



TOP TEN RIVER STEWARDSHIP ISSUES 2022



1. CLIMATE

IMPLEMENTING THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND JOBS ACT AND FUTURE GOALS

FOLLOWING OUR SUCCESS with the inclusion of \$2.3 billion for dam removal, dam safety, and improvements for environmental performance and recreation into the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, American Whitewater will be working to make sure that funding for these benefits gets out the door. This funding will also help to transform the current hydropower fleet into one with reduced impacts on river ecosystems and one that is better integrated with other energy sources. With \$150 million dedicated to Forest Service Roads through the newly-authorized Legacy Roads and Trails program, we will be working to ensure smart investments are being made to address access and water quality issues that result from poorly maintained roads on our National Forests. This means investments in larger culverts and improved drainage controls to improve resilience during extreme weather events. Climate change, overuse, and inefficient management has meant that the Colorado River has rarely reached the sea since the 1960s. With the first ever shortage declaration this past summer and significant funding from the recently passed Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, American Whitewater is working with partners across the water community to ensure healthy river flow.

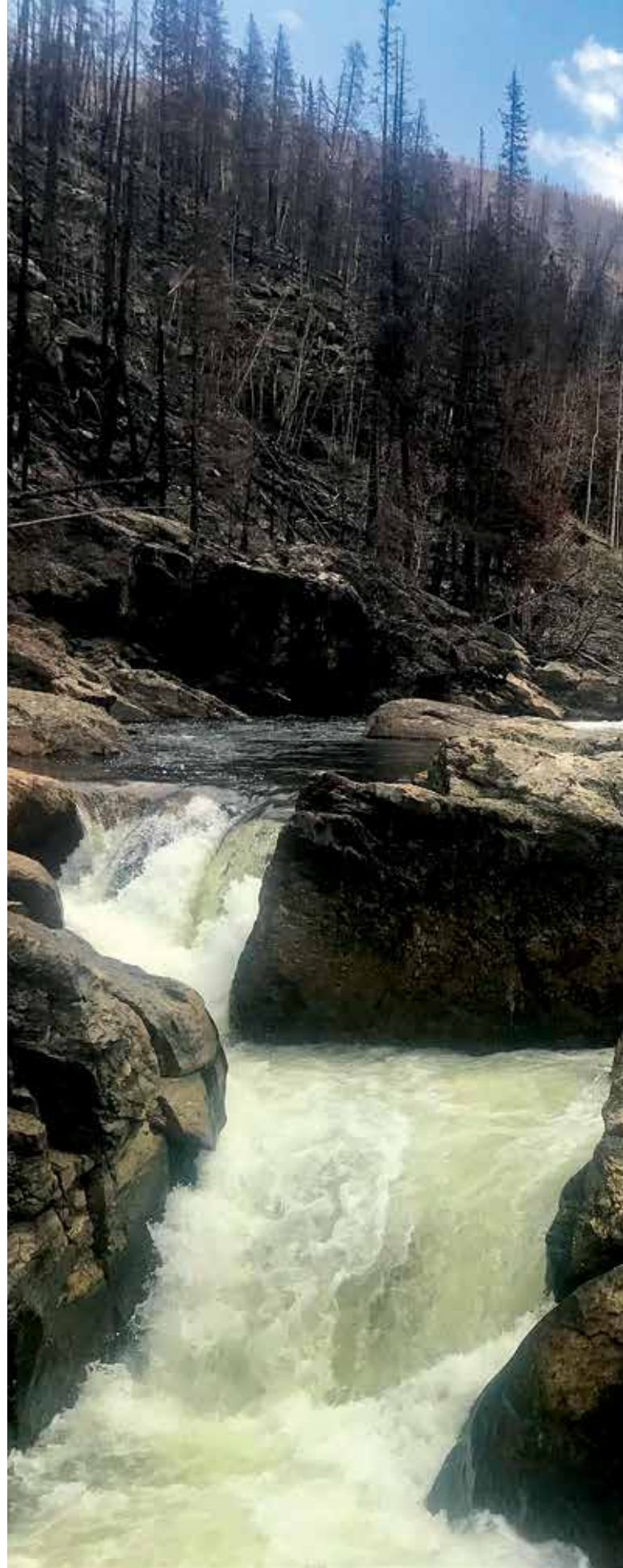
Returning rapids Colorado River below Cataract Canyon (UT).
PHOTO BY EVAN STAFFORD

