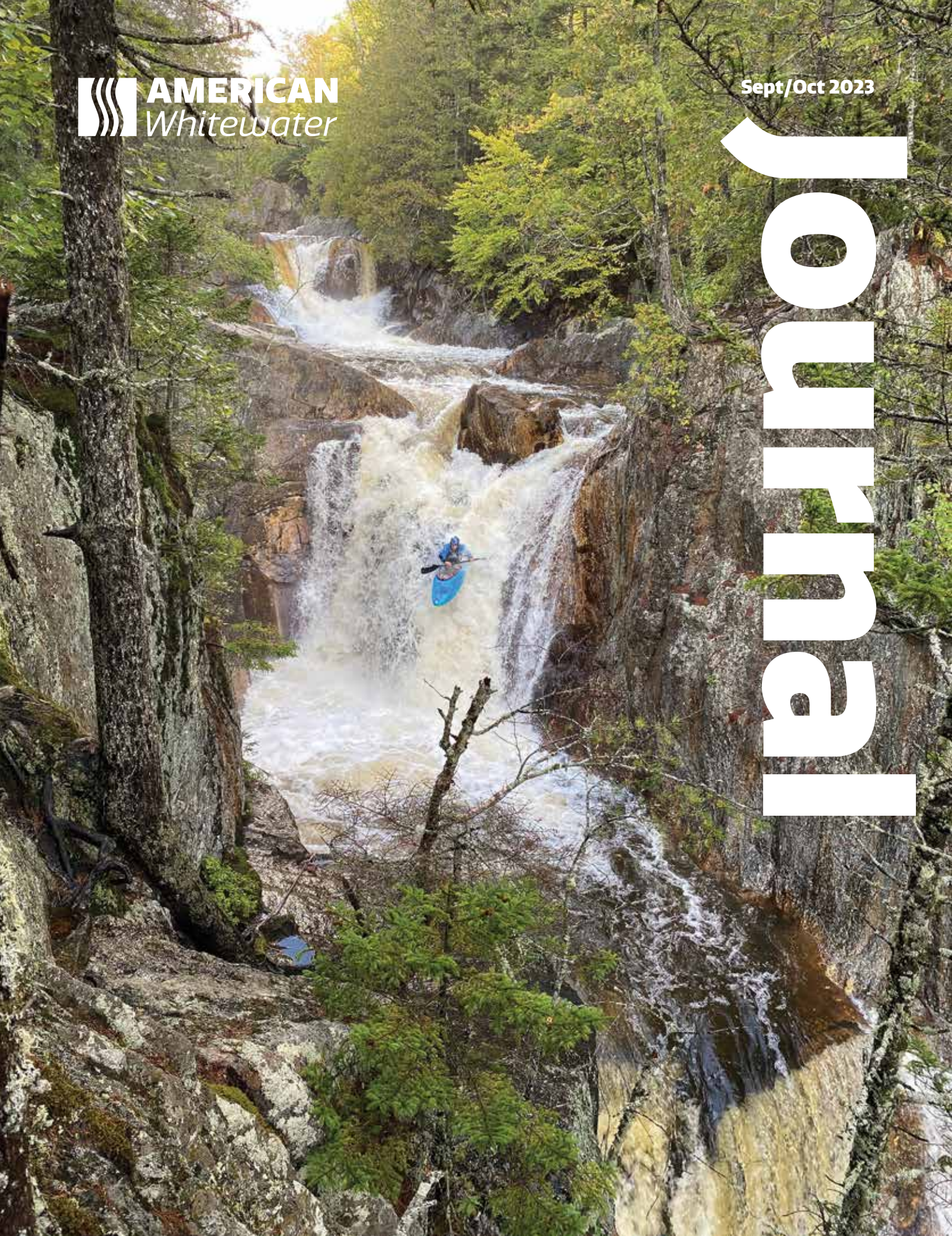
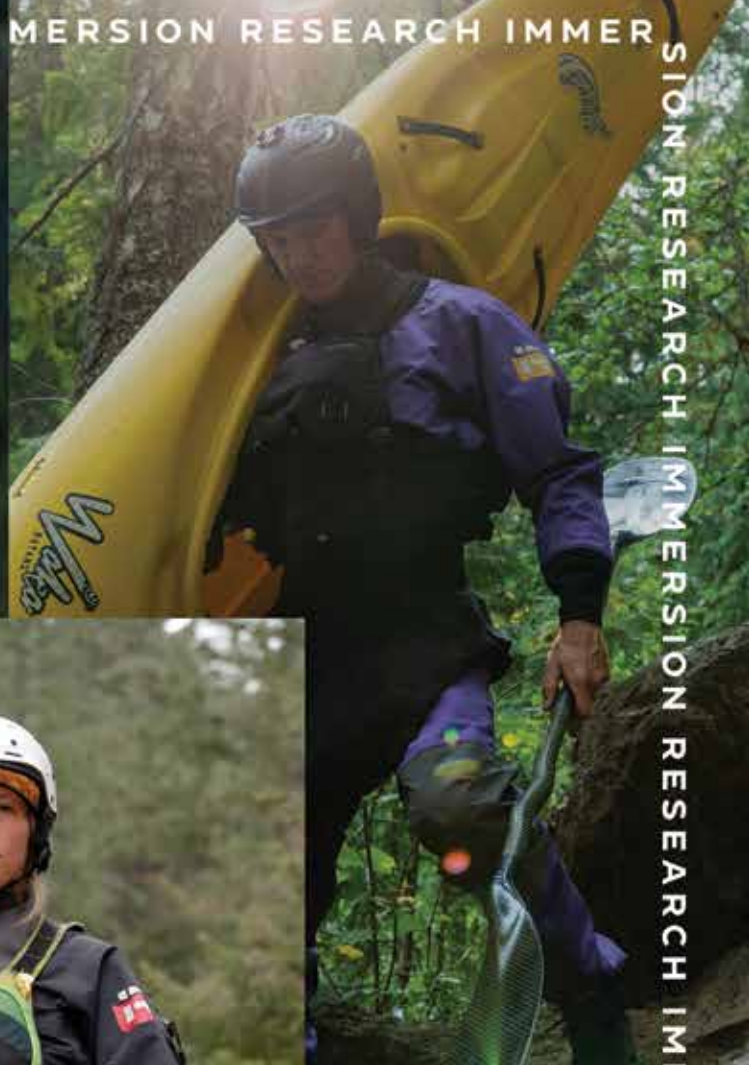


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AMERICAN WHITewater JOURNAL



A volunteer publication
promoting river conservation,
access, and safety

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On the cover: "Maine's best park and huck." Beautiful fall light baths Smalls Falls on the Sandy River. Smalls Falls is located on Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust land, which has conserved over 14,000 acres and 50 miles of lake and river frontage. Non-profit land trusts can play an integral part in maintaining access to our rivers and American Whitewater works often with land trusts to secure river access on private land when these areas come up for sale. The Trust offers free public access to 35 miles of recreational trails in the region and worked with the Maine Department of Transportation who owns the Smalls Falls Rest Area to provide easy access to the waterfalls. Photo: Riley Adams.

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.

EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER
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

By Clinton Begley

SHORTLY AFTER THE ORGANIZATION WAS FORMED IN 1954 the *American White Water Affiliation*, as it was known at the time, published the very first issue of the Journal in May of 1955. Throughout the 68 years that followed, the American Whitewater Journal has consistently been the leading voice of whitewater boaters nationwide. The publication has been instrumental in supporting the sense of community and connection that is essential to the safe enjoyment of whitewater rivers, their restoration, and protection.

A year ago I penned my first “Horizon Lines” introduction to this Journal and wrote a little bit about the importance of “roots.” To extend the metaphor, I believe the Journal has always been our taproot. It is that single anchoring structure through which the whitewater community’s ideas flow and connect.

For decades the Journal was the primary town square for our disparate affiliate clubs across the country to share beta, trip reports, jokes, and to stay on top of threats to our interests as a community. Now it is also the primary vehicle for mobilizing public support for our stewardship efforts on hundreds of rivers across the country, and is a key tool for advancing our mission.

But the Journal doesn’t just tell *our* story as an organization, it tells your story as a community. The consistent inclusion of member contributed content makes the Journal more than just a nonprofit newsletter. It is a collaborative narrative that you have a hand in crafting, and a tactile expression of what is unique and precious about American Whitewater.

The concept of community can feel pretty abstract at times. Even ours is not a monolith of thought, values, or craft, yet our core values are powerfully aligned. Creating a space for those tensions to be held and examined is part of what American Whitewater is all about. The magic of the Journal is to distill that abstract notion into something you can hold in your hands, share with friends, and be proud to see yourself in. It is also a place to share the beauty of the places we visit.

As our Journal production crew has changed through the course of this year, the Journal’s new Editor in Chief Evan Stafford has ensured that the Journal continues to “keep it real.”

Despite living in an increasingly disconnected digital world, we are doubling down on the value of connection through the co-creation and sharing of something tangible and beautiful. As you flip through or contribute to the physical pages of the Journal, I hope you can see your values, priorities, and the places you cherish represented thoughtfully.

I am incredibly grateful to Ambrose Tuscano and Meg Seifert for nurturing this Journal for so long. Their work has connected and been enjoyed by tens of thousands of paddlers over a span of decades. Their contributions to the community are immeasurable and we all owe them a debt of gratitude for their dedication to keeping these roots healthy.

As Ambrose and Meg have bid us farewell this year, I am thrilled to welcome Emerald LaFortune to the Journal’s production team as Copy Editor and Member Contributed Content Coordinator! Emerald’s voice and expertise will be a valuable contribution to the Journal, and her role represents an ongoing investment in supporting the diverse voices of our members to be reflected in these pages.

The Journal is a 100% member funded endeavor. There are no grants or contracts that shape its content or production, and we rely exclusively on your support to deliver this to you five times annually. These pages are your member dollars at work.

Thank you for continuing to invest in our roots and the future we grow together through your annual membership.

I hope to SYOTR soon!



Clinton Begley
Executive Director

Ambrose Tuscano:

Journal Maestro for Over Twenty Years



FOR NEARLY 70 YEARS, THE AMERICAN WHITEWATER

Journal has served as the one constant and unifying voice representing whitewater river enthusiasts across the country. From the very beginning the Journal was a community generated publication, and most will readily admit, though brilliant in many ways, grammar and professional writing skills are not our community's strongest points. Therefore, throughout our organization's printing of the Journal, the role of the editor has been an indispensable one. Since 2002, that editor has been Ambrose Tuscano.

For his day job, Ambrose teaches AP English, World Literature, and Foundational Literature, plus coaches Nordic skiing at a college preparatory school for competitive skiers in California. Ambrose and his wife (Meg Seifert, former Journal Layout Designer) have two children, Griffin and Marian, and live on Donner Summit in a home they built themselves. In addition to whitewater recreation and spending time with his family on the water, he also enjoys trail running, backpacking, Nordic skiing, and up until this issue, editing the American Whitewater Journal in his "free-time" away from teaching.

How he's maintained this juggling act with such efficiency and professionalism we're not sure, but we're sure glad he has! And you don't have to just take our word for how valuable Ambrose's contributions to American Whitewater have been, take it from these stalwarts of our community:

"Through my 18 years at American Whitewater, I had the great privilege of working with our Journal Editor, Ambrose Tuscano. Ambrose has this hidden superpower, transforming raw content (sometimes submitted on the back of bar napkins) into polished material. Beyond mere grammatical corrections, Ambrose Tuscano possesses a blend of skills, traits, and a deep understanding of paddlesports and rivers.

Ambrose came into these skills the hard way, he earned them! Going back to the 1990's as a high school student, Ambrose interned with the long time Journal editor of that era, Bob Gedekoh. Bob taught Ambrose well and over time the young apprentice became the master. It is with much gratitude that I now wish Ambrose well as he transitions away from his role as Editor of the American Whitewater Journal. One of the signs of a good editor is that the reader is unaware of behind the scenes edits. Trust me, Ambrose's DNA and fingerprints have been all over the American Whitewater Journal for a very long time."

– Mark Singleton, former Executive Director,
American Whitewater

"Ambrose has done a great job with the Journal, extending coverage beyond kayaking and canoeing to rafting, packrafts, and SUP. He has been especially helpful to me, with my accident reporting, and has encouraged new whitewater safety writers, too. American Whitewater is an organization for ALL whitewater paddlers, and thanks to him, the Journal reflects that goal. He will be missed!"

– Charlie Walbridge, American Whitewater Safety Editor

Beyond just copy editing, Ambrose has provided direction to many young writers in our community and has served as a true mentor to others. He's helped shape the content of the Journal to reflect who we are as river lovers and users, and he's worked to modify that representation to be as inclusive and as open to diverse voices as possible. Through his tenure, he collaborated incredibly well with staff and encouraged countless volunteers to make meaningful contributions to the Journal, all in service of making sure the publication has continually been filled with the informative and entertaining articles and images you've come to expect. We can't thank Ambrose enough for his time as the Journal's head honcho and we wish him all the best in his future endeavors! ■



**LEADING
THE WAY
FOR OVER
50 YEARS**

pyranha
ADVANCED WHITEWATER KAYAKS SINCE 1971

Whitewater Boating on the Connecticut River

Bob Nasdor

Photo: Norm Sims



AFTER A DECADE OF ADVOCACY TO EXPAND WHITEWATER BOATING

on the Connecticut River, American Whitewater signed a settlement agreement with FirstLight Power that expands whitewater boating below the Turners Falls Dam in Massachusetts as part of the relicensing of the Turners Falls and Northfield Mountain hydropower projects. American Whitewater was joined by affiliates Appalachian Mountain Club and New England FLOW, along with supporting outfitters Zoar Outdoor and Crab Apple Whitewater in achieving this historic agreement.

What's in the Agreement?

The Settlement Agreement will provide boatable flows in a 2.7-mile river reach below Great Falls that has been dewatered for more than a century for power generation. Springtime flows and fish passage facilities will also support federally-listed Shortnose Sturgeon, American Shad, and other species. During the summer and fall seasons, FirstLight will provide periodic scheduled releases that will provide boating opportunities and restore natural flow variability. The Settlement Agreement will also improve river access at multiple locations and require real-time and advance flow information. Other Settlement Agreement provisions will create conservation restrictions to protect climbing ledges supported by Western Mass Climbers Coalition and the Access Fund, protect the New England Trail, expand mountain biking trails, and other recreational uses.

