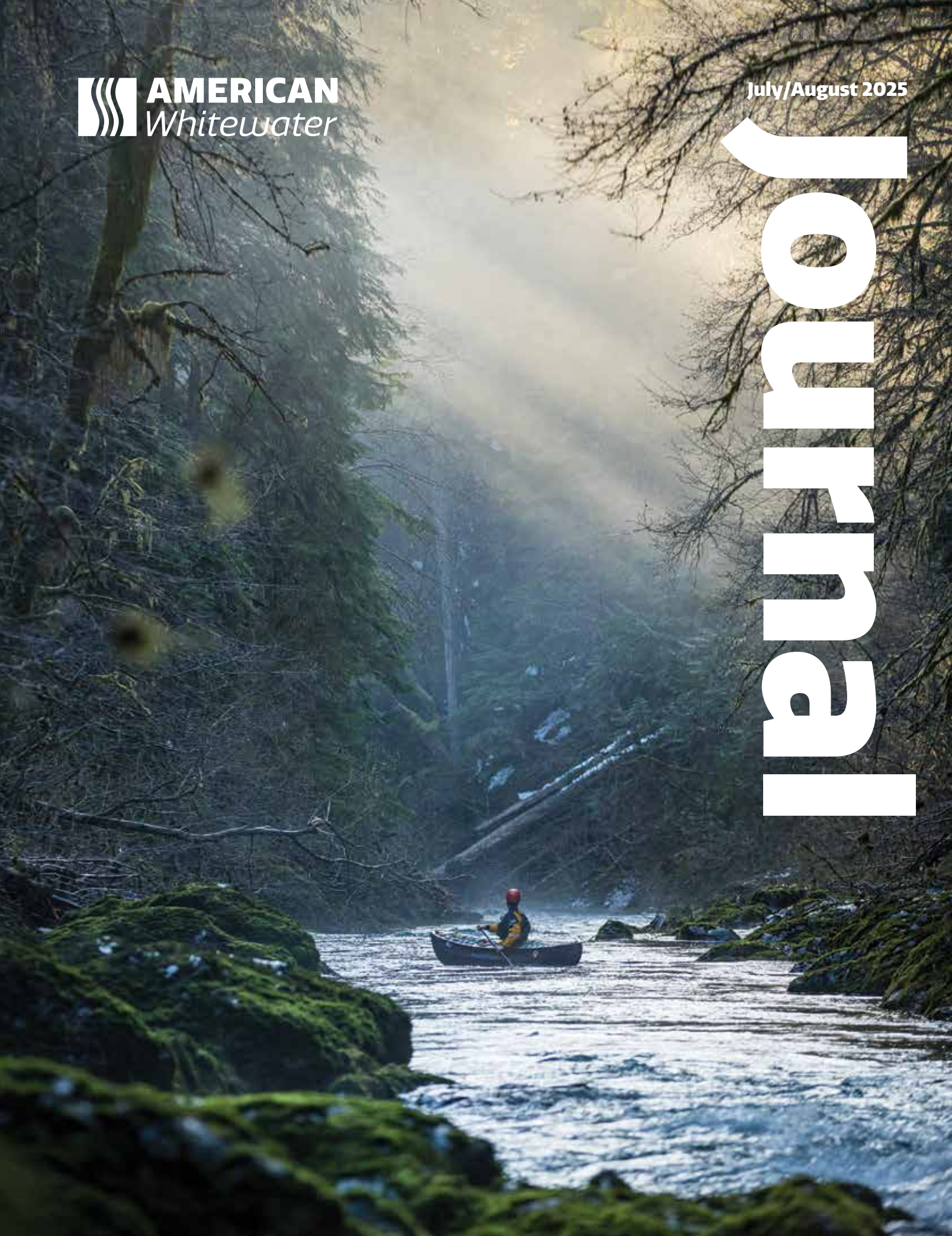




**AMERICAN**  
*Whitewater*

July/August 2025

# Journal



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AMERICAN  
WHITEWATER  
JOURNAL



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

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**Cover: The Wild Olympics legislation was reintroduced to Congress  
this past May as we continue to build momentum towards seeing  
19 rivers and their major tributaries—a total of 464 river miles—  
designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers. Humptulips River, WA  
Photo: Riley Seebeck**

## MEMBERSHIP DRIVEN RIVER STEWARDSHIP SINCE 1954

Our Mission, "to protect and restore America's whitewater rivers and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely," is actively pursued through our conservation, access, safety, and education efforts under the umbrella of River Stewardship. American Whitewater is the national voice for thousands of individual whitewater and river enthusiasts, as well as over 85 local paddling club affiliates.

### JOIN US! OUR RIVERS NEED YOU!

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



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

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

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

### CONTRIBUTE TO THE JOURNAL TODAY!

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

For more information visit our website: [americanwhitewater.org](http://americanwhitewater.org)

### EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER

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

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Photo: Justin Harris

# Horizon Lines

*Clinton Begley*

**EACH YEAR, THE JULY/AUGUST JOURNAL CONTAINS** our annual Impact Report, fulfilling a promise to keep you informed and be transparent about what we accomplished with your support last year. But more than a ledger of dollars and deliverables, this report is a celebration.

As you turn through the pages of our 2024 Impact Report, I hope you see even more than the stellar work of our small team. I hope you also see these wins as your accomplishments, because your membership, your voice, and your generosity made this progress possible.

It is one thing to belong to a community. It's another thing entirely to matter to that community. And let me be clear, you matter. For American Whitewater, that is not a slogan or a nonprofit cliché, it's a fact. No matter if you contributed \$35 or \$35,000, your support directly shaped every success we shared in 2024, and your ongoing support is essential to what we hope to accomplish this year and beyond.

I also want to be real with you about what we are facing this year, as 2025 has already brought some significant financial

challenges. By leveraging your contributions, a growing share of our funding has come from federal, corporate, and private foundation grants in recent years. In 2025, however, some of these usually secure sources have been disrupted by instability in the outdoor retail industry, the reshuffling of private foundations priorities, and changes in federal funding programs.

This reality means that the steady and reliable support of our members and donors matters now more than ever.

So thank you for being a part of our mission, for believing in the power of rivers and public access to the places you love, and for standing with us when it matters the most.

I hope to SYOTR soon,

Clinton Begley  
Executive Director



Cheeseman Canyon has a unique access situation negotiated by American Whitewater, however we intend to secure our right to float permanently across Colorado. Photo: Josh King

## ASK AW:

# River Access in Colorado

*AW Staff*

*Dear American Whitewater,*

*I just moved from the Kalispell/Whitefish area of Montana to Colorado and I'm stoked to explore new rivers. A buddy was saying, however, that there isn't a public right to float on Colorado's rivers and streams. He mentioned that a couple of friends of his even had a landowner threaten them with a firearm last summer. This is really different from Montana and everything I'm searching online is making me even more confused. Can you help me understand where I'm okay to float and what risks I might be taking if private property is nearby?*

*Signed,  
Confused in Colorado*

Dear Confused in Colorado,  
Welcome to Colorado! You're not alone in feeling confused. It is complicated, and that's exactly why American Whitewater is working hard to address this exact issue.

Right now, Colorado does not have a clear legal right to float, fish, portage, or swim on rivers that pass through private property. This means even if a river looks perfect for boating,

if it crosses private land, access can be murky and sometimes even dangerous due to barbed wire, river obstructions, and landowner confrontations. That's a big problem for public recreation, especially as more people move to the state and seek to recreate on their incredible local waterways.

The good news? Most of the popular rivers for boating in the state do not have major access issues and are safe to float, plus, you can absolutely learn more and get involved. American Whitewater and our partners have formed the Colorado Stream Access Coalition to secure a legal, statewide right to float, so you don't have to second-guess where it's safe and legal to go. This campaign is all about building a future where every Coloradan (and visitor!) has safe, secure access to our rivers.

You can learn more by reaching out to Southern Rockies Protection Director Kestrel Kunz: [kestrel@americanwhitewater.org](mailto:kestrel@americanwhitewater.org), and by following American Whitewater's social media channels and signing up to receive the BETA, our monthly email newsletter.

Sincerely,  
American Whitewater

# River Trip Meal Tips for Slackers Like Me

Words and Photos by Ashley Lodato



## THERE ARE THOSE WHO RELISH THE MEAL PLANNING

and execution involved in raft trips. They pore over cookbooks, prepare and freeze sauces, and calculate the exact number of charcoal briquettes necessary to grill 19 ribeye steaks and bake a pineapple upside-down cake on the same evening. When it's their turn in the meal rotation, they impale cherry tomatoes on bamboo skewers and grill them lightly before layering them with fresh basil leaves and mozzarella balls, drizzling each stick with beads of balsamic glaze. They whip cream and mix it with strawberries, pooling the concoction on shortcake medallions prepared over the coals in a Dutch oven.

I am not one of those people.

I'm a capable cook. Everything I make is satisfactory; occasionally certain meals are great. But when I'm on a river trip, I have little interest in spending time in camp dishing up gourmet cuisine when I could be reading on the river's edge, running in the cool of the morning, or burying my niece in sand.

If you're someone who delights in the satisfaction of a well-stocked camp kitchen, producing miracles from dry boxes and coolers, and reducing fellow trip members to groaning puddles of speechless pleasure, read no further. You do you. But if you, like me, are perfectly fine with the trip meals being perfectly fine—if not memorable—then follow these five easy principles of meal planning.

## 1. Organize by meal type, not by day

I know! Your mind is blown.

River trip meals are almost always assigned by each meal team taking a certain number of each type of meal. But one of the most valuable knowledge nuggets I mined from somewhere deep within the recesses of my logistical brain was the understanding that concentrating one's focus on certain types of meals allows for greater creativity, more efficient use of condiments, and less waste.

Let's say you happen to have a river trip with, conveniently, four different parties represented. One party takes breakfasts, another lunches, a third snacks and appetizers, and the fourth signs on for dinners. The beautiful simplicity of this scheme is that, with only one meal type to concentrate on, you can dedicate yourself with Labrador-like loyalty to that cause. Breakfast people specialize in breakfast. Lunch people focus on lunch. And so on.

