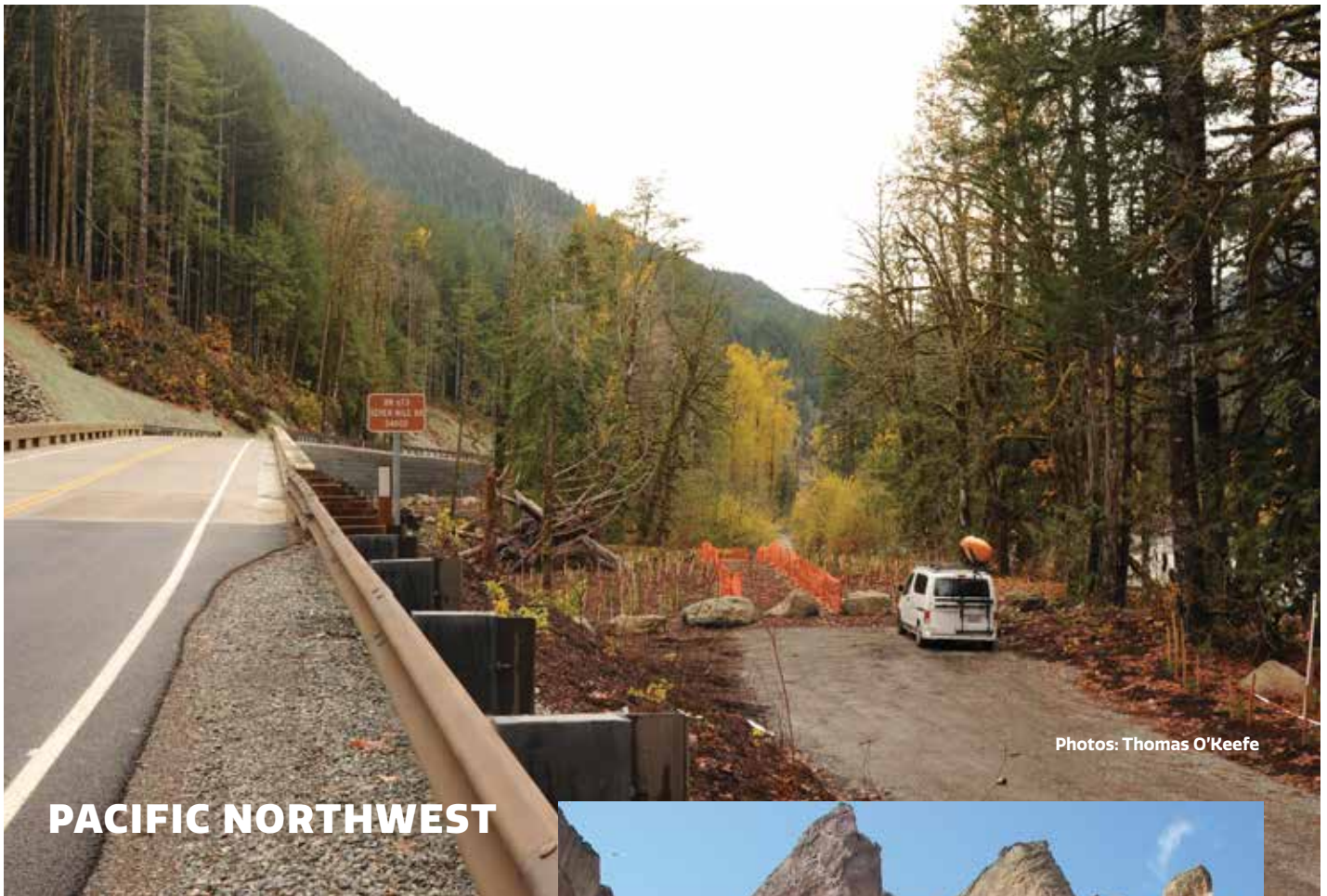


Photo: Hattie Johnson



CALIFORNIA

American Whitewater prevailed in protecting 500 river miles impacted by Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) hydropower projects. In a poorly-planned effort to raise money in a “first-of-its-kind” attempt before the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), PG&E requested approval to sell a 49% stake in all of its hydropower projects to unknown investors. Citing key testimony provided by American Whitewater and our partners from the California Hydropower Reform Coalition, the CPUC recently denied PG&E’s request. This decision sets a strong precedent for the need for public safety, reliability, and transparency in hydropower project operations and transactions. For American Whitewater members, the ruling safeguards the integrity and flows to many of our outstanding whitewater reaches found on the North Fork Feather, the Pit, the McCloud, Butte Creek, Fordyce Creek, Battle Creek, the South Yuba, the Bear, the Eel, the Mokelumne, the San Joaquin, and the North Fork Kings.



Photos: Thomas O'Keefe

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Nearly 20 years after the road washed out, access to Washington's North Fork Skykomish River was restored. American Whitewater engaged in this project over the years working to ensure paddler interests were recognized in the planning process, including establishment of a new formal public access at Seven Mile Bridge. In Oregon, we worked with Trust for Public Land to successfully bring the Crooked River access at Hollywood Road into public ownership after more than a decade of effort. For both of these access projects we worked with the Pacific Northwest Congressional delegation to secure the funding.



Enduring Rivers Circle



The Enduring Rivers Circle honors and recognizes supporters dedicated to continuing their support of American Whitewater's river stewardship efforts indefinitely through a gift to American Whitewater in their legacy/estate planning. To join the Enduring Rivers Circle contact bethany@americanwhitewater.org

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Wick and Laura Walker
Sally Wetzler
M'Leah Woodard

Photo: Evan Stafford

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Lifetime Members include a group of folks dedicated to supporting American Whitewater at the highest level. We are grateful for their support, many of whom contribute to our work on an annual basis.

Michael and Susan Abernathy
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Milt Aitken
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Mark Rasmus	Michael Smith	Chris Tulley	
Harrison Rea	Mike Smith	Barry and Kitty Tuscano	
Paul Reavley	Stephen Smith	Kenny Unser	

In Honor Of...

Contributions to American Whitewater were made in honor of the following people in 2023:

George Albrecht
Brent Austin
Carol Bitting
Travis Burkhard
Peter Butch
Jim Byers
Stephen H. Caldwell
Jeff Clement
Bill Cross
The Crystal River
Phil and Mary DeRiemer
Henry Dorris
Paul Eisner
David Christopher Ennis, jr.

Sean and Kim Finigan
John Googins
Gordon Grant
Captain Hank
Robby Hansen
Kyle Irby
Eric Jackson
Hattie Johnson
Klamath River Project
Scott Koehn
Palmer Lamb
Ben Lehman
Stan Marks
Mike Mayfield

Megi Morishita
Tom O'Keefe
Dr. Nori Onishi
Kyle Park
Sarah Zinn and Matt Crane
Kenneth R Siger
Nikolas Sikelianos
Trevor Timm
Jeff Venturino
Lilley Washburn and Michael Egues
Ben Yeamans
Scott Young



In Memory Of...

Contributions to American Whitewater were made in memory of these people in 2023.

Kathleen Anderson

Shebli Arno

Alan Baldwin

Jocelyn Barrett

BIG

David Blanding

Bill Bradt

Edward B. Clark

Anne M Collier

Peter Dayton

Ella Dingman

Dean Alan Fisher

Derrel Fortner

John Huisjen

Taylor Hunt

Gavin Jostad

Candi Kauffman

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Daria 'Dasha' Kolobakhina

Larry Larusso

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Jonas Minton

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Maureen Phelan

Tommy Piros

Gavin Rains

Brett Thrasher

Cecil Tickamyer

Sandy Tommey

Phil Urban

Mike Wilson (MFW)

