



# *Canoe News*

**The Pedal Paddler**

**Maximum Talent: Hollie Hall**

**Athol Rat Race**

**A Pitch for Heeling**

**Spring 2020 Vol. 53 No. 1**



The Athol Rat Race!



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*From the Editor:*

*As winter turns to spring, many of us are anxiously looking forward to spending time on the water and moving our training into high gear. To give you some performance inspiration, we have an interview with Hollie Hall and a report on the Rat Race (also for a good dose of chaos!). Looking for more control of your boat? Check out the article on Free-Style canoeing. And if your shoulders have about had it with paddling, or you just want to check out another angle, be sure to read the interview with Matt Walters and his fascinating pedal-powered paddle machine.*

*Keep paddling strong!*

*Steve*

*Front Cover: View from the seat of Matt Walters pedal boat, photo courtesy of Matt Walters.*

*Inside Front Cover: Athol Rat Race, photo courtesy of Peter Heed.*

*Back Cover: Hollie Halls paddling at Paddle Bender 2019, photo courtesy of Nate Mills.*

*Inside Back Cover: Andrew Cooper at the 40th Annual St. George Rive Race, photographer unknown.*

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SPRING 2020

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr. Horney:

We want to tell you how much we have enjoyed our first issue of Canoe News since joining USCA. What a hoot! We love the aluminum canoe focus of this issue and recognize that USCA is much more than the Aluminum Nationals. More to that later...

We are delighted that the FreeStyle canoeing fraternity has recently joined USCA. Peg and I have taken years of lessons from many luminaries in the FreeStyle world and have won two national titles in tandem FreeStyle.

We happen to own a very special 17 ft. Grumman aluminum canoe named NAKOMIS. Few will recognize this boat but many will recognize its original owner, Tom MacKenzie.

Tom was our friend, teacher, mentor, neighbor, and arguably America's foremost wood and fabric canoe builder. His NAKOMIS now adorns our "canoe lawn" proudly displaying the dents and repairs of his countless river adventures. Her keel-line is anything but straight.

In addition to NAKOMIS we own a sure-nuff real birch bark canoe and four wood and fabric canoes, all built by Tom. Tom's wood and fabric canoes are not only the most beautiful canoes but are



also the best paddling canoes that we have ever paddled.

We are also pleased with the USCA's focus on canoe touring. Peg and I have paddled end to end on both Canadian waterways, the Rideau (125 miles) and the Trent Severn (250 miles).

The Elderly Paddlers Association is listed in Canoe News. We are going to apply and hope that they have a "junior" division since we are not elderly. We are only in our 70s, so we are planning for our canoeing future.

Thanks to the USCA for welcoming the FreeStyle community and to Mrs. Horney and you (we know who does all the work) for the wonderful Canoe News.

***Roy & Peg Ivey***

Steve & Julie,

Just for what it may be worth THANKS(!) for doing a GREAT job on Canoe News. Over 17 years I put out a local publication for PACK (Pennsylvania Association of Canoers and Kayakers) called "Current Paddler" and I have a little idea of what you go through. So again, Thanks!

Sincerely,

***Ken Gerg***

*Ed: Thank you all for your kind words! It's a pleasure to create this publication, and we hope it's a blessing to our members.*

# VIEW FROM THE BOW

USCA PRESIDENT REBECCA DAVIS

Welcome to the USCA in 2020! This year is seeing some changes, as every year that has come before. At the Annual Meeting in January, I was proud of how our delegates collaborated on their ideas. Every individual came together- even when we disagreed- to advance the organization. Some of the changes are not my personal platform, but that is the great part of having 40+ people working together: it's not just the vision of one.

The main focus of the meeting was to balance the budget and cover our costs. While we have a sizeable balance of cash on hand, if we continue to operate at a large deficit we will be out of funds in less than 10 years. We addressed this in numerous ways. First, we decided to only spend the money we had coming in for the fiscal year, not intentionally going into a deficit. This meant making some tough decisions on what programs to fund for 2020. We still have the framework in place to issue grants, but we



don't believe we will have income to offset the cost of operating them, particularly if our insurance program continues to be a break-even proposition. Members feel that we can right this program, and turn it into a money maker once again.

When looking at the cost of membership compared to the cost of the newsletter, it became apparent that one membership was not covering the cost of the mailing we produce- particularly if the member attended Nationals or used

any of our other products or services. The options were to go with a lower cost newsletter, or raise membership for 2021, and the delegates chose to raise membership dues for the coming years. This will not affect those who have paid their memberships for 2020 or any that have yet to be paid for 2020.

Another "big ticket" item is the lack of hosts for future Nationals. **We currently have no bids to host any events in 2021.** This

problem stems in large part due to the costs of running the event, and secondarily from being a bit cumbersome to host (as previous Nationals hosts stated in feedback that was reviewed during the meeting). One of the major costs for the event that the USCA can control is the number of medals we require to be handed out to participants that the event host eventually pays back to the USCA. For example, at Warren in 2019, twice as many medals were handed out as there were participants at the event. At the end of the meeting, some different ideas were thrown around to either limit the number of medals if a class had below a certain number of entries, or to give out ribbons to the lower places, in order to cut

costs. At this point, it was decided to hold this issue off to the January 2021 meeting, and address it when we have more time to consider alternatives and present a well laid plan of attack. Obviously having more participants attend Nationals would help cover the cost of running the event, but that isn't the reality we are living in right now.

Finally, we decided as a delegate body to change our Stock C1 specifications to match those of NYPra. This will allow more consistency throughout the sport, and hopefully reduce the confusion at jiggling for those who are racing a C1 Stock canoe. Please refer to our website at [www.uscanoe.com](http://www.uscanoe.com), or the 2020

competition rules for a complete list of updates.

To close on the positive, Newaygo is gearing up to host a fantastic Nationals in 2020. They are willing to host a deep water course for the OC1s, and SUPS on the pond this year in order to make the event friendlier to all crafts. Registration will be opening in April, and this year all registrations will be handled online to reduce congestion and paperwork getting lost in the mail. If online registration isn't something for you, we will have a registration "hotline" to call in and either enter you, or assist you in the registration process. I can't wait to see you all in my home state this summer, on one of my favorite rivers!