"Oh, but dinner is so much more complicated," the naysayers wail. "It doesn't have to be," I counter.

True, dinners often involve more ingredients and, typically, more expense. But there's usually a larger party on the trip—like a family—that deserves to bear more of the burden of providing more of the calories and meal-preparation effort than, say, a lone boater or a couple.



If your group can surmount the philosophical hurdle of assigning meals by type and not by day, I promise, you may never go back.

## 2. No one cares if you make the same awesome thing twice

My brother, who often attends raft trips solo due to his family's performing arts schedule, has become the breakfast master. The first year he was assigned this duty he brought us to our knees with a breakfast we had heretofore not experienced, despite our collective decades of experience packing food and leading expeditions for Outward Bound.

All hail the Greek breakfast. Oh. My. Goodness. Olives. Hard-boiled eggs. Feta chunks. Salami. Hummus. Fresh figs. Voila—breakfast, easy-peasy, magnificent.

Although my brother rotates Greek breakfast with the standard crowd-pleasers—yogurt and granola, muffins and fruit, and bagels with toppings—there's not a person among us who would protest if we woke up each morning to my brother laying out the artichoke hearts and red peppers with prosciutto.

Lunch follows the same script, with a variety of proteins, sauces, vegetables, fruits, and—OK c'mon, we're on vacation—chips. Proteins: ham, turkey, prosciutto, cheese, tuna or chicken salad (both of which are premixed in a ziplock bag with mayo to be added at each lunch). Sauces: hummus, Bitchin' Sauce, tzatziki, baba ganoush. Fruits and vegetables: carrot and celery sticks, cabbage, pickles, apples. Breads for those who want them: bagels, sourdough, pita, crackers, or chips.

Appetizers are often as simple as a couple of bowls of pretzels and nuts or chips and salsa, or as relatively fancy as a basic charcuterie board, depending on how much time will elapse between appetizers and dinner.

Because I've been in charge of dinners for the past few years, I've developed a standard rotation: brats and potato salad, pulled pork, Buddha bowls with chicken, pasta night, chili, and burritos/fajitas/tacos. I cook the meat in advance and freeze it. If grilled onions and peppers are involved, like in fajitas, I grill those in advance and freeze them.

## 3. Wing it for the final meals

Remember all those trips when you got to the takeout, opened the boxes and coolers, and said "We could launch again tomorrow and the only things we'd need to buy would be ice and beer"? Try to hang onto that memory when you're planning meals. We always count on a leftovers smorgasbord for at least the final breakfast and lunch. It always works out.

## 4. Make dinner leftovers into lunches or snacks

If you bring extra tortillas, you can create a surprisingly popular snack or lunch item for the following day by rolling up dinner leftovers into a wrap. The trick is to do it right after dinner, while the rice, pasta, meat, and whatever else is warm. Heat each tortilla so it bends easily, spoon in a portion of dinner leftovers, roll it up, and wrap in foil. The next day, bring out the wraps and I guarantee you'll have some takers.

This, of course, results in having extra lunch foods. This, of course, is why you don't plan the final lunch or two into the meal count.

## 5. Condiments are key

Never underestimate the power of a good sauce to transform a meal from fine to fabulous. Salsa, hot sauce, garlic sauce, pesto, chipotle mayonnaise, cilantro-lime cream sauce, sesame-ginger sauce—figure out a way to fit them into the food box.

Just as a single sparkly individual can spice up a river trip, the right sauce can make a simple meal sassy. ■



# ESG

**Impact  
Report**

Photo: Riley Seebeck



**FROM THE LANDMARK REMOVAL OF THE KLAMATH**

River dams to securing new access on the Big Sandy River, American Whitewater celebrated major victories in 2024 that highlight the power of collective action and a bold vision for the future of our rivers.

The purchase of boater access to the Big Sandy stands as a testament to what’s possible when we act swiftly to capture opportunities in service of the long view. This purchase not only secured permanent access for river runners today but also inspired a new wave of opportunity on other rivers to acquire and safeguard key access parcels—ensuring that the rivers we love remain accessible to boaters, by boaters, forever.

The removal of four Klamath River dams created an unprecedented opportunity for American Whitewater to ensure that

recreation on the restored river is planned for and managed responsibly. We continue to work closely in partnership with the Tribes who led this historic effort to ensure the sustainable enjoyment of the Klamath’s many classic whitewater reaches. Already, American Whitewater has leveraged member dollars, and your voices, to help secure and direct over \$10 million in grant funding toward navigational hazard removal and formalized access to the restored Klamath River. These investments are bolstering the local recreation economy and creating opportunity for boaters from across the globe to experience this remarkable place. These are your member dollars at work.

Last year we also went on offense with the launch of the Deadbeat Dam Law Project proactively tackling the issue of private hydropower operators abandoning their dams in your rivers, obstructing navigation, perpetuating environmental harm, and

### OUR MISSION

As a national river conservation nonprofit, our mission is to protect and restore America's whitewater rivers and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely.

### OUR VISION

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

sticking the public with the cleanup bill. We sued the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in federal court on this issue, notching critical procedural wins for the next case. At the same time, we played strong defense on the Nolichucky River, standing firmly alongside the community of Erwin, Tennessee to hold federal agencies accountable for their oversight of railroad interests mining the riverbed in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

As you compare these efforts and accomplishments with our financial report, you'll see we stewarded your member and donor dollars responsibly, leveraged your contributions to secure additional grant resources, and put more dollars on the ground towards projects you care about than ever before.

Any win we notch is a win for you—and for all our members. I invite you to celebrate these accomplishments as your own because none of it happens without your financial support. Thank you, not only for belonging to American Whitewater, but for mattering to your rivers. The world is different, and better, because of your generous support of our work and the rivers you love. Thank you.



Clinton Begley,  
Executive Director



Brent Austin,  
Board President (2023-2024)

# Member Highlights

## **Bill Cross, Oregon**

*Ender Club Member*

“Rivers mean the world to my family and me. Many of our best memories are from wilderness river journeys around the West. I started running rivers as a guide in 1978. Back then, we were working to stop dams from being built. Four-plus decades later, I’ve been lucky to be part of dam removal efforts on the Klamath River. My interest is in using river recreation to promote river conservation. I’ve been fortunate to volunteer with American Whitewater’s amazingly talented professional staff, supporting their work to preserve free-flowing rivers nationwide.”



## **Laura Farrell, Steve Augustine, and Luke Farrell (the Farrellstines), North Carolina**

*Family Members*

“Rivers have been the thread weaving through every chapter of our family’s story. From my husband and me meeting as raft guides and kayak instructors to introducing our son to the river before he could walk, the river has been our classroom, playground, and sanctuary. Being members of American Whitewater is our way of giving back to the rivers that have given us so much. Their unwavering commitment to protecting and restoring whitewater rivers ensures that these cherished waterways remain wild and accessible. Through their advocacy, education, and conservation efforts, AW empowers families like ours to continue creating memories on the water, knowing that future generations will have the same opportunities to connect, learn, and thrive. Supporting AW isn’t just about preserving rivers; it’s about safeguarding the experiences, lessons, and bonds that only the river can provide.”



## **Nannette Johnson, Colorado**

*Ender Club Member*

“Being a naturalist from Georgia, I originally experienced mostly flat water, swamp paddling and black water. For the last 15 years in Colorado I’ve come to learn about the trial and tribulations in dealing with western rivers and their deep need for protection. I have become a lover of these rivers and a committed supporter and advocate for land and water conservation. Kudos AW I’m behind ya and you all should be too!”



## 500

**RIVER MILES PROTECTED**

**FROM RISKY HYDROPOWER**

**SELL-OFF (CA)**

including segments on the:

North Fork Feather River, Pit River, McCloud River, Butte Creek, Fordyce Creek, South Yuba River, Bear River, Eel River, Mokelumne River, San Joaquin River, & North Fork Kings River

## 4.25

**MILES RIVERSIDE LAND PURCHASED**

**PROTECTING TWO ACCESS POINTS AND THE WATERSHED**

(WV)

Lower Big Sandy Creek



**RIVER SAFETY**

- Published revised and newly illustrated river safety code
- Updated National Whitewater Inventory gage system

## 385

**MILES NEW OUTSTANDING WATERS DESIGNATED**

**ACROSS 15 RIVERS (CO)**

Upper and Lower Colorado, Eagle, Yampa, & Roaring Fork Watersheds



## 4

**DAMS REMOVED**

**RESTORING 45 MILES OF PREVIOUSLY**

**DEWATERED WHITEWATER AND**

**OPENING OVER 400 MILES**

**OF SALMON HABITAT (CA/OR)**

Klamath River



**NATIONWIDE RIVERS INVENTORY UPDATED**

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CREATED**

**INTERACTIVE MAP OF FREE-FLOWING RIVERS**

- A result of American Whitewater advocacy
- Aimed at maintaining the outstanding values of potential future wild and scenic rivers

## 113

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

**ACROSS 22 RIVER SEGMENTS (CO)**

including:

Taylor River, Uncompahgre Gorge, San Miguel River, Anthracite Creek, Oh Be Joyful, & East River



## 2

**COURT CASES TO PROTECT RIVERS AND OUR RIGHT TO ACCESS THEM**

• Nolichucky River (NC/TN)

• Watauga River (NC)



**DEADBEAT DAM LAW PROJECT LAUNCHED INITIATIVE TO STOP DAM OWNERS FROM ABANDONING STRUCTURES WITHOUT**

**RESTORING THE RIVER**

Somersworth Dam (NH/ME)

## 1

**PREVENTED BOATING BAN PROTECTING ACCESS ON 25 MILES (MT)**

Fish Creek

## OUR COMMUNITY

**CHAMPIONS: 100+**  
Board members  
Key volunteers  
Regional coordinators

**PATRONS: 2,400+**  
Major donors  
Upper-tier partners  
Affiliate Clubs  
Enduring River Circle  
Members

**CONTRIBUTORS: 4,850+**  
Members and  
small donors  
Contributing partners  
Volunteers  
Web contributors

**ENDORSERS: 47,000+**  
Newsletter subscribers  
AW web user accounts  
Action takers  
Event attendees

**FOLLOWERS: 150,000+**  
Social media followers  
Unique website visitors

**MEMBERS: 7,200**  
**SUPPORTERS: 72,000**  
**AFFILIATE CLUBS: 70**

Photo: Riley Seebeck

# NATIONAL

## Investing in Safe Enjoyment of Rivers

American Whitewater was thrilled to work with river safety experts and a talented illustrator to refresh our Safety Code. This simple how-to guide for safe paddling now includes more craft types, engaging illustrations, and a modern, shareable format. Breathing new life into the Safety Code allows us to introduce its old and new lessons to the current generation of whitewater boaters.