David 'Z' Zimmerman

2023 Statement of Activities*

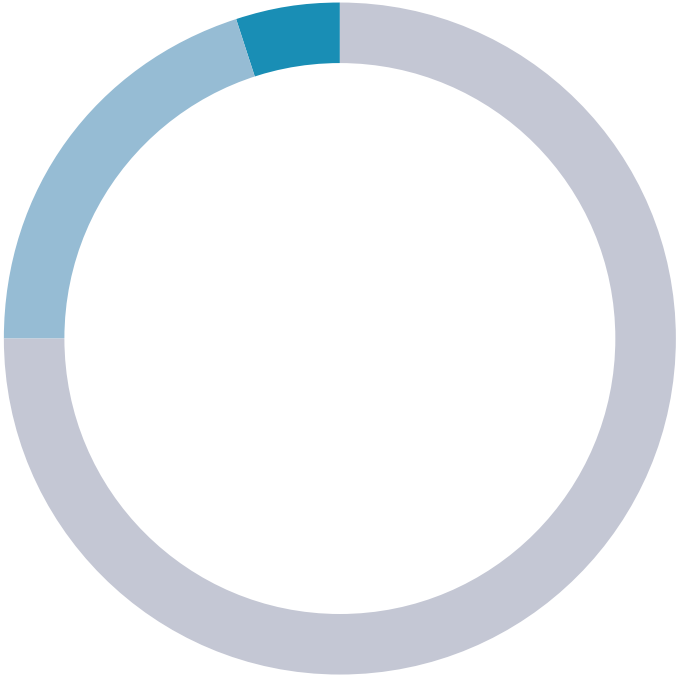
	<u>UNRESTRICTED</u>	<u>TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED</u>	<u>TOTAL 2023</u>	<u>TOTAL 2022</u>
PUBLIC SUPPORT				
Contributions	596,635	370,745	967,380	561,967
OTHER REVENUE				
Membership dues	491,203		491,203	512,917
Grants	356,030	350,800	706,830	698,075
Events	109,769		109,769	99,760
Sponsorships/Corp Programs	66,000		66,000	73,421
Products	97,000		97,000	80,388
Investment Gains/(losses)	36,595	-5,782	30,813	-51,416
In-Kind Contributions	156,851		156,851	60,608
Interest & Dividends	-5,890	34,928	29,038	10,150
Misc. Income	1,295		1,295	1,155
Net Assets Released from Restriction	408,596	-408,596	0	0
Total Support and Revenue	2,314,084	342,095	2,656,179	2,047,025
EXPENSES				
Total Program Services	1,704,878		1,704,878	1,613,171
SUPPORTING SERVICES				
General & Administrative	444,106	0	444,106	349,221
Fundraising	115,416	0	115,416	107,030
Total Supporting Services	559,522	0	559,522	456,251
Total Expenses	2,264,400	0	2,264,400	2,069,422
Total Change in Net Assets	49,684	342,095	391,779	-22,397

*Financial figures in this report are provisional. A final independent Auditor's Report and completed form 990 for fiscal year 2023 will be publicly available on our website later this year.

2023 Statement of Financial Position

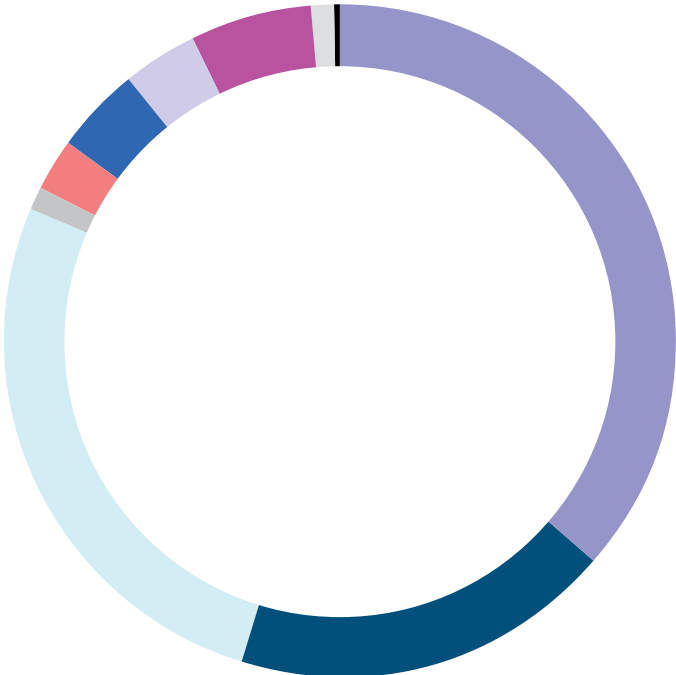
ASSETS	2023	2022
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash	1,398,283	1,135,463
Accounts Receivable	13,524	19,583
Grants Receivable	106,877	27,649
Investments	819,357	810,988
Prepaid Expenses	17,722	27,679
Inventory	30,083	33,668
Total Current Assets	2,385,846	2,055,030
LONG-TERM ASSETS		
Lands held for protection		
Whitewater Estates, KY (Elkhorn)	31,367	31,367
Warson Island, TN (Watauga)	17,414	17,414
Craig County, VA (John's Creek)	9,536	9,536
Preston County, WV (Big Sandy)	5,000	0
Total for Lands held for protection	63,317	58,317
Computer equipment, net	70,181	93,467
Total Long-Term Assets	133,498	151,784
Total Assets	2,519,344	2,206,814
LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts Payable	39,707	70,576
Deferred Revenues	171,380	217,528
Payroll Liabilities	42,200	44,432
Total Current Liabilities	253,287	332,536
NET ASSETS		
Unrestricted Net Assets	1,508,486	1,458,802
Restricted Net Assets	757,571	415,476
Total Net Assets	2,266,057	1,874,278
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	2,519,344	2,206,814

2023 Functional Expenses



- Fundraising: 5%
- General & Administrative: 20%
- Program Services: 75%

2023 Revenue Sources



- Contributions: 36.41%
- Grant: 26.61%
- Membership dues: 18.49%
- In-Kind Contributions: 6%
- Products: 3.65%
- Events: 3.65%
- Sponsorships/Corp Programs: 2.48%
- Investments Gains/Losses: 1.16%
- Interest & Dividends: 1%
- Misc. Income: < 1%

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Riverside Peanut Thai Salad

Emerald LaFortune

FOR THOSE BORED OF DELI SANDWICHES, THIS PEANUT THAI SALAD is colorful, punchy, full of fun veggies, and endlessly riffable depending on your lunchgoer preferences. Best of all, the cabbage base does well if left in the peanut sauce for a day or two, making this the perfect make-ahead lunch to toss in a day trip cooler or prep for the first few midday meals of a multi-day rafting trip.

Helpful hints: Looking for a wrap? Skip the soba and add a tortilla. Gluten-free? Replace soy sauce with tamari and use a wheat-free soba or quinoa. Want an extra protein hit? Add leftover diced chicken, steak, or pork. And don't forget the sriracha for those who like some spice!

Ingredients

Prep Time: 20 Minutes

Serves 4

Salad

4 cups red cabbage, sliced thin
 1 red bell pepper, sliced thin
 1 cup carrot, sliced thin
 1 cup shelled edamame, cooked, rinsed with cold water and drained
 2 cups soba noodles, cooked, rinsed with cold water and drained
 2 tablespoons sesame seeds
 ½ cup salted peanuts
 ¼ cup fresh cilantro

Peanut Sauce

Adapted from "Dinner in One" by Melissa Clark

Easy alternative: Use a pre-made, jarred peanut sauce, found in most grocery stores.

1 cup creamy peanut butter
 2 tablespoons sesame oil
 3 tablespoons rice vinegar
 1 tablespoon brown sugar
 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
 2 garlic cloves, finely minced
 1 tablespoon soy sauce
 2 teaspoons fish sauce
 2 teaspoons red pepper flakes

Directions

1. In a large bowl mix together the cabbage, red pepper, carrots, soba, and edamame. Set aside.
2. In a small bowl whisk together the peanut sauce ingredients, adding water in 1-2 tablespoon increments to reach desired consistency.
3. Pour the peanut sauce into the salad bowl, using tongs to mix the sauce and salad thoroughly, and pull apart the soba noodles.
4. Sprinkle with sesame seeds, sriracha, and cilantro, and serve!
5. May be covered and refrigerated for up to two days and, lucky for you, is best served chilled. ■



Feeding The Rat

Roger Chao

In the throbbing heart of chaos, where adrenaline cascades,
There lives a starving animal, a creature of the shades.
Its name is known by few who dare, the mind its habitat,
For every soul who dares to delve, must learn to feed the rat.

This is not a beast of fur and claw, of whisker, tail, and fang,
No, this beast is born within, a silent, hungry pang.
It yearns for fire, for flight, for fear, for moments pure and raw,
For within the wild whirlwind's eye, it finds its sacred law.

The rat within craves not the scraps of ordinary days,
Not the idle chatter, nor the familiar, well-trodden ways.
It demands the sharp edge of adrenalin, slicing through the haze,
The thunderous roar of action, setting dormant hearts ablaze.

In the noise and rumble of the storm, it seeks the quiet core,
In the terror's tremble, it finds calm, and hungers all the more.
It craves the stillness found in speed, the peace in pounding hearts,
And in those moments, lost in time, the mundane world departs.

Feed the rat, the mantra hums, an echo in the soul,
A siren call to those who tire of life's incessant toll.
A remedy for weariness, for the weight of the passing days,
For those who wander the flatland, lost in the superficial haze.

To feed the rat is to quench the thirst, to heed the inner plea,
A feast of heightened sensation, a surrender to the spree.
In the quiet cocoon of fury, in the tranquil eye of fear,
Lie the morsels the rat savours, each moment crystal clear.

