

NewsStreams

Because Clean Water Can't Wait



Front and Back Cover Photos:
Susan Griffin Ward

NewsStreams

Because Clean Water Can't Wait - Summer 2020



Kentucky Water Flows Within: Red River Gorge

by Chris Karrer, KWA Intern



During the second week of March 2020, two friends and I made the trek from Louisville to Red River Gorge Geological Area of the Daniel Boone National Forest in an attempt to

escape the hustle of our city life for a few short days. At the time of our departure, the COVID-19 pandemic had not yet restricted our travel but the chaos surrounding the issue was enough to motivate, at least in some part, our decision to get away. Without phone service and far from the steady stream of discouraging news, we found ourselves immersed in the peace and solitude of the Kentucky wilderness which has mesmerized locals and tourists alike for generations.

Our journey into the forest began along Copperas Creek within the Clifty Wilderness with our final destination as the Copperas Falls: a plunging 42 foot tall waterfall which supplies the gentle creek below. The nearly 2-mile hike to the falls provided plenty of time for contemplation and the various features surrounding this trail resulted in rather charming revelations.

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A Message From Ward Wilson

Executive Director, Kentucky Waterways Alliance

Dear Friends,

So many things have changed in the past couple of months. First and foremost, the lost lives and sickness from coronavirus are heartbreaking. We don't yet understand all the economic costs and effects of disruption on nearly every single person in the world. My hope is that we will come out of this time stronger and more united having gone through this together. In this issue of Newstreams, you will read about some amazing people and how they band together to work for healthier waterways.

The work of Kentucky Waterways Alliance has been affected, but not stopped. We have not laid off any staff or cut their hours, but we are working from home. The board had our first virtual board meeting in April with 100 percent attendance. We've had to postpone fundraisers, but also were pleased that Mint Julep Month still happened. KWA was able to replace some lost revenue with a Paycheck Protection Program loan, but we still project much lower income this year than was budgeted. We need your support now more than ever. Please consider a monthly donation plan to keep us working to protect, restore, and celebrate the wonderful waterways of Kentucky.

This is a beautiful time in Kentucky. We find comfort in the greening landscape, the spring wildflowers, and the rising waters we see this year, as has happened each year for millennia. The waterways are still there and they still need our help. We just have to find new ways to do what we do. With the support of our members, corporate sponsors, and partner organizations, we will keep on working for the waterways of Kentucky and the people and wildlife sustained by them.



Ward

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Linda Cowan - Salt River
Caitlin Johnson - Salt River

Kentucky Water Flows Within

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Hiking upstream towards the falls, I expected to see just that: a stream. Yet, the creek revealed only its dry, rocky bed. This continued for nearly an hour, with no more than mere puddles between great slabs of sandstone and shale. "Where is the water?" I thought. Early springtime in Kentucky is particularly soggy and my expectations were being challenged. That was only true until I heard the familiar sloshing of a frantic creek. Surreal as it was, I stood upon the dry rocks before the flowing water as it sharply ducked into a manhole-sized opening beneath a massive fallen rock. The terminal point of this stream could not be seen because it was underground, yet no less pervasive than those above.



Copperas Creek in the Red River Gorge

As I processed the sight before me, I came to the realization that Kentucky's water is always present, both physically and within our minds. Its power has shaped our landscape, powered our industries, and built our largest cities. Its beauty has inspired poets, painters, and writers alike. Its purity, filtered through the ancient limestone we stand upon, fills our glasses in more than one form. Whether or not we stand before its passage does not impede its flow, for at its furthest it remains just a few feet below. As I processed this hydrological phenomenon that day in the forest, I took a moment to appreciate the water which provides for us in myriad ways before our eyes, other times unseen, yet forever coursing through the veins of our state.

Note: Chris Karrer is a recent graduate of the University of Louisville's Sustainability program. He lives in the Salt River watershed.

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Russ Miller: River Cowboy

by Laura Gregory, KWA Red River Watershed Coordinator

He's been called "River Cowboy," a "Gentle Man," "Front Page Miller," "Sisyphus" and more. But don't ever call him Late For Dinner. He is Russ Miller and he has done more than any single person to clean Kentucky's cherished, nationally protected Wild & Scenic, Red River. Russ asks for little, but gives a lot. And he'll be the first one to tell you that he's had lots of help from his friends of which he has many.



Photo: Fred Ostrem

Russ Miller paddling the Red River with his dog Romeo

ties like wood for heat and cooking and food from the well-tended garden. He makes a little money as he needs it and chooses to volunteer as an environmental activist. Russ moves through life at his unique pace. He is methodical and intentional and the result is meaningful, artistic, focused, and genuine: an inspiration.