What's Next?

Hydropower dams are licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) every 30-50 years, and the relicensing of the two Massachusetts projects is being done concurrently with three upstream projects at Vernon, Bellows Falls, and Wilder along the New Hampshire/Vermont border. Before the Settlement Agreement becomes finalized, the agreement must be approved by FERC as well as meet Massachusetts Water Quality Standards. While the Settlement Agreement was approved by state and federal resource agencies, towns, American Whitewater, and other advocacy groups, addressing most issues, project effects on erosion remain unresolved. We remain concerned that the interests of the Nolumbeka Project, Nipmuck, Abenaki, Tribal Coalition have not been sufficiently addressed. While this settlement agreement, like all others, will not fully restore the river and all its uses, we celebrate that this agreement will greatly improve the river ecosystem and expand recreational opportunities.

With the Settlement Agreement at Turners Falls and Northfield Mountain finalized, we shift our focus to the upstream hydropower dams operated by Great River Hydro and recently sold to Hydro-Quebec. In 2014, American Whitewater, Appalachian Mountain Club, and New England Flow requested and helped coordinate controlled-flow whitewater boating studies at Wilder Dam at Sumner Falls and in the dewatered Bellows Falls natural river reach below the dam. These studies demonstrated that these two sections of the Connecticut River provide outstanding whitewater boating opportunities. Paddlers enjoy Sumner Falls under natural flow conditions and hydro generation peaking. At Bellows Falls, virtually no boating occurs due to the complete flow diversion, the lack of access, and ominously, the presence of a dangerous low-head dam. American Whitewater is working to restore flows, create new access, require flow information, and remove the low-head dam. To date, the dam's owner has been unwilling to negotiate a settlement agreement with recreation groups. We remain committed to our efforts to restore the entire Connecticut River through the relicensing process. ■

American Whitewater River Permit Survey Results

By Kelsey Phillips

MULTI-DAY RIVER TRIPS ARE A UNIQUE RECREATION opportunity that paddlers throughout the United States look forward to each year. The often-limited nature of a river corridor provides both solitude for the user and capacity issues for the managing agency, as some rivers can only sustainably support a number of visitors at a given time before certain limiting factors begin to diminish in quality, whether that is environmental quality such as riparian vegetation or the quality of the recreation experience itself. While public land management agencies can attempt to guide visitor behavior using indirect measures such as education and signage, some river managers employ direct measures such as permits to limit use on specific rivers or river segments (Manning, 2011).

River recreation managers began to allocate use in the form of permits in the early 1970s, as use increased substantially in certain areas; more than 1,000 people floated the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon in 1966, and by 1972 that number

had climbed to 16,000 (Nash, 1977). A number of other Western river managers have implemented permitting systems since, with each system consisting of a variety of unique allocation decisions. The allocation, or distribution, of these permits between private and commercial user groups (allotment) and the method with which these permits are allocated (rationing) has been discussed and disputed since these systems were implemented, in response to changing user groups (private and commercial boaters), water levels, and legal disputes (Wilderness Public Rights Fund v. Kleppe 608 F. 2d, 9th Circuit, 1979). Allotment techniques such as historical use, even-split, and even-pool have been used to distribute permits between private and commercial boaters separately, whereas rationing techniques such as lotteries, reservations, and first-come first-served have been used to distribute permits within the private sector's allotments (McCool & Utter, 1981).



Selway River. Photo: Matthias Fostvedt

The 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act directs federal river-administering agencies to address user capacities in their comprehensive river management plans under Section 3(d)(1) (Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, 1968), and the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council (IVUMC)'s Visitor Capacity Guidebook (2019) informs the process of determining a threshold for visitor use limitations (U.S. Interagency Visitor Use Management Council Visitor Capacity Guidebook, 2019). However, how these capacities are then allocated to users is guided by less developed frameworks and requires best judgement by agency managers who must consider capacities, limiting factors, and triggers for change alongside changing use patterns, with sparse contemporary recreation allocation research to guide their planning efforts. Visitor perceptions and acceptance of these permit systems is also a critical factor, as these systems have direct effects on paddlers.

While many of these permit systems were created using the best information available at that given time, use levels and patterns have changed since many of these systems were implemented, some of which were put in place decades ago (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2021; Whittaker & Shelby, 2008). The chances of acquiring a permit under the use levels that existed during the time of a system's initial implementation may be drastically lower under modern use levels, depending on the river and timeframe. The Four Rivers Lottery system in Idaho alone has seen a large increase in permit applications over the past ten years, with user capacities remaining the same and thus lower chances of obtaining a permit (Figure 1) (U.S. Forest Service, 2021). With more rivers and other recreational opportunities being permitted in the U.S. and a growing number of applicants attempting to obtain these permits via lotteries or other rationing mechanisms, an updated look at the public's perspective on these systems is needed to better inform river management agencies on a permit system's effi-

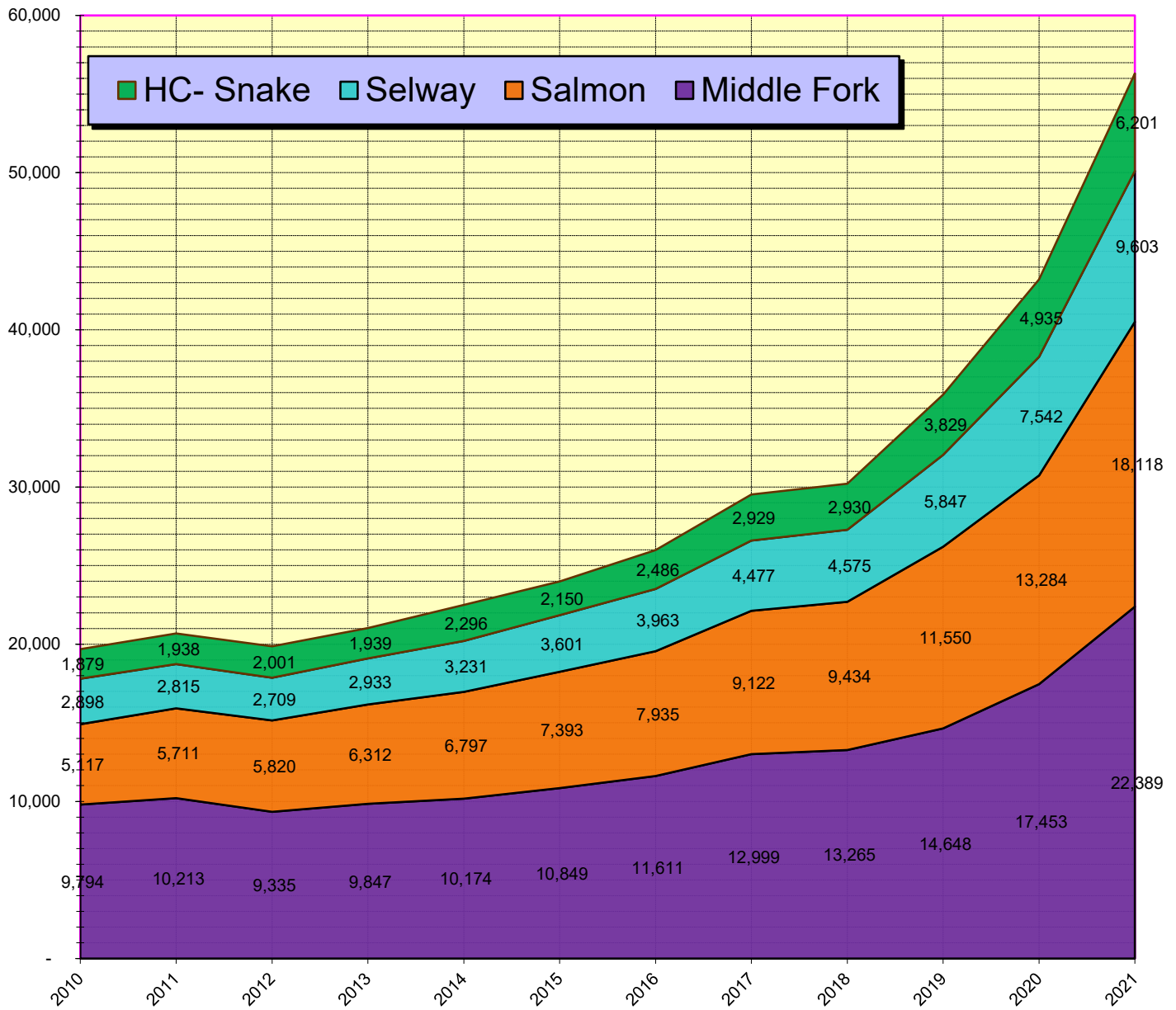


Figure 1, this page and next page: Lottery applications and float permits for the Four Rivers Lotteries, from the U.S. Forest Service, 2021.

cacy. This efficacy is multifaceted, with how well a particular system protects the resource, how easy it is to implement, and how equitably it serves the public all acting as contributing factors.

As one of the primary advocates for the preservation and protection of whitewater rivers in the U.S., American Whitewater rolled out a survey to check in with the paddling public in this time of rapid change. The survey was designed to investigate both satisfaction with and preference for various permitting systems for rivers in the U.S., as well as specific attitudes towards these systems. A convenience sample of both users and aspiring users of permitted rivers in the U.S. was obtained by sharing the survey with members of the paddling community via American Whitewater’s email newsletter, social media

channels, and website, as well as sharing with partner organizations. The survey was constructed and fielded in SurveyMonkey and tabulated using SPSS statistical software.

Of the 1,304 survey responses collected, half of these were collected during the first week of the survey being open, with the median duration among respondents that completed the survey being 25 minutes. The data were validated using several tests. The researchers anticipated the potential for passionate individuals to participate multiple times in an attempt to amplify their opinions, but detected no such activity, as very few cases had matching IP addresses. Those were inspected, and none had a significant number of duplicate responses. After removing survey response dropouts and those who did not have a qualifying experience, a total of 1,261

Lottery Applications Submitted by River

Year	Middle Fork	Salmon	Selway	HC-Snake	Total Applications
2010	9,794	5,117	2,898	1,879	19,688
2011	10,213	5,711	2,815	1,938	20,677
2012	9,335	5,820	2,709	2,001	19,865
2013	9,847	6,312	2,933	1,939	21,031
2014	10,174	6,797	3,231	2,296	22,498
2015	10,849	7,393	3,601	2,150	23,993
2016	11,611	7,935	3,963	2,486	25,995
2017	12,999	9,122	4,477	2,929	29,527
2018	13,265	9,434	4,575	2,930	30,204
2019	14,648	11,550	5,847	3,829	35,874
2020	17,453	13,284	7,542	4,935	43,214
2021	22,389	18,118	9,603	6,201	56,311

Float Permits Available in the Lottery by River

Year	Middle Fork	Salmon	Selway	HC-Snake	Total Permits
2010	387	310	62	318	1077
2011	387	310	62	321	1080
2012	387	310	62	327	1086
2013	387	310	62	330	1089
2014	387	310	62	333	1092
2015	387	310	62	336	1095
2016	387	308	62	321	1078
2017	387	310	62	324	1083
2018	387	310	62	327	1086
2019	387	310	62	330	1089
2020	387	310	62	295	1054
2021	220	203	25	245	693

Odds of drawing a permit - 1 in:

Year	Middle Fork	Salmon	Selway	HC-Snake	Overall
2010	25	17	47	6	18
2011	26	18	45	6	19
2012	24	19	44	6	18
2013	25	20	47	6	19
2014	26	22	52	7	21
2015	28	24	58	6	22
2016	30	26	64	8	24
2017	34	29	72	9	27
2018	34	30	74	9	28
2019	38	37	94	12	33
2020	45	43	122	17	41
2021	102	89	384	25	81


* The reduced number of available launches for the 2021 lottery resulted from deferred (rollover) reservations from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

survey responses remained for analysis. Half of the unqualified respondents (3%) opted to take the survey anyway, despite lacking experience. The median and mode age range of respondents was 40-49 years (27%) with 93% of respondents being 30 years or older. Participation was heavily skewed towards Colorado residents (33%), however many other states were represented, including Oregon (11%), Washington (9%), Utah (8%), Idaho (7%), and California (7%).

Typical respondents paddled between 10 and 20 days last year, 2 to 10 of which were on multi-day trips. The median and mode number of rivers ever run by respondents was 5 to 6 rivers, with the median rivers run in the past two years being 4 and a mode of 1. The majority of respondents (60%) have won no permits themselves in the past two years. Survey respondents were instructed to answer the remaining questions based on rivers with which they had direct experience or wanted to comment on, with instructions for how to choose a river included in the survey.

Several survey questions examined boaters' satisfaction with various permitting systems in the U.S. While these questions were asked in the context of each respondents' river of choice, a total percentage was calculated as well. Collectively across all rivers judged, 71% of respondents found the chances of securing a permit on the river they most want to run were not acceptable (Figure 2). The lottery system with the lowest dissatisfaction happens to be a weighted one; 34% of those who have entered the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon's cancellation lottery were somewhat or very dissatisfied with the lottery, versus the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho, where 69% of those who have entered were somewhat or very dissatisfied (Figure 3). Dissatisfaction with the process of receiving cancellation awards corresponded very strongly to dissatisfaction with a given river's main permit lottery.

When asked about their most preferred method for awarding permits, a lottery weighted by number of failed attempts was the overwhelming favorite at 56%, based on the percentage of respondents who selected a river to evaluate (Figure 4). In contrast, fewer respondents preferred the alternatives: a lottery weighted by number of years not on a river (25%), a lottery with equal odds (10%), a first-come,



first-served system (5%), and a waitlist (4%). Full rank order analysis of respondents' first, second, and third most preferred alternatives yielded a composite preference score for each system. Consistent with their single most preferred permit allocation approach, the two types of weighted lotteries again topped the list, with a lottery weighted by number of failed attempts at 33%, and a lottery weighted by number of years not on a river at 26%.