To feed the rat is prevention, a cure, a potent antidote,
Against the anemia of routine, against a life lived by rote.
Against the sickness of superficiality, the pallor of the mundane,
Against the dreariness of predictability, the shackle and the chain.

Each day we choose to feed the rat is a day lived in defiance,
Of the nebulous boundaries, of faceless compliance.
The rat refuses to be a slave to time, to live in bursts and spurts,
It craves the unrestrained, the open skies, the untrodden dirt.

Not all will understand this craving, this hunger raw and real,
It is a rhythm felt by few, an undercurrent only they can feel.
The ones who find their sustenance in the unpredictable, the wild,
The ones who reject the safety of the known, who long to be reconciled.

In their hearts beats the rat, robust, alive and free,
Unfettered by trivial pursuits, unburdened by decree.
The rat seeks no public praise, no validation in which to wallow,
It cares not for trends or crowd, it chooses its own path to follow.

The rat, if fed, is a faithful friend, a mirror of the self,
A measure of the soul within, not wealth or fame but health.
To know the rat is to know oneself, both the ebb and the surge,
To seek the summit and the depth, where fear and calm converge.

The rat in each of us is different, a personal compass of the mind,
A reflection of who we think we are, and the self we seek to find.
It's revealed in times of pressure, in the struggles we engage,
On the rock, in the water, through the air, its hunger sets the stage.

The rat, a duality within us, both of virtue and of vice,
Nourished, it guides us gladly, starved, it exacts its heavy price.
It reveals to us who we truly are, in moments raw and real,
The grit beneath the gloss, the strength within the ordeal.

Each of us harbors the rat, a part of us untamed,
It craves the rush of the cliff edge, the challenge yet unnamed.
Some will find their rat in mountains, where the snow meets sky,
Others in the silent depths, where the deep-sea creatures lie.

It's a siren call to sensation, to moments stark and pure,
A hunger for total focus, for feelings raw and sure.
Those moments when all fades away, except the task at hand,
These are the times we live for, which only the passionate understand.

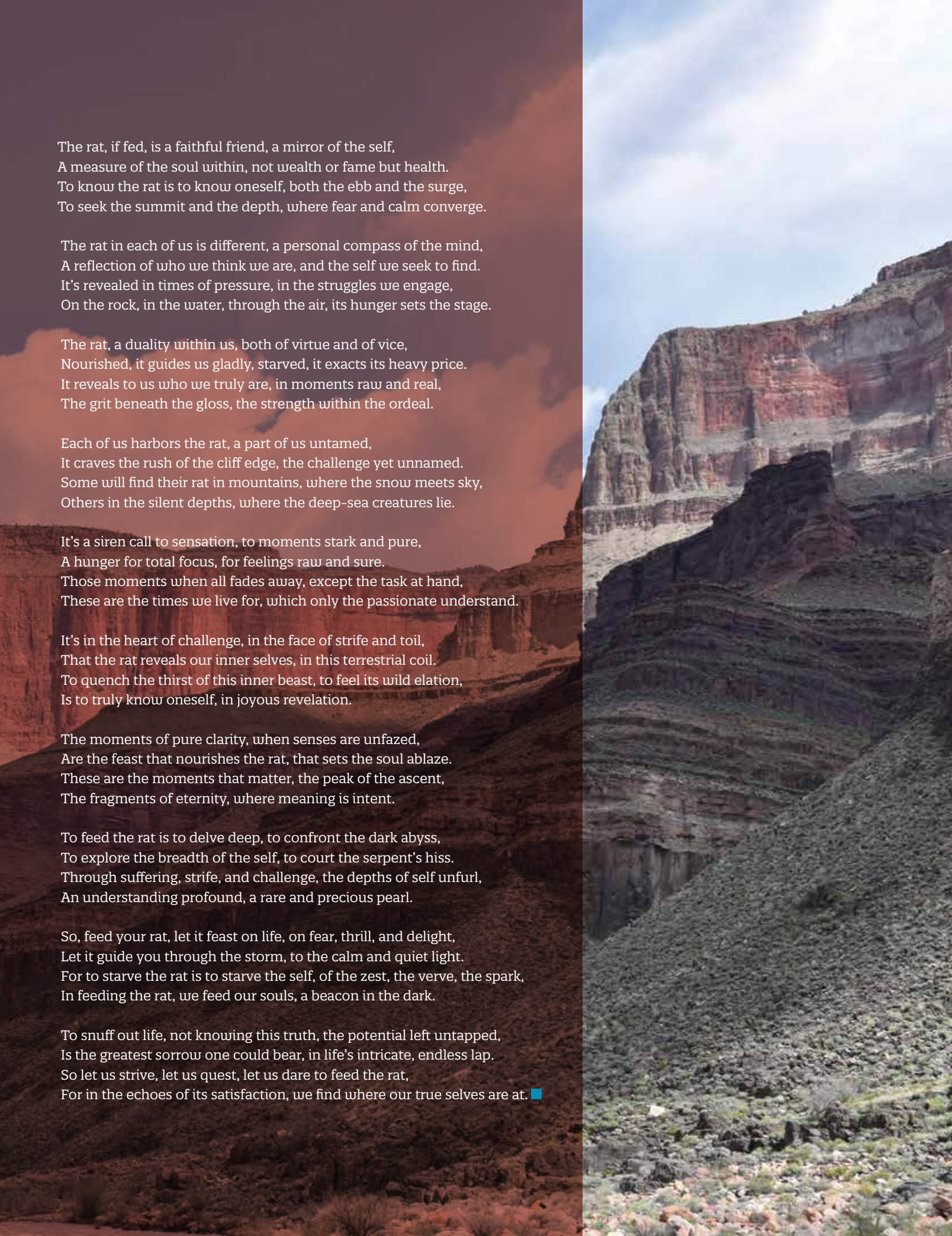
It's in the heart of challenge, in the face of strife and toil,
That the rat reveals our inner selves, in this terrestrial coil.
To quench the thirst of this inner beast, to feel its wild elation,
Is to truly know oneself, in joyous revelation.

The moments of pure clarity, when senses are unfazed,
Are the feast that nourishes the rat, that sets the soul ablaze.
These are the moments that matter, the peak of the ascent,
The fragments of eternity, where meaning is intent.

To feed the rat is to delve deep, to confront the dark abyss,
To explore the breadth of the self, to court the serpent's hiss.
Through suffering, strife, and challenge, the depths of self unfurl,
An understanding profound, a rare and precious pearl.

So, feed your rat, let it feast on life, on fear, thrill, and delight,
Let it guide you through the storm, to the calm and quiet light.
For to starve the rat is to starve the self, of the zest, the verve, the spark,
In feeding the rat, we feed our souls, a beacon in the dark.

To snuff out life, not knowing this truth, the potential left untapped,
Is the greatest sorrow one could bear, in life's intricate, endless lap.
So let us strive, let us quest, let us dare to feed the rat,
For in the echoes of its satisfaction, we find where our true selves are at. ■



River Sister

Suz Strazza

Editor's Note: American Whitewater and the Freeflow Institute offer competitive scholarships for emerging outdoor communicators. Applicants may be students, educators, aspiring storytellers of any kind, professional journalists, or other river-focused communicators. Suzanne Strazza was an American Whitewater Freeflow Scholarship recipient and River Sister is a part of her awarded project to visit and write about the Colorado River. Rivers—especially wild rivers—need storytellers. It is an honor to offer these scholarships and our privilege to empower artistic people to celebrate rivers with their own creative vision. Past recipients have deeply valued the experiences of these river-trip based writing and storytelling workshops taught by leading professionals in the field. To learn more visit freeflowinstitute.com

IN THE BEGINNING, RIVERS WERE UNTAMED. BILLIONS OF gallons of spring snowmelt rushed down mountainsides, carving canyons and scouring landscapes to the bone. Eventually, the rivers made their way to the oceans. In the West, river corridors were filled with otter and bighorn sheep, coyote willow, and box elder. Blue herons fished hump-back chub and pikeminnow. Sediment deposited along the rivers' edges formed expansive beaches. Spring runoff caused floods that washed river corridors clean, revitalizing and nourishing the riparian areas.

Rivers were the lifeblood of our planet.

We stand ashore reading, 'Danger. Cataract Canyon. Hazardous Rapids 2.5 miles.'

The Green River joins forces here with the Colorado. Emerald waters merge into chocolate brown, creating a fluid portal into the mysteries of canyon country seen only by those brave enough to continue downstream, heedless of this warning.

Here, the Colorado is her mighty self. Any upstream dams that hamper these rivers' movements are far enough away to allow the waters to flow freely.

Two rivers, three land masses, and me in the heart of Canyonlands: Island in the Sky, the Needles, the elusive Maze District. This is the Center of the Universe. Nowhere else matters.