TOP TEN 2022

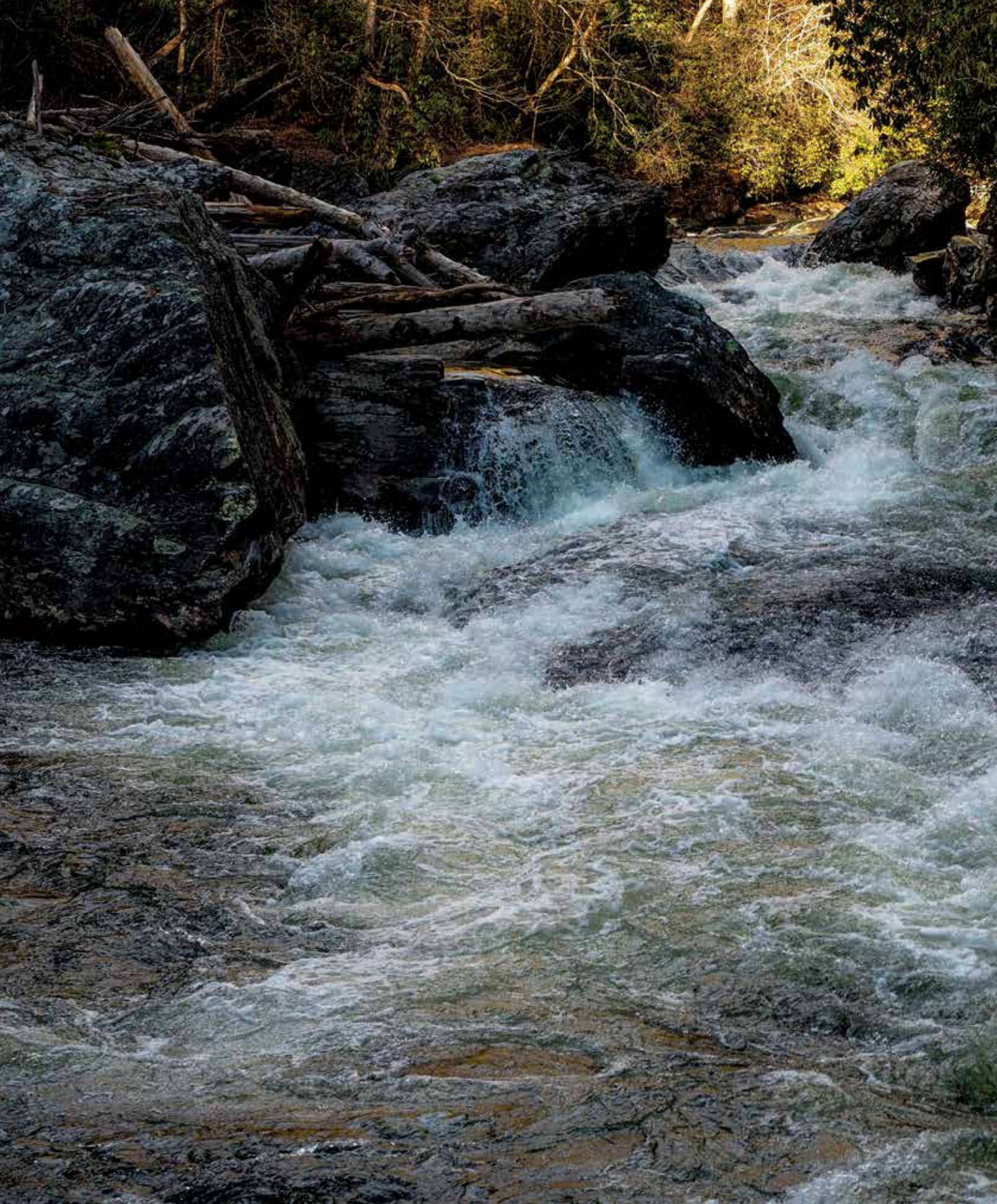
2. WILDFIRE

WILDFIRES ARE INCREASINGLY affecting whitewater rivers across the West, and paddlers are now familiar with extended river closures and the impacts of high intensity fires on the landscape. While we continue to advocate for sensible public access to rivers following fires, we are also supporting efforts to restore watersheds and improve fire resiliency.

