Supporting Professionals
Who Study, Protect, and Manage
North America's Rivers

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RMS Journal

Professor McLaughlin standing on the shore of Granite Camp. Photo: Dane Doerflinger

Drifting Home: Reconnecting With Self in the Grand Canyon

by Katrina Doerflinger

I woke in the dark. Hannah's 6 a.m. morning call still rang in my ears: "Gooooooooood mooooorning!"

The stars had shifted since I'd last seen them, staring up from my sleeping bag eight hours before. As the Big Dipper faded and the purple morning light spread across the cliffs, I thought, what a gift to rise with the sun.

This moment was one of many that defined my three-week winter expedition through the Grand Canyon. I was part of a group of fourteen college students from Western Washington University (WWU), led by two experienced trip leaders and three student trip leaders, including myself. This expedition was the culmination of a larger program that began with an on-campus class on the Grand Canyon. Our expedition was also the final achievement in both my River Studies and Leadership Certificate and my B.S. in Environmental Science (I graduated the day before we left for the river).

Preparations for the expedition started almost two years before,

(continued, page 12)

River Management Society

Editorial Policy
Articles are not edited for content and may not reflect the position, endorsement, or mission of RMS. The purpose of this policy is to encourage the free exchange of ideas concerning river management issues in an open forum of communication among the RMS membership. Unless indicated, points of view are solely those of the author.

Executive Director's Eddy

Upcoming Symposium

Risa Shimoda, RMS Executive Director

The 2025 River Management Symposium in Ashland, Oregon will take place against the backdrop of a once-in-a-lifetime story of the Klamath River restoration story.

We will learn from river managers who worked as caretakers of the dammed reaches. We will hear recounts from river runners and scientists who endorsed the removal of four hydropower dams for decades flanked by legal experts whose expertise facilitated their advocacy.

Importantly, we will meet the powerful voices of tribal fish biologists and facilitators. They will speak on behalf of the salmon whose upstream access ended in 1911 with the construction of the first of four dams, and are now dutifully reacquainting themselves with upstream reaches. We are truly thankful and excited about having an opportunity to meet and learn from those for whom the story of dam removal is but the first step toward the rest of time.

We thank individuals who have donated many hours, contributed to many decisions, and extended themselves in many ways, contributing to what will be a uniquely meaningful training experience.

The Steering Committee has included Judy Culver Chair, Kristina Rylands (Program), Emma Lord (Marketing), and Helen Clough (Sponsorship). Becky Blanchard, Kristina Rylands, and Kai Allen have been the stalwart pillars of the Program Committee.

The RMS staff Bekah Price, James Major, and (until January 10th) Angie Braley have stood tall with backend efforts that would fatigue most.

A few especially generous folks stepped up with their time and assistance this past year; they represent a special team-player. Please take a moment to introduce yourself, ask them how they helped, and thank them for their support: Bill Kuntz (BLM, retired), Dave Meurer (Resource Environmental Solutions), and Patrick Kollodge (BLM, retired).

A few important volunteers who have been critical to our planning efforts will not be on site, notably Emma Lord, who has led the Marketing team's effort and will be cheering from New Hampshire! Dave Payne (USFS, retired) provided insights and introductions to those who have been and are in the health of the Klamath. Zane Ruddy offered insights to 'the' people we should contact, well over a year ago. David Byers offered registrant packet assembly efforts while watching old movies.

Partners in program development included: Michael Dotson, Nancy Taylor, and members of the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council.

Finally, when final decisions landed that curtailed federal partners' ability to attend, several have gone the extra mile to provide recorded remarks—hardly as good as attending and sharing in person, and better than having no presence at all. ❖

Risa Shimoda
Executive Director

The Situation: You Can Help Build a Story of Impact

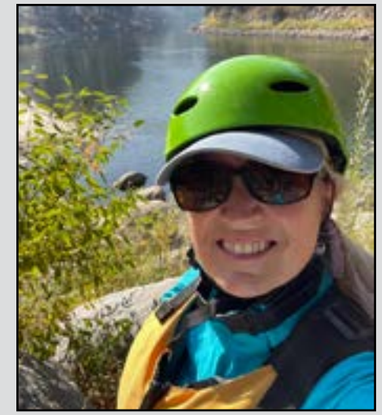
I'm sure you have been aware of and likely touched, personally and/or professionally, by changes in the federal government's program and operational priorities. So… have you filled out our 'impact' survey?

Scan this

As a voice for river professionals, we seek to inventory these impacts. By the time you read this, we will have published a map to highlight the staffing and support level changes, as well as threats to public enjoyment of our nation's rivers, including public safety and security while enjoying public lands and waterways. If you have not already contributed, please take a moment to do so: RMS members like you and your colleagues (ask them to contribute, too!) can uniquely quantify the impact of decisions made relative to river planning and staffing on all river communities even remotely related to federal jurisdiction.

I will remember this year for my overuse of Roget's Thesaurus, seeking yet another synonym for the adjective "unprecedented" depending on the context including "bizarre," "extraordinary," "unheard-of," "unparalleled," and "unrivaled." What I am leaning on for both its gravity and inspiration is that we are boating Class V: we can make our way through the blind, steep, and complex rapids by relying on our skills, experience, and wisdom, knowing our team has each other's backs. ❖

President's Corner



Kristina Rylands, Interim RMS President

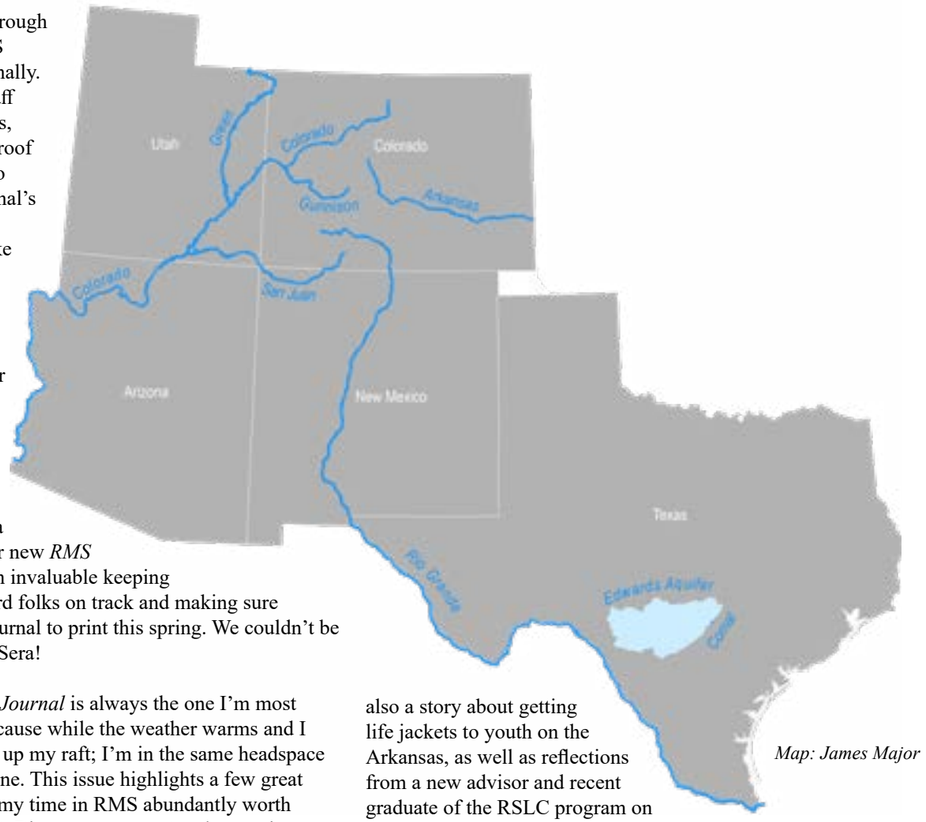
Greetings from our Interim RMS President

When I attended my first RMS Symposium in 2006, little would I know that it would be one of the most pivotal moments of my career. I came as a National Park Service Wild and Scenic River Planner in Yosemite, beleaguered with litigation issues and in need of management camaraderie and insight. Having found an instant group of colleagues and mentors, I jumped in with both feet as the Pacific Chapter President. Since then, RMS has become like my professional family. So when the opportunity came up to support the organization as the Interim President, it was a no-brainer. As we all navigate the rapids of these interesting times, I look forward to serving Risa, the staff, and all of my fellow members in this capacity until elections can be held in the spring. ❖

Kristina Rylands
Interim RMS President

Kristina Rylands is also Watershed Director & Board Vice Chair of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council.

Southwest by Tony Mancuso, Southwest Chapter President



Map: James Major

We have been working through some big changes at RMS both nationally and regionally. From bringing on new staff to welcoming new officers, everywhere I look I see proof that people's dedication to rivers—and the professional's who protect them—is as strong as ever. I would like to welcome Kristina Rylands as the RMS Interim President. I had the pleasure of meeting and collaborating with her at the '24 board retreat in Boise this past Fall, and I couldn't feel more confident having her energy and experience at the helm. Also, in just a short time Sera Zegre, our new *RMS Journal* editor, has proven invaluable keeping our scattered chapter/board folks on track and making sure that we actually have a journal to print this spring. We couldn't be here without you, thanks Sera!

