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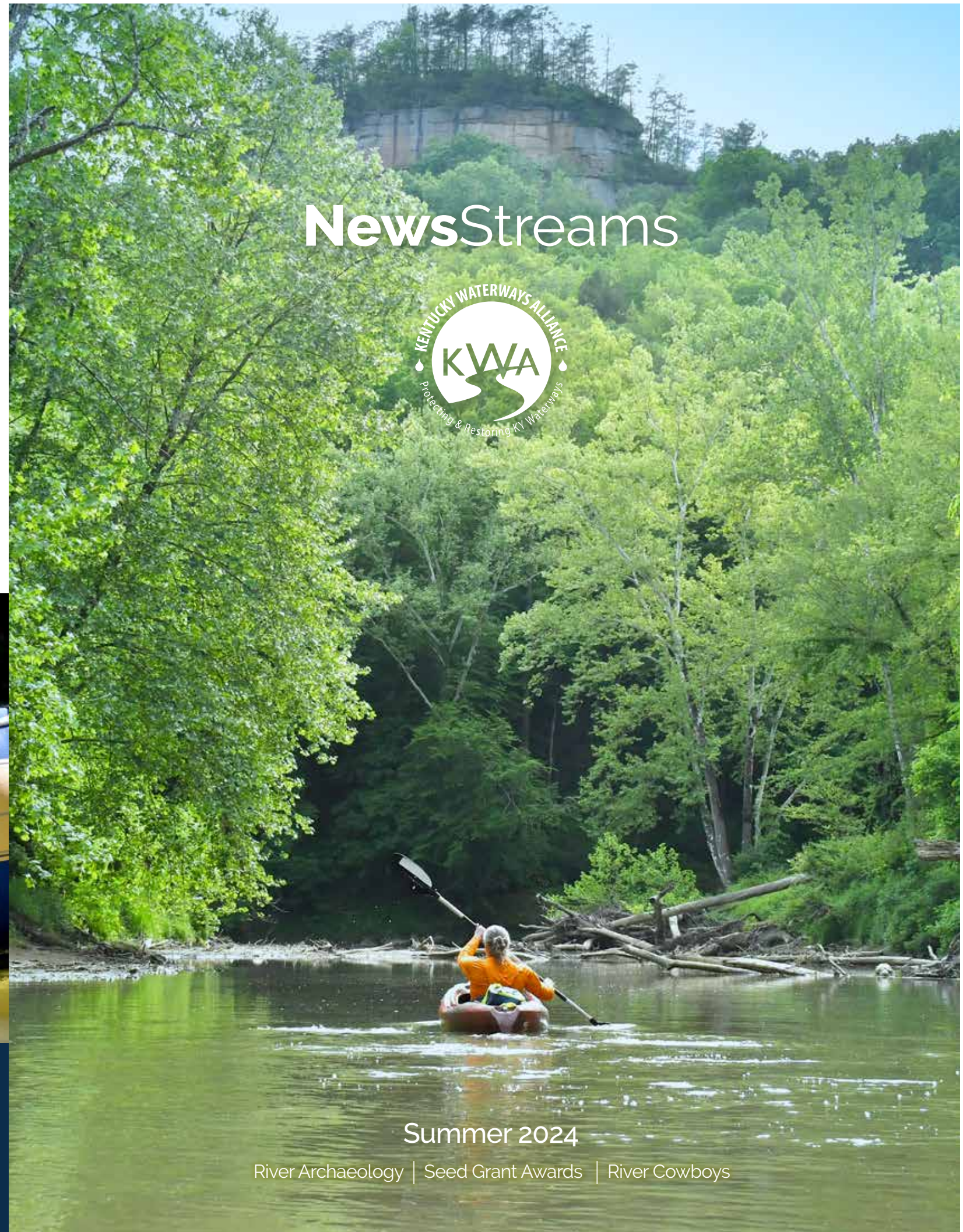
# NewsStreams



Front and back cover photos are of the Red River by Susan Griffin Ward

# NewsStreams

Because Clean Water Can't Wait - Summer 2024



Summer 2024

River Archaeology | Seed Grant Awards | River Cowboys

# A Message From Michael Washburn

Executive Director, Kentucky Waterways Alliance

Dear Friends,

A few months ago I went to see the writer and environmentalist Rick Bass speak in Louisville. It's always a treat to hear a great writer speak about and read their work, but when it came down to it, I really just wanted to say hello to an old acquaintance.