Left: Big South, Cache la Poudre (CO).
PHOTO BY EVAN STAFFORD
Below: Clackamas River access stairs (WA).
PHOTO BY THOMAS O'KEEFE







3. ACCESS TO RIVERS ON PUBLIC LAND

REMEMBER THE UPPER Chattooga? That's right, the Wild and Scenic River that the Forest Service banned paddling on until we pushed for greater access. The new Nantahala Pisgah Forest Plan will do a lot of great things, but easing the paddling bans and limits is unlikely to be one of them, even though there is vast collaborative and scientific support for doing so. American Whitewater will likely challenge the prohibitions if they remain. In New Mexico we helped to defeat five applications that would have blocked access and passage to rivers that flow through private land. We're still working towards a positive outcome in the state supreme court case that will decide the state constitutionality of these access-denying permits in New Mexico. On the White Salmon River in Washington we supported the acquisition of SDS Lumber Company lands that are critical to access for recreation in this important river corridor. We will continue to rally our community to ensure a future for conservation of these lands and continued opportunities for public use and enjoyment.

Section 1, Upper Chattooga River (NC, SC, GA).
PHOTO BY JACK HENDERSON

4. CLEAN WATER ACT

WHICH RIVERS AND streams the Clean Water Act should cover is back up for debate. The prior rule was thrown out by a court, and it's a good thing because that rule eliminated protections for many rivers. Now a new rule needs to be drawn up, and American Whitewater will be there advocating to ensure the Act protects the health of paddlers and aquatic ecosystems on whitewater rivers. Outstanding National Resource Waters is a designation under the Clean Water Act that protects rivers with existing high water quality from degradation. The Act directs states to identify and protect qualifying streams. In Colorado, Washington, and Oregon, American Whitewater is working to protect dozens of streams as Outstanding National Resource Waters and final decisions on these protections are expected to be made in 2022. Following our successful effort to overturn new Clean Water Act related regulations pushed through by the prior administration that limited the ability of states to protect rivers at hydropower dams, we will be working to shape new regulations that protect the ability of states to mandate protections for river habitat and recreational boating opportunities downstream of dams.

Middle Fork Flathead (MT).
PHOTO BY KEVIN COLBURN

5. WILD AND SCENIC

THERE ARE CURRENTLY five Wild and Scenic bills working their way through Congress that American Whitewater has played a role in developing and worked to see introduced this session. These pieces of legislation would designate 6,485 miles of 1,041 rivers in WA, OR, CA, NM and MT as Wild and Scenic and will continue to need the professional advocacy from American Whitewater and our partners alongside strong voices from our community so that we can see them become law in 2022. The Nolichucky River (NC/TN) Wild and Scenic efforts are essentially stalled in the three county commissions, though we'll continue pushing for this and other designations in Western North Carolina throughout 2022 and beyond. The Crystal River in Colorado remains one of the few free-flowing rivers in Colorado and we're working with a broad and diverse stakeholder group to ensure it stays that way. With numerous threats mounting for the South Fork Salmon (ID), American Whitewater has joined a coalition of local and national organizations who'll be continuing to explore introducing a bill to secure permanent Wild and Scenic protections for the South Fork watershed and a handful of other streams in the state.