Respondents were asked specific questions about the Selway River in Idaho, which has a unique allocation system of one launch per day during the control season, rationed via the Four Rivers Lottery. In addition to "yes/agree" and "no/disagree" options, respondents were offered a third option of "I don't know" if they did not have familiarity with the topic or did not have a specific attitude. Results were analyzed separately for those who have run the Selway previously and those who have not, as well as calculated together as an aggregated total. When asked about crowding perception, 53% of respondents that have run the Selway previously had "fewer than acceptable" encounters with other boaters on their trips, with 44% having an "acceptable range" of encounters and 3% having "more than acceptable" encounters. When asked whether the Selway should double launches to two per day, most supported doubling (63%), but there was less enthusiasm among those with experience on the Selway. Similarly, when asked how doubling Selway launches would affect their experience, most respondents expected no impact (51%), compared to 10% expecting an improved experience, 10% expecting a degraded experience, and 29% selecting they did not know. As expected, preference for launch quantity corresponds to expected impacts: those who expect that higher user volume would improve quality of experience tend to prefer doubling launches to two per day.

A number of questions regarding attitudes toward a specific river's permit system and general provisions were asked, with the option to select "I don't know" as well. Among the overwhelmingly popular provisions, 96% of respondents favored making unused commercial outfitter permits available to the public (1% opposed), and 93% favored prohibiting no-shows from applying the following year (3% opposed). 78% of respondents favored allowing only failed lottery participants to apply for cancellations (12% opposed). Several other provisions also garnered more agreement than disagreement amongst respondents. 93% of respondents agreed that permit systems should prohibit people from using scripts or bots to obtain permits (4% disagreed), and 85% agreed that there is a major problem with permit systems in that it is possible to never get a permit (7% disagreed). 74% of respondents would prefer a system that probably wins a permit in 1 to 4 years over one that guarantees a permit after a longer wait (7% disagreed). Additionally, 79% of respondents agreed that the ratio of permits allocated to outfitters and the public should be reexamined (6% disagreed).

There were also permit system provisions within the survey that demonstrated more disagreement than agreement and some that divided respondents into approving and opposing camps. Questions about using a common pool, permit application costs, and penalizing or curtailing repetitive users all had roughly equal (~50:50) ratios of agreement to disagreement.



Chances of obtaining a permit are NOT acceptable

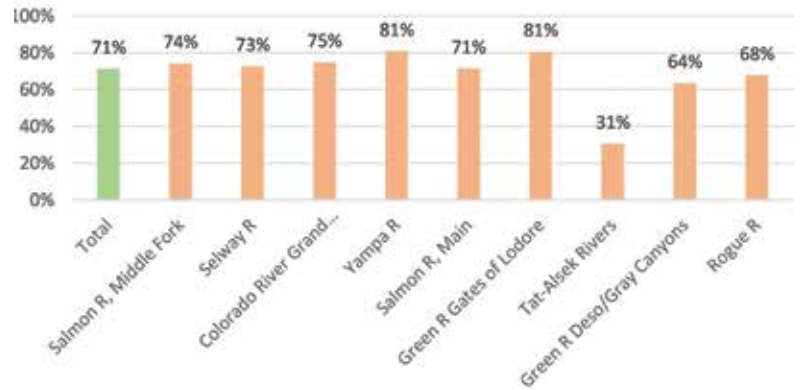


Figure 2. Survey responses for the chances of obtaining a permit not being acceptable on the river each respondent most wanted to run, with the aggregated total percentage highlighted in green.

Somewhat or very dissatisfied with lottery

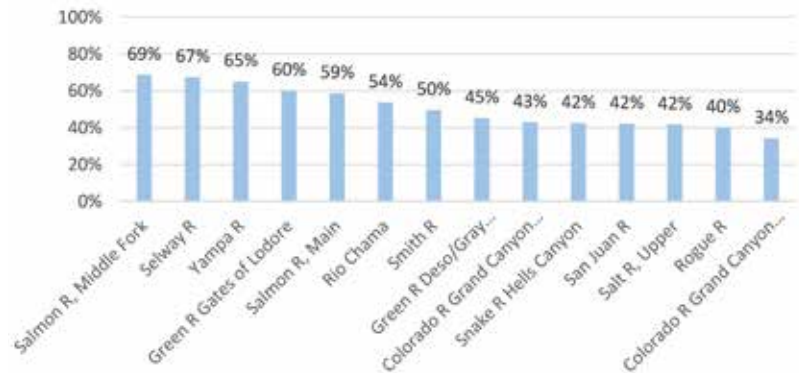


Figure 3. Survey responses for dissatisfaction with lottery systems, with a base of those who have entered. Responses of "somewhat dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied" with the lottery were included.

Most preferred method for awarding permits

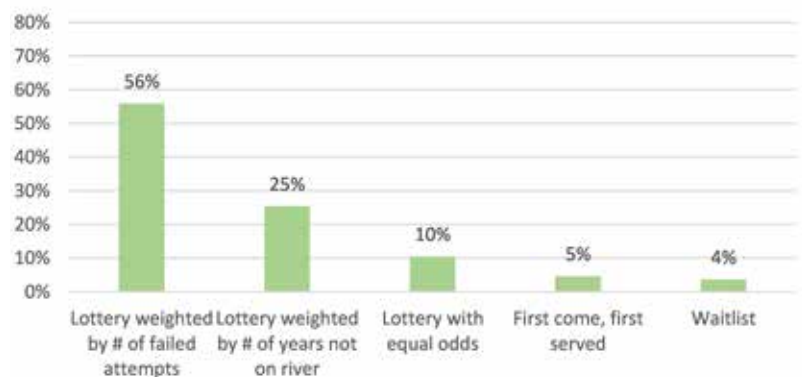


Figure 4. Survey responses for most preferred method for awarding permits, based on percent of respondents who selected a river to evaluate.



Main Salmon River, ID. Photo Evan Stafford

Alternatively, 75% of respondents disagreed that agencies should relax limits and issue more permits as the number of applications increases (9% agreed), and 56% disagreed that there is a major problem with permit systems due to being too complicated (11% agreed). Most respondents also disagreed that there were either too many or too few people on the river at one time (45% and 30%, respectively, compared to 9% and 18% in agreement). These findings indicate that people have faith in the user-capacity determination but substantial concerns about the allocation of these use opportunities.



Boater bros on the oars (Sawyer Hess age 12, Rowan Hess age 10), Rogue River, OR. Photo: Teresa Hess

Herd of juvenile rams, Middle Fork Salmon River, ID.
Photo: Evan Stafford



The results of this survey indicate that there is room for improvement in several river permitting systems from the perspective of this subset of the U.S. paddling community.

While it is unknown how well this sample represents the total population of these rivers' stakeholders ($n = 1,261$), it is clear from these results that there exists a level of dissatisfaction with various river permitting systems amongst this subset of the community. This issue has been discussed at length in the broader outdoor community as well, with the diminishing chances of obtaining a river permit making headlines in spaces such as Outside Online and the Colorado Sun (Outside Online, 2023; Ross, 2023). While river management agencies are given guidance for setting user capacities based on the analysis area, existing direction and knowledge, and limiting attributes (U.S. Interagency Visitor Use Management Council Visitor Capacity Guidebook, 2019), the permitting systems designed to ration these capacities are ultimately human creations that make choices that affect rivers and people's lives. Many of these systems were put in place decades ago, therefore it makes sense to revisit them as places, values, and uses have changed over time.

The results of this survey indicate that there is room for improvement in several river permitting systems from the perspective of this subset of the U.S. paddling community. Seventy-one percent of respondents consider their odds of obtaining a permit on the river they most want to run are not acceptable, perhaps bolstered by the fact that the majority (60%) have not won a permit at all in the past two years. The most preferred method for awarding permits is a weighted lottery, with only 10% of respondents preferring the current most widely-used method: equal-odds lotteries. Most lottery systems administered in the U.S. for river permits fall under an equal-odds lottery or advanced reservations for private trips (River Management Society, 2021), thus this survey respondent preference level is a potential opportunity for future discussions of change. Additionally, these results indicate that respondents were less dissatisfied in the capacity-setting component of river permitting systems, and more concerned with the rationing techniques utilized within them (e.g., lotteries, waitlists, first-come first-served), as well as outfitter allotments and the use of bots or scripts.



Rogue River. Photo: Thomas O'Keefe

There are some important limitations to note when discussing the results of this survey. While respondents were not asked what specific paddling activity they were doing on these multi-day trips (e.g., rafting, kayaking), it is noteworthy that typical respondents within this survey paddled between 10 and 20 days last year (1-10 on multi-day trips), with the median rivers run in the past two years being 4 (mode of 1). This result is interesting in that it could potentially point to a specific paddling user group given the mode of one river being run in the past two years. This survey could have potentially missed other subsets of the paddling community and therefore not capture the full range of the community's perspective on this complex issue. The potential for follow-up surveys in the future certainly exists, with outreach efforts aimed towards reaching more paddlers from different user groups.

These survey results are an important step towards better understanding how equitably these U.S. river permitting systems serve the public. American Whitewater is not only an advocate

for the protection and preservation of whitewater rivers but also for the public accessibility of these rivers to ensure that paddlers have opportunities to enjoy them safely. American Whitewater will share these survey results with river managers and utilize them to initiate conversations with river management agency staff regarding the efficacy and equity of current river permitting systems. We hope to partner with agencies on follow up surveys to answer more specific questions that can be paired with data on the physical capacity of rivers to support sustainable paddling and to inform future permit system improvements. Understanding the public's perspective on these systems is a crucial step in reconsidering some of these long-standing management decisions, as well as creating new systems in the future.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Tom Welander for his survey design and statistical analysis, as well as his time and enthusiasm as an integral volunteer on this project. ■

Kelsey Phillips wrote this article as part of her internship with American Whitewater, which was facilitated through the prestigious Wyss Scholars Program. She is a graduate student at in the University of Montana's Department of Society and Conservation, with a keen interest in equity issues in public lands management.

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Coming Up From Rock Bottom

Alicia Sullivan



My helmet (back right side) after the hit that caused the concussion.
Photo: Alicia Sullivan.

IN LATE MARCH OF 2022, I HAD JUST RETURNED HOME from a Grand Canyon trip. It was my sixth trip with a fun crew and I was feeling good about my rowing skills with a big raft. All that time on the water had me excited about the upcoming spring melt. The summer before, I had taken a class working on kayak skills to “step it up” beyond the rivers I had been running for years. I had a brand new Rewind and was ready to take my paddling to the next level.

“Hey Alex, watch me on this roll,” I said as I paddled out into the current just below the put-in of our local run. I flipped my brand new boat, eager to practice a roll in the current and BAM! My head slammed into something hard. I immediately had a bad feeling in my gut. Somehow I managed to roll back over and get to the side of the river. After frantic hand motions of “not ok” river signals, my group got to me. Like a well oiled machine, they helped me up the road cut, into the truck, and off to the hospital with my husband. I walked into the local ER still in my drysuit, PFD, and helmet, scared to move my neck too much without being around medical care. My ski patroller medical training was terrifying me with thoughts of c-spine injury, brain bleed, all the scary things. Thankfully, the ER visit was uneventful. I was diagnosed with a concussion, but with no symptoms serious enough to keep me, I was sent home. Ok, I thought, I have been down this road before with other concussions. A few weeks and I should be ok, back in time before the whole paddling season is over.

I could not have been more wrong. I had no idea at the time that this was the beginning of a very long, difficult road, one that I am still on a year later, and in all likelihood will be for the rest of my life. For all of us in outdoor sports, we know that concussions and other injuries are part of the risk we take doing these activities. What I didn’t realize is the potential for long running symptoms, called post concussion syndrome (PCS), that can happen as a result of mild traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Over the five months immediately after my injury, I forced myself to keep going through almost constant headaches, dizziness, mild nausea, brain fog, and fatigue. I was in deep denial about how hurt I was. Daily life was a series of triggers that incapacitated me. I was sleeping all the time, felt a deep bodily sense of “ickiness”, and a strong urge to be in quiet, dark places when I was exposed to any kind of motion. Chopping vegetables made my head spin and I couldn’t get through prepping dinner without taking multiple breaks. Going to the grocery store was overwhelming with the bright lights, music, and overload of information needing to be sifted through on every aisle. Riding in a car felt like the worst kind of carnival ride that I could only get through by closing my eyes and deep breathing. Being in a restaurant, watching TV, and listening to music were out of the question. I was struggling to find words and was having a hard time writing and concentrating at work. Looking back on it now, I can see that I was broken, but at the time, I was in denial. I felt guilt and shame about my injury and



Rowing Hermit rapid on the Grand Canyon in March of 2022 right before the injury.
Photo: Kyle Landwehrle.

the impact it was having on my husband and my work. I was afraid that people would not believe what was happening to me, as there was nothing in my outward appearance that gave away these struggles and I was second guessing myself about how bad it was. I was guilt ridden feeling that I was letting people down at work, unable to do my job because of an injury I got in the pursuit of fun.

I was also worried about being perceived as weak and what it would mean for my identity and life if these symptoms stayed. I leaned into that part of me that I used so many times to push through something hard, but it was crushing me. That toughness mindset I had cultivated through years of outdoor pursuits, the drive that helped me row through Canyon headwinds, walk miles through blisters and foot pain, and slog up hills with a heavy pack, was actively working against me in recovering from this injury. The tools I had relied on for overcoming injury or a challenge in the past weren't going to work.

It took me hitting bottom and being physically and emotionally drained before I gave myself the grace and permission to put my recovery first. I was scared of what would happen stepping away in the midst of layoffs in the tech industry where I worked. I felt like I was failing, giving into this injury. Thankfully, I had help from friends, a therapist, and a leadership coach that helped me see that my health had to be first and that I had the ability to deal with whatever came from that decision. So in September of last year, almost six months after my injury, I went on leave from work. I was uncertain when I would be back or what "normal" for any aspect of life would look like in the future. It was like standing at the scout of the gnarliest rapid you have ever run, only seeing the faintest line, and deciding to run it, trusting in your skills and the river gods to believe you would be ok.

The next five months were focused on healing. Not just the physical symptoms I was experiencing from the concussion but also from the emotional rollercoaster and trauma of the injury. I had to do some deep introspective work about why I felt that taking care of myself was weak, why I put what others thought of me and career success ahead of healing, how I could redefine my identity and reframe the outcomes of this injury.

I had no idea at the time that this was the beginning of a very long, difficult road, one that I am still on a year later, and in all likelihood will be for the rest of my life.

Rivers will always be part of my life and I know that there are still many ways for me to enjoy them that will look different from the past.



Looking down at the surf wave at the start of the “Middle Middle” on the Middle fork of the Snoqualmie, where I hit my head practicing a roll. Also the location my group got me out to after the accident. Photo: Alicia Sullivan.