## 2020 USCA Nationals Event Schedule

### Friday

K1 Touring Woman  
 K1 Sea Kayak Man  
 C2 Standard Mixed  
 C2 Mixed  
 C2 Man/Junior (C2 M/Jr)  
 C2 Woman/Junior (C2 W/Jr)  
 K2 Unlimited Mixed  
*Short Course*  
 C2 Man/Youth\* (C2 M/Y)  
 C2 Woman/Youth\* (C2 W/Y)  
 C2 Mixed Junior (C2 Mx Jr)  
 SUP Unlimited Man  
 SUP Unlimited Woman

### Saturday

C1 Woman  
 C1 Stock Woman  
 OC1 Man  
 C2 Men Open  
 C2 Standard Men  
 K1 Unlimited Woman  
 K1 Touring Men  
 K2 Unlimited Men  
*Short Course*  
 C1 Woman Junior & Barton Youth Award  
 K1 Woman Junior Unlimited & Barton Youth Award  
 C2 Men Junior

### Sunday

C2 Standard Women  
 C2 Women  
 K1 Unlimited Man  
 K1 Sea Kayak Woman  
 C1 Man  
 C1 Man Stock  
 OC1 Woman  
 K2 Unlimited Women  
*Short Course*  
 K1 Unlimited Man Junior & Barton Youth Award  
 C1 Man Junior & Barton Youth Award  
 C2 Women Junior



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# IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE!

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LYNNE MCDUFFIE

At our recent USCA meetings we were challenged with: What are we offering our members in return for our dues? We were concerned about driving off members if we raised the dues that have been the same for at least 35 years. Has the usefulness of the USCA passed? We were functioning on a deficit budget these past few years. To address that issue, we are looking at ways to cut spending, reduce expenditures, and invest a portion of our general fund into higher interest investments. That will help. We would like to make putting on the Nationals a profitable endeavor as well for the host town or club.

Many of the big clubs have so many members and races every weekend that they don't see any advantage in going to nationals and spending extra money on dues. Do you think they would be at the level they are without the Nationals? Maybe, but I doubt it.

*As in the case of my family, without the Nationals we probable would not have continued racing into our 50's.* My daughter would not have grown up being influenced by adults who were dedicated to physical fitness, fair competition, and to a sport that is supportive of all ages and abilities. We would not be promoting paddling in our small home town of 1000. We would not be good friends with so many people across the United States.

In what other sport can a child and a parent compete together, amateurs race right along side Olympic caliber athletes and women be so highly sought after as partners and celebrated just as much as their male counter parts? Our organization has opened its doors to all kinds of water craft and paddling styles, including just recently welcoming FreeStyle paddling into the family.

The USCA is run completely by volunteers. We no longer have an executive director ( which is an open position by the way). One of our former executive directors, Jim Mack did so much to promote the sport. He made us all feel good about being part of this great organization. We need to get back to our roots and start supporting the USCA whole heartedly. Twenty five dollars a year is not much to ask to keep alive an organization that has done so much for so many. What do we get for our dues? We get a governing body that brings us together as like minded people who value our waterways, fair competition and passing on the traditions to our youth. It really is a wonderful life.

Lynne McDuffie  
USCA Membership Chair

# MATT WALTERS AND HIS AMAZING PEDAL PADDLER

STEVEN HORNEY



*Matt Walters preparing for a run on the Missouri River in his pedal-powered paddle boat.*

**CN:** (This interview with Matt took place right after he finished pedaling 16 hours on a bike trainer through the night with the hopes of getting in a 24-hour workout; some knee pain cut it a bit short. He was just 6 weeks out of surgery for a meniscus tear!)

**CN:** Hi Matt – thank you for giving up your time for this interview. You’ve created something of a stir with your unique – and fast – pedal boat. Tell us about your background, and how you

ended up on the water racing a pedal boat.

**Matt:** I’m 52 years old and an avid cyclist. For a living I make oak tanks for breweries in my business (Foeder Crafters of America). Five years ago I told my business partner I wanted to paddle the Mississippi with him and my brothers. I figured we could call it Mississippi Brolo – a play on brothers and the famous book Mississippi Solo. Noting that the Mississippi would be quite a challenge, he suggested

that maybe we should start by entering the MR 340, a 340 mile race on the Missouri River. So in 2016 we bought a plastic canoe and asked a brewer friend to join us on our adventure. (We told him his only job would be to pass beer to us – but when he got to the boat he found that there was no beer, but a paddle awaiting him!) It’s pretty laughable now, but having never having paddled or trained we figured the 3 of us would go out and complete the race - and in a Tupperware boat! Our start was rough, to say the

least. We were cutting off a lot of other boats at the start just trying to get control of our canoe. After 50 miles my partner quit. At mile 65 the other brewer and I quit. It was unbelievably difficult—we actually had a hard time believing anyone could finish this race!

In 2017, still not having trained very much, I naturally blamed my boat and bought a 4-man carbon Savage River C4 racing canoe and carbon paddles (a big improvement, but we just used the paddles as they came, not knowing we needed to adjust the length of the paddles). For this second attempt we enlisted the help of another brewer friend. We actually finished on this attempt, with a time of 82 hours. The whole beer community was very supportive, and it seemed they all came out to celebrate our finish. Beer, pizza, and gift baskets were flowing freely! By the time we arrived, the winners had been home for a couple of days and they were just getting ready to have the awards ceremony. But we had far and away the biggest finishing celebration! A top finisher said that hardly anyone was there to greet him, but when we pulled in the whole place erupted for us (this is now quite embarrassing to me!) We enjoyed our trip down the river as well; when we pulled into a stop, the officials saw all the beer bottles and such in our boat and assumed we did a major cleanup along the way (something the race encourages). But it was all



*Matt Walters pedaling the Hobie-driven Savage River C4 canoe.*

our own beer bottles and wrappers!

After my first two attempts, I realized I really wanted to do well in this race. So in 2018 I took my Savage River C4 canoe, cut a hole in the bottom, and installed a modified Hobie pedal drive unit and a lawn chair, got rid of everyone else, and trained for the race. I actually did pretty well on this attempt. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to finish. I got within 70 miles of the finish when my brother Jason pulled me out of the race because he assumed I was hallucinating after I called him Shawn. A pretty poor excuse to take someone out of a race, don't you think? (laughing)

Shortly thereafter I created my current pedal boat. To practice for the MR340 and distance records, I started doing 24 hour time trials on my bike trainer in my basement, then on the road with my steel bike, then finally on the river in my boat.