South Fork Crystal River (CO).
PHOTO BY AUSTIN SEBACK

6. FOREST PLANNING

ACROSS THE COUNTRY we're working to ensure and improve river access and administrative Wild and Scenic protections for rivers in National Forests that are developing new management Forest Plans. These plans are blueprints for how landscapes, rivers, and resources will be managed for the next 15-20 years. We'll be continuing to work closely with our partners at Outdoor Alliance to ensure that sustainable human-powered recreation and river conservation are top priorities in these final plans. The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests (CO), the Tonto National Forest (AZ) and Gila National Forest (NM) will all be releasing their final Forest Plan in 2022 after receiving extensive comments from American Whitewater and our members. We are advocating for over 50 rivers to be protected as eligible under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, many of which have incredible paddling opportunities, like Oh Be Joyful Creek, the Taylor River, and Tonto Creek. The final Forest Plan is expected this summer for the Nez Perce Clearwater National Forest, and all signs indicate the plan will abandon protections for vast miles of Lochsa area rivers. American Whitewater is prepared to challenge this decision. The final plan is also due in 2022 for the Nantahala Pisgah National Forest and should be a good win for rivers. We'll see if we pick up a couple of really important eligible streams like the North Fork of the French Broad and the upper Tuckasegee. The final plan for the Sierra/Sequoia National Forests are also due in 2022. American Whitewater identified 228 miles of rivers to be evaluated for Wild and Scenic eligibility. In a win for whitewater and wilderness rivers, the Sierra National Forest has indicated key sections of Dinkey Creek will be included in the eligibility inventory.

Hellsgate Wilderness Tonto National Forest, Tonto Creek (AZ).
PHOTO BY EVAN STAFFORD







7. FURTHERING OUR SAFETY PROGRAM

AMERICAN WHITEWATER WAS proud to introduce the first 12 chapters in our new film series covering basic whitewater safety material for viewing and for community wide use. These new films offer up-to-date and easily digestible tips to help keep river users of all skill and experience levels safe on the water. In 2022, we'll be producing two more river safety films with a focus on SUP, river surfing, packraft safety, and rescue planning and methods. We'll also be encouraging river managers installing safety signage and kiosks to utilize the guidelines in our new river safety sign toolkit. In a wide-reaching initiative, we'll be working on implementing funds already designated and securing more funding for the removal of hundreds and potentially even thousands of dangerous low-head dams across the country. Finally, we'll be working with the Bureau of Land Management and other managing agencies to restore flows to the river that will address public safety within the San Joaquin River Gorge Recreation Area.

Filming for the river safety film series in Trout Lake (WA).
PHOTO BY EVAN STAFFORD

8. FLOW RESTORATION, PROTECTION, AND ENHANCEMENT

THE RIVERS OF the Adirondacks and northern Maine will be a major focus of our river advocacy efforts in the Northeast in 2022, with hydropower dams on the Beaver, Black, Moose, and Penobscot rivers in the forefront during the coming year. We are also looking forward to the start of our expanded whitewater releases on the Mongaup River in New York. In Utah, the government is considering funding a new dam in the East Fork of the Virgin River watershed that would largely dewater the Wild and Scenic River downstream as it flows through a backcountry canyon. We aim to protect the flows in this important river. Following years of working on the relicensing of the dam, we expect the first recreational releases to begin on the Weber River (UT) in 2022. Our first step will be development of a recreation plan, followed by implementation of the first few releases. Great Falls of the Catawba in South Carolina is going to start running in 2022, likely in August, with releases roughly weekly. This is a 20-year project and a big deal! In Colorado, American Whitewater's Boatable Days analysis has become the standard metric used across the state to identify and monitor the availability of recreational opportunities based on flow. To better advocate for boatable flows and flow protection, we are developing a tool to define the economic value of a boatable day to the region.



Catawba River (SC).
PHOTO BY JACK HENDERSON

9. DAM REMOVAL

THE PROJECT TO remove four dams on the Klamath River (CA/OR) continues to move forward with the environmental review process set for completion in 2022 and dam removal in 2023. When completed, this large project will address declines in fish populations, improve river health, benefit tribal communities, and open four new sections of whitewater in a 37-mile reach. We continue to actively support this effort and advocate for flows that improve river health and for public access points that provide opportunities to experience a restored river. As a bold new vision for the Snake River (WA/OR/ID) comes into focus, American Whitewater is committed to working with stakeholders to remove the series of dams that are responsible for a downward spiral in salmon accessing the high quality habitat of the upper Salmon River (ID) watershed. We'll be supporting a proposal to breach the four Lower Snake River Dams while making significant regional investments in salmon conservation, recreation, transportation, agriculture, and energy.