American Whitewater worked with a team of programmers to fully redo our online river gage system in 2024. The new gage service is more up-to-date, reliable, affordable, clearly displayed, and is easier to maintain and innovate on. Color-coded graphs create a more powerful river safety and enjoyment tool for our users. Thanks to member donations and volunteer programmers, the American Whitewater river gage program is better than ever.

### THE BIG FOUR

Ways to Avoid Injuries and Incidents

- DRESS FOR THE SWIM**  
Always wear a life jacket.
- BOAT WITH A TEAM**  
Set safety and help others.
- KNOW BEFORE YOU GO**  
Research the river. Avoid high water, dams and trees.
- SOBER IS SAFER**  
Stay alert and think clearly.

AMERICAN Whitewater

## SOUTHEAST

Hurricane Helene reshaped and even relocated the rapids in the Nolichucky River's rugged gorge. This created great new rapids and surf waves that are enjoyable at lower flows than what was possible to recreate on before the flood. The hurricane also damaged a rail line that runs along the river through the gorge. In hopes of rebuilding their tracks more cheaply, the behemoth CSX Corporation immediately began mining rock directly out of the riverbed—a practice that severely damaged the natural river channel. When all the agencies bowed to CSX's political power, American Whitewater sued. Through dogged advocacy and working closely with local river advocates, American Whitewater stepped up to save one of the region's paddling gems from unnecessary damage.





**Big Sandy**  
Photo: Justin Harris

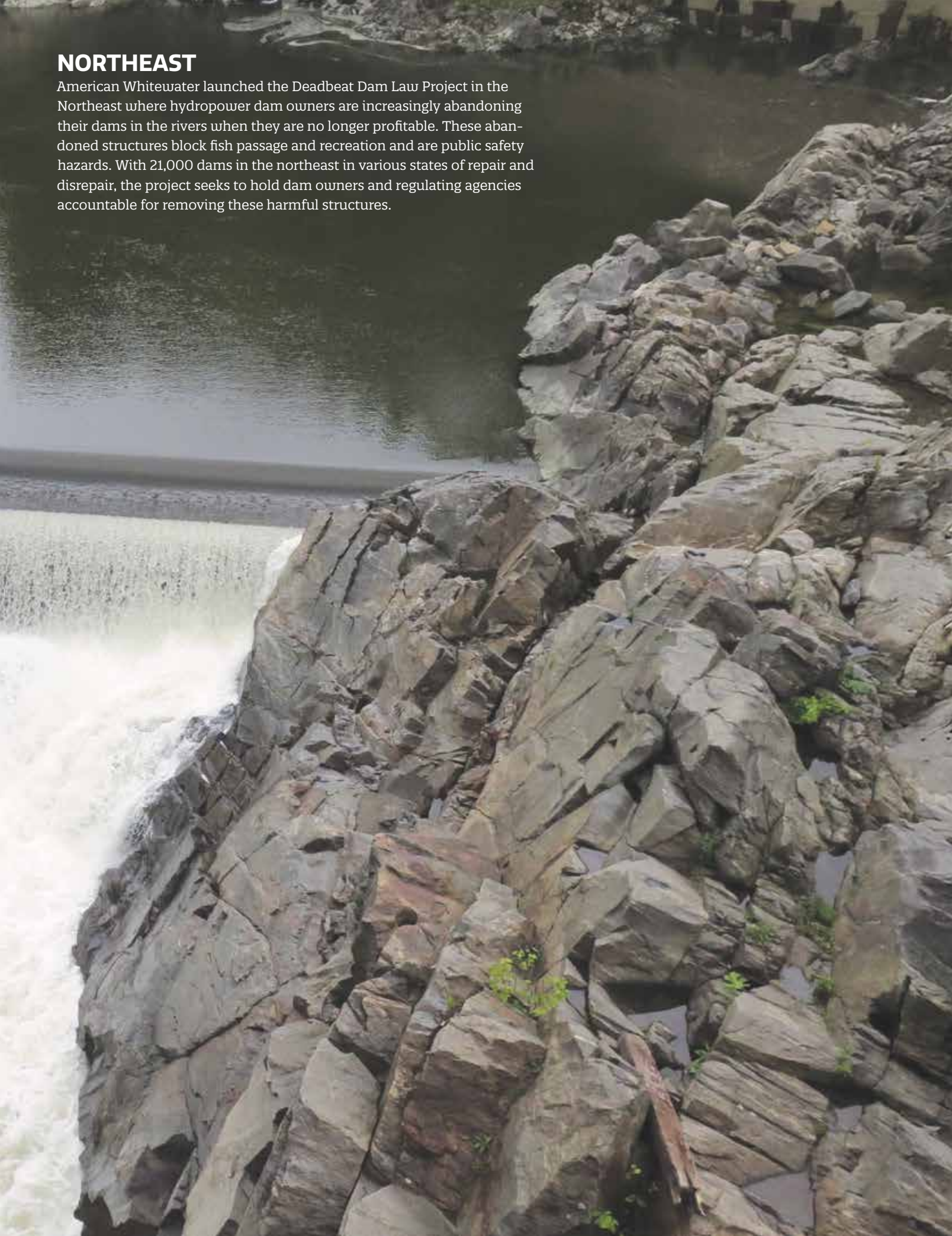
## **MID-ATLANTIC**

American Whitewater worked closely with volunteers Charlie Walbridge and Dave Hough to negotiate the purchase of 4.25 miles of the iconic Lower Big Sandy's left bank from a developer. Thanks to the generosity of the paddling community, we raised the necessary funds and made it happen! The land will now be protected in perpetuity.



## NORTHEAST

American Whitewater launched the Deadbeat Dam Law Project in the Northeast where hydropower dam owners are increasingly abandoning their dams in the rivers when they are no longer profitable. These abandoned structures block fish passage and recreation and are public safety hazards. With 21,000 dams in the northeast in various states of repair and disrepair, the project seeks to hold dam owners and regulating agencies accountable for removing these harmful structures.



## NORTHERN ROCKIES

We don't take kindly to agencies proposing to ban paddling to benefit fishing, which happened on Montana's Fish Creek in 2024. American Whitewater rallied paddlers and collaborated with partners to push back on this ill-conceived proposal, and responded with robust scientific and legal analysis. The state backed away from its would-be precedent-setting proposal, and Montana's rivers remain public and free.



Fish Creek, MT  
Photo: Kevin Colburn



Elk River, CO. Photo courtesy of  
Bucking Rainbow Outfitters

## **SOUTHERN ROCKIES**

In June 2024, we successfully designated 385 miles of Outstanding Waters on high priority recreational and ecological rivers and creeks in the Colorado and Yampa river basins, securing the highest level protections for water quality afforded by the state of Colorado. Since 2020, American Whitewater has become a leader in water quality protection efforts in the state and the Arkansas River basin is our next priority.





## CALIFORNIA

From the far north to the far south of California, American Whitewater worked to expand and defend Wild and Scenic River protections. In the north, we thoroughly reviewed and commented on two new Bureau of Land Management plans—formally objecting to one that fell short of protecting several of Northern California’s rivers, including the newly undammed Klamath, and securing improvements to stream eligibility in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. In the south, we successfully concluded years of advocacy and achieved formal recognition of whitewater boating as a protected value on the wilderness reach of Piru Creek, just outside Los Angeles.

Piru Creek, CA  
Photo: Scott Harding

## PACIFIC NORTHWEST

For the past century, hydroelectric dams have harmed the health of the Klamath River ecosystem. Now, with the removal of four major dams, the landscape is healing rapidly, and new opportunities to experience the river are emerging. American Whitewater is proud to reflect on more than 20 years of work on this effort—led by the Indigenous communities who call the Klamath watershed home.