The 2019 MR340 got delayed several times, but when it finally went off it was late in the

season and a balmy 24 degrees at the start. My mistake on that day was not wearing sunglasses or a ball cap. The sun was very bright, and I burned my corneas. I was 8 or 9 miles ahead of the next closest guy at my first stop, averaging around 11 mph (with the current). I noticed it felt like it was getting mistier and mistier throughout the day, but it was actually my vision clouding. I really struggled at night with my vision. When the sun came up the next day it was very painful. My eyes even at night felt like they had sand in them. I was a little slower the next day, and I was running with my eyes closed part of the time. After observing my erratic course on the water, the race officials in the safety boat pulled me over for a safety check within 48 miles of the finish. I told them I would have been fine except for the fog – which I didn't realize was my eyes. I pretty much had to quit at that point. When I got in the van I could hardly see my wife 5 feet away!



*Matt's pedal boat being reconstructed in carbon fiber.*



The MR340 is sort of my kryptonite; I still have the goal of finishing the race in record time. But at least I know the boat I have now is very capable; it's difficult for a single kayaker to compete against it in speed. In the various races I enter my pedal boat can usually just walk away from the other paddlers. I can comfortably average 6.5 – 7 mph for 24 hours, and I'm not in the shape of some of these younger guys. It's very fast and efficient. I'm really oriented towards long races; I'm not a sprinter.

**CN:** What led you from a Hobie drive unit to creating your own "pedal paddler"?

**Matt:** I've always been a cyclist, and I can ride my bike seemingly forever. The paddling stroke felt inefficient to me, so I decided to try a pedaling unit. I looked initially at propellers, but found they were quite inefficient. Then I looked at the Hobie unit, and it seemed to be more efficient. I

modified it somewhat and made it faster, but it still had some of the drag of a propeller in that it's pushing itself through the water. Also the Hobie motion is more tiring and less efficient than the more circular, cycling motion.

I then abandoned the propeller/Hobie idea and studied the perfect paddle stroke to see if I could replicate it mechanically. I

wanted to take two full paddle strokes for every revolution of my legs. I use outrigger paddles and vary the size of the blades like gears to get the load I want. I initially built a unit with 4 paddles, but there's quite a load when all the paddles are in the water, so I went with two paddles. The two-paddle unit is far smoother and easier; it feels like I can pedal it forever.

My boat hull was made by Yancy Scroggins. It's the boat that won the pedal-drive division in the MR 340 in 2018 with a propeller (powered by Ellen Falterman). I got rid of the propeller system and went to my paddle system. I rebuilt the boat in aluminum initially, then I rebuilt it in carbon. All up, the boat is 41 lbs. It's a very comfortable boat to paddle. I have an oval gear set-up to speed up the paddles in the air and slow them down in the water to optimize paddle speed at



*Matt taking a break following a good workout. You need to see a video of this boat in action to really appreciate the genius of the mechanism.*

every part of the stroke. My system tries to mimic the way a paddler puts his paddle in the water at an angle, pulls it through the water, removes it vertically, and recovers rapidly. I didn't want to create any splash and I wanted to maximize efficiency. If I change paddles, I have to modify my set-up. Each paddle is taking an 18" deep stroke; they're fully buried in the water. I can do 150 strokes per minute (spinning cadence of 70-75 rpm with 2 paddle strokes per rotation) and feel like I'm not really working. I'm using outrigger ZRE paddles, but I modify the lip on the paddle to be flat. Paddles are mounted to cycling cleats that clip onto the power unit to make it easier to swap paddles.

**I wear cycling shoes and clip in to my pedals as well.**

I modified a recumbent bike seat for my boat, but I'm constantly modifying the seat in search of the optimum configuration. It's quite comfortable for 24 hours, but all seats can be improved. All-out, I can get up to 11 mph on flat water, but it's pretty easy to cruise at 6.5 mph for hours on end. My goal is to figure out how to get an 8 mph flat-water cruise.

**CN:** Impressive! Do you have any future plans with your boat or drive system?

**Matt:** I've found that a 3-person racing kayak is about 1 mph faster than a single-person racing kayak. So I'm currently building a 3-person pedal boat to see if it holds true for pedal boating as

well. The 3-person 24-hour record is not that fast; I think it should be an easy record to nab. After breaking the 3-person record, I also want to try to break the solo record, and then have the two other (faster) people in my 3-person boat try break my solo record successively. Currently all the flowing-water records are set on the Yukon River, but I want to move the records to the Missouri River. It's a great river for racing: plenty of space, plenty of depth, fast flow, and a supportive group of people along the way.

Aside from the 3-person pedal boat, I'm experimenting with pumping air bubbles under the bottom of the boat to reduce friction using a pedal-driven pump. Some large boats are seeing gains of 8% by using pumped air under the hull to reduce drag, so I'm hoping to see some gains as well.

**CN:** What kind of training routine do you use to prepare for these extremely long marathons?

**Matt:** As a practice I like to pedal / paddle from Jeff City to St. Charles (115 miles) to test chang-



*And transportation is as easy as that! I'm sure he gets more than a few stares as he travels down the road.*

es to my boat (I do this run at least once a week.) When I do my 24 hour practice sessions on my trainer bike, I just get into a zone and go. I don't like opera, but I tend to listen to opera when doing those long pedals. My legs really don't bother me during these long sessions. They take an hour or so to warm up and they let me know the last hour before I stop, but otherwise I'm feeling good during most of the ride. I did 17, 24-hour endurance runs before last year's race. Of those 17, 4 or 5 were on the river in my boat, 1 on the road with my bike, and 10 or 11 in the basement using my bike trainer. I also use some of these endurance runs to figure out my hydration to prevent hallucinations. Running

straight through, my MR340 pace should be 32 hours. The fastest it has been done is 33 hours by a 6-man crew, so I'm hopeful that I can set a new record with this boat.

**CN:** Are you planning to market your boat? And how do you transport it? Does it disassemble?

**Matt:** I'm really good at going bankrupt on my own. We'll see, depending on how the boat does in my record attempts and what kind of demand there is. It would likely be a costly boat to produce, so I suspect the market would be limited.