Prime spawning habitat, Middle Fork Salmon (ID).
PHOTO BY EVAN STAFFORD



10. ENGAGING WITH AND DIVERSIFYING RIVER RECREATION PARTICIPANTS

AT AMERICAN WHITEWATER we recognize that rivers find the strongest support for their stewardship through the intimate connections that individuals make with them while enjoying floating on their waters, playing on their beaches, exploring their shores, and generally relying on their clean water, fish resources, and the habitats they provide for plants and animals. In 2022, we'll be continuing and strengthening our support for organizations introducing diverse participants to paddlesports and our relationships with tribes who've historically been stewards of the rivers and their watersheds where we recreate and work. These lands and waters are the homeland of Native Americans represented by various tribes and bands since time immemorial. As the primary guardians of the land and waters throughout the millennia, indigenous peoples have a spiritual connection and obligation to the land, water, plants, and animals that have sustained and continue to sustain these communities. Our work moving forward will be aimed at honoring these relationships, aiding in the protection of these resources, and providing a platform for these communities to tell their stories in their own words.

San Joaquin River (CA).
PHOTO BY MELISSA DEMARIE - CALIFORNIA
WATERSPORT COLLECTIVE

STEWARDSHIP

1. IDENTIFYING PROJECTS FOR GAOA FUNDING

American Whitewater helped secure federal funding for maintaining recreational infrastructure on public lands and we're putting it to work. We've worked with agencies to highlight needs and shape projects that will benefit paddlers. Examples include improving access on the French Broad River (NC) and the Tellico River (TN).

2. WILD AND SCENIC LEGISLATION CLOSE TO BECOMING LAW

This year we secured reintroduction of all of our primary Wild and Scenic River bills, and are positioning them for passage in 2022. This year is shaping up to be a big deal for the Wild and Scenic River program!

3. IDAHO'S WILD RIVERS AT RISK

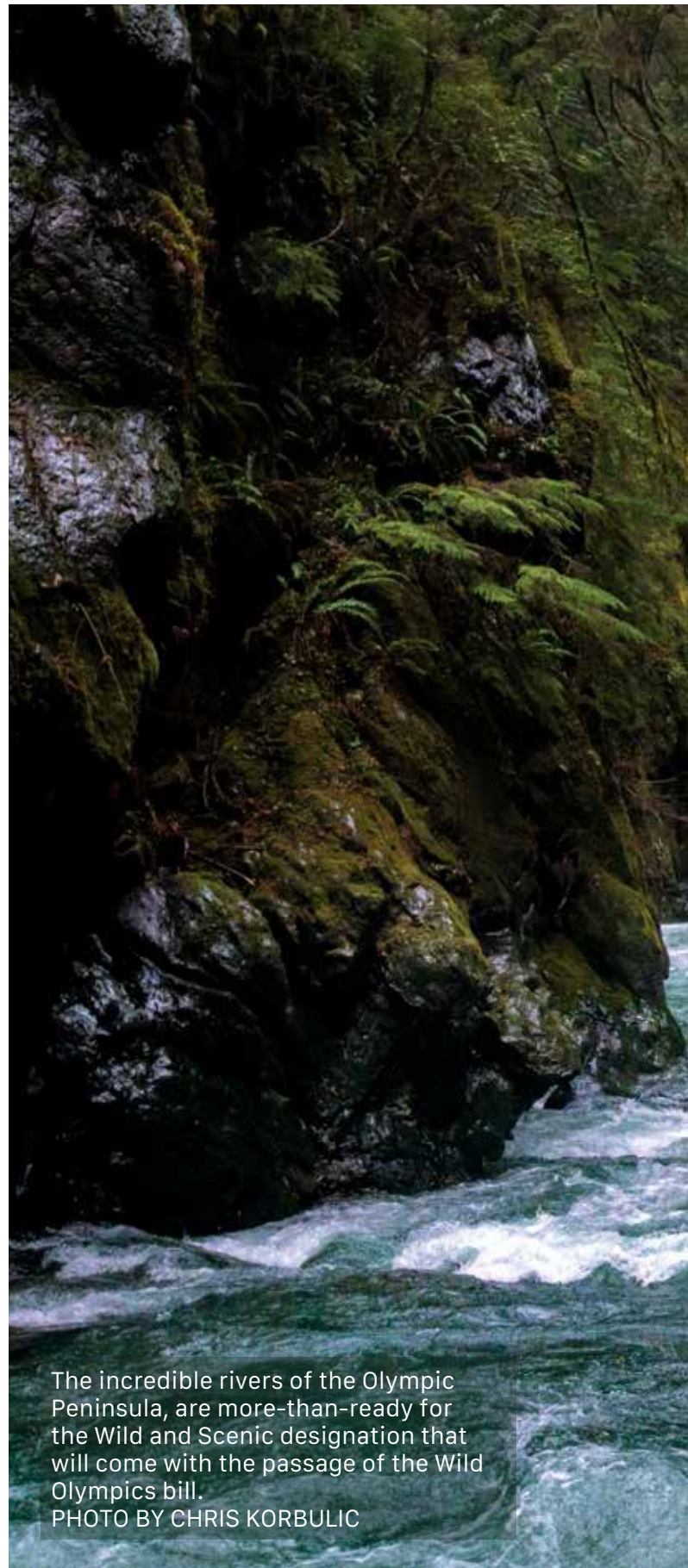
Thanks in large part to an outpouring of public comments from paddlers and groups like American Whitewater, the Forest Service was forced to slow down and take a harder look at both the proposed mine on the South Fork Salmon, as well as the Nez Perce National Forest management plan. We expect major milestones on both projects in the coming years.