Many years ago I was assigned to write a magazine profile of Rick, so I spent time with him at his home in northwestern Montana's ravishing and secluded Yaak Valley. I'd love to tell you about that trip – about the hand drawn map to his remote home that he mailed to me, about the elk he had hunted and that he served for dinner, about how when the late morning sun heated the Yaak, the entire valley brimmed with the aroma of wild roses – but that's for another time. I bring Rick up now because when I was in Montana and when Rick was in Louisville it was a forceful reminder that we can't only ever be just one thing. Rick is one of our national literary treasures. Rick is also a fierce defender of his beautiful, fragile, imperiled home, a home that he often compares to Appalachia in both its geography and the abuses it has endured. Rick's life is a lesson that joy and curiosity are not indulgences but actions - and that celebration in the context of clear-eyed appraisal is one path toward protection.

Protect, Restore, and Celebrate - that's KWA's mission and our longstanding promise to you. But much like the work that Rick Bass does as a novelist and an environmental advocate, none of our three core priorities are independent of each other. They are interdependent and gain both strength and durability from each other. Which is what I think you'll see reflected in this issue of Newstreams. You will read about work we are doing in all of Kentucky's seven major river basins - including both a seed grants program which is funding projects across the state, and the Hydro Flask-funded Commonwealth Sweep. You will learn about a new KWA-produced documentary about a group of heroes on the Red River. You will see photos drawn from much of what we have been up to this year.

You will also find something a bit new. Chris Begley, an archaeologist and professor at Transylvania University, has contributed a piece to this issue. Chris works around the world, but a large part of his work is done in the rivers of Kentucky. I am proud to run this contribution to this magazine. I hope that you will enjoy Chris's essay, which is only the first of what we see as many contributions from outside writers. We are also printing a lovely essay by KWA's own Susan Griffin Ward, a reflection and celebration of the interconnectedness of the ecosystem. Both pieces are stellar examples of curiosity and appreciation serving the pursuit of protection.

In addition to our offerings here, I encourage you to read the work of Rick Bass, particularly some of his nonfiction. I believe you will see similarities in the way Kentucky's mountains and rivers and those in the Yaak Valley have been exploited, as well as the shared determination of the people living in these beautiful places to stand up for what is right.

Finally, I want to break a bit of news. As I write this, KWA is hiring for a full-time Water Policy Director. Once we have this position filled, I see KWA becoming a stronger champion of our waterways and the people, communities, and wildlife that rely on them.

As always, send any thoughts or suggestions to me at [director@kwalliance.org](mailto:director@kwalliance.org).

Enjoy the rest of the summer!

# Save the Date:

The 2nd Annual Kentucky Watershed Network Summit in Morehead Kentucky.

Are you a watershed steward, watershed leader, or would you like to be? Do you want to connect with and learn from other volunteers and professionals who contribute to protecting, restoring, and celebrating waterways in Kentucky? Join us on August 25-26 for the KWN Summit. There will also be an informal pre-summit social on the evening of August 24.

The theme of the Summit this year is flood prevention and mitigation with an emphasis on stream buffers and converting data to action. We will have a legislative update, workshops, breakout groups, a panel discussion, and site visits at Minor E. Clark Fish Hatchery and Triplett Creek. KWA's event co-hosts, Kentucky Watershed Watch, will offer stream sampler certification training. There will be an opening ceremony with networking. Plan to come early and stay late to enjoy Morehead, Cave Run Lake, and other opportunities in beautiful Rowan County.

More information and registration links can be found at [KWalliance.org](http://KWalliance.org).