Other than removing the paddles, I don't do any disassembly of the boat for transport. It

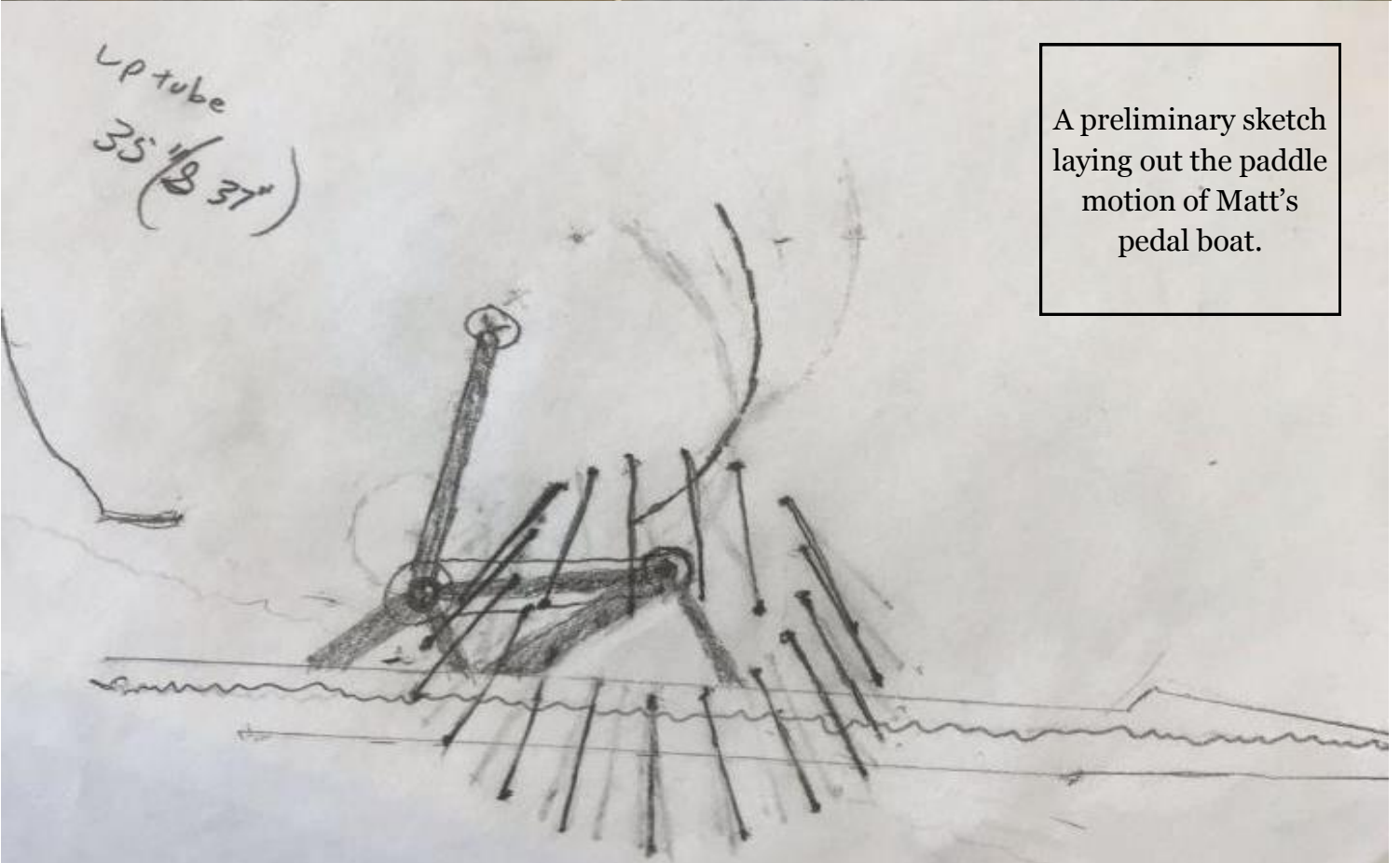
just gets put on a rack on top of my mini-van for transport. I am mindful, however, not to go through a drive-thru!

**CN:** Thank you for your time, Matt. You have quite a creative and impressive human-powered boat. I'm looking forward to following your record attempts, and even trying the boat out for myself sometime in the near future. And I'll be sure to post an update to this article when I do!

**Matt:** Thank you! I cannot wait for you to try out the boat and thanks for putting out this magazine for the paddling community. Cheers!



*Matt swapping out a paddle from the drive system.*



A preliminary sketch laying out the paddle motion of Matt's pedal boat.

# HOLLIE HALL—MAXIMUM TALENT

STEVEN HORNEY



*Hollie Hall racing the Chattajack in 2019. Photo by Rick White.*

**CN:** Hi Hollie – thank you so much for taking the time to be interviewed by *Canoe News* magazine. You’re a very rapidly rising star in the world of kayak racing, and you’ve accomplished an incredible amount in just the past few years. Tell us a little about yourself and how you got into paddling.

**Hollie:** Thank you for this opportunity. I’ve always been the

kind of person to challenge myself; I set up hurdles in my backyard as a 9 year old kid, constantly raising them as my skill increased. And that drive has followed me in everything I do, including my current job as a yoga instructor. The first time I actually kayaked was with my husband George on our honeymoon in 2011 at Siesta Key in Florida. We were only paddling little recreational 9 foot sit-on-tops, but I re-

ally loved it and I knew right away that we needed to own kayaks; being on the water like that provided a really special time together for the two of us. So we started out buying a couple of basic recreational kayaks, but it wasn’t long before we upgraded to some Wilderness Systems boats and then on to some higher quality recreational boats. At one point we had 14 boats in our garage (!), but they were all



recreational kayaks. In 2015 we started a Facebook group to enable us to meet up and paddle with what we thought would be just a few of our friends; it ultimately grew to over 4500 followers. It was called Tri-State Kayakers in Huntington, West Virginia (the largest city near us), and we ran that group from 2015 until this year. We decided to hand it over to a couple of friends who run a recreational kayaking business, since we're now more in the racing scene.

**CN:** How did your recreational paddling morph into racing?

**Hollie:** George was the first one to start racing in 2017. I stepped back from kayaking that year due to family happenings. But things changed when I attended the Ohio State Championship Race at Fairport Harbor on the Grand River to watch George race. Racing viewing was very spectator-friendly, with the opportunity to watch the kayakers pass by several times. At one point I saw Mary Jo Monte right on the tail of my



*Hollie Hall with trophies from the 2019 USCA Nationals. Photo by George Hall.*

husband's kayak, the two of them battling down the river with great intensity. Their grit and determination was palpable, and it ignited my pilot light to challenging myself. I thought "I can do that! Why am I not out there?!?"