4. QUANTIFYING THE ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF WHITEWATER RECREATION IN COLORADO

We've spent 2021 refining our study methodology to collect and analyze flow and spending data that will provide a science-based estimate of how streamflows that support recreation impact the regional economy. Rivers across Colorado provide recreational opportunities that have created an important and growing economy and support a quality of life that is highly sought after. By better understanding what those economic impacts look like, we can better advocate for flows, plan for changes in use patterns, and help rural communities plan for their futures.

5. KLAMATH

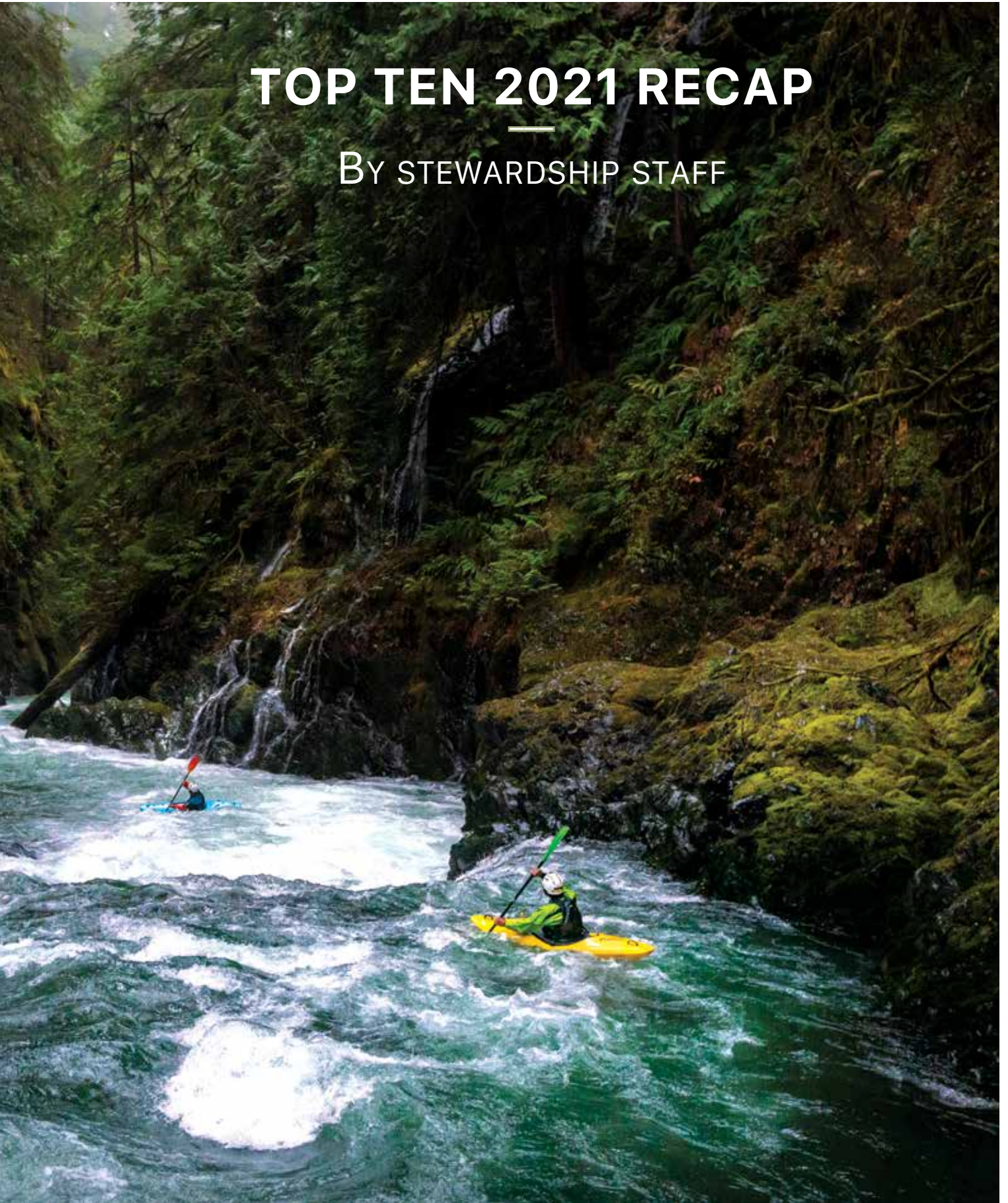
American Whitewater filed comments in support of Klamath River dam removal as federal regulators initiated a final environmental review of the project. We also secured the support of the National Park Service to convene a visioning process for the river corridor and future opportunities for recreation and stewardship of a restored river.