# Enduring Rivers Circle

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

**Barry Adams**  
**Rich and Stephanie Bowers**  
**Bob Brewer and Jonna Hussey**  
**Thomas Christopher**  
**Duncan Cottrell**  
**Stephen Daniel**  
**Melissa and Joe Driver**  
**Susan and Adam Elliott**  
**Kent Ford**  
**Susan and Robert Glanville**  
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**Rorie Gotham**  
**Joseph Greiner**  
**Teresa Gryder and Will Gehr**  
**Christopher Hest**  
**Bill and Joan Hildreth**  
**Chris Hipgrave**  
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**Roland McNutt**  
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**Carol Nelson and Douglas Wallower**  
**Douglas Pineo**  
**Rebecca Post**  
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**Norwood Scott**  
**Peter Skinner**  
**Peter Stekel**  
**Mark Taratoot**  
**Wick and Laura Walker**  
**Sally Wetzler**  
**Jennifer Wheeler**  
**M'Leah Woodard**  
**Sam Rindal**



Red Creek through Dolly Sods, WV  
Photo: Justin Harris

# Lifetime Members

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

Michael and Susan Abernathy	Brian Bivens	Christian and Angela Chabot	Andrew dela Torre
Russell Abney	Alan Blado	Arnold Schaeffer and	Matt Deacon
David Ackerman	Preston Blake	Deborah Chandler	Rick Decker
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Aubrey Anderson	Dave Bowman	Chuck Cloninger	Patrick Dougherty
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David Asbell	David Brauer	Zachary Collier	Melissa and Joe Driver
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Sutton Bacon	Charles Brewer	Jordan Combs	Kenneth Duncan
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Colton Baker	Peter Bross	Belton Copp	Susan Eckerly and Terry O'Donnell
Jack Baker	David Brown	Gretchen Cornell	Robert Eckhardt
Joseph Baranski	Ian Brown	Jesse Costello-Good	Alison Edmiston
Christopher Barker	Gordon Brown	Lora Cox	Ben Edson and Emily Mahowald
Jack Barker	Alex Brown and Vanessa Campbell	Kevin Coyne	Clint Edwards
Scott Barnes	Raymond Brugger	Jon Crain	Anthony Edwards
Jordana Barrack	Bary Bruner	Adam Cramer and Jen McCadney	Mike Eiseman
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Allison Barth	Ian Buckley and Debra Kadner	James Cross	Benjamin Ellis
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Andrew Grizzell			Phil Montgomery

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Robert Moore	Peter Quayle	Jim and Iris Sindelar	Patrick D. Tooley
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Arianne Morrison	Morgan Randell	Michael Smith	Lee Van Pelt
Stephen Muck	Ken and Emily Ransford	Mike Smith	William VanderKoooy
John Seiner, Kathleen Murphy and	Mark Rasmus	Stephen Smith	Justin VanLandschoot
David Seiner	Harrison Rea	Aulton Smith	David E. Vann
Scott Murray	Paul Reavley	Thomas Smith	Jim Veltrop
Timothy Narron	Brett Redfearn	Chris Sneed	Charlie Vincent
Mark Neitenbach	Brian Reeder	James Sneeringer	Stephen Vitale
Chris Neuenschwander	Will Reeves	Sean Snyder	Joan and Kurt Wade
Bradley Nichols	Chanchal Samanta and	Keirith Snyder	Charles and Sandy Walbridge
Douglas Nicholson	Deborah Reichert	Matt Solomon	William Walden
Eric Nies	Robert Reiterman	Susan Spaniol	Trinity Wall
George Noe	Moe Witschard and Marlene	Joel Spiegel	Chip Wallingford
Ted and Karen Northup	Renwyck	David Spiegel	Cindy Walter
Roger Nott	Deborah Reyes	Eli Spiegel	Michael Ward
John Nutt	Timothy Reynolds	Corey Spoores	Duke Warner
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Aki and Taka O'Keefe	Eric Richardson	Aaron Stabel	Ryan Waterhouse
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Frank Ohrt	Dave Robey	Kurt Stalnaker	Christopher Weed
Anne and John Olden	Brian Robin	Robert Stanley	Scott Weems
Keith Oldham	Barry Robinson	Roger L. Starring	Sebastian Weiche
Eing Ong	Stephen Robinson	Boris Startsev	Debbie and Kirk Weir
Benjamin Orkin	Corey Robinson	Mary Starzinski	Kate Wempe
George Orr Jr	Matthew Rodgers	Chris Stec	Grant Werschkuill
Tim Overland	Karl Rogers	Kathryn Stege	Seth West
James Oxford	Richard Rollins	Gordon Steindorf	Sally Wetzler
Steve Pack	Jesse Rosenzweig	Dave Steindorf	Michelle White
Eric Panebaker	Fred Ruddock	Peter Stekel	Greg and Maria Whiteaker
Janet and Dave Panebaker	Eric Ruhl	John Stelianou	Collin Whitehead
Aida Parkinson	Brett Russell	Sarah Stephenson	Natalie Whiteman
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James Parks	Peter Ryan	Michelle and Bryan Stewart	Martin Wick
Thomas Pasquarello	Roman Ryder	Edward Stockman	Greg Widroe
Scott Patton	Tim Ryle	John Stow	Lisa Williams
Nicholas Paumgarten	Scott Saavedra	George Strickland	Kurt Williams
Tim and Annie Payne	Lawton Salley	Andy Stuart	Dock Williams
Marv Sowers and Amy Pearsall	Neal and Brooke Sandford	David Su	Cheyenne Wills
James Pepin	Susan Scheufele and Greg Smith	Alicia Sullivan	Susan Wilson
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Roderick Peterson	Rick Schoen	Thomas Sweeney	Courtney Wilton
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Patrick Polan	David Seay	Richard Thistle	Brad Xanthopoulos
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Andrea Price	Ed Sherwood	Charles Thornton	Art Zemach
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Nick Pritchard	Amy Shipman	Newton Tilson	Andy Zimmerman
Aaron and Tamsen Pruzan	Daniel Siger	Marc Tohir	Mikko and Oskar Zuchner

# In Honor of...

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

**Zach Allin**

**American Whitewater's partnership in stopping the  
Rincon Gravel Mine on the Colorado River in 2023  
The American Whitewater Staff**

**Gus Anderson**

**Justin Barstow**

**Becky and Quinn**

**Richard Bowers**

**Eric Brooks**

**Camp Mushroom Bubbles**

**Canoe Cruisers Association**

**Tom Christopher**

**Bill Cross**

**Nancy Custer**

**Chris Daly**

**Mareike Delley**

**Phil and Mary DeRiemer**

**Henry Dorris**

**David Christopher Ennis, jr.**

**Green Race**

**Vincent Grube**

**Chris Harjes**

**Larry Holmes**

**Jennifer Hostetler**

**The great women and men who guide rafts  
down the Hudson River in NY State**

**Marc Hunt and Cat Potts**

**Iowa Paddling Clubs**

**Kyle Irby**

**Geoff Johnson**

**Alden Kahn**

**Kai Z. Kinder**

**Klamath River Project**

**David Konigsberg**

**Michael Martin**

**Tom McEwan**

**McKeag and Doherty families**

**Me Mum**

**Megi Morishita**

**New York State Beaverfest participants**

**Thomas O'Keefe**

**Adam Oken**

**Aaron Ollivier and Staci Gunter**

**Bethany Overfield**

**Taylor Parsons**

**Stephanie Rogers**

**Jim Snyder and Attila Szilagyi**

**ALL Southeastern paddlers**

**Donald J Trump**

**Decades of Upper Yough paddlers**

**Charlie and Sandy Walbridge**

**Q Wang**

**Nik White**

**Kent Whittington**

**Laura Wilson**

**Work of Harris**

**John Zinn**

**Kai Zinn**

# In Memory of...

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

**Wes Albin  
Augustus (Gus) Anderson  
Kathleen Anderson  
Shelby Arno  
Jack Baker  
Alan Baldwin  
Amie Begg  
Peter Heyn Borgmeister  
David Brown  
Walt Carlson  
Ed Conning  
Curt Crittendon  
Maria Daniel  
Daniel DeLaVergne  
Ella Dingman  
David Eckardt  
Chris Fleming  
Derrel Fortner  
Grandpa  
John "Gordo" Henderson  
George Henry  
Henry  
Ann Hitchcock  
Dr. Paul Thayer Holmes  
Sherwood Horine  
Gavin Jostad**

**Billy Keen  
Chuck Kern  
Pat Kingman  
Ron Knipling  
Kevan Krasnoff  
1st Lt. Nathan Krissoff, USMC  
Michael P. Martin  
Beth McVay  
Nute Mullings  
Ricky Brandon Owens  
Alan Panebaker  
Penelope  
Ursy Potter  
Greg Mallet-Prevost  
Rick Quaintance  
Scotty Richards  
Sarah Ruhlen  
Leo Slaggie  
Charles (Chuck) Still  
Chuck Still  
Cecil Tickamyer  
Chris Tulley  
Dylan Wallace  
Craig Wolfe, Sr.  
Sean Wood  
Bonnie Mae Wright**

Upper Blackwater, WV  
Photo: Justin Harris

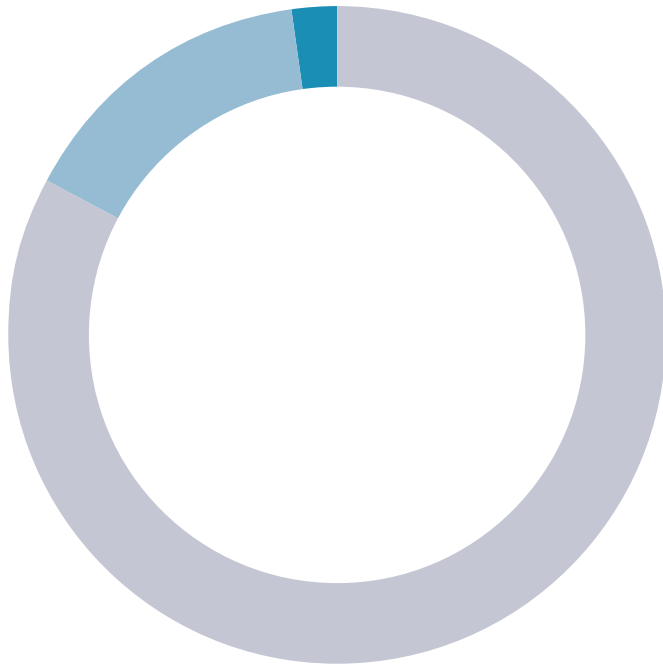
# 2024 Statement of Activities

	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL 2024	TOTAL 2023
<b>PUBLIC SUPPORT</b>				
Contributions	\$632,936.38	\$169,369.75	\$802,306	\$966,437
<b>OTHER REVENUE</b>				
Membership dues	\$451,188.00		\$451,188	\$488,840
Advertising	\$-		\$-	
Grants	\$-	\$903,345.61	\$903,346	\$706,830
Events	\$106,214.19		\$106,214	\$109,769
Industry Partnerships / Sponsorships	\$56,701.33		\$56,701	\$66,943
Products	\$81,224.79		\$81,225	\$112,446
Investment Gains/(losses)	\$1,589.77	\$27,728.09	\$29,318	\$30,813
In-Kind Contributions	\$461,539.97		\$461,540	\$65,494
Interest & Dividends	\$23,326.92		\$23,327	\$29,038
Misc. Income	\$-		\$-	\$3,658
Net Assets Released from Restriction	\$143,511.26	\$(143,511.26)	\$-	\$-
<b>Total Support and Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,958,233</b>	<b>\$956,932</b>	<b>\$2,915,165</b>	<b>\$2,580,268</b>
<b>EXPENSES:</b>				
Program Services:				
Total Program Services	\$1,861,726		\$1,861,726	\$1,642,109
<b>SUPPORTING SERVICES:</b>				
General & Administrative	\$343,413.80		\$343,414	\$422,683
Fundraising	\$36,511.41		\$36,511	\$141,167
<b>Total Supporting Services</b>	<b>\$379,925</b>	<b>\$-</b>	<b>\$379,925</b>	<b>\$563,850</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$2,241,651</b>		<b>\$2,241,651</b>	<b>\$2,205,959</b>
<b>Total Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$(283,418)</b>	<b>\$956,932</b>	<b>\$673,514</b>	<b>\$374,309</b>