George took first place in his division that day and after the ceremony, I told my husband that I wanted to try racing. Beginning in August 2017, I tried three races: my first race was the Paddle Grapple in NC, which I entered in the recreational division with an Epic V5 surf ski. That's all it took; at that point I was hooked! In the following two races I advanced to an Epic V10 Sport and began racing it in the Open Class at the Kayak River Run in Ravena, KY on the Kentucky River, and at the Great Ohio River Odyssey in Louisville, KY on the Ohio River. In preparation for the 2018 race season, George and I went to Southern Paddle Sports (when Pat Dour was running the shop) where I purchased an Epic V10L to increase my competitiveness for the coming year. Pat became our paddle sponsor in 2018, my first full race season. In August of 2018 at the USCA Nationals I won a gold racing a Stellar S18S in K1 Sea Kayak Woman, a silver racing an Epic V10L in K1 Open Woman, and a silver racing with Kim Lucas (of Performance Kayak, Inc.) in a Stellar S2EL Tandem in K2 Open Women. I ended 2018 with a first place finish at the Chattajack race in a Stellar S18S. After Chattajack, Ben Lawry and Dave Thomas of Stellar

contacted me and wanted to sponsor me in the 2019 season with the new Stellar SEA "Assassin!" I was really humbled. That was an amazing opportunity. I'll also be racing for Stellar in the 2020 season.

**CN:** You've had an impressively fast rise to the top of kayak racing; did you engage in any type of special training to enable you to reach that goal?

**Hollie:** I've always loved fitness and challenges, really any type of competitions. George is my coach. He has a lengthy background in coaching as well as a history as a Cat II competitive cyclist, so he comes with solid qualifications. Since both of us race, we work together to build our skills and he gives me my training program. In 2018 my skills just developed over the season, but in 2019 I started seriously using an erg to train in the off season.

I also have an affinity for learning. Soaking up valuable info from the experienced paddlers through conversation and written articles has helped tremendously. I love to research and have a knack at breaking down fundamentals and applying them. I sought out forward stroke clinics and even attended Ben Lawry's Kayak Camp at Tybee Island in March of 2019. I strive to continually grow and develop in each given opportunity, and am thankful and blessed by those who have been, and continue to be, a unique part of my journey.

In 2018 I was told I should really go to the Nationals. It was an intimidating thought but George talked to me a bit and I decided I would give it a try. I'm racing against some very experienced women, so it has been a whole new learning experience. The Nationals are so much fun and such a great time! It's a wonderful scene and experience. I would love to see a lot more women participate.

In addition to my boat-specific training, I believe my yoga skills boosted my ability to balance in the more elite surf skis and enabled me to move into the faster boats more rapidly than I might have otherwise. The strength and flexibility I gained from my yoga practice aided me in transitioning to the race scene as well. I also credit the breathwork and mindfulness which I practice in enabling me to maintain a clear and focused mindset and a conscious awareness of my breathing during training and racing session.

I paddled an Epic V10L for 2018, but later purchased an Epic V14 for training. The V14 is a fast boat, but it was really a surf ski designed for a larger individual. In 2019 I was introduced to the then new Stellar SEA; this new boat became my perfect match. Stellar's SEA turned out to be "just right" for me in terms of size and ergonomics. But the work in the V14 didn't go to waste; it definitely helped my transition into the SEA. Now I'm really looking

forward to going into 2020 with the same boat I paddled in 2019; changing boats each season can be challenging!

**CN:** With all the involvement you and George have in kayak racing, did any of that interest flow down to your children? And what do you see for yourself in the foreseeable future?

**Hollie:** I have two children; an 18 year old senior in HS (Elijah) and a 14 year old (Nate). Elijah isn't really into paddling, but Nate enjoys paddle boarding and he enters a few races, although not too seriously. The kids seem to take other involvements more seriously.

As for the future, I try to just take it a few days at a time. I'm still building experience, but I try to be an ambassador for the sport and get more ladies in-

involved. There are a lot of female recreational paddlers who could do quite well in the sport of kayak racing.

Racing has really opened up a great opportunity to challenge myself both mentally and physically; I'm doing stuff I never knew I was capable of! I'm always trusting the Lord to keep me safe; He carries me through. Getting paddler of the year was a shock, as were winning three golds at the Nationals. I was very pleased with how the Nationals went. Some events I'll be focusing on this year and am very excited for will be the Three Rivers Regatta in Knoxville, TN, the US-CA Nationals in Newaygo, MI, and Chattajack 31 in Chattanooga, TN. Stellar was very supportive of me during the 2019 racing season; I'm looking forward to



*Hollie Hall tackling Flame Rapids at the 2019 USCA Nationals. In Warren, PA.  
Photo by John Foreman*

paddling for Stellar again in 2020.

**CN:** How often do you race? Do you have any favorite or memorable races?

**Hollie:** I like to race often; I believe it really helps my performance. I raced 20 races in 2018, and 19 races in 2019. I've raced in 9 states and placed in all 9 states. Most of my races are in OH, PA, KY, and TN. I like the longer marathon races: 22(+/-) milers are my favorites. My first race of the season will be Paddle Bender on Lake Murray in SC. Last year at Paddle Bender there were 6 experienced women in the unlimited class; we all 6 came in within 2 minutes of each other! I was being pushed to my limits in that race: the water was wavy, I was in the SEA for the first time in such conditions, and it was hot! Overall, I would have to say the Chattajack is the toughest race I do. Not only is it long - 31 miles - the conditions can also be very challenging, oftentimes causing several contestants to bail out of the race early.

**CN:** You've mentioned a couple of times that you would love to see more people in general and specifically women take up paddle racing; what do you see as the best way to increase interest in our sport?

**Hollie:** The number one thing I would say to get women and teens into competitive paddling: talk to people! Also, invite them to spectate an event to see what

goes on to help ease any doubts or fears. Racers should talk to recreational paddlers and vice-versa when presented with the opportunity. Initially, I felt intimidated when I attended a race and saw all sorts of skinny little surf skis. After a race when there is time to mingle and get to know other paddlers ultimately relieved that feeling I was experiencing, leading me to realize how supportive, special, and unique the paddling community is!