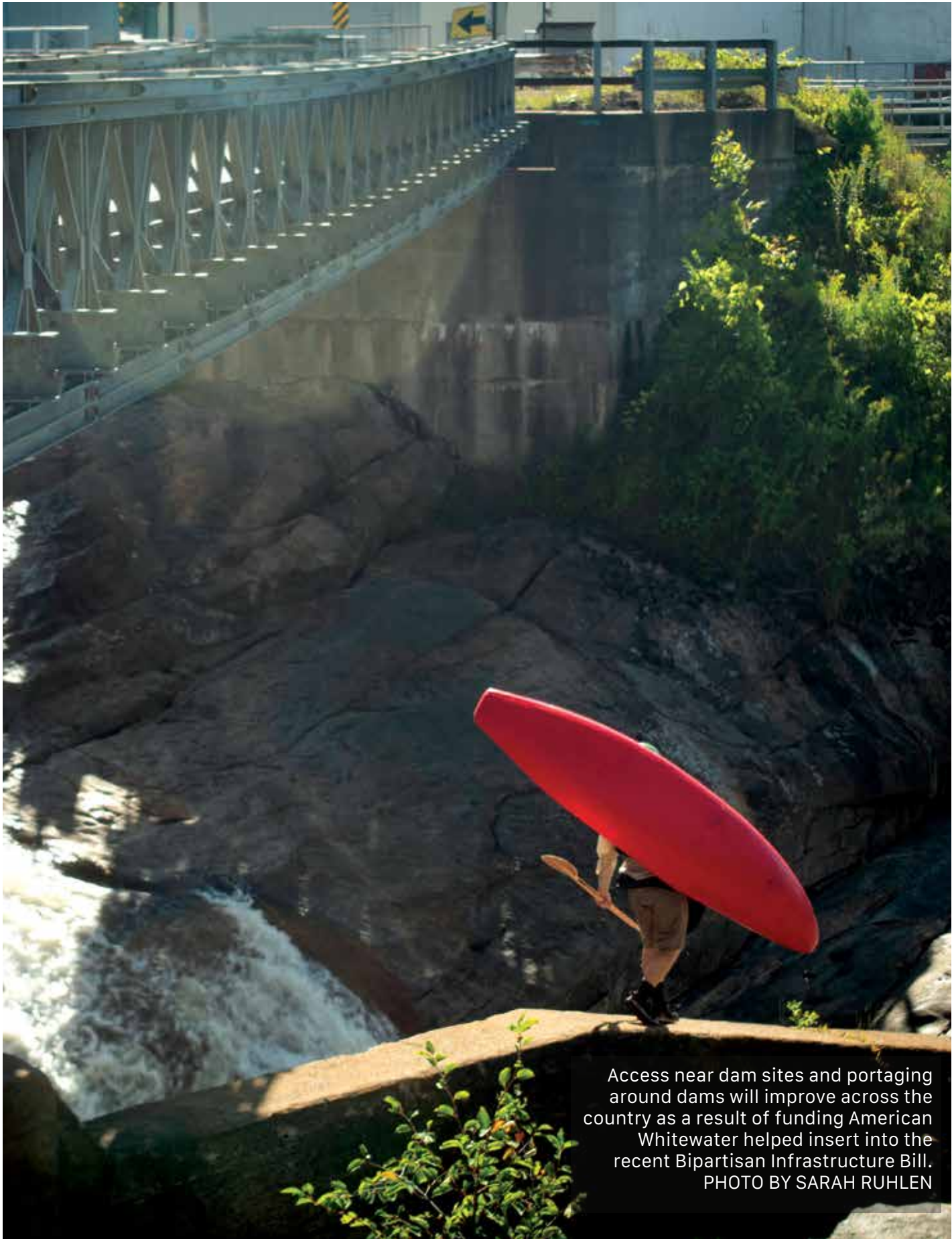


The incredible rivers of the Olympic Peninsula, are more-than-ready for the Wild and Scenic designation that will come with the passage of the Wild Olympics bill.
PHOTO BY CHRIS KORBULIC

TOP TEN 2021 RECAP

BY STEWARDSHIP STAFF





Access near dam sites and portaging around dams will improve across the country as a result of funding American Whitewater helped insert into the recent Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill.
PHOTO BY SARAH RUHLEN

6. ANOTHER SPRING PADDLING/ MAINTAINING ACCESS IN A PANDEMIC

It appears that the pandemic boom in recreation has subsided somewhat, and we are working with agencies to use newly available funding to improve access and trails, and to better communicate river safety messages to newer paddlers through our new film series, the Recreate Responsibly toolkit, our Paddle Wise program, and other tools we've helped develop.

7. NEW YORK WHITEWATER

From NYC to the Adirondacks, American Whitewater's northeast river advocacy in New York was cranking in 2021. On the Mongaup River, just north of the city, we more than doubled whitewater boating opportunities through a settlement agreement on the dam relicensing. Our boating study on West Canada Creek promises to deliver a new river reach with a runnable waterfall and extraordinary chasm. In the Adirondacks, we took on 19 dams on the Beaver, Black, and Moose rivers that began their 5-year dam relicensing process. We are working to protect and expand these releases on some of the most treasured rivers in the region that gave birth to our decades-long success in opening up whitewater rivers for paddling.

8. STATE LEVEL PROTECTIONS FOR RIVERS