On his own volition, Russ started the extraordinary Upper Red River Cleanup (aka Tire Round-up) in 1996 on a 9-mile section of Red River that includes the nationally protected Wild & Scenic portion. Russ goes out solo (sometimes with a friend) multiple times before the cleanup to dig-out, dislodge, de-mud and stash tires so that the cleanup goes quicker and smoother when the tire herders/friends join.

In May 1999 Russ wrote in the Wolfe County News, "For those of you that haven't been able to float the Wild and Scenic part of Red River, its beauty might be difficult to imagine. In spring its jade green water flows between banks scattered with wildflowers, overhanging branches are reflected in the pools, and the sun turns the water to molten crystal as it cascades over rocks and between magnificent boulders. Feeder streams create waterfalls that drop into the river as water birds fly away around the bend and sandstone cliff faces rise up against the sky. It is the essence of what people seek to find in nature."

During the initial cleanups of 1996-1999, 100+ tires were removed each year by volunteers from local

Wolfe, Powell, and Breathitt Counties as well as USFS, Bluegrass Wildwater Association (BWA), Sierra Club, and more. Russ's early river cleanups coincided with his time as Wolfe County's VOLUNTEER Solid Waste Coordinator between ~1999 - 2003.

In the Wolfe County News, March 1998, Russ asks, "Which Side are you on? It is said that we inherit the sins of our fathers. Nowhere is this more evident than when we see trash along our roads and streams. What has been taken from us because of the neglect of others? What joys will we not receive? The beauty of a hillside free of trash, the wonder of clean water, the health of our community, the unblemished vision of the creator in nature? Can our children remember any of these things that we enjoyed as children? How do we reach the members of our community that continue to trash our county? How do we stimulate an awareness of a shared vision of an environment in which we can take pride? How do we come together to eliminate this sin of trash? How do we move into a new vision? Where do we begin? There are those in our county that believe only a few are concerned with its condition and until they can see the county working to change, they will continue their old patterns. Either you want change (in our roadsides and streams) or you don't. There is no middle ground. Change requires action - Which side are you on?"

June 2006, after years of cleanup efforts, Russ wrote in The Wolfe County News, "As the river has become cleaner and the reputation of the hospitality of our community has spread, we have attracted more visitors to our county. This stimulates our economy and gives others a chance to benefit from the restorative virtues of nature. The credit for this success belongs to those that participate in these cleanups and to individuals that have worked to make this a cleaner county. Together we have cleaned up Red River, eliminated open dumps, cleaned up our community and developed a higher environmental awareness in the process. This success also belongs to the agencies that have helped fund this work: Kentucky River Authority, PRIDE, the Cabinet for Natural Resources and