When leading my yoga classes, I strive to help others believe in themselves, and it's my hope that this carries over into the paddle racing world. We first must simply try. Some people may not know how much fun racing is - no matter what choice of

vessel - simply from having never experienced it! We could talk about racing all day; however, I believe nothing replaces an experience. Encourage them to get into a recreational race; don't race for time, just enter to see how exhilarating it is to experience overcoming challenges and discovering inner strength - as well as gaining an entire community to support your endeavors!

**CN:** Thank you so much for your time, Hollie. We'll look forward to seeing you race in 2020!

**Hollie:** It's been a pleasure. Thank you, again, for providing this opportunity to share. Perhaps it will ignite an interest in those wishing to give paddle racing a try.



*Hollie Hall receiving the USCA Paddler of the Year trophy at the 2019 USCA Nationals in Warren, PA. Next to Hollie are Rebecca Davis and Roland Muhlen.*

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# ATHOL RAT RACE

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PETER HEED



## **A Canoe Race and Pre-Race Meeting Like No Other: The Wild, Wacky, and Wonderful Athol Rat Race**

*It is early April in New England. The ice has just gone out. The rivers are open, but the water is cold and running high. It is time for that annual canoe racing Rite of Spring - the unique and wild Athol to Orange, MA "River Rat Race" on Millers River!*

Not only is the "River Rat Race" one of the oldest Canoe races in North America (this will be it's 57th year!), but it also has enjoyed a well earned reputation for being....well, different! And we mean "different" in a good sort of way. The race always attracts a huge field of C 2 canoe teams (often 300+), which includes many of the top paddlers from the US and Canada, as well as a large contingent of "first time" racers. The race course is relatively short - about 5 miles -

but that only seems to enhance the fun and excitement, as every team sprints all out for a chance at some prize money. Did I mention that the "River Rat Race" pays out prize money to the top 40 boats across the finish line in Orange, MA ?!?

This is truly a canoe race like no other. What else makes it so different and so special? First, the Race Committee has their own unique canoe specifications which do not match any other

widely accepted spec rules such as the 3 X 27 pro boat or USCA 4 X 32 cruiser. Most recreational type hulls (Old Town, Coleman, Mad River, etc.) meet the Rat Race Spec, but if you really want to go fast and have a shot to win, you will need a specially designed and built “Rat Boat”, which you will probably only use once a year! This has resulted in a unique cottage industry which has grown up in western Mass. around the building and trading of wood strip Rat Boats! If you don’t have a “Rat Boat” hanging up somewhere in your New England barn or garage, you are probably not a serious Rat Racer!

What else makes this race so special? How about the start? All 300 or more canoes start at once in a narrow river less than 10 yards across! Canoes line up by number with sterns to the bank, packed tight, gunwale to gunwale. When the gun goes off, it is pure chaos - most closely resembling a demolition derby. People crash and bash! Giant “log jams” of canoes form and spin out of control. Experienced racers try their best to avoid the jams and sneak through the pack. The safety “scuba rescue” folks in their wetsuits always have plenty of business pulling less fortunate paddlers out of the river!

If you do not start among the top 150 canoes, it is very difficult to win, given the short race distance of 5 miles. The crucial starting position numbers are given out at the pre-race meeting



“draw” (more on this below). The race committee requires each boat to carry a very large competitor # which goes in the bottom of the canoe so as to be visible to the helicopter which follows the racers and sends live update reports to the radio station(!) - although they are now switching to camera drones for this purpose. There is a *Rat Race Parade* through town which precedes the race, complete with floats, bands, and local dignitaries. The race committee still refers to the women racers as the “all girls class.” The local newspaper actually publishes betting odds on the top teams, once the starting positions are made known at the pre-race meeting the evening before the race. And then there are the spectators. Literally, thousands and thousands of race fans line the banks of Millers River to watch this wild canoe race (i.e. the “carnage”). The “Rat Race” consistently attracts the largest crowd of spectators to watch a canoe race outside of

Grayling, MI or Shawinigan, Quebec.

Clearly, the “Rat Race” is different. Yet one of the most distinct and unusual aspects of this wild event is the “Pre-Race Meeting Draw” for starting positions, which takes place the evening before the race. I realize that all paddlesport racers have been to countless standard pre-race meetings in which officials calmly explain the rules, the course, and safety considerations - but this is NOTHING like that. The Athol Memorial Hall is packed with hundreds of racers and their families - every seat is taken. Standing room only. Up on the stage are tables with officials, and a huge drum turns round and round with all of the entries. Some official is making remarks and announcements at the podium over a loudspeaker system, but few can make out even a single word over the roar of the crowd. TV camera crews from a local station wait to interview the

racers as their numbers are drawn. You have to yell to be heard by someone standing right next to you.

The mood is electric. The crowd noise almost unbearable. Rumors are flying. Who will draw the best numbers this year? Who will get stuck in the back of the pack? Who is here from “out of town?” Somebody says they just saw Rebecca and Mike Davis pull in from Michigan. Somebody else says that they saw the Pellerin brothers from Québec! Shane MacDowell is overheard talking about his new “Rat Boat” - built by his father, Bob MacDowell - and it is fast! But what difference will it all make if they get a bad number, and are stuck in the back of the pack? Only time will tell.

Then it starts. With great drama and fanfare, the competitors’

numbers are pulled from the turning drum, one by one. Each team is announced, and the crowd roars! Like Bingo on steroids !! As the numbers are pulled and announced, each team goes up to the stage to receive their T-shirts and boat numbers, and then to be interviewed by the TV and radio reporters on hand. Any time a top competitive team’s name is announced, the place goes crazy. “Brent Lyesiuk and John Berry, number 46!” Huge roar! The local boys have drawn a good number, but do they have a chance? Has Zaveral’s number been pulled? Is Bob Rapant really making a comeback? “Trevor Lefever and Ben Schlimmer. Number 92!” More crowd cheers! They are around the corner, but can anybody beat them? On and on it goes, until after 9 PM when there are just a few numbers left

in the drum. Most people have now gone home. The only thing these last few teams can hope for is winning the “Pass the Most Boats” trophy. There’s always next year!

And so it goes at the “Rat Race Draw.” This unique pre-race meeting is one of the factors that makes the “Rat Race” experience so special, so unique, so much darn fun. If you are a canoe racer, this incredible event should be on your bucket list. You owe it to yourself - not only to paddle the “Rat Race” but to experience the wild, wacky, wonderful Rat Race Draw. You will not be disappointed - even if you end up in the back of the pack! Hope to see you on Millers River!