The Spring issue of *RMS Journal* is always the one I'm most fired up to read, likely because while the weather warms and I spend weekends cleaning up my raft; I'm in the same headspace as a racer at the starting line. This issue highlights a few great things that I think makes my time in RMS abundantly worth it: camaraderie and cohort. River management and rangering is as much art as it is science. History, memory, and tradition have a seat at the table in our field equal to calculus, chemistry, and economics. Take any discipline and apply it to the riverine environment and you'll be met with unforetold new challenges and considerations. Managing resources like that in the highest ideas of public stewardship demands a strong support network of co-practitioners, mentors, and folks you can lean on who "get it."

I'd like to pay particular attention to the 2024 River Ranger Rendezvous that our good friends in Desolation Canyon hosted this year. The Rendezvous brought in rangers from across the country to share ideas, strategize, and teambuild. I think that just like no one value on a river exists in a vacuum, neither does each of our respective river management teams. The more we can get our people talking to each other the stronger all our rivers become. The Rendezvous greatly fulfills that purpose for my team, and we look forward to the next one.

You'll find a dock recovery story from winter on the Moab Daily of the Colorado for all to enjoy in a warmer setting. There's also a story about getting life jackets to youth on the Arkansas, as well as reflections from a new advisor and recent graduate of the RSLC program on their time on the San Juan and Grand Canyon of the Colorado respectively. We have a piece on river professionalism, as well as a few articles from Texas: tubing on the Comal and buoys on the Rio Grande. We highlight the new American Whitewater Safety Code and the Gunnison Gorge too.

You'll find an article reprint by Herm Hoops, the 2018 Outstanding Contribution to River Management award winner. Herm was a mentor to many of us—especially in the Southwest—and I've been thinking a lot about him this spring. I miss him dearly. I was recently regaled with a story about when Herm received a rather public, superfluous disciplinary letter from agency bureaucracy. The story goes that Herm framed the reprimand and hung it in the hall outside his office. In the coming years, I'll be thinking a lot about what Herm would've done. I know that the protection of rivers and the communities that depend on them would've been at the forefront of his mind.

I hope that you enjoy diving into the rivers of our chapter this Spring 2025 issue of *RMS Journal*, and have a snowmelt season full of good work and lifelong memories. ❖

Bureau of Land Management administrative site in the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (NCA) and Wilderness, recently certified as an International Dark Sky Park. Photo: Bureau of Land Management

Colorado's Every Kid in a Life Jacket Program

by Corrine Servis

In 2023, the vision to make river safety education and personal flotation devices (PFDs) available and accessible to the Upper Arkansas River Valley youth came to fruition. River deaths in Colorado peaked in 2023 at 16 individuals, spanning all ages and means of recreation. This program is one way we are working to prevent these tragedies by instilling safe behaviors at a young age.

Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area
As one of Colorado Parks & Wildlife's 43 State Parks, the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) was established by Colorado's 1988 House Bill 1253, also known as the Arkansas River Recreational Act. Signed April 21, 1988, this bill identified the Arkansas River from the East and Lake Forks confluence to the Pueblo reservoir as a major recreation attraction and a vital resource for residents and non-residents. Beginning January 1, 1989, Colorado established that it wanted to protect the recreational quality of the Arkansas River and its adjacent lands.

The AHRA that we know today stretches over 152 miles of river corridor and sees over one million visitors per year, a number that continues to grow. The AHRA is recognized as one of the nation's most popular whitewater rafting and kayaking locations and is home to a world-class fishery. This AHRA partnership represents a cooperative effort between Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW), the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the US Forest Service (USFS). This collaboration provides visitors with outstanding recreation opportunities and care for the natural resources of the Upper Arkansas River Valley.

Seasonal River Rangers Christian Tuttle and Mariah Vaughn presenting the Every Kid in a Life Jacket Program to third graders in Cañon City. Photo: Jeff Hammond

Program Origins & Impact
In 2023, a small dream began to take shape, and the AHRA, with the help of its partners, piloted the Every Kid in a Life Jacket Program in Salida, Colorado. This program was tailored for third grade students in partnership with FIBArk, the City of Salida (including the Recreation and Fire Departments), and the Greater Arkansas River Nature Association. The Arkansas River unites our community, and river safety knowledge is essential to keeping the next generation safe as they play in and around the Arkansas River. Third graders received a basic river safety curriculum taught by partners covering topics such as the importance of life jackets, proper life jacket fit, swimming and self-rescue, being role models in the community, proper etiquette and river ethics, stream ecology, and identifying river features.

Upon completing the course, students received a free youth life jacket to keep and use in all their river adventures. When they grow out of their first life jacket, students may trade it in at the AHRA office or any partner location for an adult universal life jacket that will keep them afloat through adulthood.

In May 2023, the program was introduced to 15 third grade students at the Salida Montessori School and 89 students at Longfellow Elementary School for a total of 104 local youth. The program was so successful that AHRA wanted to expand the opportunity to more communities within the valley.

Program Expansion & Sustainability
In 2024, AHRA Park Ranger Jeff Hammond wanted to ensure that program expansion would be possible and sought funding through the CPW Philanthropy at Work internal funding opportunity to help purchase life jackets for the program. The Philanthropy at Work program is made possible by the generosity of donors to CPW who want to support the agency's activities and programs.

Due to Hammond's innovation and hard work, funding was secured, more partners were brought on board to include the Town of Buena Vista Recreation, Cañon City, and Royal Gorge Regional Information Office, and the program was expanded to also include Avery-Parsons Elementary School and Darren Patterson Christian Academy in Buena Vista as well as the Lincoln School of Science & Technology, Washington Elementary School, McKinley Elementary School, Cañon Exploratory School, Harrison K-8 School, and Mountain View Core Knowledge School in Cañon City. In 2024, the Every Kid in a Life Jacket program served a total of 494 third grade area students: 115 in Salida, 98 in Buena Vista, and 281 in Cañon City.

Future of the Life Jacket Program
Park Ranger Jeff Hammond isn't done yet. He continues to focus on making this incredible program sustainable and available to more youth in the Upper Arkansas Valley of Colorado. In 2025, Jeff hopes to expand this program to Leadville, Cotopaxi and Florence, which will complete the reach of AHRA and the youth who grow up alongside its banks. He has worked to develop a standardized curriculum so that every student receives the same foundation of knowledge. He is currently working with local master's students at Western Colorado University through The Wright Challenge to find creative and sustainable funding sources for this program.

Park Ranger Jeff Hammond, Jake Vasquez of Greater Arkansas River Nature Association, and Longfellow Elementary third grader handing out life jackets at the completion of the Every Kid in a Life Jacket program. Photo: Corrine Servis

AHRA sees this program working in concert with life jacket loaner stations in the whitewater parks in Buena Vista, Salida, and Cañon City. Between free loaner stations and the Every Kid in a Life Jacket Program, Hammond says his goal is "to flood the Upper Arkansas Valley with river safety knowledge and equipment accessible to visitors and residents alike, without financial barriers."

Colorado's Every Kid in a Life Jacket Program is just one example of the extraordinary impact we can have on our communities when we have an idea, gather our partners, and engage and give back to the communities we serve. Thank you to Jeff Hammond and all our partners for helping make this dream possible! ❖

Corrine Servis is Southwest Chapter Secretary and works as Operations Manager at the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area in Salida, Colorado.

Tubing the Comal River in Texas. Photo: City of New Braunfels

Texas' Longest Shortest River: The Comal River

by Amy Niles

The Comal River is a truly beautiful and special river. It is easy to be enamored by the crystal-clear water, but understanding where that beautiful water originates and the unique species that call the Comal River home fosters a deeper affection and appreciation for it. The Comal River exists entirely within the city limits of New Braunfels and is the shortest navigable river in Texas. In the summertime the Comal River swells with visitors from all over the world, but the river is beloved by New Braunfels residents year-round. The Comal is commonly viewed as a high-density tubing location, which it is. Tubers come to the tune of 300,000-400,000 people between Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day weekend annually to enjoy just over a mile stretch of the river, proclaimed by locals as the "longest shortest river in the world."

What many of these visitors may not know is that the Comal River is almost entirely fueled by the Edwards Aquifer, an underground water system made of Edwards Limestone. This means that the water that flows through the Comal River is coming up from the ground, and literally springs up at an average of 100,000 gallons per minute at a year-round temperature of 70-72 degrees. This constant temperature makes the Comal River a place to enjoy all year, not just when the temperatures are hot. The Comal Springs is the largest spring system in Texas, and one of the largest in the United States.

There are four endangered species that call the Comal Springs and River home: the fountain darter (*Etheostoma fonticola*), Comal Springs riffle beetle (*Heterelmis comalensis*), Comal Springs dryopid beetle (*Stygoparnus comalensis*), and Peck's cave amphipod (*Stygobromus pecki*). The beetles and amphipod are small, about the size of a pinpoint. The Fountain Darter is unusual because it doesn't have a swim bladder, which means this fish does not naturally float without swimming. These endangered species are the cause for a regional Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), which protects the water quality and quantity of this water source. The Edwards Aquifer HCP is a regional effort, with five permittees across the region: City of New Braunfels, City of San Marcos, Edwards Aquifer Authority, San Antonio Water Systems, and Texas State University.

The City of New Braunfels and Comal River stakeholders have worked hard to rewrite the narrative of the Comal River—it is so much more than a place to party. The city has a dedicated River Operations team that focuses on the long-term sustainability of recreation on the rivers, including revenue generation to fund improvements and expenses, management of a litter and trash contract that includes SCUBA services, a robust free life jacket program, and partnering with law enforcement and parks staff to create a safe and memorable experience for visitors.