# Statement of Financial Position

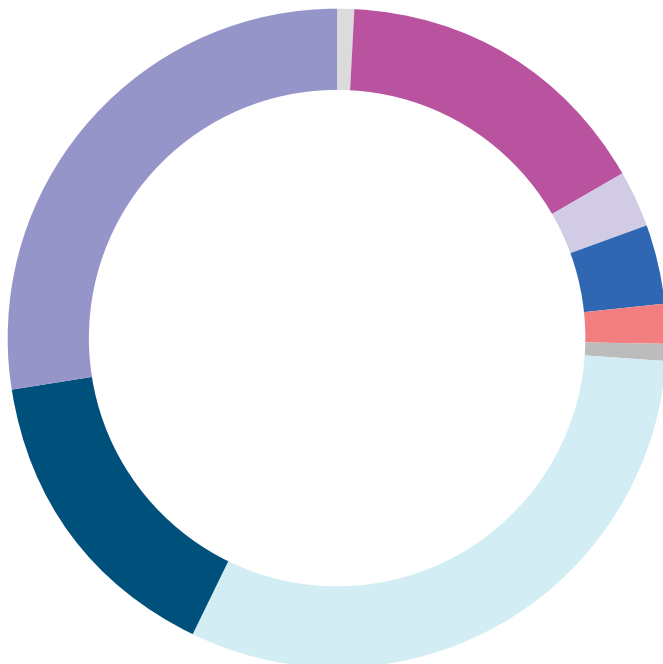
<b>ASSETS</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Cash	\$840,421.36	\$1,398,283	\$1,135,463
Accounts Receivable	\$325.00	\$13,524	\$19,583
Grants Receivable	\$201,085.84	\$106,877	\$27,649
Investments	\$781,329.26	\$819,357	\$810,988
Prepaid Expenses	\$200.00	\$17,722	\$27,679
Inventory	\$52,295.85	\$30,083	\$33,668
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>\$1,875,657.31</b>	<b>\$2,385,846</b>	<b>\$2,055,030</b>
<b>LONG-TERM ASSETS</b>			
Lands held for protection			
Whitewater Estates, KY (Elkhorn)	\$31,367.00	\$31,367	\$31,367
Warson Island, TN (Watauga)	\$17,414.00	\$17,414	\$17,414
Craig County, VA (John's Creek)	\$9,536.00	\$9,536	\$9,536
Preston County, WV (Big Sandy)	\$378,337.84	\$5,000	\$-
<b>Total for Lands held for protection</b>	<b>\$436,654.84</b>	<b>\$63,317</b>	<b>\$58,317</b>
Computer equipment, net	\$38,403.72	\$70,181	\$93,467
<b>Total Long-Term Assets</b>	<b>\$475,058.56</b>	<b>\$133,498</b>	<b>\$151,784</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$2,350,716</b>	<b>\$2,519,344</b>	<b>\$2,206,814</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES</b>			
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>			
Accounts Payable	\$108,519.42	\$39,707	\$70,576
Deferred Revenues	\$114,672.84	\$171,380	\$217,528
Payroll Liabilities	\$43,618.00	\$42,200	\$44,432
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>\$266,810.26</b>	<b>\$253,287</b>	<b>\$332,536</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>			
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$1,624,824.88	\$1,508,486	\$1,458,802
Restricted Net Assets	\$459,080.73	\$757,571	\$415,476
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>\$2,083,906</b>	<b>\$2,266,057</b>	<b>\$1,874,278</b>
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$2,350,716</b>	<b>\$2,519,344</b>	<b>\$2,206,814</b>

## 2024 Functional Expenses



- Fundraising 2%
- General & Administrative 15%
- Program Services 83%

## 2024 Revenue Sources



- Misc. Income <1%
- Interest & Dividends 1%
- In-Kind Contributions 16%
- Products 3%
- Events 4%
- Industry Partnerships/Sponsorships 2%
- Investment Gains/(Losses) 1%
- Grants 31%
- Membership dues 15%
- Contributions 28%

# American Whitewater Board and Staff 2024

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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melissaanddriver@gmail.com

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***Main Salmon River below Riggins, Fall 2022***

Original Acrylic Painting by Emily Bettin

Emily Bettin has been making art for as long as she can remember, but her subject matter has shifted dramatically throughout her life — from animals to architecture to her current focus on landscapes — always a reflection of the things that interest her the most.

She lives in McCall, Idaho, where kayaking is one of too many hobbies she dabbles in.



Photo: Bridget Crocker Collection

# Baptism

## An excerpt from *The River's Daughter*

**Bridget Crocker**

*Editor's Note: In her recently published memoir *The River's Daughter*, renowned whitewater rafting guide and travel writer Bridget Crocker shares an empowering story of a young woman facing her traumatic past and coming into her own through her relationship with the natural world.*

*Crocker writes: "I developed a special relationship with the Snake River while growing up in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, which led me to an international river guiding career. I began writing this book twenty-two years ago to help me navigate difficult family dynamics and my own recovery in the same manner I charted obstacles while leading exploratory whitewater river trips around the world. Shedding my troubled upbringing onto the page helped me to more compassionately see myself and my family in the context of our story of multigenerational cycles of poverty, alcoholism, trauma, and abuse. Rivers nurtured and educated me on how to survive and allowed me to travel and learn from other cultural points of view. They also led me back*

*to my family and my true nature. I wrote this book as an act of devotion to my younger self—a spirited girl from the cottonwood forest—and to the legions of others like me who might find hope in my story of resilience. May *THE RIVER'S DAUGHTER* encourage and guide those who feel disconnected and disempowered to reclaim their volition and place in the world."*

*The excerpt that follows takes us to Bridget's childhood along the Snake River. We're excited to share this preview with our American Whitewater readers as a glimpse into one of the most riveting outdoor memoirs of the year.*

I was forbidden to play in the Snake River. Mama said if I fell into the river, I would die. She was a nurse at St. John's, and she'd told me plenty of stories about people fishing or fooling around onshore only to be swept downstream, their decomposed bodies recovered weeks or months later, completely unrecognizable to their own families.

"I don't want to get a call to come identify your stinking little nine-year-old corpse," she'd say, shaking her head. Mama was from the barrio in East Los Angeles, where most of the riverbed was covered with concrete and bodies were dumped into the channel. "Spare your poor mother, okay? Stay out of the river."

Behind our trailer court, a grove of cottonwood trees spread out like gracious giants, nestled between our winter sled-ding hill and the lumbering Snake River. It was impossible to wander far among the cottonwoods without stumbling upon the water's edge. The river spoke to me in gurgles and shifting riverbed rocks. From anywhere in the grove, I could hear her voice, which served as a constant reminder that she was alive and powerful.

Once, I'd watched a full-grown moose try to swim across the Snake to the other shore. She was carried around the bend, clear out of view, before she even reached the middle of the river. As a skinny switch of a girl, I didn't stand a chance against such strength. That's why, when it was warm enough, I went in up to my calves only, and never in the fast downstream current. I knew I wasn't supposed to get in the river at all, because if you fall in the river, you will die, but nine-year-olds in search of gold and tadpoles sometimes break the rules.

After school, I'd spend afternoons by myself or with Justin, a friend my age from the trailer park. We liked building forts in thick, hollowed-out trunks or scouring leaf-littered ponds, hoping to spy water skippers, known as Jesus bugs because they walk on water. I preferred the company of the river to that of most other kids, but I liked playing with Justin because he wasn't much of a talker. All he wanted to do was explore the river like me. And he didn't treat me like I was nothing because I lived in a single-wide, the way the kids at school did, since he lived in one too. We never went into each other's homes. Instead, we met up at the river.

One spring afternoon, Justin and I were lured outside by a crystalline sky and a warm chinook wind. We discovered a fallen cottonwood perched on the edge of the steep riverbank, its scoured-smooth bark freshly uncovered from the heavy Wyoming snowmelt. It was difficult to walk the length of the slimy log without sliding off, but Justin and I imagined ourselves to be great gymnasts working the beam and managed to twist our bodies safely toward shore, rather than the river, whenever we lost our balance. We perfected our routines over the course of the afternoon, working out the kinks in our combinations of tricks. So when my feet slipped from beneath me during a simple hop landing, I was stunned. Instead of landing onshore, I was launched headlong into the Snake, which was filled to the brim with a winter-load of snow from the nearly fourteen-thousand-foot Tetons.

Immediately I surfaced, my lungs already so shrunken from the stabbing forty-degree water they wouldn't take air. Wide-eyed and wheezing, I bobbed next to the steep cutbank just

long enough for Justin to lean out from the log and grab my outstretched hand. But the river was far stronger, and Justin was yanked into the current with me.

We became part of the flushing surge. The Snake swiftly carried us downstream from the cottonwood grove, past the trailers, and toward Swinging Bridge, with miles to go before the confluence with the Hoback River.

From somewhere, a voice called out, SWIM!