I was fortunate to have amazing resources from physical therapy, speech and language therapy, neurology, neuro-ophthalmology and licensed mental health providers to help me through this very tough process. I spent hours in doctors appointments, at-home therapy, self care, and deep emotional work. Developing grace, acceptance and balance in life sounds obvious and easy, but for me, it has been hard, the most difficult thing I have ever done.

As I write this today, I have made significant strides towards recovery. Physically, I am able to do most daily activities. I still can't drive long distances, be in a noisy environment for too long, listen to electronic music beats, or be around anything flashing. But I can make dinner and the grocery store no longer triggers hours of symptoms. I am able to walk long distances again, work out, ride my bike, and am taking slow turns down easy ski runs. I am hoping to try some Class II in a raft soon. My

doctors say I should continue to improve, but it is uncertain if I will ever fully be back to pre-injury “normal.” I am learning to redefine normal and focus on how far I have come. I am starting work part-time next week and will use that opportunity to put into practice the boundaries and self care I have cultivated. I am much more in tune with my body, the physical sensations that tell me I am near a limit, and am now emotionally healthy enough to listen.

This recovery time has also shown me the immense gift of the communities I have from paddling and ski patrol. Every resource that helped me in my recovery came from connections within those communities. Friends I met were critical in connecting me to medical care, encouraging me to take time off, supporting me during recovery, and being the best cheerleaders I could have ever hoped for. Without the support from my husband, my family and this incredible community of friends, I would not be where I am today. The love and kindness that I finally allowed myself to feel from this support that had always been around me has been incredible and one of the brightest silver linings to this experience.

I may never get in a hardshell boat again, which is a hard thing for me to say after 23 years of paddling. Kayaking has been a constant in my adult life. It has influenced where I live and the community I have built. It has been a big part of my self-identity. While this injury likely closes the chapter on hardshell kayaking for me, as a good friend reminded me, it leaves space for something new. In the process of grappling with the wild range of emotions from this change, I have been able to come back to the core of why I became a paddler in the first place: the love of wild rivers, community, and adventure. Rivers will always be part of my life and I know that there are still many ways for me to enjoy them that will look different from the past. I am looking forward to seeing what this next chapter of river adventuring brings. ■

Whitewater Accident Summary

January – June 2023

Charlie Walbridge

AS THIS YEAR'S RECORD SNOWS FELL IN THE WEST, the region's paddlers prepared for a high water season. Big flows mean more accidents, and the first six months of 2023 were quite eventful. Only 6 of the season's 32 reported fatalities were east of the Mississippi. The list included 4 kayaks (2 whitewater and 2 rec kayaks), 4 open canoes, 18 rafts (14 private, 4 commercial), and two standup paddleboards. Many incidents resulted from a lack of basic safety equipment or training; others hinged on failure to take standard on-water precautions. The death toll started in the Southwest, on the Salt and Gila Rivers, and moved north into Colorado, which leads this year's state count with 12. High water was a factor in almost all of the Western accidents. Nationwide accident causes included 5 deaths where no PFD was worn, 11 flush drownings, 7 strainers, 3 heart attacks, and 3 involving low head dams. Ten accidents involved solo or one boat trips where there was no safety backup. The victims included 9 paddlers under 30, and 14 over 60 years old. Many thanks to everyone who sent in reports during this very busy year so we could create a good picture of what's happening on the water, and to Charlie Duffy for his useful charts.

Eastern Accidents

Richmond, Virginia paddlers were shocked by a death at Hollywood Rapid on the James River on May 2nd. Leah Patterson, 26, was part of a group of experienced local river guides on a high water (8.5 feet) run. At this level a large strainer at the bottom of this Class III+ rapid becomes quite dangerous. The strainer was broken up after a previous fatality by local paddlers, but it keeps reforming! Ms. Patterson's R-2 flipped; she was pushed into the strainer and held underwater. Firefighters and kayakers worked together to make a very difficult recovery.

There were two early season deaths in the East involving solo paddlers: Philip Shelton, 64, in a canoe on the French Broad River in North Carolina and Doug Maher, 70, in a rec kayak on Ohio's Cuyahoga River. The dates were February 18th and March 5th, respectively, so it's certain that cold water posed an added risk. There were no witnesses so no one knows what really happened. Both were reported missing and found after lengthy searches.

Two other fatalities were the result of serious on-water health emergencies. On April 15th two men kayaking at the Savannah Rapid Park in Evans, Georgia stopped to swim in the rapid. Thomas Bellamy, 35, was doing fine until he suddenly started struggling and was pulled underwater. The fact that he did not resurface suggests that he was not wearing a life vest. On April 24th, Matthew Peck, 72, was competing in the Westfield Whitewater Race in Western Massachusetts when he suffered a heart attack. Two off-duty EMT/ firefighters paddling behind him saw he was in distress and pulled over to assist. Excellent emergency care and a fast response by local EMT's were not enough to save him.

Another death occurred on New York's Chemung River. Two women paddling a canoe on an Earth Day trip hit a strainer, flipped, and pinned. One person swam to safety, but Susanna Garber, 22, was trapped underneath the canoe. Swiftwater rescue teams from the Wellsburg Fire Department and Southport Fire Department released the canoe and recovered her body.

Lastly, we note in passing the April 13th death of 65-year-old Michael Brook on the Susquehanna River in Harrisburg, PA. Mr. Brook was fishing from a powerboat when the motor died and he washed over the Dock Street Dam. The downstream hydraulic held him until he drowned. It should be noted that over 30 people have drowned at the dam since it was built in 1935. Many were paddlers who did not recognize the danger.

Southwest Accidents

Arizona and New Mexico had a big runoff year, and this contributed to a number of accidents. The first occurred on March 6th, during a low water, early season run on Arizona's Upper Salt River. A group of five experienced oar-rig rafters encountered trouble in the Upper Canyon, where the river makes a sharp turn against the Boy Scout Wall. One raft pinned, then three others ran into it and flipped. Everyone made it to shore except Kent Brocklehurst, 64, who was last seen holding onto his raft as it swept around the corner. The accident happened late in the day, and the group was separated in very rugged country. Several of them spent a cold night without food or shelter. The next day they reunited, but Mr. Brocklehurst was still missing. An EPIRB was activated, but the search that followed proved fruitless. Other rafters found his body a month later.

There was a second fatal accident on the lower Salt River in downtown Phoenix. Paddleboarders Shane Coates and Ryan Jacobs, both 38, died after they and they went over a low head dam on April 9th. A bystander heard the men yelling for help and called 911. Paddleboards and life vests were later seen recirculating in the hydraulic. Their bodies were recovered a week later.

Recent floods have drastically changed New Mexico's Gila River. A paddler who has run the river for decades said, "I've never seen the river so obstructed by strainers, logs, and root balls! Forested cobble bars have been stripped of vegetation, including large trees. Expanded cut banks have undermined mature trees that are now in the river. Riverside trees and benches have piled flood debris far above the water surface." This high-water destruction was the cause of a fatality on March 27th. Five paddlers an assortment of recreational kayaks, IK's, and a canoe encountered a river-wide strainer that more experienced groups had carried. Tregg Grant, 55, washed under the strainer with his canoe and drowned. The others got ashore and recovered his body when it washed out. They activated their EPIRB and were evacuated by helicopter.

There were three deaths on New Mexico's Upper Rio Grande River during extremely high water. Dealing with flipped rafts and multiple swimmers under these conditions is quite difficult. David Bishop, 50, died after his raft flipped in Racecourse Rapid and he took a long swim. This was a one-boat trip at (2600 cfs) level. On June 6th John Mattson, 73, took a bad swim after a commercial raft with 8 people flipped in Razorblades Rapid. He was found on shore, suggesting that he survived the swim only to die of a heart attack. On June 7th there was a second commercial drowning in Racecourse Rapid, where Alan Gadkari, 62, died. Water levels on these last two accidents were around 3000 cfs, which is extremely high.

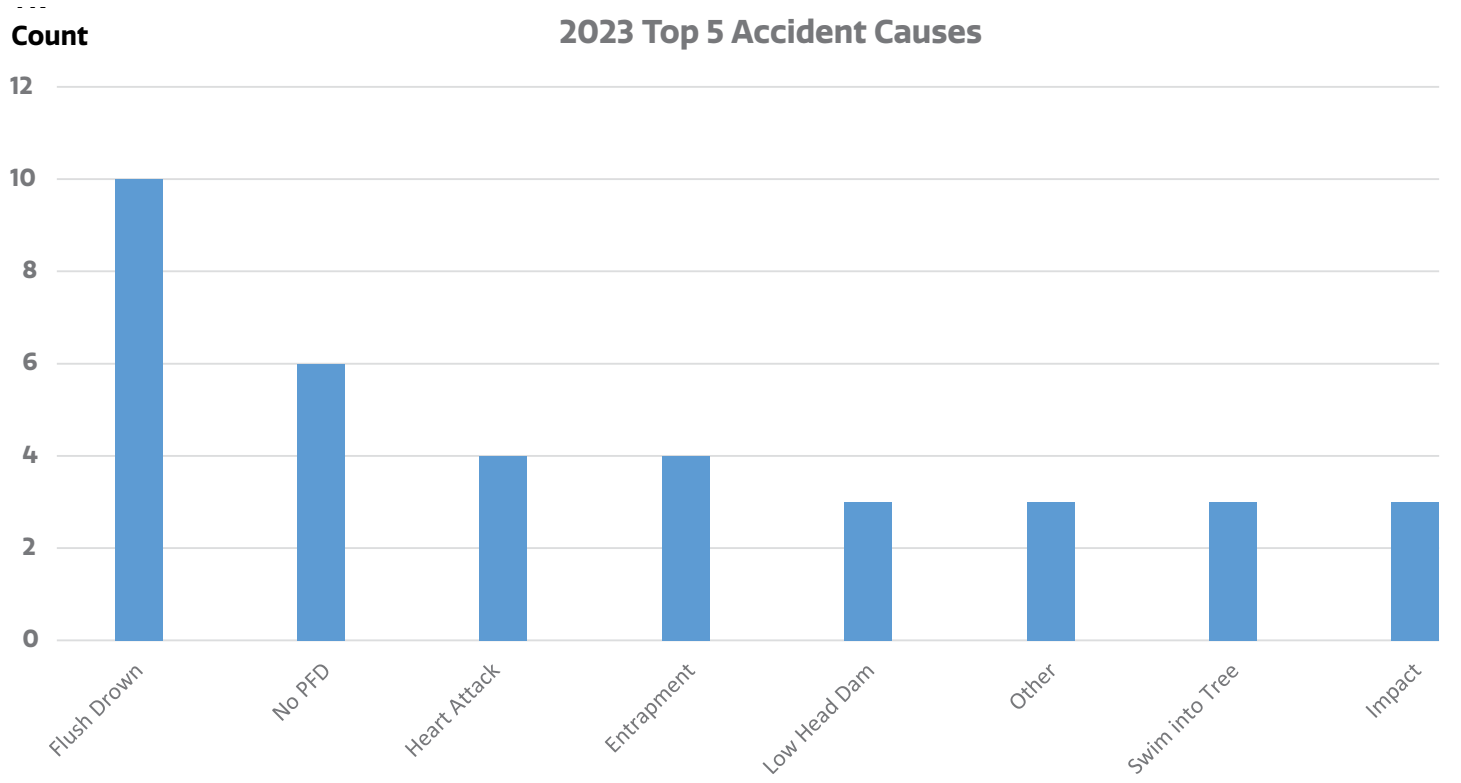
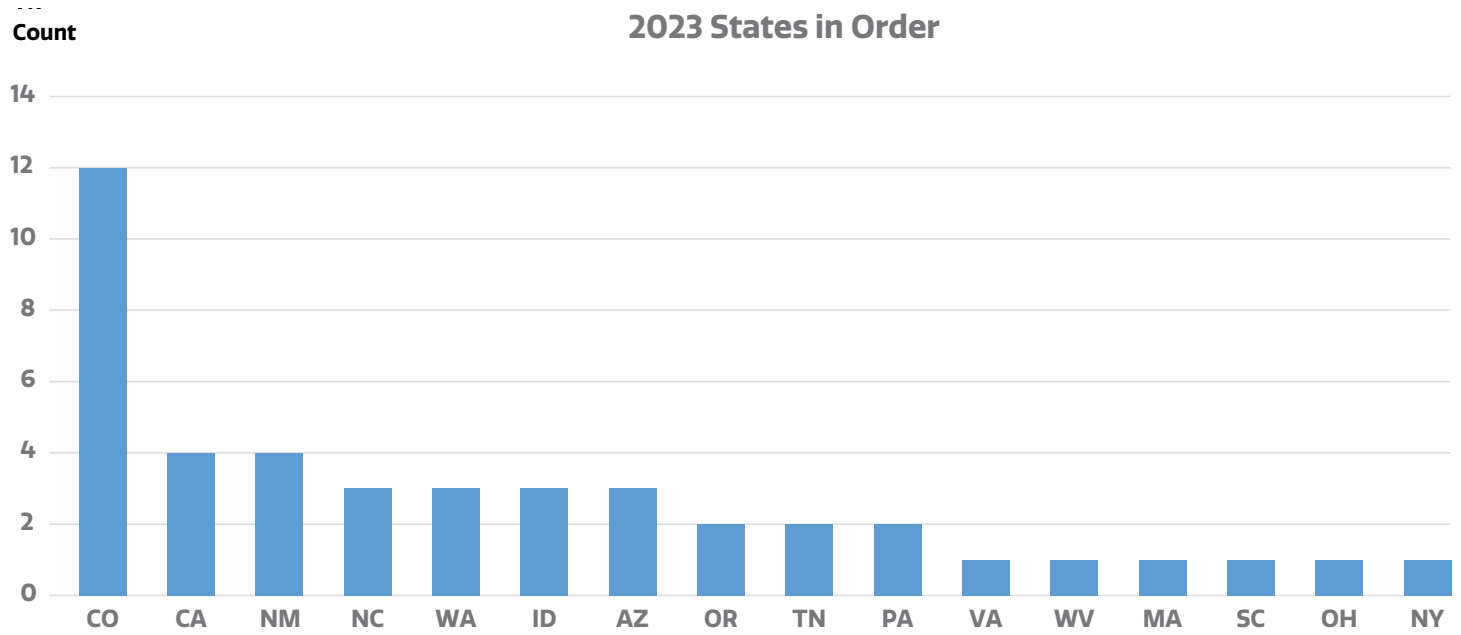
California Kayaking Accidents

California rivers claimed the lives of two very capable kayakers this past spring, the first on the Class V South Fork of the Yuba from Rt. 49 to Bridgeport. This is a favorite run for local experts, much like the Upper Yough in Maryland, but significantly harder. A very skilled 17-year old paddler who had impressed many people in the cutting-edge kayaking community of White Salmon, WA had just graduated from high school and was paddling in California before beginning work as a river guide in Idaho. Few details are available, but the 800 cfs flow exposed a sieve in "Tower 2" rapid just below a boof. The paddler, running in a party of four, was pinned there and could not be rescued.