The Comal River is so special and so unique, requiring a delicate balance between prioritizing protection of species and allowing the resource to be enjoyed by recreational users. What many people do not realize is that by prioritizing the protection of river flow for the endangered species, the recreators benefit. The river has been in a recorded drought for five years, and it is becoming increasingly severe. Without the aquifer protections in place for the species, the river's flow would disappear entirely. While most people understand the importance of protecting river flow to allow for tourism, it is important to note that protection of the endangered species plays a key role in accomplishing that goal.

The City worked hard to have the Comal River designated as a National Water Trail in 2024—the first river designed with tubing as its primary form of recreation. This is significant because tubing can be an entry level river recreation activity, available

Above: Safety on the Comal River. Photos: City of New Braunfels
Below: Comal River Tube Chute built by the City in the 1970s.

to people of varied socio-economic backgrounds. It is not as expensive or gear-intensive as kayaking or SCUBA diving, allowing more people to get an introduction to interacting with rivers. People of all different backgrounds and ages get to enjoy the river through this low-stakes activity.

It is wonderful to see generations of families of all different backgrounds gather at the Comal River to enjoy time together outdoors. You can grab a bite to eat or shop downtown, then take a stroll to the river to enjoy the view or people watch. There are countless ways to enjoy the river, even without getting wet.

The Comal River is one of my favorite things to talk about. I have proudly been on a team that manages the recreation around the Comal and Guadalupe Rivers in New Braunfels for ten years, and I never grow tired of being by the river, hearing people's memories and stories about visiting here, and learning more about the rich history surrounding the Comal River. ❖

Amy Niles is the River and Watershed Manager for the City of New Braunfels in Texas.

The Rio Grande and Texas-Mexico Border Infrastructure

by Nicole Franklin and Adriana E. Martinez

The marine floating barrier (buoys). Photo: Adriana E. Martinez

Along the Rio Grande located at the United States-Mexico border sits Eagle Pass, Texas, hometown of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Adriana Martinez, PhD. Martinez, Professor of Geography and Environmental Sciences, has spent years researching the impact of border security, and most recently, the effectiveness of large buoys installed on the river by Texas Governor Greg Abbott. As Martinez captured in a photograph on a November 2023 research trip, migrants traveling to the U.S. have avoided the buoys by heading upstream, easily bypassing the floating barriers.

Migrants crossing the Rio Grande while Dr. Martinez and team conduct their research. Photo: Paula Allen

"The whole time we did work, migrants were crossing," said Martinez. "We saw a group of Venezuelans who had been walking for two months."

According to Martinez the buoys, which were installed July 10, 2023, and then extended in January 2025, present as giant orange balls, stretching 2,000 feet along the center of the river.

"They have razor sharp discs in between the balls. The balls are supposed to spin so the idea is you can't climb them since they'll just spin and spin. But that isn't true. You can climb them," said Martinez. "They're supposed to have netting underneath them so you can't go underneath them, but from what I can tell there is no netting underneath them."

The price tag for preventing undocumented entry into the U.S. by way of these buoys is approximately $2 million including installation and maintenance. "I grew up with immigrants crossing my parents' yard. It's the nature of living and growing up on the border," said Martinez. "People were living in the town before it was the state of Texas and became the United States."

Martinez chose to focus on the environmental science of border crossings and began her research in 2008.

"I then began river modeling in 2019 to examine the effectiveness of militarization in addition to the fence."

Since November 2024, Martinez and her group of volunteers have conducted multiple trips to conduct field research. The team traveled out in boats and performed sediment sampling, released dye to follow the currents and have also conducted a series of drone flights.

Other deterrents not too far in the distance that remain are concertina wire in several areas—lining the river banks, covering empty train cars, and encasing chain-link fencing.

It was during Martinez' short trip over the Thanksgiving holiday that news broke of several drownings, which are unfortunately all too common. "Drowning deaths occur when having to cross in more dangerous locations, such as avoiding concertino wire and avoiding buoys."

Within weeks of the July 2024 installation of the buoys, officially known as the "marine floating barrier," the federal government alleged "that installment of the barrier violated the Rivers and Harbors Appropriation Act of 1899."

The state appealed.

In December 1, 2024, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled in favor of the U.S., which also claimed the floating barrier disrupted the Rio Grande's navigability. A removal order was issued. However, the state appealed, and with the new presidential administration, the case has been paused. In addition, the State of Texas recently announced that responsibility of the buoys will be transferred to the federal government.

However, the environmental impact remains. "Four islands were destroyed during the construction of the buoys. They obliterated vegetation on the islands," said Martinez. "By tying the buoys to a large series of concrete blocks they are essentially creating a river bar in the middle of the channel that wasn't there before, changing the flow."

The possibility of the buoys becoming detached during high flow events is also concerning. According to experts that testified during the federal case, and Martinez's observations, the buoys are not properly secured and the cables used are not long enough to allow for large floods. Should be buoys move, they could do damage to bridges, dams, or buildings near the river downstream.

Martinez continues to document these impacts through sediment analysis and drone flights over time. She hopes to document how these buoys, and any future buoys placed at Eagle Pass or elsewhere, may impact the river over time. She also hopes to continue to examine changing river conditions in the future. ❖

Nicole Franklin is Director of Communications, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Marketing and Communications.

Adriana E. Martinez, PhD, is associate professor of geography and environmental sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and River Studies Field Network Alumni from 2023. Follow Dr. Adriana Martinez on Instagram @ThinkingRiverThoughts

Dr. Martinez and team conduct their research alongside the marine floating barrier (buoys). Photo: Amerika Garcia Grewal

*(**Drifting Home**, continued from page 1)*
when a group of us gathered on campus for a Grand Canyon permit party in February 2023. I had the privilege of working with John McLaughlin, a professor at the WWU College of the Environment, who ran the program. I served as an assistant to Professor McLaughlin for almost a year. I conducted student outreach for the program, coordinated river trainings with the WWU Outdoor Center, co-wrote a grant proposal, and advised McLaughlin as a student voice in his decision-making. Ultimately, I stepped into the role of a student trip leader and boat captain for the expedition. That meant I was responsible for rowing all the major rapids, a task that demanded both skill and confidence. After months of meetings and hard work, we finally launched in December 2024. We stepped away from the bustle of academics and trip planning for a simpler life on the river. This transition made me realize that this expedition was more than just a test of my technical proficiency, strength, and knowledge of the river; it was a larger transition out of college life and into my mid-twenties.

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College students from Western Washington University below Deer Creek Falls on a three week winter expedition in Grand Canyon of the Colorado. Photo: Dane Doerflinger

A Reset
As we know, our minds and bodies haven't evolved for the constant demands of modern, urban life: endless notifications, artificial lighting, and long hours of sitting. Instead, they're designed for movement, natural rhythms, and the ebb and flow of acute stress and recovery. Nowhere is this more evident than on the river, where life aligns with the patterns our bodies instinctively recognize. On the expedition, I felt this shift immediately. My sleep, energy, and focus all adjusted to a way of being that felt not just natural, but necessary.

One of the first things I noticed was how quickly my circadian rhythms adapted. Without artificial light or constant digital stimulation, my body fell into its natural rhythm. I fell asleep outside every day to the sounds of the river and woke up with the sun. I felt consistent energy throughout the day, no afternoon crashes, and rarely a groggy morning.

Physically, I felt stronger than ever. My days were filled with movement: rowing, hiking, lifting heavy gear, and setting up camp. Every action had a purpose and immediate impact. The simplicity of it all was grounding. I wasn't worried about endless notifications or looming deadlines. My focus was on the present moment: the canyon walls stretching toward the sky and the dip and drip of my oars.

Stress still existed, of course, but it was acute rather than chronic. The challenge of reading water and making quick decisions kept me sharp, but once we made it through each rapid, there was a palpable release. The stress of running rivers was nothing like the underlying, low-grade anxiety of daily life. Instead, it was a cycle of tension and resolution, a rhythm that mirrored the river itself.

A Microcosm of Connection
Beyond the physical and mental reset, there was an undeniable social transformation within our group. Over the weeks, we formed a nomadic microcosm. Everyone had a niche to fill in our group. Without the obligations of modern, urban life, we interacted face-to-face and genuinely relied on each other for physical and emotional safety. We even developed an informal economy of bargaining and gift-giving, where dish duty became our currency. The miles we floated eroded the veneer of social norms and allowed us to form real, unfiltered connections.

For three weeks, I didn't miss anything from the outside world. I felt at home, completely present in a way I've rarely experienced outside of river environments. There was no pressure to be anyone other than myself, no need to curate an image or meet external expectations. It was a rare freedom, and one that I questioned constantly, having only experienced it a handful of times before.

Returning to the "Real World"
The first morning back from the Canyon was the hardest. I woke up without the stars above me, without the cold breeze on my face, without the rush of the river.The silence of four walls felt unfamiliar and heavy. I was mourning not just the Canyon and life on the river, but also the person I had become while I was there.

I had felt more alive, more aligned with myself on the river than ever. And now, back in the structured world of schedules and obligations, I wasn't sure how to hold onto that feeling. All I wanted in those first few days was to be back on the water.