I didn't want to end up like Mama had warned, bloated and purple on a gurney, so I put my face in the water and flailed out a crawl stroke like some possessed water skipper. Justin did the same, and we both made it into an eddy, where we grabbed some stout willow branches and flopped onto shore.

"I can't believe we made it," I said.

"We could have died," Justin panted. "We can't ever tell our parents." Telling would put an end to fort building and interfere with morel mushroom-gathering season, which was fast approaching.

"I'm glad you yelled to swim," I said. "It was so cold, I forgot."

"I didn't yell."

"Who was it?" I looked around. There was no one, not even a deer or a moose. It was just us and the river.

"I don't know. I didn't hear anything." Justin looked at me like I'd lost it.

This wasn't the first time I'd heard the river talk. Since we'd moved to Wyoming from California two years earlier, I'd heard the Snake's voice several times. It happened mostly when I was so focused on watching the river that I felt as if I'd blended into the surrounding shore. I knew it was strange to hear voices in the water, so I'd never mentioned anything to Justin, or to anyone.

If you fall in the river, you will die. I'd fallen in, and the river had told me what to do: SWIM. Even though I carried the grief of a violently broken home and endured shaming at school, I decided that I must be a very lucky and special person. The river must have developed a fondness for me and protected me, like a cow moose protects her baby.

Afterward, I quit listening to Mama whenever she talked about the river. She didn't know the water the way I did. The Snake had touched me, and in some way, I now belonged to the river. ■



# A Beginner's Guide to River Surfing, Part I

Mike Harvey

## THE CONCEPT OF TAKING SURFBOARDS TO A RIVER

wave has been around for decades. There was even a classic '80s Mountain Dew ad that featured river surfing in Wyoming. In some places, like on the Eisbach Canal in Munich, Germany, river surfing has been popular for years.

However, in much of the U.S., river surfing had for decades been reserved for the biggest runoff years and often involved challenging logistics. That all changed in the mid-2000s when whitewater park designers began designing features for whitewater parks with river surfers in mind.

## WHITewater PARKS TAKE RIVER SURFING MAINSTREAM

Whitewater parks are public parks in rivers that utilize engineered features to create waves. Some of the most famous spots are in Denver, Colorado, Bend, Oregon, Boise, Idaho, and my local wave in Salida, Colorado. Whitewater park waves have greatly increased the accessibility of river surfing by creating surf near population centers, where surfers have easy access and predictable conditions.

More and more communities are embracing river surfing with new wave features being built across the country. There are even now artificial pools with river surfing waves like Lakeside Surf in Lake Chelan, Washington, and Fireside Surf in The Colony, Texas.

## FOR BEGINNERS—HOW TO GET STARTED

### *What is a standing wave?*

River surfing takes place on a "standing wave." A standing wave is a stationary wave that forms when water flows downhill over an object like a rock, ledge, or, in the case of a whitewater park, an engineered structure. The water speeds up and, if the geometry of the obstruction is correct and the water hits a slower-moving pool, the water "jumps" into the shape of a wave.

Unlike surfing in the ocean where you're moving toward the beach on the face of the wave, river surfing is like surfing on a treadmill. The water is moving under you while you surf back and forth across the face of the wave. When you are river surfing you can make the same types of turns you would make while surfing in the ocean. You can have long rides (unless there's a long line of people waiting to use the wave) and unlike the ocean, the waves won't change with changes to the swell direction or wind, so they remain more predictable.

## THREE TYPES OF WAVES FOR RIVER SURFING

River surfing waves can be found on rivers across the U.S. and around the world. In general, there are three types of waves to be surfed:

### **Natural river waves**

There are rideable waves that occur naturally in rivers. These waves often have a shorter window when they're working depending on river flows. This was how river surfing got its start—enterprising surfers finding rideable waves on rivers, mostly when they were at high or flood-stage water levels. Natural waves come with their own set of challenges and safety concerns. Try to connect with a local to help familiarize yourself with the spot the first time you decide to surf a natural wave. Surfers without specific river safety knowledge should seek out expert advice before surfing natural waves.

### **Whitewater park waves**

There are more and more whitewater parks being developed around the U.S., and the fastest-growing user group in these parks is river surfers. Whitewater parks are public and free to use and a great place to learn, as they are accessible and generally are a more controlled environment. However, keep in mind that whitewater parks are still located in natural rivers and many of the same hazards exist. Make sure you have proper safety equipment and never surf alone.

### **Wave pools**

Artificial wave pools are red hot all over the world, and standing waves are the least expensive to install and operate. You can now find three of these pools in the U.S., with more venues in the works. Standing wave pools eliminate many of the hazards that form in a river and are a great place to learn with on-site coaching.

## **FIVE PIECES OF ESSENTIAL GEAR FOR RIVER SURFING**

River surfing is a distinct sport from traditional ocean surfing and requires specialized gear for the conditions. In addition to the differences in the style of wave, there are safety concerns specific to surfing in a river.

### **River Surfboard**

Obviously, you need a surfboard to surf in a river. However, it's important to understand what type of wave you are riding to choose an appropriate board.

Generally speaking, a flatter, slower wave requires a board with more volume (thicker), and for a faster more powerful wave, you'll want a lower volume (thinner) board.

### **Wetsuits and booties for river surfing**

Where I live in Colorado, rivers are cold year-round. There are places you can get away with less insulation, but you want to wear a wetsuit thick enough to keep you comfortable during your session. We mostly wear 4/3 wetsuits (4 mm neoprene core body blended with 3 mm neoprene) for river surfing in Colorado. In the middle of the summer, you can switch to a 3/2. In the winter we recommend a 5/4. Depending on your local conditions and water temperature you might need two or three suits. In some places, however, you can get away with one suit that works most of the time your local wave is rideable.

Wetsuits aren't just for keeping your body heat in. They provide some protection against abrasion and light bumps and bruises. In addition to a wetsuit, it's recommended to wear booties to keep your feet warm and protected while wading and walking on rocks. We recommend 3 mm thick booties most of the time. You can switch to 5 mm for the coldest sessions.

### **Personal flotation device (PFD)**

A personal flotation device (PFD or life jacket) should always be worn while river surfing, especially at higher flows, in wild environments like natural waves, and in whitewater parks with rapids below them. A Coast Guard approved life jacket keeps you floating even if you're unconscious. If you're being held underwater by the currents in a river, a life jacket will help you to resurface quickly. Since you generally don't have to paddle on your stomach like you do when surfing in the ocean, comfort while lying on your board is not a big issue.

Many rivers in the U.S. have laws requiring a life jacket to be worn by everyone on the water. A U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) approved vest provides the most flotation. It is the best choice when you're new to the sport. Once you learn a spot and if the flows are appropriate, you may be able to wear an impact vest or non-USCG-approved flotation aid. These are less bulky options but do not provide as much buoyancy.

### **Helmets for river surfing**

When you fall and resurface while surfing in a river, your board can hit you in the head. Rivers are also rocky environments and river surfing features are built out of rock and concrete. All of this means you need to protect your dome. Choose a helmet that fits well. If your helmet slides back on your head and exposes your forehead while you're on dry land, it surely will in the water—that's no bueno.

### **Choosing a safe leash for river surfing**

A leash can be both a critical piece of safety equipment and a potential hazard.

In a river, having your board attached to you is critical so that you can use the volume of the board to keep you on the surface of the water and paddle to shore. However, attaching a leash to your ankle is a serious hazard. A leash can become entangled in rocks or vegetation and act like an anchor, holding you underwater.

The solution is to use a releasable leash like the Badfish Re-Leash or similar. The Re-Leash is designed to be worn on your waist either attached to a strap on your life jacket or a river belt meant for this purpose. The leash has a release mechanism that allows you to pull a canopy ball, causing the leash and board to release away from your body. Never wear a traditional ankle leash in the river.



### **Leashless is an option**

Research is still being done to test the efficacy of releasable leashes, and going leashless may be safer at times and is an option when rivers are at lower flow, there's not significant whitewater below the wave, or you're a very experienced surfer who can control their board and stay with it at all times.

### **WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU GO RIVER SURFING**

Anytime you try something new there are going to be some nerves. One of the things that makes river surfing so cool is the strong community and ethic of inclusion. Unlike its ocean surfing counterpart, there tends to be a welcoming vibe for newcomers to river surfing. In river surfing, the wave will be consistent unless the river is coming up or down quickly. There's enough for everyone, so there's no reason to be too aggressive. That said there are a few points of etiquette that keep the vibes positive and everyone having fun.

### **BE COOL—RIVER SURFING ETIQUETTE**

#### **Keep your rides short**

In river surfing the only limiting factor to the length of your ride is the strength of your quads. However, after a while, your friends in the lineup will get tired of watching you surf. Keep your rides to one minute or less.

When it's really busy, try to keep each ride to 45 seconds or less. Trust me when I tell you that's plenty. Jump out of your seat right now and do 60 seconds of squats. I think you'll agree that's a pretty solid effort. As you get better, you can make your turns in the first 20-30 seconds then try that 360 you've been working on in the last part of your ride.

#### **Alternate**

If a wave has access from both sides of the river, lines will form on both sides. The side you'll line up on, at first, will be based on whether you're a goofy foot (right foot forward) or

regular foot (left foot forward) rider. Be cool to your friends by alternating sides. If one line is longer than the other, two riders from the longer line can go for every one rider in the short line.

#### **Yield to run-of-river traffic**

Rivers are public waterways. There are going to be other people out enjoying them. On the Arkansas River, we have all manner of craft floating downstream in the summer—rafts, kayaks, paddleboards, river tubes. Everyone has a right to use the river. When someone is coming down through the wave, be ready to get out of their way. That means you want to kick off the wave completely and give them a clear path.

You will see surfers try to hang on the shoulder of the wave and give someone room to pass, but boats need space to maneuver. Look upstream before you launch to avoid having your ride cut short.

#### **Watch out for each other**

Keep your eyes on the surfer who just fell off the wave. It's easy to get mesmerized by the wave, but when you're out river surfing, you're part of a community that watches out for each other. If you're a few back in the lineup, you can do your part by confirming that the last surfer got out of the river safely after their ride. This is particularly important in larger rivers or when the water is high. People can be swept away quickly.