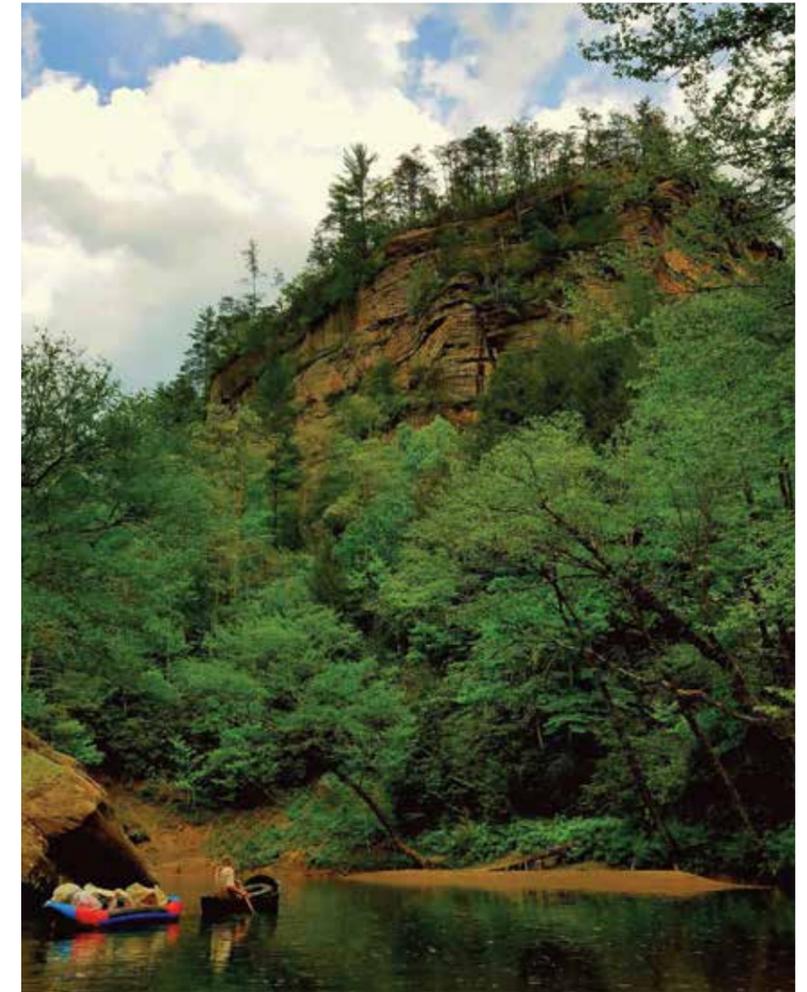


Photo: Donnie Lawson

Environmental Protection, the Wolfe County Fiscal Court, the Appalachian Heritage Alliance, [KWA and others]. It is said that to those whom much is given much is expected. We have been given this beautiful place to live and I think by our actions we have proven worthy of it."

Russ deservedly received awards for his environmental efforts. The Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) honored Russ with an Earth Day Award for his efforts to clean up the Red River in 1999. In 2001, Russ was a Finalist for Eastern Kentucky PRIDE's Tony Turner Volunteer of the Year Award and in 2002 PRIDE honored him with the Volunteer of the Month award "due to his efforts toward cleaning up Wolfe County. Thanks to Mr. Miller's volunteer recruitment efforts, 5 streams were cleaned; 55 illegal dumps were cleaned up; 37 roadways were cleaned; 787 white appliances



were collected; 688 tons of trash was collected; 4,843 tires were collected; over 3,992 of trash were collected; and over 462 volunteers worked over 1,416 hours on cleanup activities. In addition, Russ led the charge to secure PRIDE Super Grant funds to clean up the Harvest Ridge Road (Calaboose) illegal dump." These numbers don't include Russ's additional efforts including coordinating the removal of 100+ Junk Cars, many other dump sites, and hundreds more tires from Wolfe Co and along Red River. In July 2004 he was presented with the "Lifetime Achievement Award" from Kentucky Cabinet of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection.

After reading newspaper clippings Russ saved and loaned me, it appears he was silent since 2006. That is, until the 23rd Annual Upper Red Cleanup in 2019 when he wrote in Swift Creek Courier that "America's greatest freedom is the freedom to be irresponsible. Freedom requires discipline and keeping our county clean is the best way I know to demonstrate that we are a proud and responsible people."

Recently I asked Russ why he didn't write articles for years. Surprised at the duration, he said "I know that for a long period, I feel like I was repeating myself. Maybe my muse left me. But we were doing it. It got to being: gathering tires and picking up trash. And trying to forget about it until next year. Truth be known, we've met some of our best friends and we get to be with them because of the cleanup. It's a nasty, unthankful job, but we have a great group and we get to experience it with them. And that keeps you coming back."

I'll leave you with one final thought from Russ, clipped from an unknown/undated newspaper: "There is a feeling that one gets at the end of a clean-up that transcends the pain and weariness. You look up river and know that you have played a part in some much larger plan, that for all that has been given to you, you have given back, and in the process you were given even more."

We look forward to future Upper Red Cleanups with the calm, caring, generous, courageous person leading the charge, who is none other than the River Cowboy, Russ Miller.

*To read a fuller version of this article and see more photos of Russ cleaning the Red River, please visit: www.kwalliance.org/RussMiller

In Memoriam: Maggie Morgan 1983-2020

Earlier this year, the Kentucky water community lost one of our leaders. Maggie Morgan, the Four Rivers Basin Coordinator and chair of the Watershed Watch in Kentucky Steering Committee, passed away in a tragic car accident. She had served as Basin Coordinator since 2009. In her four years chairing the Watershed Watch of Kentucky, Maggie raised funds and oversaw the development of the strategic plan. She worked to develop new programs such as the



Maggie receiving the 2019 Robert A. Lauderdale Award for Outstanding Contributions in Water Quality



Maggie teaching students about runoff and erosion

4-H Youth Stream Team and the Volunteer Lakes Monitoring Program. Last year, Maggie was awarded the Robert Lauderdale Award from the Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute for Outstanding Contributions in Water Quality. KWA Executive Director Emerita Judy Petersen was selected to receive this award in 2007.