At the southern end of the Sierras, the Kern River was running at 4800 cfs on June 16th. That day a group of five expert kayakers planned a run through Class IV Ant Canyon below the Johnsondale Bridge. The water level was high, 4800 cfs. At the bottom of the first drop, Class IV Bombay Rapid, the river pushes into a low island at river center. Will Hoxie, 26, headed for what looked like a clean opening through the brush. Suddenly he hit a hidden log protruding vertically just below the river's surface. Instinctively, he braced into it. The end of the log pushed violently into his kayak cockpit, trapping him with his head barely above the water. The force of the water wrapped his boat, a modern creek design especially resistant to pinning. Several branches across his body complicated the pin.

His companions made several desperate attempts at rescue, but the location – a washed over island mid-river – made for difficult access to this frightful pin. Mr. Hoxie was conscious when the group got to him and they struggled to keep his head above water. Ropes were used in an attempt to release the boat. Finally, he was overcome by the surging water. After 90 minutes of desperate efforts the group notified authorities. The river was rising, eventually cresting and holding at 10,000 cfs. Swiftwater teams determined that a recovery could not be made safely; they plan to return when the water drops.

Risk in whitewater can never be eliminated, and this last incident is a good example of what mountaineers call "objective danger" – environmental risks that are almost impossible to spot and avoid. There are two previous examples of this type of pin in the AW Database, one fatal, both unexpected.



The difference between the two accounts above can be explained by the quality of information shared with AW. In each case I made inquiries, got some bare facts from newspapers and on line, and tried to follow up with knowledgeable people. I was able to talk about the Kern River accident with Evan Moore, a local outfitter and expert kayaker. Although he was not on the scene, he reviewed the incident with those who were. I took notes, prepared a brief summary, and sent my draft to Mr. Moore for approval. The result is what you see here. I truly believe that an accurate account of an accident best honors the life of a departed friend, and will do everything I can to be sure that what goes into the AW Database and into these articles is accurate and respectful.

Also in California, rafter Stanley Rice died on June 13th after his raft flipped and he washed into a strainer. This was a one-boat trip on a Class II section of the South Fork of the American River near Below Hennington - Lotus Park. Flows were high. A companion made it ashore safely; but he was pinned. Bystanders formed a human chain in an unsuccessful rescue attempt

Colorado - High Water

As warm weather hit Colorado and rivers began to rise, two flush drownings occurred in the popular Shoshone section of the Colorado River in Glenwood Canyon. Nicholas Courtens, 24, was part of a two boat, 8-person raft trip who drowned after a long swim on May 21st. The river was roaring, at 12,000 cfs. The second death occurred on June 25th when a father and son launched a single raft on the same section at 8600 cfs, which is still very high. The absence of a second boat for backup left the pair very exposed in the event of trouble. The raft capsized; the boy managed to swim ashore, but his father was carried downstream to his death.

There were three other flush drowning deaths elsewhere in the state, all influenced by high flows. This year the Dolores River, which sometimes doesn't run at all, had a long season with some early high water. On May 10th Richard Zehm, an experienced rafter, launched a single oar rigged raft with a single passenger on the wilderness section of the river. The river was running high, just over 3000 cfs. The raft flipped below Big Gypsum Valley and washed downstream for 10 miles! Although the man's passenger was picked up by another party, Mr. Zehm, 71, was last seen alive swimming after his raft. Both men wore life vests but had no cold weather gear. Kayakers later found his body way downstream.

On June 25th Diane Graham, 51, flipped a raft with two children in it at "Needle's Eye" on the Class II-III "Pumphouse Section" of the Upper Colorado River near the Radium Campground. This was a one-boat trip in a small, cheap boat. No life vests were worn despite a high 5200 cfs water level. The children were rescued by other groups, one of them after a long swim. Ms. Graham was not.

Colorado Tubers

Two inner tubers were among those killed on swiftwater rivers in Colorado. On June 11th a 12-year-old boy drowned after falling of his tube in Clear Creek. No life vest was in use, and when first responders pulled him from the creek, he was dead. On June 16th 41-year-old tuber got into trouble at the Buena Vista Whitewater Park. The Arkansas was reaching its seasonal peak in mid-June, with flows of 2500-3000 cfs. The man fell off his tube and was seen struggling against the current. An outfitter got hold of him and brought him ashore, but he could not be revived

Colorado Outfitted Deaths

Two of this year's deaths on Colorado rivers occurred on commercial trips. On June 10th a three-boat commercial rafting trip launched on a cold, relentless Class IV-V Upper Animas River. According to Evan Schertz, who discussed the accident with AW, the 1200 cfs, level was high but not off the charts. Sara Rosecrans, 24, was a company employee participating in the trip. The group stopped to scout Ten Mile Rapid, one of the toughest drops on the run. Ms. Rosecrans' boat, running first, flipped in the lower set of holes. (This was the site of a 2009 fatality) Most of the paddlers got to shore, but she and the guide held on to the raft as they washed downstream. The trip's safety kayaker followed closely, but could not help.

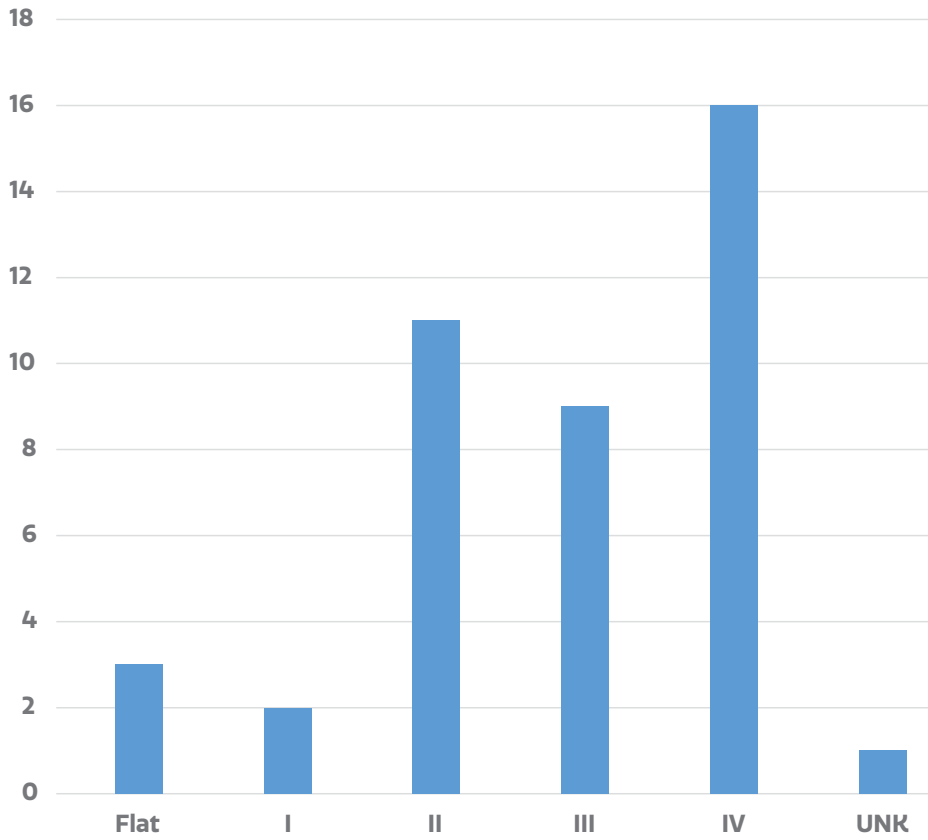
Below here the river is fast Class 3-4 with few eddies. As they washed through Landslide Rapid they were separated from their raft. The guide managed to swim to safety, but Ms. Rosecrans was carried further and became unresponsive. The safety kayaker made an amazing rescue, getting her to shore in a fast, eddyless section. In the next 20 minutes he performed CPR, contacted his trip with a 2-way radio, and used an EPIRB to summon help. A private group of four kayakers brought an AED downstream and assisted with resuscitation. CPR was discontinued after 90 minutes; an hour later first responders arrived on the riverside train and evacuated both groups.

There was another commercial fatality in Royal Gorge on the Arkansas River. Dr. Dustin Harker, 47, was running the river with four of his 13 children when his raft flipped in Class IV Sunshine Falls. Water levels were high. When Dr. Harker's daughter became stuck under the raft, he pulled her free before swimming to safety. When everyone had made it to shore Mr. Harker collapsed and could not be revived. A heart attack or some other health problem is the likely culprit.

An Equipment Trap

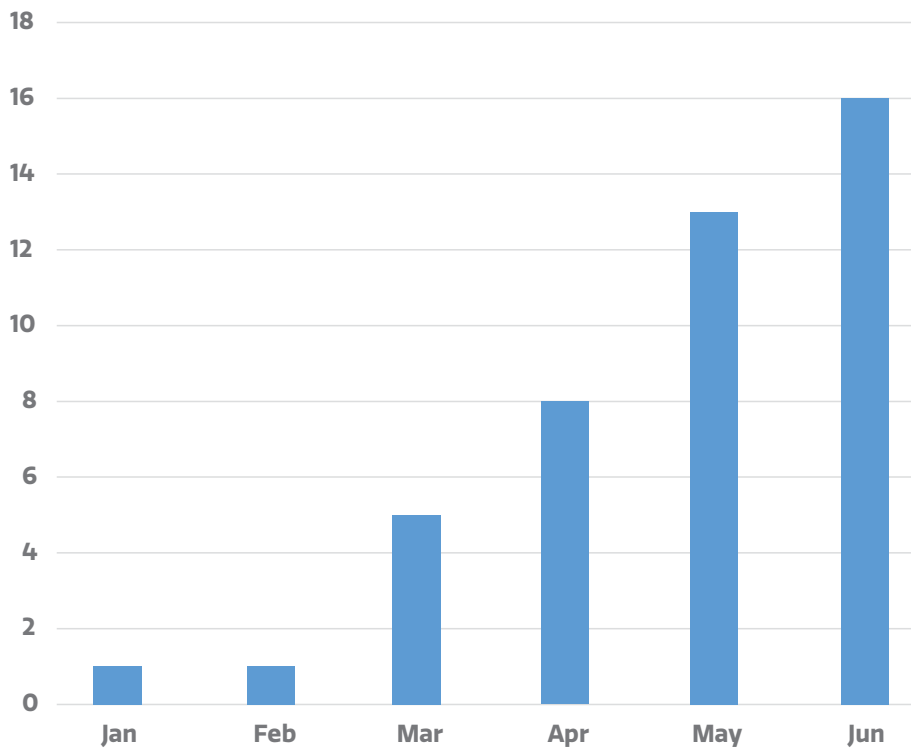
An equipment trap is an incident where a person is caught in a loose line, life vest, or other equipment. On June 3rd a father and son planned to fish a Class II section of the upper Colorado River near Bond CO in a 13' oar-rigged raft. Water levels were high. They deployed an anchor attached to the raft frame in a swift, deep section of the river. When the anchor was set, the current surged over the stern of the boat. It swamped the raft, then pushed the raft under the frame, tearing it off. The father

2023 Incidents/Class

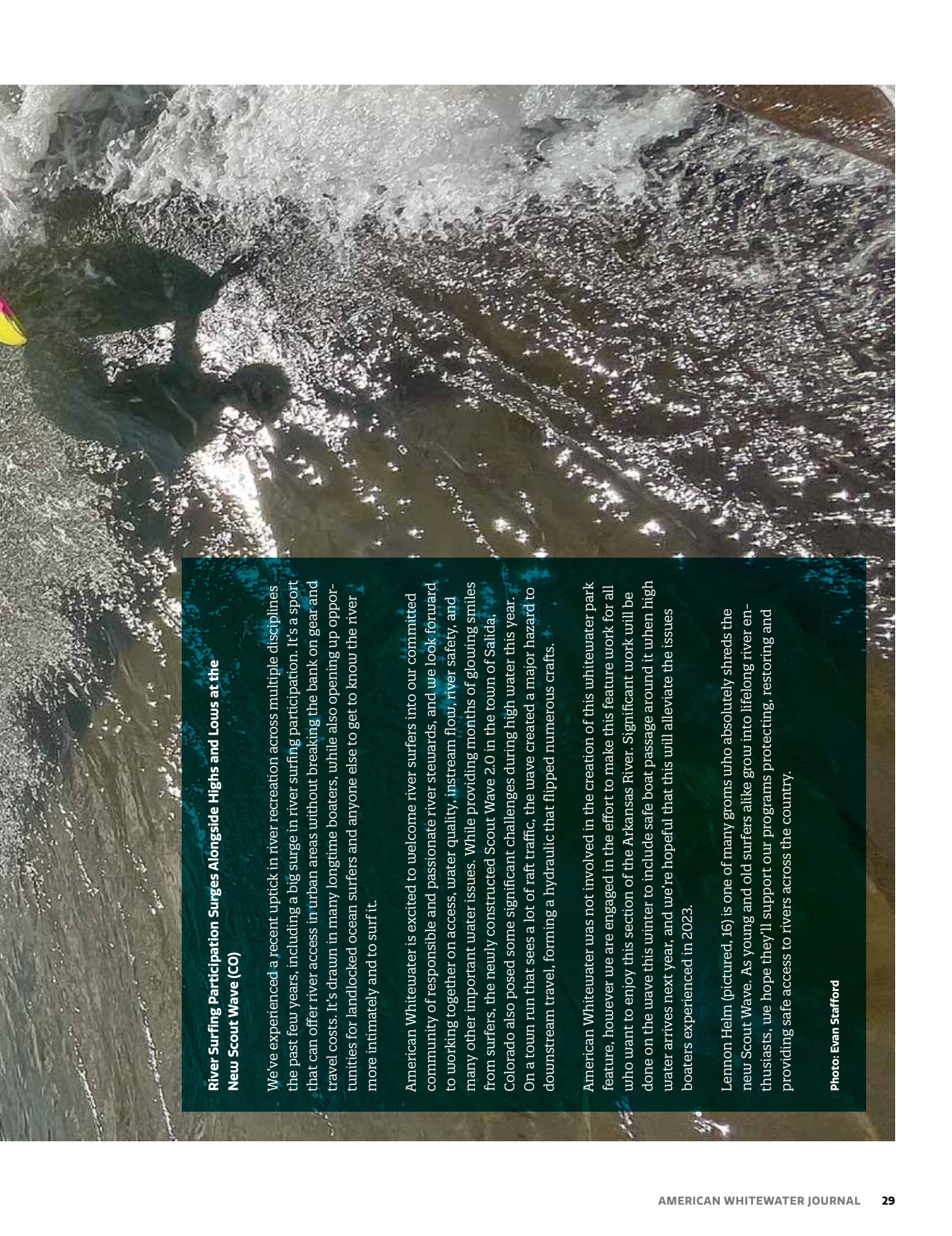


Count

2023 Incidents/Month







River Surfing Participation Surges Alongside Highs and Lows at the New Scout Wave (CO)

We've experienced a recent uptick in river recreation across multiple disciplines the past few years, including a big surge in river surfing participation. It's a sport that can offer river access in urban areas without breaking the bank on gear and travel costs. It's drawn in many longtime boaters, while also opening up opportunities for landlocked ocean surfers and anyone else to get to know the river more intimately and to surf it.