Carrying the Canyon Forward
Rather than let that longing consume me, I began incorporating pieces of the Canyon into my everyday life. I started journaling consistently again, writing down reflections as I had while on the river. I tried going to bed earlier, honoring my body's natural rhythms. I made an effort to slow down and focus on one task at a time rather than the endless multitasking that modern life demands. These implementations have been rocky, to say the least, and some haven't lasted long, but the effort itself reminds me of what matters.

I never expected the Grand Canyon to have such a profound impact on my outlook, but it did. There were countless moments during that trip that reminded me of what truly brought me joy. Away from distractions, away from the noise of modern life, it was the simplest things that brought me joy; a sunset, a song on the guitar, and clean socks.

At the beginning of the expedition, I thought of life outside the canyon as the "real world," but the truth is, the real world is wherever I choose to be. The canyon wasn't an escape; it was a return. I was reminded that I can shape my daily experience and that I don't have to accept a life that dulls my senses and pulls me away from the things that make me feel most alive.

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A Future on the River
I know I will return to the Southwest. I want to explore opportunities presented to me through the River Studies and Leadership Certificate. I'd love to work as a river ranger or guide commercial trips in the Southwest. I'll be back on the water this summer with Orion Expeditions, rafting the Wenatchee and Deschutes River. The Grand Canyon didn't just change the way I see the world, it changed the way I choose to live in it. And for that, I am endlessly grateful.

A passage by author Zak Podmore encapsulates my reflections on the canyon:

> We need the canyon because it resists the flattening and compression of the landscape. Today, you can drive out to the nearest interstate and cross from one end of the country to the other following the same green exit signs. You can sleep in the same hotels and eat in the same restaurants. You can open your phone and see the same websites regardless of your location. Unique, grounded spaces are facing an extinction crisis along with so many species. But wild places, where phone signals fail and the reach of corporate familiarity ends, provide anchors against the disorienting effects of a uniform globalized culture.

The Canyon reaffirmed why I want to spend my life on rivers. It showed me that wild places are more than just landscapes; they are anchors in a world that often feels chaotic and disconnected. ❖

Katrina Doerflinger holds a B.S. in Environmental Science from Western Washington University and a River Studies and Leadership Certificate.

Sitting below the Nankoweap granaries looking downstream after a steep hike up. Photo: Dane Doerflinger

Pulling Together

Words & photos by Tony Mancuso

I wrote up a fun exercise some of us Moab area river crew participated in this past winter. I'm writing this after waking up to the news that 3,400 of my peers were laid off at the USFS, accompanied by rumors that a similar force reduction is on its way for the BLM. To be clear, RMS is an apolitical organization. Personally, I'm feeling contemplative about the nature of partnership. Some years ago, a SPLORE trip participant (who had just swam The Claw) looked me right in the eyes and said: "No one gets down the river alone."

A consequence of robust and rapid ice flow early 2025 was that a floating dock had become unmoored upstream and broached in the top right side of White's Rapid of the Moab Daily, Utah.

Back in January, the Four Corners area was deep in the grip of one of winter's cold snaps. Overnight lows in the single digits may seem perfectly reasonable to our friends in the Midwest; but in Moab we're more of the 'sandals-and-coconuts' kind of people.

We get ice in the river every year, but it rarely as prolific the way it was this winter, when a rapid shift from "unseasonably cold" to "record high temps" set all of that shelf ice loose at once. A consequence of this robust and rapid ice flow was that a floating dock had become unmoored upstream and broached in the top right side of White's Rapid (Class II).

We keep just one little motor raft ready for use through the cold months, and all of our seasonal rangers were gone for the winter watching football and setting off avalanches. So I poked my head into the region chief's office: "Hey Matt, wanna go for a ride?"

We put the boat in the water, took off downstream, and got to the scene. It was a big dock, and the water was moving fast despite the very low-flow conditions. A picket-fence arrangement of rocks had the dock hung up—thankfully, way off to the side of the main line through the rapid.

With no immediate threat to safety or obstruction to navigation, we breathed a little easier. Our team couldn't get this out ourselves, but we've got friends—friends with whom we don't get to play nearly often enough. After getting ahold of the dock's owner and explaining their options, we started a group text with the County Sheriff's Office. Here in Utah, the sheriff's have jurisdiction over search and rescue and the Moab community is blessed that our Sheriff has a darn fine swiftwater team.

The official at Grand County Search & Rescue (SAR), Scott, suggested that this would be a great scenario training, and he was absolutely right. Group texts and voicemails flew from tower to tower, and when the dust settled, we found ourselves with a fine little training opportunity.

River crews from Canyonlands National Park, Grand County SAR, and Utah DNR met up at the scene on a chilly morning. The weatherman said the clouds would eventually clear and temperatures would rise. As I looked around the circle of drysuited swiftwater technicians, it became apparent that the weatherman had better hope he was right. Given the time of year, the location of the scene, and the rarity of a scenario like this, we had an all-hands-on-deck situation.

I suppose it's time to extend my most sincere and deepest thanks to the interagency crews that came to help, particularly: Scott Solle & his team from Grand County SAR, and Jake Sutter & Steve "T-Berry" Young from Canyonlands National Park. (T-Berry was, in fact, the RMS Outstanding Contribution Award winner in 2022.) Going by my best conservative estimate, we had no less than 250 years of combined river experience on this job. (No wonder it went so smoothly!) I imagine a lot of the river heads that read *RMS Journal* are salivating to hear the nitty gritty technical details of exactly how we got this dock unstuck.

I'll do my best to explain what I understand, but dear reader, I must apologize—I'm not the right person to ask about the difference between Aramid or Dyneema.*

** They are both strong, synthetic fibers. Dyneema is lightweight with high-strength-to-weight ratio; aramids are heat and abrasion resistant.*

The scene was essentially as follows: a dock, constructed of two panels, was stuck in boulders on river right. There was a calm eddy upstream of the dock and a rock sieve on the downstream end. The dock was oriented so that its length ran parallel to the flow, with the upstream end pushed high up on a boulder sticking out of the water. The calm eddy upstream would be a fine place to park once the dock was dislodged, but the upstream panel, which was pushed up in the air, had lost many of its Styrofoam floats.

This presented our first major consideration. It seemed that if we just pulled straight from upstream, the floatless dock would take a nosedive into some swiftly moving water, and at the very least, we'd all be buying new carabiners.

So, the major task of the day seemed to be getting the dock rotated 180° so that the downstream side (which had retained all of its foam) would absorb the brunt of the flow. The brave, stylish, intelligent, and charitable folks from Grand County SAR volunteered to be the team that got wet and waded out to get a grip on the dock itself. The NPS and state teams would stay upstream on the hauling side of the operation. In case it wasn't too obvious, this was far from a "throwbags & Z-drags" kind of swiftwater task.

We ended up using hundreds of feet of rope, mainly to reach and wrap around suitable anchors; the massive sandstone boulders our canyons are famous for. It was a steel-carabiners-only day. DNR brought out a pair of 30,000 lb snatch blocks and NPS contributed the true MVP, a modular capstan winch.

We set up our line on the upstream boulder end of the dock for a straight pull. Once that was tensioned, we were relieved to have something that would save any progress we made. Second, another haul line was attached to the downstream "floaty" end. This second line had to be redirected from shore so we could rotate the dock at the proper angle. This redirected "bottom end" haul line worked with those snatch blocks, which are just pulleys the size of your face. Not unlike a Z-drag, really, but much heavier and with a few more bends in the line.

My favorite part of the day was working on the haul line. Setting up the hardware, building anchors, and planning were all great, but there was something cathartic about a group of people coming together and pulling in unison to make even just an inch of progress. Symbolic, maybe?

When we were halfway there, the dock—now perpendicular to the flow and absorbing the most force—got snagged on another rock. In any river safety course, you'll be taught that the slow and simple approach is the best. It was great to see this principle in action as the downstream team made the most of the tools available to them, grabbing a large cottonwood log to use as a lever to pry the re-stuck dock loose again. Caveman science.

(continued, page 19)

Left: A modular capstan winch.

San Juan River. Photo: Jamie Frith

Rivers as Teachers and Tools for a Better Future

by Cecil Goodman

This past November a group of 15 students and myself spent nearly a week on the San Juan River. November in that country, as many of you reading this will know, is singularly beautiful and cold. The canyon walls are lit with golden wintry light—here is a silence that you don't experience in the warmer months as the cold air sinks and gathers along the river, and you feel the sun for a few glorious hours—just long enough for the sponges to thaw from the tables, and the water jugs and the floor valves on the boats to unfreeze. I spend that glacial week in November each year with my students on the river as part of the Wilderness & Colonization class at Prescott College that I teach.

Many of us, when we think of outdoor adventure education and river field studies, we think of an environmental science focused curriculum. It can be difficult to explain to people what this course is, what I am doing teaching history and cultural studies to students on a river in the brilliant cold of November, and why it matters now.

In 1996, the Dakota scholar and writer Elizabeth Cook-Lynn published a searing book of essays. In the titular essay, *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner*, she posited that the writings of the iconic writer of the American West were not innocuous works of literature, but instead reinscribed Indigenous dispossession and American settler colonialism by fostering a specific kind of American imagination of self, place, and belonging. "There is, perhaps, no American fiction writer," Cook-Lynn (1996) wrote, "who has been more successful in serving the interests of a nation's fantasy about itself, than Wallace Stegner and there are few of us who have not read his works" (p. 29). His writing on the American West, she explained, reinforced in the American imagination a nativity to place and an understanding of Indigenous history as having ended in 1890 in order for the American West as a place to be born. She signs off at the end of the essay with this reminder that writing and imagination— especially of place—are never harmless: "My reading in the works of Wallace Stegner is minimally undertaken and then only to remind myself that literature can and does successfully contribute to the politics of possession and dispossession" (p. 40).