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# Tire Disposal: A Crisis in Kentucky's Waterways

By Michael Washburn



Heron fishing on tire, Ohio River

Kentucky's Red River is our only federally designated "Wild & Scenic River." Yet, each year, as you can see by our accompanying feature on the new KWA-produced documentary *River Cowboys*, KWA and our partners at the Friends of Red River (FORR) pull an astonishing number of tires from the Red. As our Watershed Program Director, Laura Gregory, recently noted on social media, in the space of a few weeks, she and her colleagues removed nearly 200 tires from a four mile stretch of the Red River near Clay City.

This is not just an issue with the Red River. Earlier this year, a KWA board member sent a message to staff. He had enjoyed an overnight paddle on Floyds Fork, but during the middle 10 mile stretch he counted nearly 400 tires.

## Four hundred tires in ten miles. Two hundred tires in four miles.

KWA constantly boasts that Kentucky has 90,000 miles of waterways. Well, in just 14 miles of those waterways there are 600 used, illegally dumped tires, disfiguring the natural beauty of our great state. This visual pollution detracts from the natural beauty of these environments. Trash-filled water bodies not only diminish aesthetic value but also deter tourists and visitors, impacting local economies that rely on tourism and recreational activities.

Tossing old tires into our waters is not just an act of aesthetic negligence: it's a detrimental practice that has severe consequences for the environment and the communities relying on these water bodies.

Tires contain a variety of toxic chemicals and heavy metals that can leach into the water. These chemicals include benzene, mercury, arsenic, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which pose serious health risks to aquatic life and



Wild Turkey with tire, Kentucky River

humans alike. When tires are submerged in water, these pollutants can dissolve and contaminate the entire aquatic ecosystem, affecting fish, plants, and other organisms that rely on clean water to survive. These contaminants can accumulate in the food chain, potentially reaching humans who consume contaminated fish or water.

Beyond that, when dumped into waterways, tires can disrupt natural habitats and ecosystems. They can alter water flow patterns, block passages for aquatic animals, and degrade water quality. Rivers and creeks are essential habitats for numerous species, including fish, amphibians, and insects.



Tires collected, Green River



Upper Red River tire cleanup, Photo: Bluegrass Wildwater Association



Tire caught on tree, Green River

Disrupting these ecosystems can lead to declines in biodiversity and even local extinctions, upsetting the delicate balance of nature.

It's important to note that there are proper ways to dispose of old tires including Kentucky's amnesty programs for tires, for instance. But these programs are underfunded, under publicized, and underutilized. This is an important issue, and it will only become more important as we move into an era of increased electric vehicle usage. EV's are much heavier than their gasoline counterparts and burn through tires even faster.

Moving forward, KWA will spend more time addressing this issue of tire pollution, alongside our other work. This year, for example, KWA is providing seed grant funding to Pike County Clean Community Board for the expansion of a tire removal project that began in 2023 to remove an estimated 5,000 waste tires that have been dumped over the years into Levisa Fork, a tributary of the Big Sandy River, located in the City of Pikeville.

To be perfectly frank, individual effort likely can't remedy this situation. Like many things, it takes a community effort, and we hope that you will join us and communities around the state as we try to reduce the number of waste tires in our water.

## Kentucky Premiere of River Cowboys Documentary!

We made a documentary! KWA produced and held the Kentucky premiere of *River Cowboys: Keepin' It Wild* at Red RiverFest to a standing room only crowd. KWA and Friends of Red River teamed up to create this short, but very powerful, film on the tire disposal issue in the Red River. The film highlights the efforts of Russ Miller, the original "River Cowboy" and the community of people dedicated to keeping the Red River wild and scenic.

In addition, the film documents the history of the Upper Red River Cleanup, how tire dumping issues impact the health of waterways across the nation, and offers some possible solutions. The crowd that gathered for the premiere at Sky Bridge Station was rapt and had lots of interesting questions for the panel discussion that followed with the River Cowboys.

This film was created with support of grant funding from River Network and Kentucky River Authority. A special thank you to Mike Wilkinson Visuals' videography which captured the beauty of the Upper Red River Clifty Wilderness area and challenge of "herding tires" in this remote area.