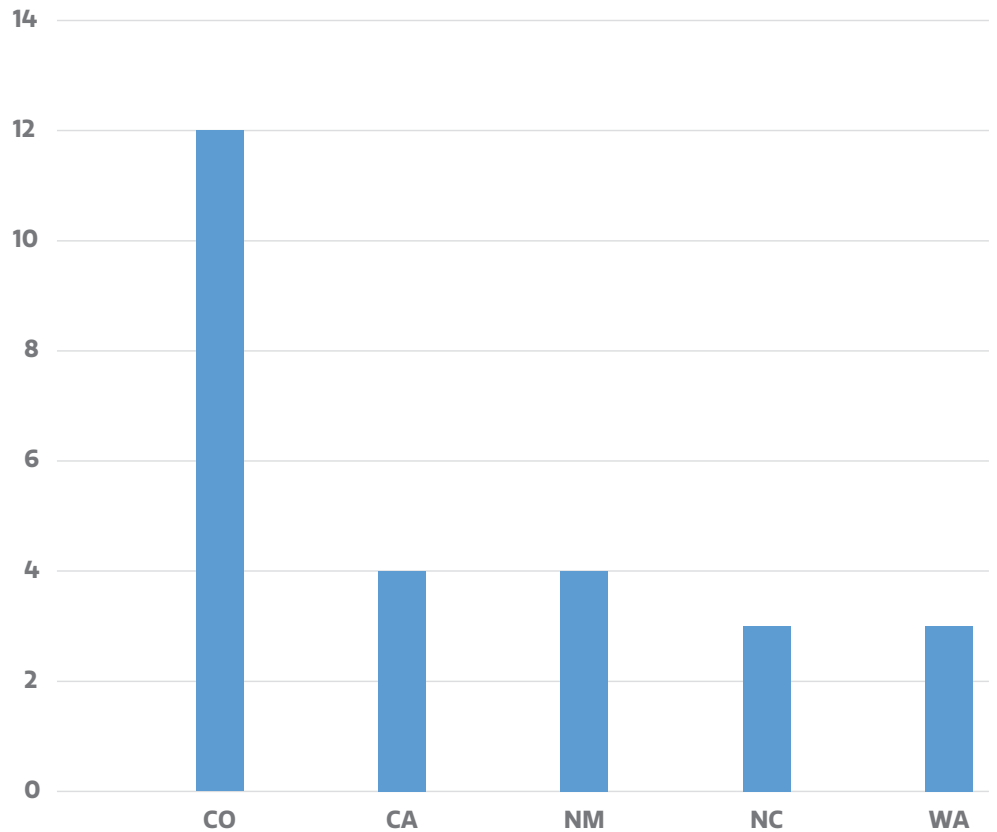
American Whitewater is excited to welcome river surfers into our committed community of responsible and passionate river stewards, and we look forward to working together on access, water quality, instream flow, river safety, and many other important water issues. While providing months of glowing smiles from surfers, the newly constructed Scout Wave 2.0 in the town of Salida, Colorado also posed some significant challenges during high water this year. On a town run that sees a lot of raft traffic, the wave created a major hazard to downstream travel, forming a hydraulic that flipped numerous crafts.

American Whitewater was not involved in the creation of this whitewater park feature, however we are engaged in the effort to make this feature work for all who want to enjoy this section of the Arkansas River. Significant work will be done on the wave this winter to include safe boat passage around it when high water arrives next year, and we're hopeful that this will alleviate the issues boaters experienced in 2023.

Lennon Helm (pictured, 16) is one of many groms who absolutely shreds the new Scout Wave. As young and old surfers alike grow into lifelong river enthusiasts, we hope they'll support our programs protecting, restoring and providing safe access to rivers across the country.

Photo: Evan Stafford

2023 Top 5 States



swam safely to shore, but his son's life vest snagged on the frame and he was pulled underwater. Local kayakers saw what happened and tried to help, but by the time they released the boy, he was dead.

Washington State Accidents

In Washington State, the popular Class III Wenatchee River below Leavenworth was running 16,400 cfs on May 4th when an eight-man commercial raft flipped at "Shark's Tooth". The whole group including guide Mike Spurrell, took long swims in the 46-degree water. A guest saw that Mr. Spurrell, 46, was "not doing well", grabbed him, and swam him to shore. He was unresponsive, and CPR was unsuccessful.

On May 20th Christian Galvez, 17, was with a group of 6 other people floating the Cle Elum River on a makeshift raft made from inner tubes lashed together. They washed into a strainer where the young man was pinned under water. In a tragic June 6th blunder a couple launched on the Class III Klickitat River above the fish hatchery in a cheap inflatable kayak. They had no life vests, helmets, or thermal protection. The pair went over a low head dam just downstream that experienced groups carry or put in below. The man got out of the river, but Sandya Sridhar, 29, wearing a pink sweater and yoga pants, washed downstream. Despite extensive searches by drones and commercial outfitters and first responders her body has still not been found.

Two fatal one-boat trips

Several other fatal accidents are worthy of note; both one boat trips that found high-water trouble. On May 1st Tracy Demaree, 63, launched an inflatable kayak at Barber Park in Boise, Idaho. Several people in the park saw him swim and dialed 911. Nine Boise Fire units, including the river rescue boat and Boise Police drones, searched

the river without success. His body was found three weeks later. On June 19th a raft carrying three men flipped while trying to ferry across Oregon's fast-moving Clackamas River to reach Austin Hot Springs. One man got to shore, but two others, aged 66 and 67, did not. Three weeks later only one body had been recovered. The fact that none of these bodies floated suggests that life vests were not in use.

Tree Fall Death

Lastly, we note with sadness the death of Cory Peppard, 61, who died on June 14th when the top of a large tree, 14" in diameter, broke off and fell on two tents set up along Oregon's Grande Ronde River. There were no high winds or other exceptional weather conditions in the area. Several others in the group sustained very serious injuries. Their EPIRB was activated and a life flight helicopter evacuated the group. While not an on-water death, it's not unique. There are several similar accidents in the AW Database where paddlers were hit by trees, on and off the water. Because climate change and forest fires have undermined the health of many forests, extra vigilance in selecting safe campsites will be essential in the future. ■

Your help is needed!

American Whitewater needs your help to gather reports of moving water accidents to share with other paddlers. First person accounts from experienced paddlers, newspaper articles, and on-line posts are all important and can be forwarded via email or messenger. Since many media articles are inaccurate or incomplete, clarifying comments from paddlers who are familiar with the area are really useful. And while serious incidents involving skilled whitewater paddlers are quite rare, they can teach us important lessons, help us avoid trouble, and show us how to better manage emergencies. Accurate accounts of these accidents will help manage malicious rumors, an important consideration in this age of Internet gossip.

To report a whitewater accident, near miss, or serious injury, please go to the Safety Page on american-whitewater.org, click "report an accident", and enter the information. You can also email me at ccualbridge@cs.com or message "Charlie Walbridge" on Facebook. You can share newspaper articles, Facebook and chat room posts, or even rumors! I answer every message received, and while not an "investigator" I often run down sketchy reports to find out what happened. I can also help you prepare an accident report if needed.

Announcing: The AW Accident Database Facebook Page

All of the accident reports we receive are added to the American Whitewater Accident Database, which currently has over 2200 entries. In the past few years most of these reports were sent to me via Facebook Messenger and posted on my personal Facebook page. As the number of reports increased, they took over my page. Some of my non-paddling friends and relatives are not pleased to be greeted by such somber material when they check their morning news feed. Others who would like to see the reports regularly are not interested in friending me. With this in mind I've created an American Whitewater Accident Database page, and all interested people are invited to "like it". While I will continue to post a few reports to my personal page, the Accident Database Page will get them all. Your reports can be sent there as well as to my personal page or email.



Photo: Cleo Fogal

Global Citizens

Kayla Angstadt

ALL AROUND THE WORLD THERE ARE BEAUTIFULLY SCENIC WHITEWATER rivers. And similarly, all around the world there are undeniably unique river people. From the Futelefu in Chile, to the Gauley in West Virginia, and all the way to the Ganges in Rishikesh India, whitewater enthusiasts travel internationally to experience the best rivers. Throughout all of my adventures to whitewater festivals, guiding internationally, and simply just stopping by a river along my travels, there is one thing I see in common among the river folk; they make great global citizens. Cross Cultural Connect defines a global citizen as, “a person who recognizes that they have their own unique culture while respecting and valuing the diversity of others. They simultaneously acknowledge the interconnectivity of all humankind.” Kayakers, canoeists, shredders, creature crafters (is that what they like to be called?) and all walks of whitewater lovers tend to make of some of the best examples of global citizens and here’s why.

They are open minded and inviting. Let’s face it, whitewater people can get pretty weird. But one thing I seldomly see is hatred towards others. “Put-in” and “take-out” points of rivers are generally some of the most welcoming places I have ever been. Individuals from all backgrounds come together for one commonality, their love for the river. Professional river guides must take into account how different cultures learn and respond to teaching in order to have a successful descent. Even off the river, I have seen (and experienced) many boaters open their homes to traveling kayakers, no matter where they are from. They understand that (other than a great run) boaters need shuttles, showers, access to a washing machine, food, and a phone to call home every now and then. Being that many have been in the same situation as the boater visiting, they tend to be more empathetic towards the traveler’s wants and needs.

They are willing to help others regardless of culture. Whenever someone is stuck on a rock, pinned against a bridge, or getting worked in a hole, people of whitewater

When we step back to see the bigger picture, we can see that global citizens truly make a difference in this world, even if it just feels like we are trying to have a good time and protect what we love.

will do whatever is in their means to help (unless it's Gauley Fest, then there is usually some cackling, filming, and even friendly sabotaging before it's time to step in...but that is a different article). When someone is in danger or even a stressful situation, Swiftwater experts of all kinds will step up to help another, regardless of their culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or gender. They recognize that all people on the river are simply trying to have a safe and enjoyable experience.

They care about the environment. A clean river is a happy river and a happy river hosts happy boaters. Not only for the simple reason of wanting to receive a clean line or even a possible beatdown in clean whitewater, but different tourist towns depend on healthy rivers in order to be economically successful. Whitewater organizations throughout multiple countries unite volunteers to create cleaning trips and take action to keep rivers from pollution. Even the American Whitewater Association worked with government officials to explain the impacts and changes that the Clean Water Act would have on rivers and surrounding communities. When passionate people get together, real action and positive outcomes can be made regarding the global issue of polluted water.

In conclusion, whether they recognize it or not, river enthusiasts are prime examples of global citizens. They welcome all walks of life to experience the thrills of nature while being open minded to people of different backgrounds. Experienced guides and boaters acknowledge the interconnectivity of all humankind when it comes to having a positive and safe adventure on the water. They are willing to help complete strangers if it is within their means. Lastly, they work together to protect their sacred work and play environments. When we step back to see the bigger picture, we can see that global citizens truly make a difference in this world, even if it just feels like we are trying to have a good time and protect what we love. ■



Photo: Mark Armistead



Eagle Falls Clean Up and Graffiti Scrub

Words and Photos by Thomas O'Keefe

IN AUGUST 2023, THE WHITEWATER BOATING COMMUNITY GATHERED AT Eagle Falls on the Skykomish River in Washington State to clean up this popular day use site and remove graffiti from the rocks. Many of our members grew up and live in the Skykomish River Valley and this effort is part of the ongoing stewardship of the river corridor that American Whitewater, our members, affiliate clubs, and partners support.

We give a big thanks to Christian Knight who initiated the effort and secured funding through Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Washington and a grant that was administered by Forterra to purchase a blaster to remove graffiti. The equipment is now housed at the Forest Service office in Skykomish. Astral also contributed to cover expenses for materials the day of the event. The goal of the project, which we anticipate will take ongoing care and attention, was to take meaningful steps towards transformation of the anything-goes culture at Eagle Falls, to a culture of environmental stewardship. The effort is aligned with our objectives in the Snohomish River watershed to provide healthy outdoor experiences for residents and visitors of all skills and abilities through sustainable whitewater and flatwater river recreation opportunities in Snohomish County.

Big shout out to Mike Nash, who helped us secure the right equipment and was on site all day to ensure it was operated properly. Thanks to everyone who came out and helped make the event a success. American Whitewater hopes to use this experience to build more support from local partners and the Forest Service to ensure long-term stewardship and care for this special place on the Skykomish River. ■





It's a big effort that takes support from the entire community to remove the graffiti from Eagle Falls on the Skykomish River in Washington State and we appreciate all of the help from this year's incredible group of volunteers. Thank you!



It's never too early to think about leaving a lasting legacy to the rivers that made a difference in your life.



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

For more information about making a bequest to American Whitewater contact Bethany Overfield at 1.866.262.8429 or bethany@americanwhitewater.org



Home on the River

By Monica Nigon

THE ARKANSAS RIVER CONTAINS UP TO CLASS V whitewater, but when it begins high in the Colorado Rockies, it is a mere trickle. The water meanders through lush valleys as a shallow bog, toothy 14,000-foot peaks dominating the horizon in all directions.