I have always considered the river, seen only from an overlook 1,000 feet above, as the divider of this rockscape. But now I see that instead of separating, the river stitches this world together; she is the link. The heart.

Love fills my soul.

I'm with the Returning Rapids Project (RRP) on my first trip through Cataract Canyon, here to see the death-by-dehydration of Lake Powell Reservoir and to catch a glimpse of the mythical Glen Canyon rising out of the draining waters.

Several years ago, a few Cataract Canyon boaters, including my friends Meg and Mike, began to discern hints of a pre-dam river emergence, a glimpse of what used to be. Notes, photos, and observations were compared, stories shared, and hopes ignited. The Returning Rapids Project was born.

Geologists, hydrologists, historians, ecologists, environmentalists, journalists, and decision-makers have all joined RRP trips to see for themselves the renewed vitality of the river corridor and the growing crisis in the reservoir. The Colorado is determined to be a healthy river once again despite dams, water over-allocations, and climate change.

Seeing is believing how the destruction of a vital and thriving landscape created a stone graveyard above Glen Canyon Dam and a desertified wasteland where the river should greet the sea.

Simply put, management of the Colorado River is failing.



We must reconsider how we are storing and distributing water from this river.

Cataract Canyon is known for its harrowing runs through whitewater of mythic proportions. We are not here for the thrill. Instead, our destination lies beyond the whitewater.

We are here to see what happens when a river decides to fight back.

I came to cheer on my sister.

In the past handful of years, I have endured vicious abuse, divorce, a child's near-fatal mishap, a concussion, betrayal, cancer, shingles, and my father's death. Agonizing loneliness. Deep, murky grief. I felt like I was being tossed, bashed, and submerged in a continuous string of Class V rapids, wearing only water wings. Each time I surfaced for air, another wave threatened to drown me. I was fighting to stay afloat and to stay alive.

As I swam through the agonies, I found resilience and solace rowing the waterways of the West. Each oar stroke boosted my fortitude and eventually flushed me out of the dark recirculating hole threatening to swallow my entirety. Watery cur-

rents buoyed me and carried me back to the land of the living.

Now, it is my turn to be a lifeline and help the river thrive.

Here at the entrance to the mythical world of Cataract Canyon, the 14 miles of continuous whitewater ahead begets a healthy, vibrant waterway.

Any moving water in the desert is rare. Free-flowing rivers feel miraculous. Dams have taken away the natural cycles of Western rivers, hampering their ability to cleanse and replenish the surrounding landscape.

Flaming Gorge, Navajo, and Glen Canyon Dams are the three most significant hindrances keeping the Green, the San Juan, and the Colorado from flowing freely through here. But a quick visit to the Bureau of Reclamation website reveals that these are only three of 63 "projects" in the Upper Colorado Basin Region. Rivers "reclaimed" because of our need to improve our planet.

The fallout of that misguided thinking lies downstream of here.

We are headed to Lake Powell Reservoir.

*Calling the reservoir a "lake" is gaslighting.
A lake is a living thing; a unique community of thriving flora
and fauna.
This is not that.
Language matters.*

Since the day in 1963 that Glen Canyon Dam was completed, the health of the Colorado River has been deteriorating.

Before the dam, there were around 60 rapids in Cataract Canyon. Big Drop 3 (BD3) was 23rd in the long line of whitewater. In 1983, the last time Powell was at full capacity, reservoir water reached upstream to BD3 drowning everything below. Only 40% of Cataract Canyon remained unaffected.

As the reservoir filled, whitewater became flat, beaches submerged, and plants and animals vanished.

An unhampered Colorado runs thick sienna with sediment, plants, and nutrients carried down from the peaks of the Wind River Range and the Rocky Mountains.

When tumbling river meets stagnant reservoir, it abruptly halts. Still water, unable to hold its silty burden, drops it. On average 30,000 dump truck loads of detritus a day land at this convergence, forming a delta that separates river from lake.

Every day since 1963.

You do the math.

The river flowing into the reservoir is turbid. Flowing out of the reservoir into Grand Canyon, it is disturbingly clear.

Glen Canyon, purported to be one of the most beautiful places on the planet, is filled with as much as 160 feet of sediment. The dense mud is compacted under the weight of the water and hardens against the sensuously curving walls of Glen.

This mud-rock is slowly being exposed by the retreating reservoir. It is so prolific in this tortured landscape that it is dubbed the "Dominy Formation," a reference to Floyd Dominy, former commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. The man responsible for Glen Canyon Dam.

Not exactly a complimentary nod to his legacy.

Fluctuations in river flows and reservoir levels create a delta that travels as drought and overuse cause the reservoir to recede. Where the original river channel is exposed, her momentum pushes the delta farther from BD3 and closer to Glen Canyon Dam.

Between BD3 and the moving delta lies the Recovering River Corridor, where this magnificent river is returning to life despite all efforts to control her. As her currents rise from the

bottom of the riverbed, she overcomes her constraints, reclaiming what was once hers.

Water levels drop, Dominy collapses, riparian areas revive, and wildlife returns.

Miles downstream, sitting on the bank of what used to be the reservoir, the returning Gypsum Creek Rapid at my feet hums and bubbles with power. A cord from my heart is bound to hers. The Colorado gathers strength. At high water, she will bulldoze the silt and debris across the reservoir, making space to flow once again.

Like me, she is slowly recovering, fighting back. This rapid is 95% revived. Dead reservoir water becomes a living, breathing river once again.

Come on Darlin'. If I can do it, so can you.

Strange silt sea creatures rise out of the channel. Some of these mud statues will dissolve over the next few days, while some will wait until next spring's high waters wash them away.

The river corridor is constantly transforming.

Along the canyon walls, new landscapes emerge from the choking silt. Massive walls of mud have hardened into solid ground. New life grows in the nutrient-rich Dominy. Compressed organic matter in the silt turns into methane. The release of pressure as water levels drop causes the gas to rise to the surface in mini mud volcanoes.

The canyon vibrates with life.

Flowing river eats at the foundation of the Dominy, destabilizing this eerie landscape. A giant silt wall has laterally slumped down to the river, so large it can be seen from space: the 'Space Slump'.

We climb directly out of the boats and up the steep walls of hardened silt onto a postapocalyptic landscape. Hidden in the terraces above the river, there is a brand-new lake likely formed by the re-emergence of a spring long hidden in the Dominy. Free to breathe, the mini-geyser creates an enormous body of water high above and entirely separate from the river.

We breathe freedom together.

After paddling a packraft across this expansive lake while taking water samples, an RRP team member swims downward, never finding the bottom. Meanwhile, we investigate underwater volcanoes burping along the shoreline. A flick of a lighter on the water's surface causes a flame to flare when it connects with the released methane.

Signs of renewed vitality are everywhere.

A bottomless lake hangs off a cliff.
Burning water, a moonscape of mud.
I feel turned upside down.

When we reach the delta, the current ends. Silt distills. The sudden switch from opaque to crystalline is unnerving.

Tears erupt. I gaze longingly upstream to bighorn sheep and coyote willows. Dead water and lifeless shorelines are devastating.

Dodging speed boats, we float past the clifftops of Glen Canyon. Below us, Katie Lee frolicked naked across the slickrock serenading a place that captured her heart. A champion for this river, this canyon, her songs crack us open and urge us to fight.

I ask my hosts, "How can you cross this threshold from healthy to dead day in and day out? How do you bear the grief?"

Hope.

They point to red rock wall exposed under dissolved Dominy; a beach within Glen Canyon, not seen since the dam was built. Optimism lies in the tiniest details.

My heart aches for the river's suffering. I will away her confinement. BLOW UP THE DAM, screams in my head.

The river gurgles. Be patient. My time is coming.

You got this sister.

How do we support her return to health? Destroy Glen Canyon Dam? Stop irrigating and golfing? Bring water in from alternative reservoirs, depleting other landscapes? Leave it alone and hope for the best?

We have yet to figure it out, but here is what we do know: The way that we have been managing this river and all of its tributaries is not working.

River corridors, critical wildlife habitat, and our collective sanity are all suffering. Even the oft-despised reservoir is deathly: bathtub rings abound, wildlife does not.

We absolutely must imagine a better world and advocate for a healthy river that touches the sea.

Her survival depends on creating a management plan based on the reality of drought and unrealistic water demands. Let's repair the damage and encourage the lifeblood of the West to return to all her glory.



Photo: Suzanne Strazza

With the help of rivers, I recovered from absolute devastation, returning to life healthy and vibrant. With my help, our help, the Colorado River can do the same.

After seeing the river's feisty determination to once again flow freely I too am filled with hope.