Russ Miller, original River Cowboy



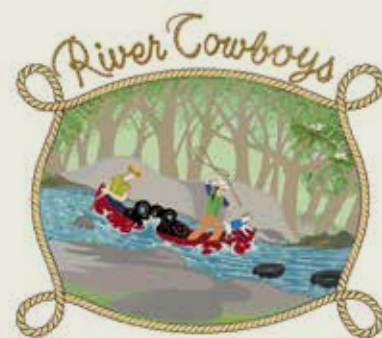
Photo: Wilkinson Visuals



Russ Miller and Friends of Red River



Premiere at Sky Bridge Station



## Louisville Premiere of River Cowboys Coming This Fall!

Visit [www.KWAlliance.org](http://www.KWAlliance.org) for details!

## The KWA Commonwealth Sweep

The KWA Commonwealth Sweep is a series of cleanups being held this year in each of the Commonwealth's seven major river basins. This initiative is made possible by a grant award from Hydro Flask's Parks For All program in support of KWA's efforts to not only remove unsightly and dangerous pollution from our rivers and streams, but create shared commitment to healthy waterways. Cleanups are an opportunity to educate participants and partners in best practices so that they will be equipped to lead future conservation efforts in their watersheds.



### Completed Commonwealth Sweeps

**April 20: Beargrass Creek in the Salt River Basin.** KWA partnered with Metro Council District 9 (Andrew Owen), Metro Council District 8 (Ben Reno-Weber), Beargrass Creek Alliance, Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Metro Solid Waste Clean Collaborative, MSD, and the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO).

**April 27: Banklick Creek in the Licking River Basin.** KWA partnered with Banklick Watershed Council to host the Great American Cleanup-Litzler Litter Pick Up along with the City of Covington, Keep Covington Beautiful, and The Center for Great Neighborhoods.

**June 8: Goose Creek Cleanup in Manchester, KY in the Upper Cumberland River Basin.** KWA partnered with Eastern Kentucky PRIDE, Kentucky Wildlands, Clay County, and the City of Manchester.

**July 13: Indian Creek Cleanup in the Kentucky River Basin.** KWA partnered with Red Oaks Forest School and the US Forest Service.

**July 20: Warren County Cleanup at Weldon-Peete Park at Barren River in the Green River Basin.** KWA partnered with Warren County Stormwater, Warren County Parks and Recreation, Bowling Green Parks and Recreation, and the City of Bowling Green.

### Upcoming KWA Commonwealth Sweeps

Visit [kwalliance.org](http://kwalliance.org) for details and registration

**September 14:** Four Rivers Basin with Hancock Biological Station and the Watershed Studies Institute at Murray State.

**October 5:** Big Sandy River Basin with Big Sandy Watershed Watch, Concerned Citizens of Martin County, and LiKEN.

# River Archaeology

By Chris Begley

In 1811, the first steamboat on any river west of the Appalachian Mountains set off from Pittsburgh to New Orleans. They made it as far as Owensboro before the New Madrid earthquake hit. Over the next several days the crew would wake up to find the river entirely changed, with the boat in the middle of the river, still tied up to what had been the riverbank and was now the river bottom.

In 1844, the steamboat Lucy Walker exploded near Louisville. It was crewed by enslaved people and owned by a Cherokee man. Around one hundred people died.

In 1868, two steamboats collided near Warsaw, Kentucky and caught fire. They burned to the waterline and sank. These two boats were called the United States and the America. I know that sounds like a metaphor for something, but it's just what happened.

In the late 18th and early 19th century, river pirates hid out in a spectacular cave on the banks of the Ohio River down around Paducah, robbing flatboats floating downriver. This story provided the plot of a Davy Crockett movie from the 1950s.

These are just some of the events of the past that we still talk about. These are the ones we know about. Think how many more stories exist of which we know nothing. People have lived here for over 15,000 years. Imagine all the ways in which the waterways in Kentucky were used, and the ways they shaped our history. That's where archaeology comes in.