More recently, in April of 2020, Ophelia Watahomigie-Corliss, writing in *High Country News* as a Havasupai tribal councilwoman about the uranium mining threats to the Havasupai, and to their home, Grand Canyon, called for the teaching and visibility of Indigenous histories in Grand Canyon. Her demands were part of a movement towards a collective vision for the future of Grand Canyon and public lands that centers environmental justice and is led by Indigenous peoples:

> It's time Grand Canyon officials took some responsibility and helped educate visitors about our history, land and water…And now it's time for them—and for everyone who loves the Grand Canyon—to stand with us, to get to know who we are, and to work with us toward a just and shared vision for the next 100 years of this national park. We want the park to recognize our histories and to share that story permanently at the visitor center—to find a place for us in all their exhibits and in permanent signage throughout the park. Let us rechristen the landscape here, changing the names of places, trails and springs back to the Indigenous names, the ones the tribes are comfortable sharing with the public. All park rangers, personnel, outfitters and river runners should receive cultural sensitivity training, so they can teach visitors about the true history of the land (para. 4-6).

The class, including the time we spend learning on the San Juan River, are one way I as an outdoor educator attempt to respond to these calls for social and environmental justice from Indigenous communities, writers, and activists. Alongside my students, we explored:

- What role has outdoor education played in the politics of dispossession?
- What does it mean to teach on and about public lands and the rivers we care deeply about?
- How do we as outdoor educators, especially those who are non-Indigenous like I am, grapple with the violent histories and dispossession of the land in the United States?
- What is the role of outdoor adventure education in responding to these questions, histories, and Indigenous-led environmental justice movements, especially in the present moment?

We take up these questions by studying the idea of placemaking: how the river is both a very real, but also an imaginary place that has been made, is being made, and can be remade. To do this, I ask my students to critically "map" the river—they choose an element of the place and consider historically and materially how the place of the San Juan River has been made. While on the river, it is impossible not to consider water as a defining element of the place. Some students choose to study the human uses of water along the San Juan River and how it relates to different land management designations and tribal entities. Other students consider how the material reality of the river they float through—the very real, very beautiful geological composition of the land itself—has impacted how the river has been used and developed over time. They

(continued, page 18)

San Juan River. Photo: Jamie Frith

Overlooking the San Juan River during the Wilderness & Colonization class at Prescott College. Photo: Jamie Frith

***(Rivers As Teachers**, continued from page 17)*
also explore what this means for nearby communities and river users, particularly regarding mining and resource extraction.

Others might look at the history of borders in and around the river to teach each other about the ways in which land and power interact on and with the landscape and impact access, ownership, water usage, and recreation (Figure 1). And, they learn about the Indigenous-led fight for the recent designation of the Bears Ears National Monument as the first co-managed federal and tribal National Monument. They begin to see how places take on value: the value of extraction, the devaluation of land into wastelands, and the value of land as an escape for certain groups of people.

Beyond the specifics of our curriculum, the point is that the river, by looking at it critically and historically, allows us to enter and voyage through the complexity of history and power; to consider how our experiences and relationships to nature and place are not natural and innocuous, but are contextualized and impacted by history and power.

The river is the teacher and the tool; the method and the methodology. The students uncover that the imagination of a place—in this case the bucolic sections of the Upper and Lower San Juan River seemingly removed from civilization—can serve as a smokescreen to histories of dispossession and extraction. By exploring the critical histories of exploitation, dispossession, and resistance that have shaped the creation of this place in our American imagination, students rethink their relationship to the river and to the outdoors, deepening and complicating their understanding of place. For many of them, this helps them to develop a land ethic of responsibility and solidarity. They also learn that history and (re)thinking critically about place help us in understanding and responding to the unspooling threats on land in solidarity with Indigenous-led environmental justice efforts. It is becoming excruciatingly clear that now is the time to learn from and respond to our histories. Threats are happening fast and at a breakneck speed, and by the time you read this, many things may have changed. As of this writing, on February 3, 2025, the new Secretary of the Interior released a directive entitled "Unleashing American Energy." As many of you reading this know, and are undoubtedly impacted by, the directive orders the Department of the Interior to take "actions to review and, as appropriate, revise all withdrawn lands." This would mean the reassessment of the borders of the co-managed national monuments, Bears Ears, and the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni—Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument that abuts Grand Canyon National Park, as well as all other national monuments. The explicit goal of this reassessment is to "free up" protected lands to "unleash" oil, gas, and mining development and speculation.

How Have Changing Borders Impacted Colonial Relations on the San Juan?

1. Borders are a creation of institutions and culture, they are not inherent phenomena.
2. Colonial impositions of borders change land relations to further corporate and settler interests.
   - Borders imposed by the colonial government are a tool of settler colonialism. Borders have removed Indigenous nations from lands for white settlement, resource extraction, and other colonial land relations.
3. Colonial borders transform the land into resource and property through recursive dispossession.
   - Borders transform land into (private) property to be "owned," changing human-earth relationships into one of extractor and extracted (resource).
4. How can I apply this knowledge to the places I live and work in? And where do we go from here?
   - The co-management plan is an example of shifting relations between Indigenous Nations and Colonial land management.
   - This example demonstrates a present and future of meaningful Nation to Nation collaboration.

Remaining Questions we have:
- How many other co-management plans are on the way since Bear's Ears? What conflict, if any, has arisen within the management of Bear's Ears since becoming co-managed? And what do these conflicts tell us about the intentions of all parties involved in managing this National Monument?
- How many current mining or oil/gas projects in these lands are ongoing today? Has there been resistance to them?

Figure 1*: Excerpt of student work from The History of Borders on the San Juan River.*

Relatedly, and pointedly, while Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni protects the land from future uranium mining, the existent Pinyon Plains Uranium Mine, located at the base of Red Butte within the national monument, has become a current threat to the waters, aquifers, seeps, and springs of the Havasupai and the Grand Canyon, as well as a danger to surrounding Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities along its haul route.

The mine, which was reopened in 2017, began extracting ore in early January of 2024 (Center for Biological Diversity, 2024), and on February 11, 2025 began hauling high-grade uranium ore to White Mesa Mill near Blanding, Utah near the San Juan River. In other words, the threats are real and interconnected and the time for all of us to act in ways we can is now.

Clark Tenakhongva, former vice chairman of the Hopi Nation and former co-chairman of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition,wrote in letter published in *High Country News* on January 29, 2025:

> To protect our sacred lands and, at minimum, hold the line on what tribes have fought for (and won), there must be a bold alternative to Trump's authoritarianism…It is my hope that if elected officials, community members and agencies truly act out the values they purport, we can start down a path of healing. I close this letter with a sincere prayer and a reminder that life is precious (Para. 5 & 7).

As an outdoor adventure educator of over 20 years, and as someone who cares deeply and passionately about people, land, waters, and our non-human relatives, I believe that we need to help our students to understand our histories and to take action to envision a future of solidarity, reciprocity, and justice. Rivers can be the teacher and the tool that help us find the courage to respond to these attacks on land, waters, people and communities, and to mobilize for a better future. ❖

Cecil Goodman is Director of the Adventure Education Department at Prescott College and the new Faculty Adviser for the River Studies and Leadership Certificate.

***(Pulling Together**, continued from page 15)*
With the dock moving once more and progressively getting in deeper water, we were certainly over the crux of the ropework for the day. Once we had the dock safely in the deep eddy and had cleaned up the many piles of ropes, NPS used their J-Rig to haul the dock back upstream to its home, with a nudge here and there from the DNR jetboat to help it through the faster spots.

It was a great day filled with collaboration, idea sharing, mentorship, new skills, valuable lessons, and plenty of friendly jokes. In a very real-world way, teams across interagency river management rarely get to link up and do things like that. So many stars need to align; it could be less than half a dozen times in a river ranger's career that such a scenario presents itself.

That's one reason I'm such a big fan of the River Management Society. Connecting practitioners is the most effective way that we can advance the art of river rangering; and the quality of a society can be judged by the richness of its art. So, I think we had a very good day for our field this past winter. As long as it stays a non-emergency, I certainly wouldn't mind getting some of that exercise again. ❖

Tony Mancuso is RMS Southwest Chapter President and River Program Manager for Green and Colorado Rivers for Utah Department of Natural Resources.

BLM celebrates 25 years of Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area

Chukar Trailhead of the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness and National Conservation Area, Colorado. Photo: Bureau of Land Management

An excerpt from an October 9, 2024 press release:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) invites public land enthusiasts everywhere to join in celebrating the 25th anniversary of Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (NCA) and Wilderness. Driven by local community efforts, the nearly 63,000-acre NCA was established on Oct. 21, 1999 to recognize and protect the area's outstanding natural, cultural, geologic, scenic, wilderness, and recreation resources.

"The establishment of this national conservation area 25 years ago involved tremendous community support," said BLM Colorado State Director Doug Vilsack. "The BLM manages this special place to protect its cultural, ecological, and wilderness resources, along with abundant opportunities for recreation, exploration, and solitude. Rafting the Gunnison River is a personal highlight for me, from the thrill of maneuvering the rocky rapids of the gorge to the tranquility of floating the calmer waters downriver."