Sitting by the campfire on the shore of the vanishing "lake," we imagine a thriving river and revived Glen Canyon.

"What does the river want?"

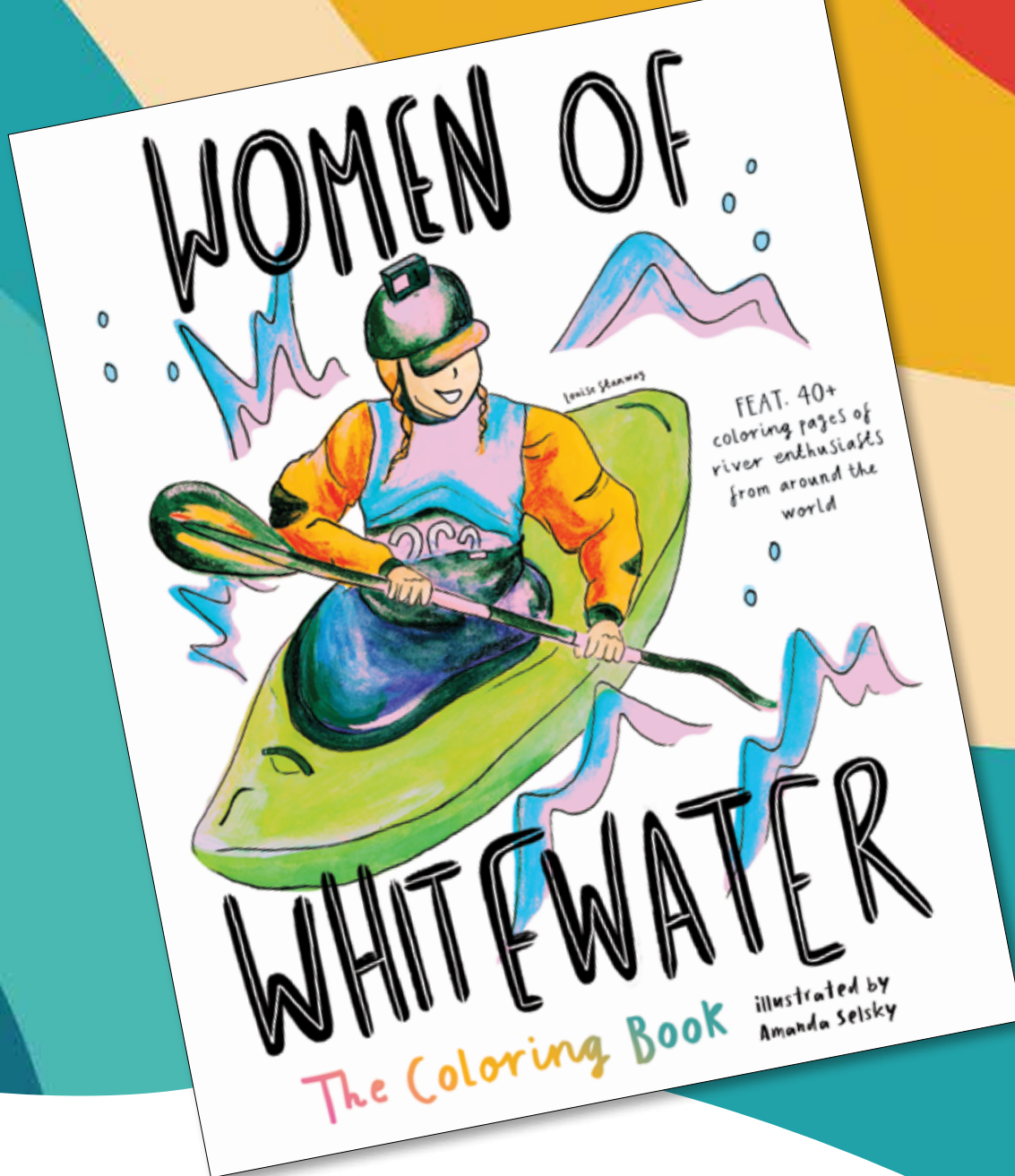
She is telling us, we need only to listen.

The river speaks through my friend Meg:

I wish to touch the sea,
To flow in Glen Canyon,
And where I have been displaced, I am replaced.

May all your dreams come true, sweet sister. ■

Author Note: My deepest gratitude to American Whitewater, the Freeflow Institute, Ed Roberson, the Returning Rapids Project, and Glen Canyon Institute. With your support, I have been able to write along the most astoundingly precious rivers with people of incomparable passion and knowledge.



Women of Whitewater: The Coloring Book

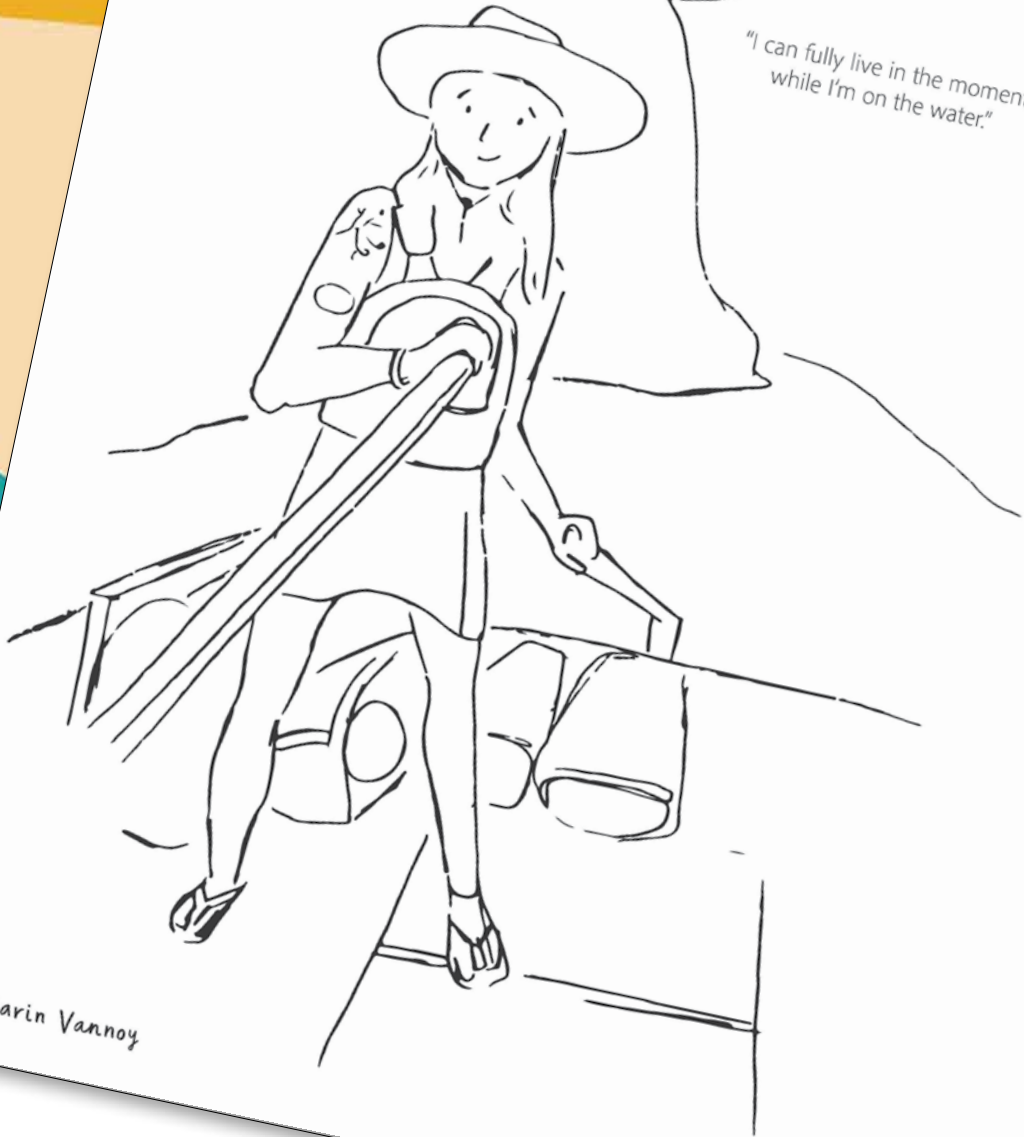
About The Project:

“Women of Whitewater: The Coloring Book” is a high-quality 40+ page coloring book that celebrates women in paddling and their stories through hand-drawn, dynamic illustrations. It features illustrations of raft guides, paddlers, recreational boaters, whitewater enthusiasts and wizards, kayakers, moms who row, and more. This book was first proposed to the Carbondale Arts Fellowship in 2023 in collaboration with local raft guide Charlotte Hanks (featured in the book!) who emphasized the need for greater representation of women in whitewater.