KWA Board member Robert Johnson knew her well and shared these memories. "While I was working with the Jackson Purchase Foundation, I received a resume from Maggie. There wasn't an opening at the time but I filed it away and several months later the Basin Team Coordinator position came open, so I called her. She came to work with the Foundation as a dedicated worker and friend. She was passionate about every project and brought attention to detail needed to make for successful water quality projects whether large stream restoration projects or individual rain gardens and rain barrels. West Kentucky has lost a great motivator and strong environmentalist. Maggie spread the word about the importance of protecting our natural resources and led by example. She will be greatly missed. Our prayers are with her husband Ryan, son Will, and all those she touched."

A scholarship fund has been set up for her son, Will Morgan. Contributions may be made to the Will Morgan Scholarship Fund, c/o CFSB, P.O. Box 467, Benton, KY 42025 or to the Friends of Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 89, Benton, KY 42025.

Proposed Red River Gorge Area Destination Resort

by Laura Gregory, KWA Red River Watershed Coordinator

Did you know there is a proposed destination resort for the Red River Gorge area (Powell, Wolfe, Menifee, Lee County)?

A destination resort was proposed by Red River Economic Development, LLC (RRED), a non-profit arm of the Kentucky Chamber Foundation, which in turn is the charitable non-profit arm of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, the state's largest business association. The Kentucky Chamber Foundation focuses on research and action to enhance the state's economic, education and workforce efforts.

RRED was created in order to promote tourism and create jobs in the Red River Gorge area, more specifically to apply for a federal ARC (Appalachian Regional Commission) grant in order to develop a masterplan for a destination resort and associated tourism attractions in the Red River Gorge area. RRED Board is made up of bankers with interest and/or connection to Eastern Kentucky and the four Red River Gorge County (Powell, Lee, Menifee, Wolfe) Judge Executives. Initial work on this economic development project started in 2012; RRED held their first public meeting at Natural Bridge State Resort Park October 17, 2019. In response to some backlash of local representation/concerns, RRED organized a local Advisory Board/Committee that is a sounding board for the hired Masterplan contractors, Stantec.

You can read any of RRED's public papers/studies on RRED's website – www.redriverky.com.



In response to the RRED's proposed destination resort a group of local concerned citizens came together to form a non-profit - Red River Gorge United (RRGU). The group is made up of residents, business owners, tourism, recreation and conservation advocates that reside in and/or are passionate about the region. RRGU's mission as an organization is to represent the people and ecosystem of the Red River Gorge area by maintaining a sustainable environment for visitors to enjoy, while preserving the local resident community and natural beauty of the area, and finding a perfect balance between people, ecosystem, heritage, and sustainable growth.

Their first public community meeting was held February 1, 2020 (video on RRGU Facebook). Their late March/April public community meetings were cancelled due to COVID19.

KWA has been advocating for an open, community-based, ecologically sensitive approach to the resort planning since this project became public in 2019. We are involved with both RRED and RRGU and our local partners the US Forest Service and other agencies.

Read more, fill out the community survey, donate, volunteer, stay tuned to public meetings and announcements – www.rrgunited.org or on Facebook.

Master Plan by Stantec - Project Schedule

Phase 1: Project Initiation and Reconnaissance
January 2020

Phase 2: Community & Stakeholder Engagement

Phase 3: Confirming vision & Masterplan Production

- **3a:** define appropriate linkages

- **3b:** natural environment

Phase 4: Establish Brand Identity

Phase 5: Master Plan Documentation & Approval
July 31, 2020

RRRED Timeline:

Oct 2013 - AECOM "Potential for Tourism Development in Eastern KY" Study

April 2017 - HVS Market Study - Proposed Resort

April 2017 - HVS Eastern KY Tourism Study | Destination Resort and Tourism Assessment

Oct 2018 - RRED Concept Paper - Eastern KY Destination Resort

Aug 2019 - RRED Request for Proposals - Master plan for Destination Resort

Sept 2019 - RRED received 13 proposals

Oct 17 2019 - RRED holds first public meeting at Natural Bridge State Park

Oct 2019 - RRED interview 4 finalists

RRED awarded \$500,000 Appalachian Regional Commission grant (coal severance funding) and a \$500,000 matching grant from KY for the resort master plan

Dec 2019 - RRED option (payment for landowner not to sell/develop) on 891-acre property in Slade extended through Sept 30, 2020

Jan 17 2020 - RRED holds 2nd public mtg, votes to hire Stantec for Masterplan, and announces Local Advisory Board (video on RRGU Facebook)