Peter Heed





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Charles River Watershed Association

**SUNDAY  
APRIL 26  
2020**

# Run of the Charles

Kick off the paddling season with the 38th Annual *Run of the Charles*: Boston's Premier Paddling Race this spring! Each year, over 1,000 paddlers and spectators gather to compete on the Charles River in New England's largest flat-bottomed boat race. Founded as an initiative to get people out on the river and celebrate the clean up of Boston's infamous "Dirty Water," today's *Run of the Charles* continues this legacy with new courses and a Finishline Festival at DCR's Artesani/Herter Park. Courses include a 14-mile relay and 12-mile, 6-mile, and 3-mile races. Each race finishes by the Finishline Festival, which hosts a live band, food trucks, raffle, vendors, award ceremony, and a beer garden.

*Registration opens in January. Don't miss your chance to sponsor or enter Boston's Premier Paddling Race.*

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190 Park Rd, Weston, MA 02493  
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e [rotc@crwa.org](mailto:rotc@crwa.org)

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# A PITCH FOR HEELING

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BRUCE KEMP



## PART 1

If you're reading this article it's a good bet that you've seen a video or two where a paddler has significantly heeled (tipped) the canoe, sometimes all the way down to the rail, while executing a turn. You may have thought "OK that looks cool, but why do that? Is it just some way of making something simple look fancy- just another way of showing off?" Well a bit of that maybe, but heeling has

an effect on the hull that can be very useful.

Most canoes are designed to track (resist turning) quite well when level in the water (side to side and front to back) and paddled correctly. The keel line (length of the hull that is below the waterline) is relatively long compared to the width of the hull and it parts the water nicely as it travels forward or backwards. In general, the longer the keel line and the nar-

rower the boat, the more efficiently this happens. Thus, racing and fast tripping canoes tend to be long and narrow, while canoes designed for maneuverability tend to be shorter and wider. Regardless of the design when one attempts to turn the canoe, the ends of the hull must push a lot of water to one side or the other and this requires additional effort.



Before beginning our turn we spend some energy getting the canoe moving; creating momentum. Any effort spent while turning the canoe, expends energy and reduces that momentum. One way of reducing that effort is to add rocker. Rocker is a curvature of the keel line from front to back. This raises the bow and stern a bit, causing the bottom shape of the hull to look in profile a bit like the rung of a rocking chair. With the ends now sitting a little higher in the water, the amount of water that needs to be pushed aside as the boat turns is reduced and the turning is going to be a little easier. Looking at two extremes, a typical racing

canoe will have little or no rocker while a whitewater play boat will often have so much rocker that it begins to resemble a banana and is sometimes humorously referred to as such. The more rocker, the easier the boat turns. When I began canoeing, I was told that I could buy a canoe that tracked (went straight) well or one that turned well, or one that did a little of each (but wouldn't be all that great at either). The common wisdom was that to cover my bases, from lake tripping to running rivers, I'd need a selection of canoes.

Well, not necessarily. I'm here to tell you that you can have your cake, and eat it too. You can have a single canoe that will both track nicely and also turn efficiently

when you want it to. Your dream canoe. It's one that has a fairly straight keel line when you want it to go straight but can be converted to a highly rockered canoe when you want it to turn. In fact, it may well be the canoe that you already have in your shed. Picture most any canoe, be it a tripping, touring, racing, or general purpose craft. Sit it flat on the ground or better yet, float it on a pond (if on the ground, you'll have to use a bit of imagination). You'll notice the keel line runs the full length of the boat or nearly so. Now, tip the boat a bit to one side or the other. The tipped down side has now effectively become the bottom of the boat and the ends (stems) of the boat have risen higher in the water (or the imagined water). The keel line

has become much shorter and the canoe suddenly has more rocker. The further you heel the boat, the greater the rocker, to the point where the stems may leave the water entirely.

The trick is in learning how to control that rocker. How to heel the canoe onto its side, smoothly and consistently; when, where and how far you need to; and then how to flatten it back out with the same level of control. Generally a modest heel is sufficient to get the job done but the further you heel the boat, the greater the rocker and the less it resists turning. It even matters which way you heel it, toward or away from the turn, but that's for another article. In other words, how you adjust your canoe to



meet your needs at any moment. This can be done while sitting or kneeling, though you'll have infinitely more control when kneeling.

So, do you still think it's just something that looks cool, that it's a way of showing off? It can be that for sure, but it's much more about precision boat control. It's about the ability to have a nice tracking touring boat, which at your whim, becomes rockered and turns on a dime before continuing on its journey. It's about transforming/fine tuning your canoe, on the go, constantly.

The two videos linked below show a no frills axle (a basic turn

to the on side) using a modest heel to enhance the turn. The 1<sup>st</sup> video is at normal speed while the second is at 1/4 speed.

3 point axle at normal speed.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhsGKTF\\_o0Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhsGKTF_o0Y)

3 point axle at 1/4 speed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGp3sYe-Hx4>

***Just as important as rocker, is pitch. We'll explore that in part 2 of this series.*** Heel and pitch can be used just as effectively in **both solo and tandem canoes**. In a tandem canoe, with both paddlers working in harmony, it's a beautiful thing to experience or watch. The video that will

be included at the end of part 2 of this series includes numerous demonstrations in real world settings.

Controlling rocker and pitch are key elements that are taught by FreeStyle instructors at all of our events.