About The Illustrator Amanda Selsky:

Amanda Selsky is an illustrator based in Carbondale, Colorado. When she first moved to Colorado, she loved going on the river and greatly admired the women who confidently rowed through rapids, including Charlotte who helped lead a ladies rowing clinic in Glenwood. As a classroom teacher who took students on rafting field trips, she saw how empowering it could be for young people too. All girls deserve to see future versions of themselves behind the oars.

Elise Campbell
Jackson Hole, WY &
Salmon, ID
Whitewater Wizard



"I can fully live in the moment
while I'm on the water."

 Garin Vannoy

Featured Coloring Page: Elise Campbell

Elise was born and raised in Traverse City, Michigan and began traveling abroad during college. She continued traveling and guiding everything from rivers to sea kayaks to ice climbing to backpacking and dog sledding! She spent a few years racing dog teams in Fairbanks, AK - appreciating the other ways to play in 'the water': snow! She has always found a sense of peace and the space to take a deep breath when she is outside, so she will see where that takes her next! ■

To purchase a coloring book, visit
store.americanwhitewater.org



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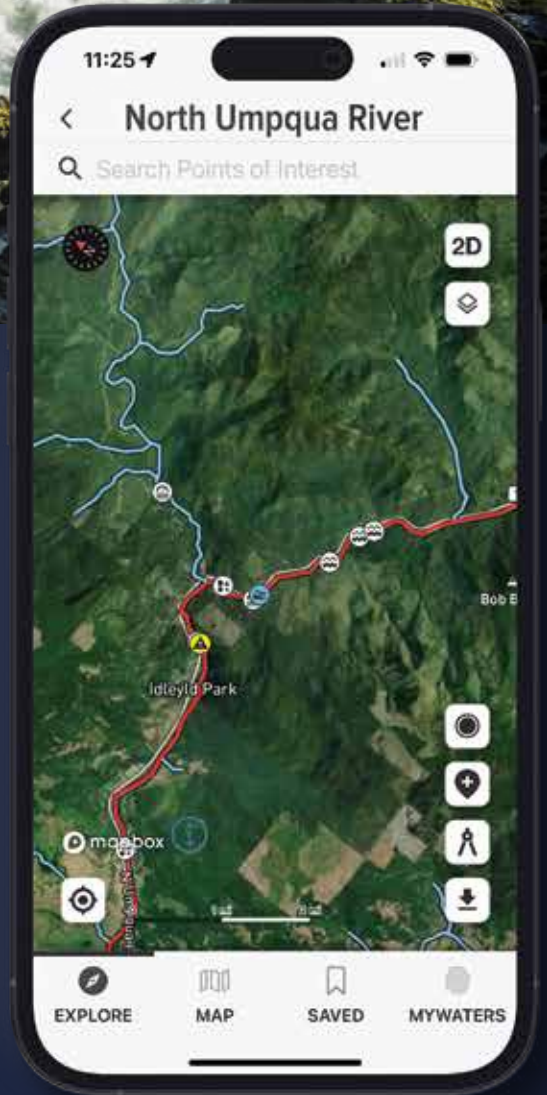


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Gauley Paddlers Encouraged to Step Up Safety

THIS YEAR WE WANT TO ENCOURAGE BOATERS TO HAVE

a great time on the Gauley, but to also keep it classy and keep the safety of your group and others front of mind. Here are some tips, based on conversations with the National Park Service and our own recommendations as fellow paddlers.

Every fall the predictable flows, sublime scenery, and powerful rapids of the Gauley bring boaters together from vast distances for something of an annual reunion in a National Park setting. Mixed into the roar of the rapids are the cheers of river runners celebrating each other's good and bad lines and at times the joy of the river and community fuels a party-like atmosphere on the river. At the same time, the Gauley has significant hazards that claim lives with sobering regularity.

- *Don't Create Hazards:* Be thoughtful about where you tie rafts up to ensure they are not in possible swim or recovery locations (like at Postage Due), don't throw things at or jump onto rafts that are not in your group, and don't blow your whistle

unless it is to convey critical safety information. Generally try to make the Gauley a safer place for other visitors.

- *Drive Cautiously on the Shuttle Roads:* The shuttle roads are narrow and kind of sketchy! Be sure to have a designated driver if you need one, and drive slowly and respectfully on the shuttle roads.
- *Be Ready to Help Others:* Groups are encouraged to stay physically and mentally alert and ready to help swimmers and people in need. This means avoiding drug and alcohol use on and before the river that could impair your ability to help others. It also means stepping up to help people rather than being a bystander.

While these suggestions are basic, they can have life-or-death consequences, and in some cases can cross the line of potential criminal consequences. Above all, they are the right thing to do out of respect for our fellow boaters and the incomparable Gauley River. Have fun out there! ■

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OF RIVER STEWARDSHIP



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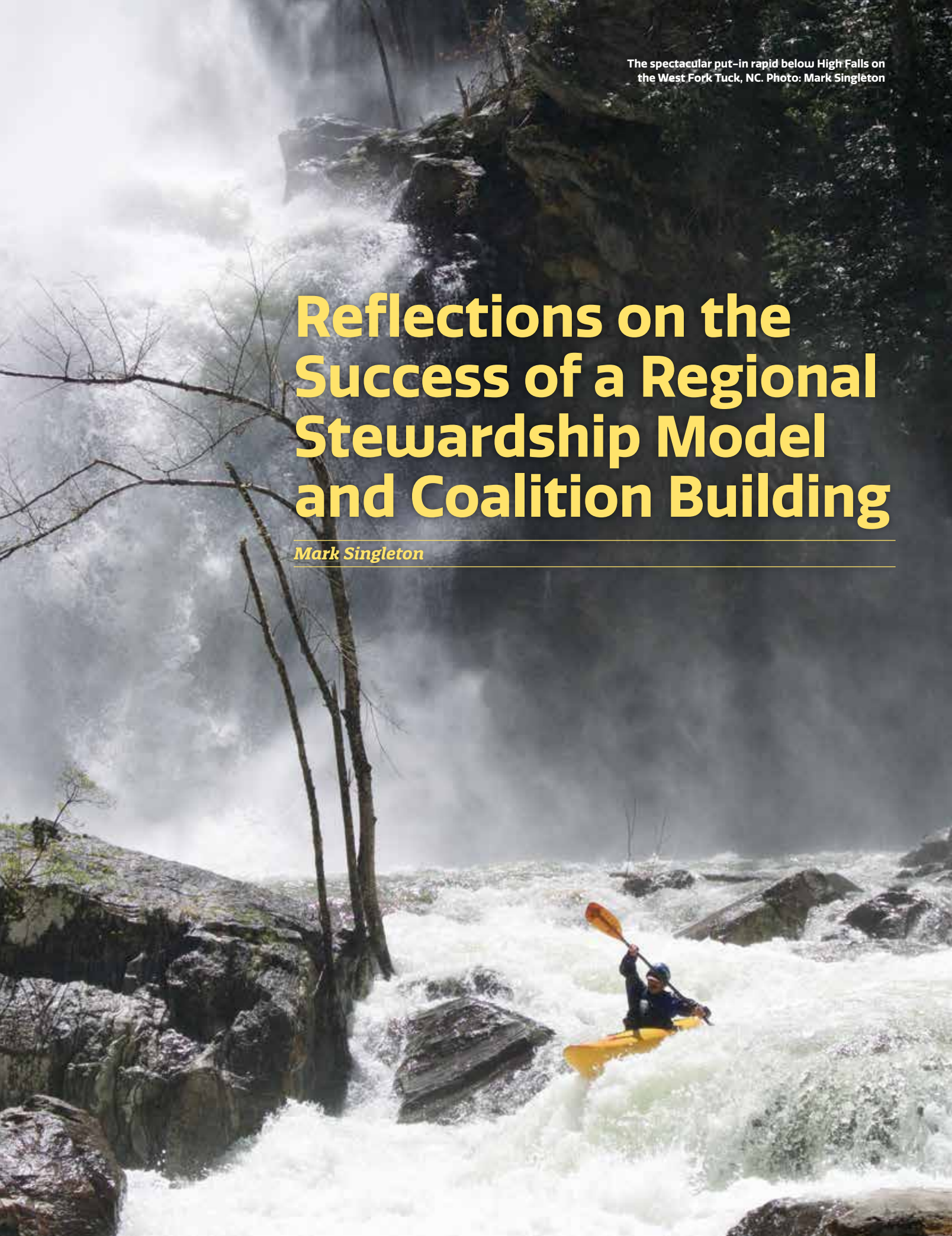
For more information about making a bequest to American Whitewater contact Bethany Overfield bethany@americanwhitewater.org



The spectacular put-in rapid below High Falls on the West Fork Tuck, NC. Photo: Mark Singleton

Reflections on the Success of a Regional Stewardship Model and Coalition Building

Mark Singleton



I SERVED AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF AMERICAN

Whitewater for 18 years, starting in 2004 and ending in 2022 when I retired. As American Whitewater celebrates its 70th Anniversary, I thought the time might be right to share some of my experiences from the last two decades and beyond. As the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche first stated, “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.” The same can be said for organizations, especially those that can learn from their mistakes. Just like people, you learn a lot from how organizations recover and move forward. With the 70th Anniversary happening now, let’s celebrate those crazy circumstances that made us what we are today.