Chris Begley in the Kentucky River looking for the flat boat of iron ingots. Photo: Chris Begley

I'm a maritime archaeologist, and I work underwater. I study the ways in which people interact with waterways, and this can include looking at shipwrecks, infrastructure like docks or anchorages, or the construction of dams or canals. I work all over the world, in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the Pacific, and the Indian Oceans. Mostly I work in the sea, in salt water, looking at ships meant for trade or fishing. I also work here, in Kentucky, in the rivers mainly.

I have a few ongoing projects in the rivers of Kentucky. I think we've located a flatboat that sank loaded with iron from the Fitchburg furnace near Ravenna. Based on pervasive stories in the area, and with the help of local historians and river experts, I was able to identify a section of the river to search. Although nothing was visible on sonar (we use side-imaging fish finders), I did survey a section of the river bottom using a metal detector. Anything on the river bottom was buried in sediment in that area, but results suggest a possible location for the flatboat. Further work is needed to identify the buried anomaly, but was complicated by a large submerged tree that washed downriver and stopped right over the anomaly, making it too dangerous for divers to operate in that area. Recent floods may have dislodged the tree, and later in the summer I will return to that location and try to resume the project.



Kentucky River, Photo: Chris Begley

I have also been working to locate the resting place of the steamboat America, mentioned above, that ran into the steamboat United States, and whose position used to be well known to the community, but has now been lost. Locating the wreck would be the first step in a potentially more substantial investigation during which we could collect evidence on ship construction, the nature of the collision and fire that sank the boat, and possibly information on the cargo and on the material culture of the passengers and crew.

I am most interested in the questions about the passengers and crew on the steamboat. What did they bring with them? What did they bring back from somewhere else? I have even more questions about the crew. In many ways, we have much more documentation of the passengers. Think about the ways in which the crew on a cruise ship is largely hidden. The crew were often the kind of people about whom less is written, and whose lives are less well understood. How much do you think was ever written about the enslaved people that crewed the Lucy Walker? Archaeology can help us answer questions like that.



Kentucky River near Hazard. Photo: Chris Begley

## River Archaeology continued

Archaeologists like me conduct our research to answer specific questions, and we do that by looking at the things that people leave behind. Commerce, communication, even kinship is inextricably linked to the waterways running through the Commonwealth. Timber, coal, mail, and people came and went along these waterways. We use written and oral histories as well, but there are many questions not answered by the written history or the stories that are handed down to us. Entire parts of the population are not well represented in historical documents, including women, children, racial and ethnic minorities, and poor people. And sometimes those written texts don't tell the whole story. Sometimes, they are pure fiction. Archaeology helps us arrive nearer to the whole story. It can be painstaking and frustrating, or incomplete and inconclusive, but archaeology is the only way we currently have to access that part of the human past lost to the tides of time, and to bring the untold stories to light.

Sometimes the questions I ask are very basic. I may want to know what archaeological sites are present in a certain area, or where certain wrecks are located. In other cases, I might ask how people used imported goods to create an identity for themselves at the end of the colonial era. I might ask what was imported and exported, and with whom did this trade take place?

We associate shipwrecks with treasure, and treasure hunting. What is valuable to an archaeologist is often much different than what is valuable to a treasure hunter. First of all, we do not keep or sell anything we find, so finding a hundred gold coins is no different in that sense than finding a glass bottle or a dinner plate. For an archaeologist, information about the past is the treasure. We often say that it's not what you find, it's what you find out. Even something that is broken or has been discarded can contain a lot of information and can help us fill in gaps and understand the history of the Commonwealth a little better.

Scuba diving in the rivers in Kentucky is not always fun. If I can see anything beyond a few inches, I consider myself lucky. Sometimes I can't see anything at all, and I work by feel or using a sensor like a metal detector and listening for the sounds as I detect something. I understand why we do not have many recreational divers in the rivers. The lakes are different, and some of those are very good for scuba diving. Personally, I like the dark rivers. They hold many surprises, and treasure in the form of information about the past. Every dive is an adventure.

All archaeologists, including maritime archaeologists, depend on people in the community. We depend on their knowledge of the river and of the history of a particular area. They help us find questions to ask, help to locate archaeological sites, and help us interpret what we find. I invite any of you to let me know if you've heard something or seen something that you think may merit investigation.