The NCA stretches from Delta County in the north to Montrose County in the south just east of Colorado Highway 50 and encompasses diverse scenic landscapes, ranging from desert shrub and sagebrush lowlands to highly eroded adobe badlands to piñon-juniper woodlands adorning the slopes. At the heart of the NCA lies the spectacular rugged canyon of the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness, a 17,700-acre treasure that showcases about 1.7 billion years of geologic history, from the ancient metamorphic and igneous rock of the steep-walled inner gorge to the younger sedimentary layers lining the upper walls and rim. ❖

BLM rangers conduct a river patrol on the Gunnison River within Wilderness, utilizing pack rafts, duckies, and hard shell kayaks. Photo: Bureau of Land Management

Editor's Note:

A year before the Gunnison Gorge became an NCA, I spent the summer of 1998 as a BLM river ranger. It was my second river ranger position, but first implementing the recreational fee demonstration (fee demo) program. In 1996, The U.S. Department of the Interior authorized four federal land management agencies to implement and assess fee programs across various recreation sites. The goal was to retain the majority of the revenues on-site to support local recreation. The Gunnison Gorge was one of the 68 projects from the BLM, but the other four land management agencies had similar-sized projects. The demonstration revenues were used for amenities on site, including facilities maintenance, campgrounds, operations, visitor services, interpretation, environmental protection, safety and health services, and access (O:PPAREPFINAL.PDF). The fee demo program was assessed and renewed (when I worked in BLM's Washington Office) until 2005 when it was eventually replaced with the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, granting federal agencies fee authority.

In 1998, however, we faced some challenges of implementing the $3 per person fee within the Gunnison Gorge. Aside from explaining the new fee to locals with decades of generational recreational use before its implementation, the number and range of access points over a wide and remote geographic area made for long days with multiple rangers in a variety of transport modes: truck, foot, and boat—the latter preceded by a mile hike in.

Four main trails offer access to the western side of the Gunnison Gorge for hikers, boaters, and anglers. We encountered anglers enjoying the world class trout fishing, as well as whitewater boaters with enough skill and planning to carry their gear down the one-mile Chukar Trail to the put-in or arrange for a pack-in by the BLM-permitted horsepacker. One ranger was stationed at a camper at Chukar Trail; we river rangers patrolled by boat, overnighting at the BLM tipi (*see pictures page 3 & 21*) at the base of an alternate access trail. Although this was before the era of ubiquitous cell phone photo sharing, I remember two photos: me hiking down Chukar with a *Necky Jive* in a kayak backpack; and me sitting on a new pit toilet strapped to a loaded raft that would later be assembled at a downstream use area. That year, I got my first multi-tool and I used it to assemble that toilet.

We were lucky if we were in the truck in time to enjoy Leroy's Polka show on Colorado Public Radio. LeRoy Jagodinski was the founder of the Gunnison River Pleasure Park that serves anglers and all types of boaters as a river access and the takeout for the Gorge section. I stayed only one summer, but the following year the area received special designation. So much has changed in 26 years, but I was pleased to hear from BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner Tatyana Sukharnikova that the Gunnison Gorge is still much the same beloved retreat, and it's economical too—the fee is still $3. Plus, the sky remains so dark the NCA recently became certified as an International Dark Sky Park. Thanks to Tatyana for the BLM photos. Put a kayak on your back, turn up the polka music, and cheer for the return of the rangers. ❖

Edd Franz, Jim Worthington, Carleton Lane, Ron Lunsford, Dustin Schrock, and Rooster Barnhart. Photo: Bureau of Land Management

Article Review: Consummate Professional

by Gary G. Marsh

I recently came across an article that I think can benefit RMS members. Originally authored by Steve Tarari (2025), I summarized the original article, pulling in notable quotes and my perspective as a river professional.

Before diving into Tarari's qualities of a professional, let's establish what it means to be a professional. Merriam Webster (n.d.) defines a professional as a noun or adjective:

> [R]elating to the technical or ethical standards of a profession as a career, exhibiting a courteous, conscientious, and generally a business-like manner, receiving financial gain or livelihood in an activity or field of endeavor.

Synonyms: master, veteran, seasoned, expert, proficient, adept, skillful, experienced, qualified, practiced, ace, prepared, accomplished.

I won't try to answer at what point one is considered a professional. Tarani (2025) defines a professional as: "being the best version of oneself in any role, consistently striving to contribute positively to one's field and leaving a lasting, positive impact on those you interact with" (para. 29). The Army has a slogan that summarizes this: *Be All You Can Be.*

"Professionals embody a set of principles, behaviors and attitudes that collectively define the gold standard" (Tatari, 2025, para. 4). Knowledge, tools, skills, and experiences are used to master their expertise and application on their job, instruction, or hobby. Professionals cannot achieve success without a system to work within. Without a cohesive system of authority, organization, training or discipline there cannot be a standard, network, performance or effectiveness in guiding their work. They have both freedom to fail or succeed and learn to innovate only after they have mastered the components within their existing system.

"RMS must continue to support individual differences, and economic and social challenges, while encouraging difficult conversations, innovative solutions, and the sharing of ideas within diverse and dynamic environments."
—Judy Culver, *RMS Journal,* Winter 2023, p. 34

For purposes of this article, let's say a river professional is someone paid to work on, with, or around rivers for an organization, agency, department, or client, an advisor, a consultant, or a contractor. Now that we've established the definition of professional, I'll share ten best practices for professionals, as outlined by Tarani (2025).

"Never become so much of an expert that you stop gaining expertise. View life as a continuous learning experience."
—Denis Waitley

1. Integrity–"In today's fast-paced world, where career trajectories are as varied as they are unpredictable, the notion of professionalism remains a bedrock of success and respect in any field….an ethos that transcends appearances and resides in the core of one's character and actions" (Tarari, 2025, para. 4).

Professionals are loyal to the truth, operating "within a framework of professional and ethical guidelines, making decisions that not only comply with laws, rules, and policies but uphold the highest standards of honesty and fairness" (Tarari, 2025, para. 15). They stick to sound principles and cannot be corrupted in relation to truth and fairness. They possess an uprightness of character, and have an uncompromising adherence to a code of professional values. Professionals avoid deception, expediency, artificiality, or shallowness. These characteristics build trust and confidence when faced with temptations.

"If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don't have integrity, nothing else matters." —Alan K. Simpson

2. Planner– An old phrase comes to mind: fail to plan, plan to fail. Prior to any event, instruction, engagement, or conversation, have a plan and a backup. Although change can bring uncertainty and stress, professionals are comfortable with uncertainty based on their experience: "They can adjust their expectations and stay focused on finding solutions rather than becoming paralyzed by the unknown. This ability to remain calm and composed under pressure as a direct result of immediate change is a crucial aspect of professionalism" (Tarari, 2025, para. 28).

"No pressure, no diamonds." —Thomas Carlyle

3. Competence– "[P]rofessionalism starts with competence—the ability to perform one's job with skill and efficiency…striv[ing] for mastery, continually seeking to improve their knowledge and capabilities. This relentless pursuit of excellence is a hallmark of true professionalism" (Tarari, 2025, para. 7).

Competence requires self-initiation and discipline to seek information beyond a class or course of instruction. Those who want to get better seek advice from other instructors and mentors, keep up with online trends, content, and relevant topics. Professionals demonstrate their skills with confidence, consistency, and conviction.

"The realization that 'doing right' for our rivers is inextricably linked to learning more and partnering with those who really know rivers has been humbling."
—Risa Shimoda, *RMS Journal*, Summer 2024, p. 2

4. Subject Matter Expert– "[S]taying relevant is key to long-term success. Industries, technologies and methodologies evolve, and professionals who are stuck in their ways risk becoming obsolete" (Tarari, 2025, para. 26).

Professionals are expected have more experience than the average person so must keep up with the latest methods, technologies, and equipment to answer technical questions. Learning is a life-long journey and a commitment to continuously improve, expanding skills, knowledge, and abilities to remain effective and relevant. Being able to provide examples of your experience is key. Encourage self-discovery and teach others to succeed beyond your skills, abandoning your ego when others are more skilled.

"All streams flow to the ocean because it is lower than they are. Humility gives it its power." —Lao Tzu

5. Learning style– Individuals absorb, process, and retain information in different ways; using different teaching methods taps into unique ways of engaging with materials being taught. Various methods (e.g., visual aids, hands-on activities, or discussions) cater to different preferences and reinforce understanding (Tarari, 2025, para. 26).

"Recognizing and leveraging your preferred learning or teaching styles…can lead to more efficient and enjoyable learning experiences. [Using varied methods helps]...design more inclusive and effective teaching methods, ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to learn in the way that suits them best" (Tarari, 2025, para. 27).

"I will always lean on the river as a great teacher: whether I'm a young explorer, angsty teenager paddler, graduate school scholar, or now, a dedicated river manager."
—Sarah Smith, *RMS Journal*, Spring 2024, p. 21

6. Communicator– "It's not just about what is said, but how it is conveyed. Professional communication is clear, concise and respectful; whether in an email, meeting or casual conversation. This also includes active listening—hearing and understanding the perspectives of others. In industries like customer service, where interactions can make or break a business, the ability to communicate effectively is indispensable. A good communicator can de-escalate situations, provide clear instructions and foster positive relationships" (Tarari, 2025, para. 17).