*Editor's Note: Stay tuned for Part II! In the next AW issue, Mike Harvey will explain the mechanics and technique of surfing your first river wave, as well as highlight some of the best river waves in the U.S. ■*

# What Newbies Need To Know

## 10 Lessons For New Whitewater Enthusiasts and the Boaters Who Mentor Them

*Teresa Gryder*

### **WHEN YOU FIRST START RUNNING RIVERS, YOU DON'T**

know what you don't know. You don't even know what questions to ask. It's a vulnerable stage. Once you go a few times, you start developing real questions, but until then you have two choices.

You can experiment with river running by yourself, or you can find people to teach you. If you go without guidance you are going to take some hits. You'll likely have losses and bad experiences. You could die. The river requires toughness whether you have instruction or not.

When I started paddling I did not know much. I thought I knew things because I had been swimming in rivers since I was a tadpole, but what I didn't know dwarfed what I did. I had no idea how strong the current was, how hard it would be to keep a kayak right side up, or how the cold water would paralyze me.

I started on whitewater that was too hard, and it got the best of me. I didn't have a wetsuit, and it was March on the Nantahala. I swam trying to peel out from the put-in eddy, got rescued, and then swam again at the top of Patton's Run. I swam that rapid from the top, and by the time I washed out the bottom I had given up. I was ready to die. I was so cold I couldn't move—and I didn't care.

Some people have this kind of experience and never get in a boat again. With a little bit of help at the beginning, you can avoid ever having to go there. Get the right gear. Go at the right time and to the right place. It doesn't have to be hell. Playing with the river and bonding with a team are joyful things. I want people to love wild rivers—and river people—like I do.

Running rivers is inherently dangerous. Going down a river is not a competition with other humans. It's a dance with the indifferent powers of nature. The risk is real. Running rivers takes you away from civilized comforts, and sometimes you must either go down the river or hike out through a wilderness to get home.

Whether you are a new boater yourself or are mentoring people new to the sport, here are ten things every whitewater enthusiast should know.

### **1. You have to WANT IT**

Running whitewater is not easy or "safe." Learning it requires fitness, persistence, and toughness. It takes months or years to get the "feel" of it, depending on how often you go. You will never be done learning. Competence comes slowly, and dabblers never get there. The river punishes the underskilled.

***Lesson #1: This sport requires courage and motivation.***

### **2. Recognize the HAZARD.**

Some hazards don't look that bad. If you don't know any better, you might not know that the water can be so fast, powerful, and cold that you can't really swim out of it. You might not know how trees in the water catch stuff, "straining" it out of the river, or that sometimes the water goes under rocks instead of around them. Sometimes the river traps things in its currents. You will learn, but be cautious. Ask people to explain what's dangerous and what's not. Pay special attention to hidden dangers like high water, cold water, and low head dams.

***Lesson #2: Be cautious, because what you don't know can hurt you.***

### **3. Everybody SWIMS**

Some new paddlers think that they can avoid going in the drink. This is simply false. Everybody goes in eventually. If someone promises you that you won't flip over or fall out, don't believe them. Sometimes your best option is to abandon ship. Learn how to get out of your boat and what it takes to get back in. Learn how to swim in whitewater, how to avoid foot entrapment, and how to recover your equipment. Always consider the water temperature when getting in a boat, because you might not get to stay in the boat. Dress for the swim.

***Lesson #3: Be prepared to swim in whitewater; your turn is coming.***

#### **4. The PEOPLE you go with really MATTER.**

Yes, you should go with people, because if you go alone who is going to drag you out of the drink? Who is going to chase your equipment? And who is going to tell you the things you don't know yet? Especially at the beginning, find people to show you the ropes. Trust your instincts and find people you trust. Some "experts" are overly confident and potentially complacent about the risk. Some rookies pretend to be experts. Go with humble people who will discuss the risks and challenges and team up to teach you the ropes. Join a club or take classes until you find your crew.

**Lesson #4: Go with people who will teach and look out for you.**

#### **5. Good CONDITIONS are Key**

First of all, river sports depend on having the right water level. Too low can be no fun, and too high is often dangerous. High and rising water is the most dangerous combination. One of the questions you need answered is, "How's the water level?" Eventually, you'll learn how to check the gages and understand what they mean, but at first, you just need to know that it's a good flow, not too high or too low. Flows change with rain, snowmelt, and dams. Weather influences what equipment you need, and season determines how long the days are. Cold water, short days, worsening weather, and poor equipment can add up to disaster when combined.

**Lesson #5: Only go when the conditions are right.**

#### **6. Get the right EQUIPMENT**

Whitewater paddling is a gear-intensive sport. Round up the right equipment and get familiar with it. Beg for help in a club if you can't afford it. Try it on in your living room or garage first. After you have the essential gear, take it out on flatwater, then moving water, then very easy whitewater. A short list for kayaking, for example, includes: helmet, lifejacket, sprayskirt, paddle, boat, floatation, river shoes, drysuit/wetsuit, throwbag, whistle. Better equipment often makes you safer, so upgrade when you can.

**Lesson #6: Get the right gear and practice with it.**

#### **7. Build SKILLS**

As soon as you get to the river, start studying how to read water, so you can predict what the water will do to your boat. If you kayak or canoe, get the scoop on how to wet exit. You'll be working on maneuvering forever, but especially get instruction on how to do eddy turns, peel outs, and ferries which involve interacting with current.

At some point, you will wipe out and learn how to self rescue. It's an essential skill that is different for every boat type. Either swim your boat to shore, get back in it, or roll it up. If your boat can be rolled, learn how. Get lessons, go to the pool, do the work. Being able to roll in whitewater is a magic key because you no longer have to swim just because you flipped over. If you use a raft, IK, or packraft, learn how to unflip and reboard your boat in midriver. Your learning will take off.

You have to mess up. Until you have dealt with problems on easy water, you are not ready for anything harder. When you are learning how to catch eddies, peel out into strong current, boof rocks, and play in waves and holes, you will make mistakes and learn to deal with them. Once all that's not a big deal, you're ready to push it a bit. It takes a lot of river time to get comfortable. Take your time. Part of the joy in whitewater paddling is that you will still be learning as long as you keep doing it.

**Lesson #7: Focus on skill acquisition and make mistakes on easy water.**

#### **8. We TAKE CARE of each other.**

On the river everybody is part of the team. We rescue each other, share costs, and generally expect every person to be awake and responsible. To get a good start, show up on time with your equipment double-checked. On the water pay close attention to the people and the situation, and help when you can.

Everybody helps with shuttling. Everybody helps with situations. We do what we can for each other because we care and because it is our culture. If you want to run rivers without having any responsibility to the people around you, hire guided services where there is no such expectation. If you are a helpful and attentive member of your group, you will have no shortage of people to run with.

**Lesson #8: Be a team player.**

#### **9. We are RISK MANAGERS**

On the river, risk exposure is unavoidable. You are responsible for your own safety and decisions, and I am responsible for mine. The decision to delegate your personal authority to someone else is a decision. Choosing to go—or not—is a decision. You cannot escape your own responsibility to get the information you need to decide well.

The river is dynamic and it forces decisions. Sometimes you will guess wrong and be penalized. People who succeed at river running are able to manage their own mood, stress, and substance intake, and keep making good decisions when the situation gets challenging. This sport is not for everyone, and there is no shame in choosing something less risky.

**Lesson #9: Your life depends on your own decision making.**

#### **10. Running rivers is REWARDING**

There's a reason that people do this sport for life. Being in nature is a balm for our souls. We thrive in the strong friendships we build while facing challenges and enjoying beauty together. Riding a magic carpet of water helps put us in the flow, and many find it to be a spiritual experience. There is nothing half as much worth doing as messing around in boats.

**Lesson #10: River running makes us happier than most anything else. ■**



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# Avoiding River Incidents

## Part 2: The Big Four



Words by Luc Mehl; Illustrations by Sarah K. Glaser

**THIS IS THE SECOND IN A THREE-**part series about avoiding river incidents. In Part One, we introduced the Swiss Cheese Model as a reminder that incidents are typically the result of an alignment of gaps in several protective barriers, as opposed to a single poor decision. Here, we evaluate the most significant gaps as revealed by the American Whitewater Accident Database.