In Colorado, Washington, and Oregon, American Whitewater is working to protect dozens of streams under state Outstanding National Resource Waters protections and final decisions on those are expected in the following year. Clean Water Act related regulations pushed through by the prior administration that

limited the ability of states to protect rivers at hydropower dams were successfully overturned by a team of advocates including American Whitewater. We will be working to shape new regulations that preserve the ability of states to mandate protections for river habitat and recreational boating opportunities downstream of dams.

9. WILDFIRE IN THE WEST

For the third consecutive year, wildfires significantly affected rivers and watersheds across the West and we continue to work to ensure that access to rivers is reopened following fires and that post-fire land management actions adequately protect rivers and water quality. We also are continuing to refine a programmatic approach for our ongoing work related to wildfires and whitewater resources.

10. BROADENING THE BASE FOR RIVER STEWARDSHIP

Our partnership and support of the NF Mono Tribe within the hydropower relicensing process on the San Joaquin river continues. In June 2021, Pacific Gas & Electric included their Traditional Cultural Landscape map for the Tsoobebau and North Fork Mono Trail in the final Historic Properties Management Plan. This map is a significant milestone in the relicensing process to the North Fork Mono Tribe recognizing cultural resources that have been impacted but previously ignored within the project. The first California Rivers Through Native Eyes piece is highlighted in this issue of the American Whitewater Journal (page 28).



Cascade River (WA), a candidate for state level Outstanding Waters protection.
PHOTO BY THOMAS O'KEEFE