We have two ears and one mouth for a reason. Use your ears to learn your audience and relay information appropriately based on the specific group or their level of understanding.

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." —George Bernard Shaw

7. Reliability– is "the currency of professionalism. A professional is someone who can be counted on to deliver what they promise both on time and to an expected standard" (Tarari, 2025, para. 15).

This characteristic fosters trust and dependability, which is vital to any working relationship. Accountability is more than meeting a deadline or target. Professionals make and admit mistakes, taking responsibility for their actions, and taking steps to rectify them. We often learn more from our failures, errors and mistakes than our successes. We seldom win on the first attempt.

"Reliability is the precondition for trust." —Wolfgang Schauble

8. Demeanor – "A professional presents themselves in a manner ...appropriate for their role and [audience]. This isn't just about adhering to a dress code; it's understanding the expectations of one's environment and meeting it "(Tarari, 2025, para. 19).

Beyond appearance it includes confidence, individuality, the way one carries themselves, interacts with others and handles pressure. No matter the circumstances, a calm and composed conduct solidifies a professional and others' confidence in them.

"Those who stand for nothing fall for everything."
—Alexander Hamilton

9. Respect – "Respect is the social fabric that holds professionalism together. Professionals treat others with respect, regardless of their position, backgrounds or opinions. This [characteristic] is shown through fairness, courtesy and a willingness to consider others' viewpoints. In a collaborative work environment, respect fosters teamwork, innovation and a positive atmosphere. It extends to respecting boundaries, such as personal space, time and privacy, which is essential in maintaining professional relationships" (Tarari, 2025, para. 22).

'There is no respect for others without humility in one's self.'
—Henri Frederic Amiel

10. Adaptability– "Adaptability also means being able to learn and unlearn skills...A professional doesn't cling to outdated methods simply because they are familiar. Instead, they embrace continuous learning and are willing to pivot when necessary. They understand that to stay relevant and effective, they must continually update their skills and knowledge. This mindset not only makes them more proficient in their current roles, but also prepares them for the future" (Tarari, 2025, para. 24).

Change may create opportunity: "Those who are adaptable are more likely to recognize and capitalize on new opportunities, whether it's a new role, a different project or a shift in the market. By being…willing to step out of their comfort zones, adaptable professionals can take advantage of...opportunities to...advance their careers and achieve greater success" (Tarari, 2025, para. 25).

Adaptability is a crucial aspect of a professional who may be faced with unexpected challenges from new technologies to organizational shifts. A professional adapts to change, remaining flexible and open-minded while continuing to perform at a high level. These individuals are likely to stay current with trends and developments, ensuring their skills and knowledge are of value.

"Being humble means recognizing that we are not on earth to see how important we can become, but to see how much difference we can make in the lives of others." —Gordon B. Hinckley

In summary, these ten qualities are a great reminder to embrace the RMS mission to support professionals who study, protect, and manage North America's rivers. There are undoubtedly other qualities (like PASSION!) you have or observe in our peers and leaders who work in this awesome world of river management. ❖

Gary G. Marsh, Retired, BLM National River Lead, RMS Board.

American Whitewater Safety Code: Newly Illustrated & Revised

Above and opposite: Examples of printouts available for download. Credits: American Whitewater

by Evan Stafford

American Whitewater is proud to announce the publication of our newly revised and beautifully illustrated American Whitewater Safety Code. Over the past two years, our team analyzed our accident database and researched hundreds of other sources. Then, using the best available information reviewed by a broad cross-section of whitewater experts, we made a complete revision to our Safety Code, including all new modern artwork. Both magazine-size print Safety Code books and a free digital download are available on our website.

Safety has been a core issue at American Whitewater since our humble beginnings in 1954. Today we are leaders in accident analysis and safety education. Formal risk management is part of all our programs. We work hard to publicize practices that help every American enjoy our rivers safely, and we advise legislative bodies and river managers on the best ways to educate river runners, including with open source river signage, and other online and print river safety materials.

American Whitewater was one of the first organizations to promote the globally developed and adopted International Scale of River Difficulty in the August 1955 and Winter 1957 issues of the *American Whitewater Journal*. In 1959, the first edition of our Safety Code was adopted and published and we've continually revised these river safety guidelines over the course of our seven-decade-plus history. Outdoor recreation and river running specifically have inherent risks, however many whitewater incidents, especially for less experienced boaters, are preventable with basic whitewater safety knowledge.

The Safety Code had not been updated since 2005 when we applied for and received a United States Coast Grant in 2022. The grant was to fully overhaul and modernize the safety code and to produce other safety code related products including boat identification stickers, instructor printouts, and safety hang tags for retail products. Our goal was to make a concise and compelling set of informational guidelines for river runners, covering necessary equipment, identifying hazards, and on-water safety skills and techniques for descending whitewater rivers. The Safety Code would be constructed in a way to optimize digital uses, while also still being published as a magazine-length book.

American Whitewater spent 2023 conducting a review of the safety code by expert river safety and rescue practitioners, river managers and other river safety educators. This invitation based review included an online collaborative editing and commenting exercise, a webinar-based consensus-oriented discussion of significant topics, and finally a review of a draft revised Safety Code and adoption of revised language. A review of the accident database and current trends in river incidents also informed the Code's revision, identifying key safety areas to emphasize and make easily accessible to our community.

Building upon the previous iterations, we reorganized and updated the safety information. This included creating a hierarchy of levels to engage with the material. Single page printouts, well delineated chapters, bolded key phrases, and large scale illustrations make the code approachable at a glance, on a single topic, and as a complete document covering the full breadth of basic safety information. Based on our review of the accident database, we created easy-to-access content in the Safety Code, including free, downloadable one-page printouts, such as: "The Big Four Ways to Avoid Injuries and Incidents" and "The River Runner's Checklist." Various products are available for purchase, including industry hangtags for retail products and the Safety Code book on our online store. Find the resources at americanwhitewater.org/safetycode. ❖

Evan Stafford serves as the Communications Director for American Whitewater.

RIVER SIGNALS

Common Hand, Paddle and River Sign

Signals can vary between communities and user grou
important to review river signals with a new group, or an
prior to entering the water. Once on the river, signals sho
others in the party.

ALL CLEAR
Come on down

Proceed. Hand or paddle raised straight up vertically. When visual communication is not possible, one whistle blow.

POINT POSITIVE
"Move that way"

Point in the direction a river runner should travel. Never point at an obstacle. Always point to the safe direction to travel.

I'M OKAY
Are you okay?

While holding the elbow outward toward the side, repeatedly pat the top of your head. This signal is used both as a question and as a response to indicate you are not badly injured or in immediate danger. If not okay, don't make this signal.

HELP/EMERGENCY
Assistance needed

Give three long blasts on a rescue whistle while waving in a crossing motion with arms over your head. If a whistle is not available, make three loud whooping tones.

EDDY OUT
Get to side of the river

Swirling motion with a single finger or paddle in the air, then pointed to the side of the river (river left or right) with the eddy. Should be done well in advance of need.

SCOUT
Look at rapid

Get to shore for a look. Two fingers pointing to your eyes, then to the side of the river where the scout should take place.

AMERICAN Whitewater

RMS RESPONDS:

How will you use the Safety Code?

"I teach a block of field research courses that include a 10-day river expedition, preceded by classroom-based river safety instruction and a 1-day river training trip. Many students apply the courses to help complete RSLC requirements. Previously, I cobbled together diagrams, readings, and other resources to prepare students for on-water river safety training. Now AW's revised and illustrated Safety Code collects many of those ideas in a single resource. I will make the Safety Code required reading and I will integrate its material in river safety training. Hopefully, students will be less naive and more reassured as we follow guidelines in the Code and check all the boxes in the checklists. Most importantly, they will be better prepared with knowledge and experience based on the Code.

— John McLaughlin, Western Washington University

Besides helping with RSLC course safety requirements, these resources are useful for flood preparedness: educating first responders and community members on river safety, like how to throw and receive a throw rope and communicate during a flood."

— Nicolas Zegre, West Virginia University

Riverside discussions covered natural resource protections, cultural sites and tribal management, safety protocols, visitor management, and river planning. Photo: James Major

River Ranger Rendezvous 2024: Continuing a Grand Tradition

by Tony Mancuso

As we all know, the River Management Society (RMS) offers a wealth of knowledge and resources to its members. From the National Rivers Project to the River Training Center and RMS Listserv, RMS serves as a clearinghouse for knowledge and expertise. While all of those initiatives deserve praise, I would like to highlight what I believe is one of the best programs that RMS conducts.

For the Summer of 2024, the privilege of hosting the River Ranger Rendezvous returned to the Southwest Chapter. This year, the rangers took a fantastic five-day, 89-mile float through one of the premier multi-day sojourns in the country: Desolation Canyon of the Green River. "Deso," as it is known, is a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Special Recreation Management Area within the Price Field Office in Eastern Utah: the river section was recently added to the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System with both Wild & Recreational reaches. Deso is an absolutely stunning experience with equally deep cultural history, wildlife, and wilderness values. In fact, the Desolation Canyon Wilderness was designated in the 2019 Dingell Act concurrent with the Wild & Scenic Rivers designation, spanning an astonishing 142,996 acres—more than twice the size of Arches National Park.

On a side note, I would recommend anyone interested in the area read the book *Raven's Exile* by Ellen Malloy. Malloy is a nature writer with exquisite prose who spent seasons in Desolation Canyon with her husband river ranger Mark Malloy.