On its journey south, the stream picks up snowmelt running down the east side of the Continental Divide, inviting more tributaries to accompany it. Seemingly before the Arkansas is ready, the riverbed narrows, becoming a steep, rocky gorge with loose scree and pinyon pines clinging to its banks. The size of the gorge can't take the amount of water the river offers, so she undergoes a mood change. What was moments ago a wide, docile creek is now a surging, swirling, powerful beast that, in the springtime, will rip trees three-feet in diameter from their roots to be carried downstream.

This is where you'll find enthusiasts kayaking and rafting their way through the volatile whitewater. You might hear their whoops of joy, their laughs, and their conversations as they stand on shore, arms crossed, and discuss the best way to navigate the rapids. The river is bustling with activity here. A multitude of colorful rafts pass by each minute carrying neoprene-clad paddlers with bright helmets. This is where you'll find me almost everyday, either guiding tourists down the rapids or paddling with my friends.

A bit further south, the sounds of shouting raft guides and laughing paddlers fade. The river widens and she becomes mild again. The Arkansas takes a left and begins heading toward its final destination: the thick, soupy Mississippi River. Here she will meet the waters of the modest Zumbro River of southeastern Minnesota.

The Zumbro consists of three forks: the South, Middle, and North. Through a span of about 60 miles, the three branches gather into one. The mood of the river is forever the same, the Mississippi in miniature. Its banks are muddy, held together only by the thick roots of oak and maple trees. Mud and sand bars protrude lazily, and you're likely to sink up to your ankles if you brave walking on them. You'll find secretive muskrats and devious raccoons camping on its banks. If you're lucky, you might see a fox, a mink, a beaver.

The Zumbro passes one small Minnesota farming town after another, often jumping its banks in the spring and in heavy summer thunderstorms to leave soft, silty obstructions on the roads. The banks become steeper as it winds through the rocky bluffs of the Driftless Area. At last, it slurps reluctantly into the Mississippi River, creating the amorphous border between Minnesota and Wisconsin. There, it leaves its provincial roots and encounters 1500-ton barges; swirling, murky backwaters leading to dead ends; locals in shiny, expensive fishing boats chasing the elusive walleye; waterskiers, houseboats, and cities.

A couple of decades ago, on the North Fork of the Zumbro River, my brother and I, our hair dark and wild, would spend our long summer days exploring muddy banks. We'd tie clear fishing line messily around the end of a stick, dropping our hooks into swirling eddies for carp and catfish. We'd bring our squirming black lab puppy down to the Zumbro to fetch sticks and shriek with laughter when she shook and covered us with cold water.

As we lived rurally with few neighbors, my brother was my best and only friend through the humid Midwest summers. He is three years older than I am, and as younger siblings are wont to do, I considered him infallible.

As years passed, he wanted to go fishing with his friends instead, and I was forced to stay behind. He didn't want to go sledding with me after school in the winters anymore, and he found ways to occupy himself away from our home in the summers. I'd go to the river alone, halfheartedly throwing sticks for our dog to swim to. I'd lethargically walk through the woods bordering the river, looking for great-horned owls and pileated woodpeckers without much enthusiasm.

Eventually, I made my own friends and got a driver's license so I could leave the solitude of summers alone. I no longer wallowed in the absence of my friend. He went to college and rarely came home. Yet I reveled in each visit, every holiday, desperately clinging to every moment he chose to spend with me. Soon, even that would shatter, anything still binding us together would tear. Soon, there would be nothing to return to at all.

On an icy January morning in 2008, when I was 16 and my brother 19, I was pulled out of my morning literature class to be told by my white-faced father that my mom had been killed in a car accident.

His college three hours away, my brother had an excuse to avoid the crumbling remains of a family. I hid behind grades, athletics, and an eating disorder, feeling the roots of a home disintegrate as my dad, my brother, and I retreated into our grief. The sepia-toned memories of two headstrong children and their parents on lawless summer days slowly faded.

I moved to Wisconsin for college, copying my brother's tactic of physical distance as a means of avoidance. Eventually, the small blue house where we grew up was sold. While this meant the final blow to what was now just the tenuous idea of a home, I

was relieved. The ghosts of a family that used to be whole—of a mother, leading the children on caterpillar-finding walks in the woods, running through the sprinkler with them to wash muddy feet and sweaty faces—could no longer haunt me.

Somehow our ties to the Zumbro couldn't be severed. Seemingly by some sort of magnetic force, my brother and I both ended up pursuing lives on rivers. He was a river ranger in Montana, then a whitewater guide on the White Salmon in Washington. I became a ski bum in Colorado and pursued guiding on the Arkansas River.

We were both called in a parallel way, perhaps pulled subconsciously by those summer afternoons in the shallow, muddy Zumbro River. Of whole days seeing how far we could make it up the river jumping from rock to rock, sandbar to sandbar. Of shouting as we swung off steep, slippery banks from dark vines that dangled over deep eddies. We looked desperately for a time when we felt safe, a time that didn't contain the enormous void of our mother.

After years of searching, I've found joy again on the river with a ragtag group of raft guides who show kindness, compassion, and loyalty on par with any family. I sometimes feel just a hint of the unbounded freedom I used to feel as a little kid in Minnesota, playing outside with no fears or regrets. I explore side canyons, clamber on huge boulders that dot the grainy beaches, and sometimes borrow fishing rods to cast into lazy eddies for brown trout.

When I'm on the Arkansas with friends, I imagine the cold, raging whitewater meeting the Zumbro hundreds of miles away. I hope the Arkansas tells those waters and the ghosts of two dark-haired children hello from me. I hope the young sister will recognize the shimmering apparition of her 30-year-old self in the Arkansas' waters. This woman is laughing and sunburnt, surrounded by the mountains that give her peace, yet always, always, missing the sleepy water of her childhood.

On the river, I am nowhere and everywhere at once, transcending time and place. The fierce, steep Arkansas will soon be the same as all of the water in the world, the same as that shallow river in southeastern Minnesota, mixing and swirling through swamps and lakes and oceans. Thus, it doesn't matter where I work or sleep or live.

I am home. ■

What's Permitted?

Words by Hayden Blackford, Photos by Evan Stafford

IN 2020, I WAS GUIDING A BOAT WHEN MY FAMILY

told me their son, who looked to be about 14, had used “bots” to secure a camping permit in Glacier National Park. At the time, I thought that their child was perhaps a gifted coder. It would be nice to have that ability. Perhaps the kid was a good coder, but he didn’t have to be. Like most of the public I did not know, as I do now, that there are websites where you can pay for a service to scrape the Rec.gov website for camping permits, river permits and backcountry access.

Soon, I had a chance to better understand the benefits of bots myself. In May 2022, I kayaked the Middle Fork of the Salmon and even turned the corner onto the Main Salmon. Connecting two permits into a nearly 200-mile adventure on some of the country’s preeminent wilderness whitewater was only possible with a little bit of computer code. My journey, alongside a handful of others, hinged on the help of a coder, who will remain anonymous. This coder’s mission is to increase awareness of this unique confluence of public access, natural resource management, and technology.

Increased Demand, Less Access

Boaters need considerable skill to navigate many permitted rivers, but the last few decades have seen a substantial increase in competent boaters, as well as an increased pool of hopeful lottery applicants.

It’s becoming increasingly common for government agencies to require permits for high-use areas to combat the excessive use and subsequent abuse of America’s wild places. While there are some outliers—the Grand Canyon’s river permits—many of these entities outsource the booking process to Recreation.gov (Rec.gov), a government service maintained by contractor Booz Allen.

Rec.gov has used its lottery system to distribute permits from camping in Yosemite, to climbing Mt. Rainer, to boating the Main Salmon. Their permitting processes change depending on the local governing entity’s desires, but many follow the same framework.

As many river enthusiasts know, you can cancel your reservation for most river permits after the permits are distributed randomly through a lottery. At this point, there is a one-time first-come-first-serve free for all during which Rec.gov releases all cancellations at once. After this, cancellations pop up at random intervals. Many people do not know, however, that a program can scan or “scrape” the website at short intervals all day and all night, alerting interested recreators to a cancellation.

After successfully using a scraping bot to scan Rec.gov for cancellations, my group picked up a cancellation permit. In the typical sense, a scraping bot is not a bot, as it will not book the permit for you. It doesn’t need to. It simply alerts you to the existence of an open permit. When using this software, it’s unlikely someone with enough time to kill would face any

competition in obtaining their desired permit, and even then, the competition would probably come from others using the same tactics.

The Only Constant is Change

After paddling a stretch of nearly 200 miles through the largest wilderness area in the United States, it is easy to understand why river runners worldwide try their hand at the lottery.

Many would think that the Frank Church River of No Return, the River of No Return being the original namesake of the Main Salmon, has been frozen and protected from change. In truth, this area changes before your eyes as the river excavates new cutbacks, dead trees give in to the power of gravity, and avalanches sweep trees into the river, where spring runoff takes them up like toothpicks in a toilet bowl.

Forest fires have pockmarked the landscape, increasing the frequency of landslides. In late 2022, forest fires contributed to a landslide at Ramshorn Creek, which choked the river, said Sanne Hilbrich, a guide I met on the river who works for Far and Away Adventures. As the water charted a new course through the debris, it created a new riverbed, but with more turbulent waters. Drawing from nearly a decade of experience, she said the downstream rapid, Velvet Falls, was also changed, at least temporarily.

Rec.gov acknowledges the difficulty of planning a trip around high-water, and allows permit holders to cancel their permits with little to no notice when a river is in flood stage. Other environmental conditions can further complicate a trip’s logistics and cause last-minute cancellations as well.

The river changes, the gear we use to run rivers changes, and the way we obtain permits changes too. In my group of seven kayakers, who would spend ten days traveling together, only some knew how one member procured the permit. For our group, the software designer hoped to bring awareness to the loophole through direct experience.

A New Way to Find a Permit

After my recent trip, I reached out to Eric Karjaluo, the owner of Campnab. This site advertises itself as being able to find bookings for sold-out campsites but is also capable of scanning for river trip permits.

“All we do is notify folks about availability, which tends to be more convenient than manually checking the website throughout the day,” Karjaluo said. “This means there’s no guarantee that someone will get a spot. They still need to book the campsite permit through the respective booking system.”

These automated scraping tools, designed to streamline the process of securing prime camping and activity spots, have garnered disapproval from a subset of river enthusiasts. However, it’s essential to recognize that this perspective might not



be universally shared. While the critics might dominate the conversation, a more silent majority might be appreciating the ease and efficiency these tools bring to securing permits without paying lottery fees. Several other sites operate similarly to Karjaluo's Campnab.

"We do see a lot of new folks trying to build something like Campnab. I'd guess we've seen about 30 pop up over the years," he said. He shared an associate co-founded the website to save his wife time manually refreshing the British Columbia Parks' website. That was in 2017. The site celebrated sending 3.5 million notifications to users in June 2023, and the duo has moved to work full-time at their startup. The website also monitors Rec.gov, Reserve America, and some state park sites in America.

Far from being a problem, Karjaluo argues that sites like his offer a solution, and in enabling people to find access to the outdoors, he's helping Rec.gov fill reservations. He thinks that what's more important is that people remember to cancel their permits, as forgetting to is an issue with campsite availability, leading to wasted campsites. He did not expect this venture to be as successful as it has been. His side hustle has become his main job -- being the middleman between prospective recreators and their public lands.

"Booking systems could certainly approach cancellations in different ways. For example, some areas hold sites for release at a set time. Others already have built-in notifications in place," he said.

When I talked with Karjaluo, about 50 people were scanning for Salmon River or Middle Fork of the Salmon permits using his website. This number surprised me, but he thought it was an unremarkable number of people. He noted that the number changes "constantly" because people will stop scanning when they find a permit.

"It's hard to give specific numbers on scans and interest as those numbers are always changing," he said. "Once folks find a spot, they cancel their scans, so these go up and down all the time."

The Selway, which only has 25 annual permits, had ten people scraping for a cancellation. In 2020, drawing a Selway permit through the lottery was one in 122; Middle Fork Salmon was one in 58; drawing a Main Salmon Permit was one in 60. Karjaluo and I had this conversation in June, when many people had already found their permits or given up. The scanner I was familiar with had picked up a lot of permits immediately following the free-for-all release Rec.gov did in the spring. Immediately after permits are distributed through lotteries and

the planned cancellation release date, many end up with dates that don't work due to unforeseen circumstances. Scraping bots become the most valuable here. The longer one waits for cancellations, the better the chance of finding suitable dates.

These scrapers are available online, and several other startups provide the same service. Github, a website where people can share computer code, has several accessible software renditions.

"Please don't abuse this script," wrote a user named banool, under their scraper bot program. "Most folks don't know how to run scrapers against websites, so you're at an unfair advantage by using this."

Rec.Gov As a Tool

The U.S. Forest Service, an entity that controls permit guidelines for the Four Rivers area, has some control over how cancellations are released. Still, not complete control, Amy Baumer, the Public Affairs Staff officer for the Salmon-Challis National Forest, explained. Agencies use river permits to limit or control access and prevent natural resource damage or overuse within the river corridor. River corridors are confined travel areas with limited space, so requiring permits and limiting use helps protect the river resources.

"For the Middle Fork of the Salmon and Salmon River systems, a cancellation is released randomly within 24 hours after it is canceled. This is to provide fair and equitable opportunity for the public to reserve a cancellation on a first-come, first-serve basis," Baumer shared. Rec.gov's system performs the random release. Baumer could only comment on the Salmon-Challis National Forest, but it's important to note that scraping bots can pick up just about any cancellation on Rec.gov's website.

The number of no-shows varies, but typically the number on the Middle Fork and Main Salmon is pretty low at annually, about fifteen on the Main Salmon and about five during the Middle Fork control season. "If a permit holder fails to cancel their reservation and does not show, we restrict the permit holder from applying to the river lottery, and they cannot hold a permit for the river system for the next three years," Baumer explained.





The Forest Service outlined its lottery system using a Comprehensive River Management Plan, which addresses how the agency protects and enhances the values of the river for future generations to enjoy. The management plan would need to change for the river's cancellations to be released differently.

"Currently, there are no plans to update the management plan," said Baumer. "When the Forest does update the plan, there will be a robust opportunity for the public to provide input."

Janelle Smith, the strategic communications lead for Rec.gov, reminded that Rec.gov is simply a tool.