*See page 19 for more information.*





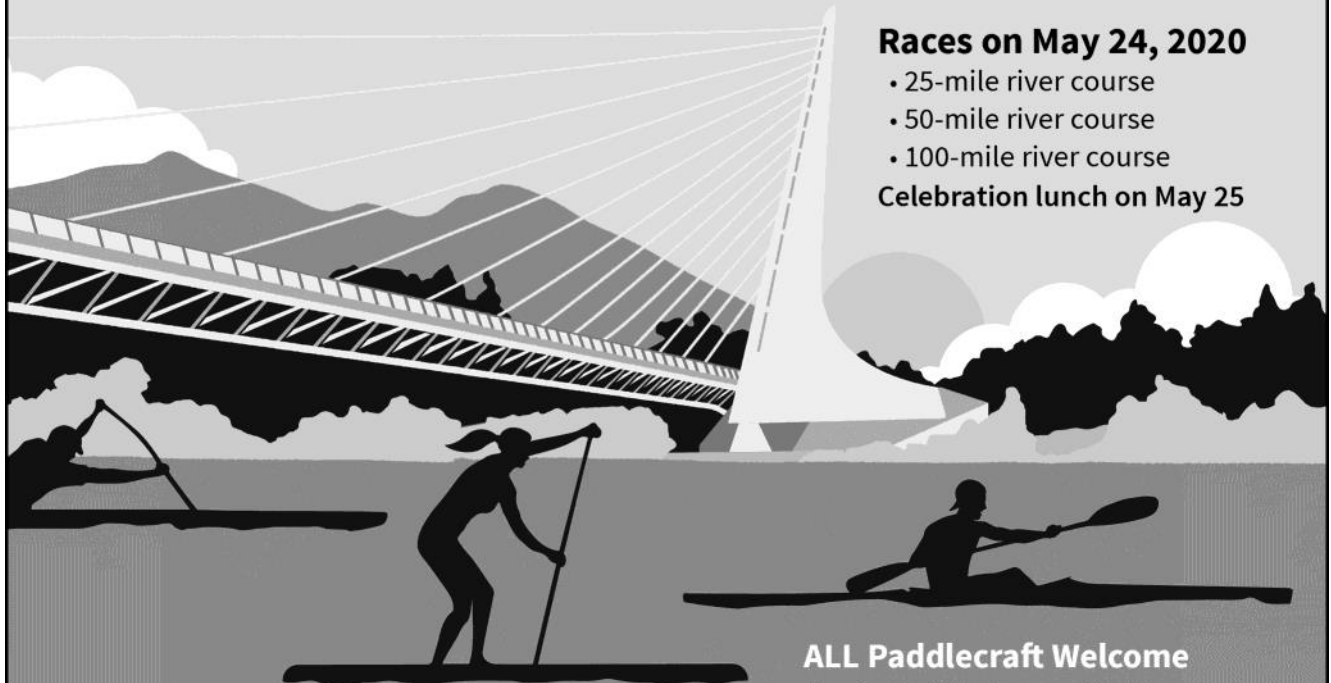
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*Adaptive Paddling* – Jan Whitaker  
*Auditing* – Steve Rosenau  
*Barton Award (Sub-ctee, Youth Activities)*  
- Phoebe Reese & Teresa Stout  
*Bylaws Review* - Lynne McDuffie  
*Camaraderie* – Open  
*Camping/Cruising* - Bob Allen  
*Competition* – Norm Ludwig  
*Competition / Dragon Boat* - Robert McNamara  
*Competition / Kayak* – Ron Kaiser  
*Competition / Nationals Awards* – Open  
*Competition / Orienteering* – Stephen Miller  
*Competition / Outrigger Canoe* – Steven Horney  
*Competition / Adult Sprints* – John Edwards  
*Competition / Youth Sprints* - Open  
*Competition / Standup Paddleboard* - Lloyd Reeves  
*Competition / Swan Boat* - Glen Green  
*Conservation* - TBD  
*Education* - Lynne Witte  
*FreeStyle* - Molly Gurien  
*Historian* - Joan Theiss  
*Instructor Certification* – Bob Spain & Tave Lamperez  
*Insurance Oversight*- Joan Theiss & Scott Stenberg  
*International* - John Edwards  
*Marketing* – Earl Brimeyer  
*Membership* – Lynne McDuffie  
*Merchandise Sales* – Larry Latta  
*Nationals Coordinator*– Teresa Stout  
*Nominating* – Tricia Heed  
*Publications* – Steven Horney  
*Publicity & PR* – Open  
*Safety* – Glen Green  
*Technical Inspection* – Bill Corrigan  
*USCA Bylaws/Rules/Regulations Review & Oversight* – Joan Theiss  
*USCA/ IC F Grants* – Priscilla Reinertsen  
*Youth Activities* – Phoebe Reese & Teresa Stout  
*Webmaster*- Larry Latta  
*Women's Interest* – Teresa Stout

## **Special Appointments**

*USCA Marathon Coordinator to USACK Marathon Committee* -Kaitlyn McElroy

## **Business Affiliates**

### **American Dragon Boat Association**

John Miller; Dubuque, IA  
dboatmny@aol.com

### **Great Hollow Nature Preserve**

John Foley; New Fairchild, CT  
jfoley@greathollow.org

### **Housatonic Valley Association**

Alison Dixon; Stockbridge, MA  
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### **Island Inspired Boards, LLC**

Catherine Sutz; Myrtle Beach, SC  
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### **Performance Kayak, Inc.**

Hansel Lucas; West Newton, PA  
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### **The Paddle Attic**

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### **Western Penn Solo Canoe Rendezvous**

Bruce Kemp; Fenelton, PA  
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### **Yadkin Riverkeeper, Inc.**

Katie Wilder; Winston-Salem, NC  
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## **Club Affiliates without a Delegate**

### **Birch Hill Canoe Club**

Charley Brackett; Fitzwilliam, NH  
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### **Bridges Athletic Club**

Jack Brosius; Chestertown, MD  
jack.rosincreek@gmail.com

### **Cranberry Lake Boat Club**

Debra Roberts; Cranberry Lake, NY  
debroberts54@gmail.com

### **Dayton Canoe Club**

Thomas Shulder; Dayton, OH  
tshuler1@aol.com

### **Elderly Paddlers Association**

Michael Miller; Cincinnati, OH  
mmmillermc@gmail.com

### **Friends of the Great Swamp**

Loretta Wallace; Brewster, NY  
laurwally@aol.com

### **Island Paddlers**

David Donner; Amherst, NY  
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### **Middle Grand River Organization of Watersheds (MGROW)**

Loretta Crum; Lansing, MI  
lcrum@mgrow.org

### **New England Kayak Fishing**

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seahorsech@comcast.net

### **Outrigger Chicago**

Olaf Pippel, Chicago, IL  
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### **River Advocates of South Central CT**

Mary Mushinsky; Wallingford, CT  
marymuchinsky@att.net

### **River City Paddlers**

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joilynnz0222@gmail.com

### **Shark River Paddling**

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### **Symmec Creek Restoration Committee**

Harry Mayenchein; Chesapeake, OH  
hmanshine@zoominternet.net

### **Texas Outrigger Canoe Club**

Kristen Helm; Houston, TX  
krishelm@earthlink.net

### **Tour du Teche, Inc.**

Trey Snyder; St. Martinville, LA  
treysnyder.cpa@gmail.com

### **Westfield River Watershed Association**

Michael Young; Westfield, MA  
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