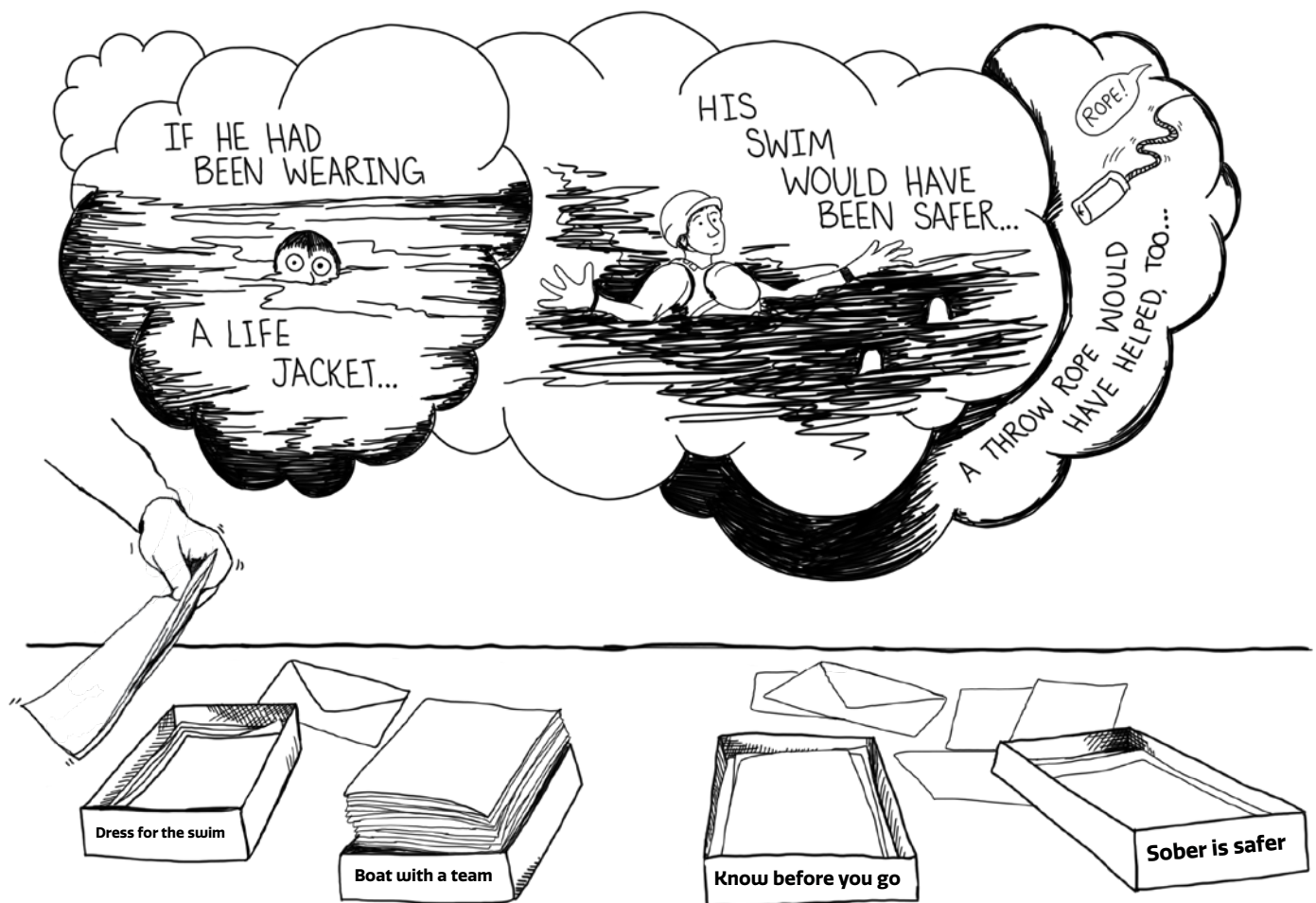
In 1959, American Whitewater published a Safety Code to help river runners enjoy whitewater while managing risk. The Safety Code has been updated periodically to capture changes in river running culture and equipment and underwent a major revision in 2024.

A priority in the most recent Safety Code revision was to identify the most

common factors we can control in today's river incidents. Referring back to the Swiss Cheese Model, we wanted to identify the gaps within our protective barriers. The first step was to check in with Charlie Walbridge. Charlie created the American Whitewater Accident Database in 1975 and has been compiling data on river incidents by collecting and categorizing real river stories ever since. Charlie's contribution to river safety through research, records, and analysis is unparalleled.

Through Charlie's work and the Accident Database, we can identify the four most significant actual risks in running rivers. We'll call these most significant risks "The Big Four." Let's look at the Big Four—and how they can compound—in more detail.

**Starting in 1975, Charlie Walbridge began seeking documentation of river incidents. He received thousands of letters, emails, and messages over the years, resulting in the knowledge about incidents that we have today.**



## Dress for the swim

The leading types of incidents in the Accident Database are flush drownings (drowning without submersion or pinning) and life jackets not worn or present. So, by the numbers, wearing the right clothing and protective equipment is one of our most important barriers. The priority should be to wear a properly fitting life jacket (otherwise known as a personal flotation device or PFD) designed for whitewater river recreation. Many accidents or near-misses, where victims are “flushed” downstream and cannot exit the river quickly, take place during high water, particularly in cold water. So our next priorities should be protective layers such as wetsuits, drysuits, and warm layers that allow victims to maintain energy and survive longer during extended swims in cold water.

## Boat with a team

Capable partners and multiple boats can make a world of difference if something goes wrong on the water. Charlie emphasizes that this isn't just about getting on the water solo. It's also about having multiple boats in the water. Combined, boating alone and one-boat trips, which together we'll call boating without a team, are the most significant cause of incidents in the Database, even above high water and cold water combined. Similar to boating solo, a one-boat trip means there isn't anyone who is still in their craft to help if the boat capsizes or pins. Boating with a team becomes especially important in high and cold water, as often the best safety against swimmers flushing downstream is other boaters positioned at the bottom of rapids who can immediately begin chasing victims if they end up in the water and assist them to shore.

## Know before you go

We can all relate to the advantages of knowing what to expect around the corner. By the numbers, high water, pinning, and wood hazards are the most worrisome. We can reduce the gaps in this protective barrier by reviewing river guides and forums, researching current and appropriate water levels, and talking with other river runners about present conditions and hazards. The only way to truly avoid the dangers of high water and other extreme conditions is to research and understand how flow levels, weather, and other factors affect the nature and difficulty of a chosen river reach. For some segments, 2,000 cfs might be a perfect low-optimal flow, but for others, perhaps a small creek, 2,000 cfs might signal a flood. Floods can move around wood and other hazards, compounding the danger of taking on high water runs, especially on unknown or new-to-you runs.

## Sober is safer

Physical and mental reaction time can make the difference between an uncomfortable situation and an injury—or worse. Alcohol and other substances delay our reaction time. So does a short night of sleep or a long drive before getting on the water. Being in an altered state can also significantly affect your ability to help others in need of rescue. Therefore, keeping a clear mind is not just about your own safety, it's an important piece of group safety. Being sober is an easy first barrier to apply to the maintenance of your personal and group's safety and an obvious factor that can compound dangers as they're encountered on the river. The overall point is to make decisions that create the best situation for us to stay alert and think clearly while on the water. If substances are part of your river experience, save them for after your run. In Part Three, we'll shift the focus to human factors and decision-making tools—details that are not easily captured in incident records. ■



# Cheoah Releases Turn 20!

*Kevin Colburn*

**THE CHEOAH RIVER WAS A HOT MESS WHEN I FIRST** went there as a new American Whitewater hire in 2001. I was greeted by stagnant slimy pools and chigger-filled alder thickets instead of a river. The river had been dewatered by a power company for 73 years and it showed. After four years of wild negotiations, 20 years ago this September, the first scheduled release made its way down the Cheoah in 2005. The river began its recovery that day, and southeastern paddlers discovered a gem that had been lost to the region's industrial past for far too long. It is a thriving river. Today the Cheoah is a thriving river that serves as a reminder that paddlers can change the world one river at a time.

The Cheoah greets paddlers with 1,000 cfs of clear bluish water flowing through tenacious alders over small ledges as it picks up gradient. Soon paddlers float under the massive pipe that usually carries the diverted river, and they boof a powerful little ledge. For the next few miles the Cheoah dishes out a fast-paced barrage of powerful wave trains, classy boofs, and

more holes that you can count. Just when you think you have it figured out it launches over the 10-foot falls at Bear Creek, rounds a steep bend, and throws a juiced-up rapid with offset beatdown holes at you. It's a great run, and lots of options exist for laps and partial runs since its roadside. People love it.

Restoring flows to the Cheoah River was hard. A group of more than 30 of us met at Tapoco Lodge for two-day negotiation brawls monthly for a couple years. The power company hired a high-dollar attorney to fight releasing water in order to protect their profits. The federal agencies fought releases tooth and nail because they wrongly felt that releases would damage the ecology of the river. The reservoir-side homeowners opposed releases because they wanted to protect their reservoir levels. Paddlers had no friends, but the outfitters, paddling clubs, and American Whitewater kept at it. We fought bad science, slanted laws, political meddling, power company gamesmanship, and a toxic negotiation process that chewed up facilitators like gum. And we won.



Photo: Evan Stafford

Eventually, we convinced the state and federal agencies that the Cheoah River needed more natural flows to support aquatic life, including rare and endangered species. This shifted the debate, and a flow schedule was hammered out that included good variable base flows and a series of 20 annual spring pulse flows that mimic natural rain-driven flow events. The drama continued right up to the buzzer, when the power company and the Forest Service secretly hatched a scheme to make the public pay for recreation releases. American Whitewater withdrew from the agreement in protest, and successfully challenged the idea at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The public owns the water, we don't buy it from power companies.

We are now half way through the 40-year FERC license for the hydropower project that we secured in 2005. Over the past 20 years the Cheoah has brought joy and strength to thousands of paddlers, who have in turn contributed to the local economy. It has also been the site of tragic accidents that are never far

from paddlers' minds. The ecology of the river has significantly recovered, although an invasive plant from the reservoir is likely impacting some species. One thing is sure: When I paddled Cheoah this spring, it was very clear that flow restoration has been a good thing for the river.

I fought for the Cheoah in my mid-twenties, fresh out of grad school, against people twice my age and far more powerful. It was daunting to say the least, and an honor to be trusted with this role. By my side were our brilliant volunteers Rod Baird and Chris Bell, and great partners from the Carolina Canoe Club, Western Carolina Paddlers, and the outfitters. If it were not for paddlers—and American Whitewater—there would be no high flows in the Cheoah River today. So enjoy the next twenty years of releases, knowing that paddlers can do great things. ■



Photo: John Baker



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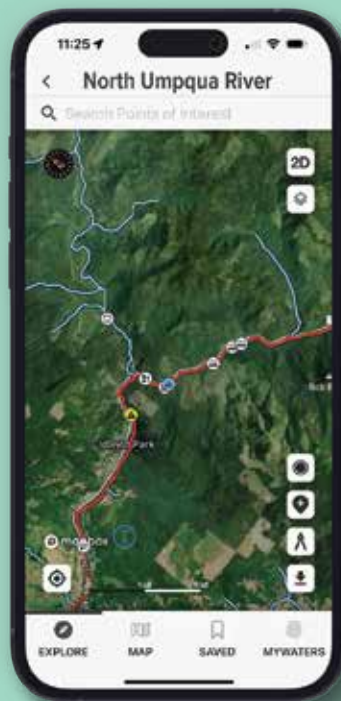
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