You don’t get to be 70 years old without going through a couple of near-death experiences. Same thing for organizations. In the late 1970s, a group of East Coast paddlers led by Pete Skinner gave American Whitewater CPR. The following excerpt comes from the International Whitewater Hall of Fame website.

The “American Whitewater Affiliation” (AW now American Whitewater) was founded in 1954 (in part) as a means of communication between America’s few, widely dispersed whitewater enthusiasts. They were known for publishing the American Whitewater Journal and their widely recognized Safety Code. The organization was run entirely by volunteers and offered no pay to those who wrote articles or produced the magazine. By 1977, Pete (Skinner) joined the board and was almost immediately elected President. As the sport grew, glossy commercial magazines became available and AW was losing membership. By 1979 AW was falling apart. Its long-time volunteer editor and executive director retired. Issues became thinner, and a few were missed entirely. The volunteers who handled the “business side” stepped down, and could not be replaced. Renewal notices weren’t being sent out, and AW’s bank account shriveled. Membership dwindled to a few hundred.

Pete decided that American Whitewater would not die! With the last money in the AW treasury he traveled to California and secured a large donation from Yvon Chouinard of Patagonia, who is himself an accomplished whitewater paddler. This allowed Pete to create several new issues of the AW Journal and send out renewal notices.

As membership picked up, Pete decided that American Whitewater could do more. He’d been trying to stop a hydro project on New York’s Black River, which had become a whitewater hotspot, but the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) would not accept input from individuals. Pete met attorney Pope Barrow while working with Citizens for Gauley River. They realized that hundreds of dams were going to be relicensed in the coming years, and some had the potential to re-water outstanding stretches of whitewater.

As a young kayaker, sometime in the early 1980s, I found myself on the banks of the Cheat River in West Virginia. A friend and I had pulled over in the rocks above High Falls for a riverside lunch while paddling. Two other boaters joined us and we struck up a conversation. They talked about hydro relicensing and the opportunities it could bring for additional paddling opportunities for rivers currently impacted by dams.

Of course, I was intrigued, but it sounded far-fetched. Little did I know at the time, I was talking to Pope Barrow and Mac Thornton, two of the godfathers of American Whitewater and the hydropower relicensing program. Unknown to me at the time, this day would be a foreshadowing of my future self. To insert the river community into the relicensing process, Pope, Mac, Pete, and others had found a way to use clever language, embedded in the Federal Power Act amended in 1986, to call for equal consideration of non-power values. This requirement to include consideration of public and environmental values in licensing proceedings has provided American Whitewater with a major tool for river restoration.

Fast forward 20 years on my personal timeline. After various jobs in the ski industry and as the marketing guy for a large East Coast outdoor center, I found myself at Gauley Fest sitting at a long table in a bare concrete block building with flickering fluorescent lighting. There were a dozen chairs on either side of the long table and two chairs at either end. This was my interview for the Executive Director position at American Whitewater. The Board Chair at that time, Sutton Bacon, started a rapid-fire volley of interview questions he had prepared on his laptop. The whole scene was like a ping-pong match of rapid questions and quick answers, with 24 members of the 27-member American Whitewater board filling the chairs that lined the side of the table.



Removal of Dillsboro Dam paved the way for West Fork Tuck releases.
Photo: Mark Singleton

I'd read about this style of interview, so it didn't take me totally by surprise. I kept my responses succinct and tried to stay light on my feet. Board member's heads would turn toward Sutton when he volleyed a question to me. As I answered, heads would turn towards me. This manner of questions and answers lasted about 40 minutes. When Sutton exhausted his question list, other board members made a few inquiries. The whole interview lasted about an hour. Being that the interview happened at Gauley Fest, I then went boating.

I was offered the job as Executive Director in the fall of 2004. The organization had been doing incredible work through the previous decade. John Gangemi and Jason Robertson, following and complementing some groundbreaking work by Rainey Hoffman and Rich Bowers, with huge efforts from board members and volunteers, led the organization to a new era of flow restoration wins and staffed stewardship work. From the mid-nineties, the organization had racked up success after success on rivers like the Deerfield, Moose, Tallulah, North Fork Feather, and Bear. This was a timeframe of unprecedented opportunity to restore rivers and AW maintained a steady keel through all of it, showing up to many hundreds of meetings regarding well over 100 dams that were up for relicensing.

Despite the wins, the organization was encountering financial issues that resulted in a painful reorganization of staff. Some positions were cut, and others were reduced through attrition. A new financial reporting system was built from the ground up. With a leaner team and consolidated offices, we could make it work with our limited financial resources.

American Whitewater moved into offices located on the campus of Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina. The new location provided a significant reduction in office overhead expenses and the university provided a critical year of business incubation. American Whitewater, at this period, was 50 years old but needed management like a start-up for us to re-find our financial footing.

A year later the organization moved off campus, two miles down the road, to Sylva, North Carolina. At the time, the organization was deeply involved in two local river projects. One was advocating for the removal of Dillsboro Dam, a little dinky dam with big implications for future West Fork Tuckasegee releases. The other was access to the Chattooga Headwaters, the only National Wild and Scenic River with a ban on boating. Both of these initiatives caused a stir in the local community, which was somewhat uncomfortable for a public university. Yet, once the Dillsboro Dam was removed, I never once heard anyone say they wanted that dam back. The Chattooga Headwaters access remains a sticky issue 20 years later.

Regional Stewardship

With a permanent location in western North Carolina, we began to rebuild the organization around a stewardship mission. Previously, access and conservation programs had been in separate silos, without much communication between the two program directors. Rather than looking at these elements of the American Whitewater mission as separate, a regional model was implemented.

Our approach embraced the notion that conservation and access needed each other. The understanding that river protection and restoration and healthy human-powered outdoor recreation are mutually dependent is core to the stewardship program. River runners appreciate natural landscapes; those special places need conservation-oriented users to help preserve and protect them. Another way to say this is, you can't love what you don't know. It's boaters' intimate knowledge of rivers that makes them such fierce defenders of the river's inherent values.

At about this time, Kevin Colburn stepped into the role of National Stewardship Director. He also covered projects in the Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Northern Rockies. Thomas O'Keefe and Dave Steindorf, super volunteers during the decade before my tenure, became regional directors, Thomas in the Pacific Northwest and Dave in California. Both were regions with many active projects that needed immediate attention. While this regional stewardship model has been a key to long-term success, it was implemented out of necessity to cover pressing projects where we had a significant stake in the outcome.

Over time other regions have been added to the mix. Late in 2006, a group of paddlers interested in Colorado River issues met in Buena Vista on the banks of the Arkansas River to discuss specific needs and unique challenges rivers faced. This working group included members of the paddlesport industry, retailers, athletes, local politicians, tourism officials, water rights advocates, and attorneys. Our goal was to develop a common vision for protecting flows and for improving the public's ability to enjoy whitewater rivers. At the time, Colorado was looking at ways to fill the gap in meeting water demand for communities on the Front Range. What was apparent from this meeting was that American Whitewater needed a seat at the table when water allocation discussions were taking place. Without that representation, flows that are critical for whitewater boating and river health were going to be on the menu as a way to feed the water needs of large metro areas on the east side of the Rockies.

Out of this initial meeting came the work plan and job description for our Colorado Stewardship Director (now expanded to the southern Rockies). The first few years of the program were challenging, as staff tried to find their stride alongside the rest of our stewardship program, which at the time was largely focused on hydropower.

In the southern Rockies, water allocation was the issue. The breakthrough came when Southern Rockies Regional Director Nathan Fey, aided by then-recent flow studies graduate and current Communications Director Evan Stafford, began using the flow study process developed for hydropower relicensing as a method for identifying flow needs in Colorado rivers. The flow study model provided solid data for identifying optimal flows for recreation. With data in hand, agency river managers told me, "Until AW came along, trying to get boaters to agree on flows was like nailing Jell-O to the wall."

Armed with these tools, the Southern Rockies boating community has made a huge impact in preserving and protecting flows for the future. In the present day, with Hattie Johnson as the Southern Rockies Restoration Director and Kestrel Kunz as the Southern Rockies Protection Director, our interests are well represented and organized thoughtfully. Our stewardship program has proven to be resilient and strong, making significant contributions to a focused, science-based approach to how water is allocated in the region.