"It's the tool for all of the different federal agencies to use as they choose to," she said. "As each agency has land management plans, part of that plan is the type and amount of recreation that can go on in an area. A reservation system is just part of that tool in their tool kit to help them do that."

Another misperception is that there are bots that do make reservations. Smith assured me that Rec.gov has controls they are continually monitoring. Another type of bot they monitor is the scraping bot, where the bot monitors the site, and then the user has a code that allows them to notify people when cancellations occur. The ability of users to do this stems from the transparency and openness of data that Rec.gov maintains. The federal government requires that Rec.gov be transparent with their data.

"Any change that we make is going to be informed by our customers, and the customers are the public," Smith said. "Our customers are those land managers, the campground hosts, the local managers. Everything we do is informed by the people we serve. So, it's in response to their needs or requests that we continue to offer new sources or make changes, modifications, or enhancements to what we already do."

Rec.gov is making some changes. Smith mentioned that the website is running through a soft launch of a Campsite Availability Alert feature, which will allow visitors to set an alert with their specific requirements. The new system will operate like a scraping bot as you plug in your preferences, location, dates, and type of site. Then, the company will let you know when it becomes available.

"Before we launch it to the rest of the system, we learn from it, we tweak it if needed," Smith shared. She also stressed that this tool will only be for campsites. When asked if Rec.gov can make people aware of scraper bot services, Smith answered that the government could not show any preferential treatment to any one service, so they could not bring attention to a business that is for profit. In the end, Smith wanted to remind people that Recreation.gov is a government service, and they have their "ears finely tuned to listen to what our field managers are saying."

“We’re all consumers, too,” Smith said of her fellow employees. “I can’t think of one of my teammates that’s not also a customer and out there recreating every chance we get.”

Returning to the River

“Even back in the mid to late 70’s, the permits were difficult to get,” Scot Houska, an outdoor enthusiast based out of Grand Junction, Colorado, said of the Green River’s renowned Gates of Lodore section. Since the 70s, Houska has been back half a dozen times, but this time was different. This time, with the help of a friend, computer software facilitated Houska’s trip.

The same person that led me down the Middle Fork was able to transfer Houska’s permit by dropping it from the Rec.gov cart after having scraped it. The permit showed up immediately instead of randomly, as a standard cancellation would. Houska remembers when you had to fill out a physical application packet, mail it back, and then wait for your lottery results to get a river permit. Then, you could call the governing entity in a month or two and ask if cancellation permits had become available.

For years, starting from the mid-70s, he diligently submitted applications year after year. Initially the applications were very successful, but eventually Houska’s luck ran dry. In April 2023, he got the chance to return, nearly 50 years after the river first impacted him. For years his wife applied alongside him, and when his sons came of age, they applied; the household sent in four applications at a time for years.

“We have circles of friends, two or three friends and their spouses, who had been applying for decades,” Houska said. “I hadn’t been down that river for 18 years because neither I nor my circle of friends had been able to get permits.”

He noticed that even after tens of thousands of people had floated the river between his visits, the river was much the same as he remembered it.

“It was just as pristine as it was the first time I went down it in the mid to late 70s,” he said. “The regulatory side of just trying to protect it is working. It’s fantastic.”

For Houska, the adrenaline drew him in in his youth, but the wilderness experience led him to return repeatedly. While he attributed some of his struggle to book a permit to more people trying to access a limited resource, Houska also speculated that more people are being encouraged to apply for financial reasons.

“For Rec.gov, this is a commercial enterprise, and the more people they can get to apply and send in a permit application for a fee, the more money they make,” he said. “This is a business model for them.”

The company that runs Rec.gov, Booz Allen, makes money from Rec.gov. According to a recent class action lawsuit against Booz Allen, they took over control of Rec.gov in 2018. In doing this, the company charges fees at 4,200 locations across the country, generating “tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars of revenue every year,” the lawsuit states.

Interestingly, as Houska points out, people using scraping bots only pay for the permit they book, as they can completely pass the application fee for the permit. Under the current system, prospective recreators for the many services Rec.gov offers are more likely to receive a permit and pay fewer fees to access the public domain when using a scraping bot.

“The only way I can get a canceled permit (without a bot) is if every morning I wake up and check to see if somebody gave up their permit the night before,” he said.

Houska will continue applying for permits the same way he always has. Still, he was happy to get the opportunity to see the river once again and to share the experience with his family. He’ll go back to applying for access the old way, though he’s not optimistic about his chances.

“To the extent that there are groups of people that get that kind of access, year in year out, and then there are people like me waiting 18 years, there’s something broken there,” Houska said.

Keeping it Fair

After spending months working with this coder and looking into the phenomenon of scraping bots, it’s hard to imagine the system working correctly when more people have access to these systems. Still, it would only be fair for people to try, in my opinion. In bringing attention to this system, it’s unlikely to work the same as in years past. The Forest Service could change how cancellations are released, but as they said, this would take time. Additionally, each Forest district would need to propose and approve changes individually. It’s hard to offer solutions, but I think Janelle Smith from Rec.gov said it best: “Any change that we make is going to be informed by our customers, and the customers are the public.” ■

Shish-Kebabs

Kebabs offer a world of possibilities for creativity and fun.

Dave Steindorf and Thomas O'Keefe



Editor's note: Riverside Recipes is a new section in the American Whitewater Journal that will regularly feature the most delicious recipes in riverside cuisine. If you have a recipe and photos to contribute, please reach out to Emerald LaFortune at editor@americanwhitewater.org or make your submission via our online form at www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Journal

WHEN OUT ON AN OVERNIGHT SELF-SUPPORT TRIP

one of the real pleasures is enjoying great food outside with friends. The social experience of preparing and sharing food brings joy and fellowship to spending time outdoors on the river. With just a little thought and planning you can cook a great meal that is more tasty and fulfilling than the pre-packaged instant meals that seem to dominate the menu on far too many overnight trips.

This is one of our favorite meals for an overnight kayak trip that allows you to avoid bringing the full kitchen. It is also a great option for night one on a multi-day trip. It requires some preparation at home, but once you are in camp you only need a small fire to prepare the meal and no clean up is necessary. The only tool you need is a shish-kebab skewer, which we carry in our bulkhead pillar.

Prep time 90 min (at home)

Total time 60 min (at camp)

Serves 4; about a dozen 10" skewers

Ingredients

Marinade:

Vegetable oil	¼ c
Soy sauce	¼ c
Catsup	2 T.
Apple Cider Vinegar	1 T.
Fresh-ground black pepper	¼ t.
Garlic	2 cloves
Thyme	½ t.
Oregano	½ t.
Rosemary	½ t.

Beef	1 lb.
White Button Mushrooms	8 oz.
Cherry Tomatoes	12 oz.
Baby Potatoes	1 lb.
Sweet Mini Peppers	12oz.

Helpful hints

Use filet mignon or tenderloin for the meat. Avoid stew meat or chuck; just because it is already cut into cubes does not mean it is what you want. The quantities above provide for a good mix of meat and vegetables, but you can adjust accordingly.

Directions

At home the day before your trip, par-boil the potatoes and cut the meat into cubes. While waiting for the potatoes to cool, mix the ingredients for the marinade. Keep the meat and vegetables separate, but split the marinade into equal portions and mix with each. You can double bag in ziplocs or vacuum seal. Put the bag of meat in the freezer and the vegetables in the refrigerator (hint: freezing the meat before your vacuum seal works well to avoid an oily watery mess with your vacuum sealer). Before departure, put the bags in a small cooler with the frozen meat as your ice block and then transfer the package to your kayak before launching.

By the time you get to camp, the meat will have thawed and marinated nicely. Everyone gathers around the fire with their skewer and builds their own shish-kebab which is grilled over a bed of hot coals. Eat off the skewer and enjoy the feast.

Fire Safety

Use good judgment and practice Leave No Trace principles when building a fire. Be sure to check local regulations on fire pans and whether fires are permitted; in many locations throughout the West, fires are not allowed during the summer season unless you are burning charcoal in a fire pan.

Optional

Kebabs offer a world of possibilities for creativity and fun. Consider other meats like lamb or alternate marinade recipes (this recipe is one my dad used growing up featuring fresh herbs from the garden). You can also use different vegetables like zucchini or squash. Throw an eggplant in the coals for baba ganoush. If that sounds like too much effort, you can bring a can or two of Trader Joe's Grecian Style Eggplant with tomatoes and onions. Rice pilaf can also be a fun compliment to this meal if you bring a stove and pot. You can cook the rice in chicken broth with a touch of olive oil, diced onions, toasted pine nuts, and your preferred spices that could include turmeric, cumin, or paprika. If you do that, you might want to lower quantities on the potatoes. ■

Carabiner Concerns

By Teresa Gryder

MOST RIVER RUNNERS USE CARABINERS. WE USE THEM

to clip our water bottles and throw ropes into our boats. We like to have them handy in case we need them for a rescue. Some folks have a stash of carabiners in a pin kit.

Recently I've been hearing that you should "always" use locking carabiners, which have a built-in mechanism that prevents the gate from opening by accident. Maybe "always" isn't right, but they do have value. Any climber can tell you that you use a different carabiner when you're clipping a bolt than you do when you're building an anchor.

Any non-locking carabiner that is out in the open is a potential entrapment hazard. Here I will share three personal stories illustrating how non-locking carabiners can cause trouble. Two of the stories happened to me, and one to a friend on a trip we shared.

Carabiner Story #1

I was guiding section IV of the Chattooga River, on the border of South Carolina and Georgia. At high water, we put two guides in each raft at Jawbone rapid to make sure that we nail the line and make the eddy below—above a big drop called Soc'm Dog. I was the bow guide, which means that I was hanging over the bow of the raft with my belly on the front tube, making sure that we made all the turns.

I was also wearing what I call a "guide belt" around my waist. A "guide belt" to me is a length of webbing that is kept handy so that you can use it to help right a flipped raft, or pull a buck-et-boat over to empty it, or clip onto anything stuck in the river to get started pulling it free.

Predictably, as I was bow guiding through Jawbone the non-locking carabiner on my guide belt clipped itself into the small D-ring in the front of the DIB raft. There was no way I was going to fall out. I also would have been in dire straits if that raft had flipped. It didn't, but I am one of those people who can't help but think about "what if" scenarios. I could have drowned, just because of my ever-useful webbing around the waist.

Carabiner Story #2

I was guiding on the Ocoee River in Tennessee. I was never a "trash for cash" type of guide, so my customers were often underwhelmed, even bored, by the ease of running the river. To keep things interesting I would sometimes do a quiet backflip out of the raft and hide in the water under the stern of the raft until they noticed I was gone.

In the Doldrums I backflipped over the stern of the boat and on the way my "guide belt" clipped into the D-ring on the raft again. I was dangling face-down in the river by my waist. My crew heard me complaining and saved me. I don't know why I had my guide belt turned around with the carabiner in the back, but I did, and it caused me to be entrapped yet again. You'd think I never learn.



Carabiner Story #3

We were guiding on the New River in West Virginia. My friend Karen used a mini-carabiner to put a strap around a thwart in the raft to attach her throwbag where she could grab it quickly.

As happens sometimes when you are paddle raft guiding, my friend was thrown forward running a drop and her leg hit the thwart in front of her. The mini carabiner was oriented gate-outward and it hooked into the flesh of her leg. She used her knife to cut the webbing and get free from the raft, but the carabiner was still in her leg. Karen didn't complain, but she did get a ride to the hospital.

These stories illustrate how carabiners pose an entrapment hazard. They also suggest that carabiner entrapments happen mostly in rafts. Is it true?

Since writing my first draft of this article I've started using two locking carabiners, on my throw bag and my guide belt. I have modern lockers, not the ones we were using 20 years ago. They're OK, a little awkward, but so far so good. The mechanism requires a twist but no traction, and the carabiner stays locked or unlocked, however I put it. I miss having the ability to easily slide stuff across the gate to then unclip it. Things snag on the locking mechanism.

I stuck with non-locking carabiners for a long time. I have made innumerable saves using that webbing and carabiner. Having quick, one-handed access to it allowed me to clip into pinned boats even while floating past in rapids. I also used that length of webbing for an assortment of other tasks, and I didn't want to add the confusion of a locking mechanism.

To mitigate the risks, I tucked the carabiner under the "tunnel" of my drysuit or drytop. It's wasn't out there asking to clip onto something. By virtue of the way I handle a carabiner, the gate was oriented in and up.

If you are a late adopter of locking carabiners like me, I urge you to invest in locking carabiners and learn to operate them. It's nice to have a stronger carabiner that won't bump open.

If you are a late adopter of locking carabiners like me, I urge you to invest in locking carabiners and learn to operate them. It's nice to have a stronger carabiner that won't bump open. Lacking a locking carabiner, climbers use two oval carabiners with the gates opposed to limit the possibility of anything coming loose unexpectedly. Boaters are well advised to adopt this habit when it counts.

I also encourage you to be cautious about where you store your carabiners. Obviously Karen never strapped a carabiner on a thwart again after that puncture wound. Some kayakers keep a carabiner on the shoulder of their life jacket—it's very handy there, and can be used to keep your sprayskirt out of the way when scouting or portaging, but also may pose an entrapment risk. It's a balancing act between convenience and functionality on the one hand, with risk on the other. In general, the fewer dangly things hanging off your person the better.

It's worth thinking about each piece of gear you carry and optimizing your kit over time. We have enough risks to concern ourselves with just running rivers. Hopefully, folks will learn from my carabiner mistakes instead of having to repeat them. ■



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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

California

Smith River Alliance, Crescent City

Colorado

Dolores River Boating Advocate, Dolores
Colorado Whitewater Association, Denver

Georgia

Georgia Canoeing Association Inc, Winston

Kentucky

Bluegrass Wildwater Association, Lexington
Vikings Canoe Club, Louisville

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

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Arizona

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Redwood Empire Paddlers, Santa Rosa
River City Whitewater Club, Sacramento
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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

Connecticut

New England Canoe and Kayak Racing Association, Meriden

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

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,
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Philadelphia Canoe Club, Philadelphia
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, Middleburg
Coastal Canoeists, Richmond
Float Fishermen of Virginia, Roanoke

Washington

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

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Canoe Cruisers Association

West Virginia

Mason Dixon Canoe Cruisers, Bolivar
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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.

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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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- Food Packing for the River
- Kanawha Falls Rescue 2020
- History of the Groover
- Part 1: No Boat, No Paddle on the Big Susitna River



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