January 29, 2020 - Stantec met with RRED Local Advisory Board

March 25, 2020 - CANCELED due to COVID19: Stantec meeting with RRED Local Advisory Board

July 31 2020 - Stantec scheduled to submit Master Plan

Red River Gorge United Community Concerns with Proposed Development

Growth

- Top-down approach to community development
- Community wants slow, sustainable growth

Transportation

- Roads too narrow already and not room to expand
- Not pedestrian/bicycle friendly
- Possibility of changing RRG loop to one way and adding light at Nada Tunnel
- Air, noise & light pollution
- Need public transportation/shuttles
- Overcrowding, already at capacity in RRG - roads, trails, crags, etc.
- Maintaining integrity of RRG
- Rural gentrification
- Would resort get a new exit off Mtn Parkway? Reroute small business traffic?

Environmental

- Waste water, stormwater, sedimentation, flooding
- Garbage
- Threatened & endangered species
- Arches
- Water, air, noise, light, pollution

Historic

- Archaeology
- Cemetery

Jobs

- Low wage jobs
- "Creating Jobs for locals"? OR bringing in workers?
- Training and transportation needed for local workers
- PoCo low unemployment rate - 4% -f

Economic

- Coal severance funding used in area where coal jobs not lost
- Property tax go up for Powell, Wolfe, Menifee, Lee residents while tax breaks for resort
- Restrictions for future development near proposed resort?
- No planning & zoning currently
- Proposed restrictions to 10-mile radius of resort
- Who ultimately benefits from resort development?

Citizen Science on Kentucky Lakes

by Ward Wilson, KWA and Malissa McAlister, Kentucky River Watershed Watch

Watershed Watch is a statewide volunteer water quality monitoring program that has hundreds of participants. KWA has supported Watershed Watch groups since we partnered with the Sierra Club and Kentucky Division of Water to establish the program over 20 years ago. We are the fiscal sponsor of the Green River and Salt River Watershed Watch groups. Citizen science is a way for people to learn about their home waterways and contribute to the understanding of its health. This article was written by Malissa McAlister of the Kentucky River Watershed Watch about a new initiative that addresses lakes. We would encourage anyone that loves our Kentucky lakes to get involved in Watershed Watch and celebrate Lakes Appreciation Month in July.

In 2017, Watershed Watch of Kentucky and the Kentucky Division of Water partnered to initiate a pilot program to enlist citizens in monitoring lake quality. The number and size of lakes in Kentucky makes it impossible for state agency staff to do all the water quality measurements we need to understand the health of these important waters. This pilot effort started with Herrington Lake in central Kentucky and Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley in western Kentucky and has since expanded.



To help track HABs, look for surface algae that appears as:

- Grainy up close, like sawdust
- Bright green or greenish blue, paint-like
- Red or brown slicks

If a HAB is suspected, avoid swimming in or near algal blooms, don't drink untreated water, rinse fish fillets, keep pets away from the water, and seek medical attention if you become ill.

Potential blue-green outbreak at a marina on Herrington Lake

Volunteers are trained in an hour on their lake. Samplers learn how to make general observations about the lake conditions and take a measurement with a Secchi disk. A Secchi disk is a black and white disk that measures the depth that light penetrates into the water, at which it disappears. This simple measurement was developed in 1865 by Italian astronomer Angelo Secchi and has been used by lake scientists for over 100 years to monitor lakes.

Lake sampling is done every two weeks when the NASA-USGS Landsat satellites pass over Kentucky. The Kentucky Division of Water uses the field observations and satellite data to run modeling programs that track and predict lake water quality issues and trends, especially with



Malissa McAlister taking a secchi depth measurement on Herrington Lake

regard to the potential for harmful algal blooms (HABs). Harmful algal blooms happen when naturally occurring blue-green algae grow out of control. They can produce toxins that make people and pets sick, as well as cause taste and odor problems in drinking water and disrupt lake ecology by reducing dissolved oxygen levels.

The lake sampling program has created a network of people who can report the first signs of harmful algal outbreaks. When a bloom is suspected, they report to the Division of Water and their professional field staff follow up with further testing to determine if swimming advisories are necessary. Already, lake samplers have helped identify likely blooms on Herrington Lake.

If you are interested in helping track lake health by becoming a lake sampler, please contact the Watershed Watch Volunteer Coordinator, JoAnn Palmer at joann.palmer@ky.gov or (859) 846-4905. More samplers mean more eyes on our lakes and a better awareness of any problems that may need attention.

Go to www.kwalliance.org/CitizenScienceArticle to read a longer version of this article with additional details and ways to get involved.