We used the same approach when we established the Northeast Stewardship Program a few years later. Over the next decade, 50 hydroelectric dams in the Northeast are scheduled to get new 30-to-50-year federal licenses, creating a once in a generation opportunity to improve river conditions. In the Black River Basin alone, there are more than 20 hydropower dams on the Black, Beaver, and Moose rivers currently in the relicensing process. With Bob Nasdor as the region's stewardship director, American Whitewater is working hard to mitigate project impacts and achieve river restoration goals. Through these efforts, we will restore flows to dewatered river reaches, improve existing flows, enhance public access, and benefit communities throughout the region.

Collaboration and Coalition Building

Without a DC presence, American Whitewater needed a way to be effective at the national level. The interests of our user community were often hijacked by other organizations claiming to represent boaters. As you may have heard before, "If you're not at the table, you're on the menu." Back in the fall of 2004, a small group of executive directors met in an unexceptional DC conference room off K Street to begin the process of working together. We didn't have an organization name, nor was there much money to fund an effort. REI had provided a small pot of seed money to bring our groups together.

I remember leaving that meeting thinking, "This is a good idea, but probably not going anywhere." I was wrong and soon we jumped in as leaders of a new and soon-to-be incredibly influential national organization representing the interests of human-powered outdoor recreation users, including river runners. Those meetings turned out to be the beginnings of the Outdoor Alliance (OA), a high-functioning organization uniting the voices of outdoor enthusiasts to conserve public lands and waters and to ensure those places are managed in a way that embraces the human-powered experience.

Collaboration and coalition building is hard work, but it's one way to build influence inside the DC Beltway and beyond. Our key motivation in those early days was to have greater influence with decision makers who were shaping policy for public lands and waters. What we heard in initial coalition meetings with lawmakers was, "What took you so long to start working together?" Previously, each organization represented its own interests; working together we started to command respect as a much larger group.



The EDs of Outdoor Alliance during a day of congressional meetings

Early efforts were strapped together with bailing wire and duct tape. We were driven by the desire to tell our own story and have our members' voices heard in DC. With support for the young coalition from the Turner Foundation, we were able to reach out and hire a DC-based consultant to drive our efforts. Adam Cramer (if you paddle the Potomac much you probably know him) came on board to assist Outdoor Alliance in 2006 and came up with the title 'Policy Architect' to describe the work he was doing. Adam was also an AW board member at the time and had been AW's lead volunteer on the state hydro-power relicensing effort for the Upper Yough.

During that period, critical information on the economic impact of outdoor recreation was missing from the dialog. The outdoor industry began publishing studies outlining the size and impact of outdoor recreation, and that information became an arrow in our quiver that shot straight and true. Policymakers were hungry for a common agenda on recreation policy, and we had the recreation policy agenda down pat. We also knew how to present it with authenticity. Outdoor Alliance policy platforms were clever, well-constructed, and got attention. They were also good for both recreation and conservation.

In 2013, it became clear that the OA concept had legs and was maturing into a trusted voice for outdoor recreation and conservation. The thing that was missing was a full-time person at the helm. Adam graciously exited his DC law practice to become the full-time Outdoor Alliance Executive Director. Under his leadership, OA grew from five founding member organizations (American Whitewater is one of the five) to the ten groups represented today. The budget and staff also grew.

Today, OA operates on a budget of over a million dollars and has a paid staff of six with assistance from contractors for specific projects. The growth in staff and budget happened without cannibalization of any member organization funding. In short, OA grew the size of the pie advocating for the interests of the human-powered recreational user. If you have happened to listen to the Hammer Factor podcast, you will hear Louis Geltman, OA Policy Director, talking smart in his policy updates. Our AW river stewardship team works closely with Louis, Adam, and the rest of the OA staff in a strategic approach to address policy issues and management plans that impact our community of whitewater paddlers. This year, Outdoor Alliance celebrates its 10th Anniversary since achieving nonprofit status.

Other coalitions have been an important part of our development. Staff have worked very closely with the Hydropower Reform Coalition (HRC) as an effective tool for our interests. The HRC works to protect, enhance, and restore America's rivers, watersheds, and communities affected by hydropower operations. Current California Stewardship Director Theresa Simsiman serves as the California Hydropower Reform Coalition Chair. Additionally, American Whitewater staff have provided key leadership to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Coalition, whose mission is to protect and defend existing and potential Wild and Scenic Rivers, and broaden the movement for their conservation by raising awareness about their value. Coalition building takes time and energy, but it has had a huge impact on our national success.

Stabilizing the Organization

Once the program side of the house was in order, we began the process of slowly rebuilding our financial resources. With a regional stewardship model and local success stories, we had a compelling narrative to share with boaters to encourage supporting American Whitewater. What had been a low point in direct dues-paying members of around 3,000 in the mid to late 2000s has become over 7,000 members today, thanks in large part to the engagement work of Bethany Overfield who was brought on as the membership and engagement director.

Additionally, we were able to grow our industry support. This happened largely outside the paddlesports industry with lifestyle brand support. Another key component of our financial recovery was grant funding. What foundations wanted to know (and some grant managers come straight out and say) is, "If this is such a great deal, who else is helping pay the freight?" When you can point to 7,000 dues-paying members, our industry partners, and generous additional support from major donors, you have a winning trifecta. Today, the funding streams of American Whitewater are well diversified; if one of them were to dry up or take a major downturn it would hurt, but it wouldn't kill the organization.

The Safety Program

Safety has been a core issue for AW since 1954, and today, thanks in large part to Charlie Walbridge and his upkeep of the accident database, we are leaders in whitewater safety education and analysis. Formal risk management is part of all our programs. What we know is that responsible behavior on the water aids our efforts for improved access, where agency staff often try to use risk and public protection issues to block the responsible use of river resources.

We work hard to publicize safe practices that help all users enjoy rivers safely, and we advise legislative bodies and river managers on the best ways to educate whitewater paddlers. If you look back through the pages of early American Whitewater Journals from the mid 1950s, you'll see that the International Scale of River Difficulty, the codification of a I-VI whitewater classification system, was developed internationally, and adopted and promoted by American Whitewater.

Today, with leadership from Communications Director Evan Stafford and National Stewardship Director Kevin Colburn, our safety products include not only the widely used International Scale of Difficulty, but also our Safety Code. The Safety Code includes the best available information that has been reviewed by a broad cross-section of whitewater experts; an open-source signage toolbox supplying graphics, messaging, sign templates, sign placement criteria, and other content guidelines for safety and wayfinding at river access sites; safety videos with easily digestible tips to help keep river users of all skill and experience levels safe on the water; and other rescue and risk management materials.

We've found incredible success by putting a significant portion of every dollar we receive directly into our river stewardship work. In addition, American Whitewater has received over a decade's worth of straight Four-Star ratings (the highest) from Charity Navigator. Only the top 2% of charities have received that many consecutive Four-Star ratings.

Looking Ahead

What do the next 20 years bring? Our everything, everywhere, all at once strategy will likely need to be evaluated moving into the future. What I do know is AW has been very fortunate to find staff bold enough, alongside a stellar group of committed super volunteers to help take on this scope of work. The core stewardship group that came together 20 years ago with Kevin Colburn, Dave Steindorf, and Thomas O'Keefe is still in place today, and they're flanked by a deep roster of experienced colleagues who form what you might call a 'super team'.

When I add up the total number of years the current staff of 14 has in experience working directly on AW and river stewardship projects, either as paid staff or as super volunteers, it comes to over 200 total years of experience. This represents over 14 years on average per individual – that's an incredibly deep talent pool! And, longevity isn't the only thing we have in spades. Mission-driven work has a way of attracting the most talented folks out there. Scott Harding and Jeff Venturino now round out the current stewardship team, bringing fresh talent and perspectives that continue to help ingrain our mission and organization in local communities across the country.

Staff is everything for a small nonprofit organization. I don't know of really any other groups that have the tenure this staff has. Both individually and collectively they punch way above their weight. No other organization or utility has the depth of experience in hydro relicensing that this group has, with well over 100 relicensing efforts under their collective belts. This is a very unique super-power, one that AW will continue to put to use moving forward, as second and third-generation hydro-power licenses come up over the next 20 years.

Experiences over the last 20 years have done a lot to inform and shape the stewardship program in place today. As an organization, American Whitewater has been very lucky to have the support of members, major donors, foundations, and industry partners. It's been a great crew to be on the water with. Just like learning to paddle, you don't gain skills without a few swims. Yes, we've swum a few times along the way. But our swims have taught us things we needed to know and we are stronger as an organization for those lessons. ■

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