The 2024 River Rendezvous assembled a truly impressive spectrum of twenty River Rangers from across the country: the Green (UT & CO), Colorado (UT & CO), Owyhee (ID), Salt (AZ), Gunnison (CO), Madison (MT), San Miguel (CO), and Verde (AZ) were all represented. Participating agencies included Canyonlands National Park, Dinosaur National Park, BLM Utah-Price, Coconino National Forest, State of Utah Sovereign Lands, BLM Montana-Dillon, BLM Colorado-Grand Junction, State of Utah Recreation, and BLM Idaho-Owyhee. Additionally, we were joined by RMS Staff and River Training Center Instructors who led us through fantastic discussions about resource management. Over the course of the week, we collaborated on topics that included wildland fire risks, visitor interactions, law enforcement, habitat restoration, cultural resources, inland navigation and more. Some participants were finishing up their very first season, and others had been river rangers for more than 20 years.

Our host agency, BLM Utah-Price, deserves tremendous appreciation for both accommodating the Rendezvous and acting as our hosts for the duration of the trip. Rangers Bobby Hollahan, Reece Wilson, Cory Jensen, and Cameron Stark, as well as Asst. Field Manager Dana Truman and Outdoor Recreation Planner Jaydon Mead deserve a robust round of applause for their support.

This broad assembly of knowledge and experience is what makes the River Ranger Rendezvous such an important program for the future of our practice. Other disciplines in land management agencies (e.g., forestry, law enforcement, engineering, rangeland conservation) have deep scholastic traditions or organizational institutions that uphold a sense of camaraderie and even lay down dogmatic principles. The art of river rangering has been around for plenty long enough; but we have always been a loose assemblage of professionals with ideas and mandates as varied as the rivers we manage. It's true, too, that this informal decentralized structure has worked to our rivers' advantage. Usage patterns, seasonality, hydrology, and habitat are all unique to each of the rivers we manage, and it flows naturally that the specific management actions we take would be unique in kind.

Still, there are obvious advantages to building a sense of cohort among our river rangers, which is what the Rendezvous does so well. Watching each other in action, listening to stories, and learning new techniques together are what it takes for us to begin to understand what a river ranger really is....and that it is a difficult thing to define. Some of us are "visitor services," some are "biological science technicians," or "resource protection," or "forestry technicians." It's not uncommon for a new ranger to ask, "...but, what am I supposed to do?" Mission and values statements, training videos, and a firehose of nuanced technical fieldwork crammed into one week won't ever empower our river rangers to identify with the role they fill once on the river. However, meeting other people with similar charges, learning from them, and finding mentors and friends…that's what river rangers need the most, and it certainly is what the River Ranger Rendezvous does so well.

Checking back in with the teams in my region after the trip, I kept hearing, "Best trip of the season," "Didn't know a trip could be so smooth," "[so-and-so] was so cool to talk to." I'm so grateful that RMS maintains this tradition, and I look forward to it every time it comes around. I can't wait for next year. ❖

Tony Mancuso is RMS Southwest Chapter President residing in Moab, UT.

Canyonlands National Park River Ranger Natilya Blades and James Major row through Desolation Canyon on the 2024 River Ranger Rendezvous. Photo: Sarah Johnson

Raft Repair for Biologists and Dummies

by Herm Hoops

1. Prevent damage, avoid rocks, driftwood and submerged items like fence posts. Keep the boat away from overhanging Russian olive trees, the thorns will puncture any boat. Anticipate hazards and make corrective maneuvers before they become evasive maneuvers. Don't depend on rapid motor bursts because the motor may not have power enough to pull away from obstacles and current.

   REMEMBER: Is the fish you're chasing worth sinking the boat or having to take time to make major boat repairs?

2. If you fail to heed the above advice, and damage your boat follow the repair guidelines below:

   - Move the boat to a dry, stable place where you can assess the damage. In many cases (a tear beyond an inch long for example), your on-river day is probably over. Make camp and take the time to make a credible repair.
   - Remove enough air from the boat to allow you to flatten the area to be repaired. Remove any water, mud or other debris and thoroughly dry the area needing repair (inside the tube or floor, as well as the outside). Open the repair kit and assemble the tools and materials you will use.

   NOTE: In cold or wet weather it will help to heat the fabric and adhesive. You may have to use a tarp to maintain a warm, dry work area. A pot of hot water placed on the boat and fabric will bring the fabric to repair temperature (warm to the touch). If it is cold you might also consider warming the adhesive in a pot of very warm water.

Major Mishap making repairs under pressure.

3. For most repairs, outline an area 2-4 inches beyond the damage and cut a patch to that size. For large tears you may have to cut a patch with 4-6 inches of overlap. You can use a can, pot or other item to mark the damaged area and the patch. Cut rounded corners on the patch.

   NOTE: Common errors in boat repair are:

   - The boat and patch are not roughed up enough
   - Adhesive is applied unevenly or too thick
   - The boat or patch becomes contaminated
   - The patch is not applied perfectly flat
   - The adhesive is not allowed to cure properly and/or the boat is inflated too soon after repair

4. If the tear is gigantic, or complex you may have to sew the torn material.

   REMEMBER: **this is a last resort**, it will cause additional damage to the boat fabric and is not likely to hold air without a perfectly applied patch. In stitching we suggest that you use a baseball stitch, but try to keep the surface (material and thread) as smooth as possible. Each imperfection leaves an air escape channel, therefore when stitching we suggest your patch be at least 4 inches larger than the tear.

5. If it is raining, cover the boat and work area with a tarp—the fabric and patch must be kept dry. Also, remember dirt and debris is an enemy in applying an air-tight patch. Keep everything clean and dry.

6. Using an abrasive (roller rasp or sandpaper) rough up the area outlined on the boat and the entire patch. Sand both pieces vertically horizontally and diagonally, and sand until the fabric loses its shiny color and looks dull (like velour) —especially be sure that the edges of the boat and patch are roughed and dulled.

7. With a clean, non-lint rag, wipe the patch and boat with solvent (MEK - methyl ethyl ketone) or toluene. **Note that these are hazardous chemicals**, so avoid inhaling them, or getting them in your eyes. Wipe until no color comes off the patch and boat where you have roughened it. From this point on avoid touching the cleaned surfaces patch or area on the boat —oils will weaken the bond.

8. Assuming you are using a one part adhesive mix adhesive with a small splash of solvent to slightly thin it very slightly. Apply a THIN layer of adhesive to the boat and patch, go just beyond the outline you drew on the outside of the boat. Too much adhesive on either or both surfaces will make a poor bond. This first layer is to be absorbed into the fabric, so let it dry completely—at least an hour.

9. When the first layer of adhesive has dried COMPLETELY apply a second THIN coat of adhesive to both surfaces, and allow the adhesive to dry until it is tacky. Use your knuckle after a few minutes and check, when it sticks to your knuckle it is ready to be applied.

10. It may be best to have a helper assist applying the patch. Be careful, because it is a contact adhesive and when the patch touches any adhesive on the boat it touches it will stick. If bulges or irregularities occur you CANNOT remove the patch and reposition it. YOU MUST START OVER. So lay the patch on the tear from one side, or from the center, whichever seems easiest. At any event, apply the patch carefully and flat. Using the roller or a dulled putty knife, press the patch to the boat, be gentle at first and try to press out any air bubbles. Start slowly, and when the patch is absolutely flat use additional pressure.

11. If you encounter a large bubble, or small imperfection you can try and heat reactivate the adhesive for a brief period. You can heat a frying pan or other flat item and place it on the patch, when it is hot to the touch you can then try and re-press the patch to the boat. If you have to read these instructions to patch your boat you probably should avoid this step.

12. Wait at least 2 hours before inflating the boat. Normal inflation is 2.5 psi, we suggest that you inflate it to the lowest pressure to get the boat to camp or boat ramp. It takes 24 hours for most adhesives to achieve full operating strength.

13. **When you return to the shop BE CERTAIN TO REPORT THE DAMAGE and HAVE YOUR PATCH INSPECTED OR REPLACED.** ❖

Herm Hoops was a long-standing member of and contributor to River Management Society, hailing from the Southwest. His memory lives on.

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RMS Chapter News

Welcome New RMS Members

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Jacqueline Marinaro
Buena Vista, CO

Glen Leverich, Senior Geomorphologist
Portland, OR

Kimberly Balke, Program Director
Conservation Resource Alliance
Traverse City, MI

Individual

Nick Kaczor, Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinator
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Christopher Colvin, Branch Chief
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Journal Feedback, Please!

Please take a few minutes to offer feedback on the *RMS Journal*.

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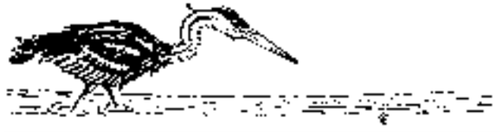

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Summer 2025	Vol. 38, No. 2	Northwest	May
Fall 2025	Vol. 38, No. 3	Northeast	Aug
Winter 2025	Vol. 38, No. 4	Pacific	Nov
Spring 2026	Vol. 39, No. 1	Alaska	Feb
Summer 2026	Vol. 39, No. 2	Southeast	May
Fall 2026	Vol. 39, No. 3	Midwest	Aug
Winter 2026	Vol. 39, No. 4	Southwest	Nov

Southwest Chapter Focus