*Chris Begley, Ph.D. is an anthropology professor at Transylvania University in Lexington. His most recent book is The Next Apocalypse: The Art and Science of Survival. You can reach him at cbegley@transy.edu.*

## A Wild Kingdom

By Susan Griffin Ward, KWA Director of Community Engagement



It was a peaceful Sunday afternoon, until it wasn't. Without warning, the creek valley was filled with terrible screams. When the bedlam began, we were sitting in our canoe, in a stream, straining our necks to spy on the heron rookery swaying 200 feet above us in ancient sycamore trees. Spring is nesting season and herons were sitting on eggs and feeding chicks. The peaceful scene abruptly ended when an eagle attacked. The herons' crazy shrieking and violent flapping of their powerful wings did not thwart the eagle's hunt for dinner. It was chaos.

Just as suddenly as it started, it was deathly quiet. No longer hungry, the raiding raptor ruled the rookery with a conqueror's ease; a heron nest served as her new throne. While the eagle surveyed her kingdom, the remaining herons were stock-still, effectively now prisoners of war. Under threat and unwilling to leave their babies, their instinct was an attempt at invisibility. That's what most mothers would do, me included. The reign of terror lasted a surprisingly long time. When the eagle finally flew off, a hawk chased her--perhaps to steer her away from and prevent a raid of its own nest.

Great Blue Herons are my favorite bird, my personal blue bird of happiness. It is true when I tease my children that I have taken more photographs of herons than them. I never tire of watching the resident river poets dressed in their blue-gray robes; they are lyrical in flight, and when fishing on a shoreline a study in stillness and silence that a monk would envy. But I am also amazed every time I see an eagle soaring over the Ohio River.

I considered that the eagle might also be nesting and have her own chicks to feed. All creatures are focused on survival. The eagle needs the heron, the heron needs the fish, the fish needs the mussel, the mussel filters the water to keep it clean, and all living things depend upon clean water to live. This includes humans, but often we forget what's important to the smallest of creatures is also in our own best interest.

Now it's almost commonplace to see eagles on the river, proving that wildlife and the environment can be restored when humans make the right choices. Witnessing this life and death scene unfold was a dramatic reminder that wildlife is indeed wild, not always easy, and protecting the ecosystem is critical to survival for all of us. A good start would be to stop pouring poison into our water.



Eagle in heron rookery

# Watershed Seed Grant Recipients Announced

KWA is pleased to announce the recipients of our Watershed Seed Grants! This pilot program is focused on reducing nonpoint source pollution. Seed grants provide funding assistance in all of Kentucky's seven major river basins to organizations undertaking projects addressing nonpoint source pollution to protect and restore their watersheds. The review process included utilizing the EPA's Environmental Justice screening tool.



**Basin:** Licking River  
**Organization:** Kentucky Watershed Watch (KyWW)  
**Project:** Water Monitoring Support Hub

KyWW is developing multiple water sampling Support Hubs in the Licking River basin. These will enable volunteers to check out loaned sampling kits, receive assistance with identification of potential sampling locations, incubate R-cards overnight for E. coli analysis, use computers or Wi-Fi to enter sample results in the KyWW database, and participate in a variety of networking and training events. Regional Support Hubs are expected to increase the number of volunteers and sampling locations by limiting the driving distance for volunteers and to improve access to participation for low-income and rural volunteers.



**Basins:** Kentucky River and Upper Cumberland River  
**Organization:** Red Bird Mission  
**Project:** Septic Pump Out

Septic pump out projects have been selected to receive seed grants in two river basins, Kentucky River and Upper Cumberland River. Red Bird mission will implement this project which supports 26 septic tank pump outs and watershed education for residents who live near a creek or river in both the Kentucky River Basin and in the Upper Cumberland River area. This project will decrease E. coli pollution from the overflow septic tanks that are overflowing into our watersheds. This grant will provide community education on the care and maintenance of septic tanks, promote sustainability of existing septic systems, and decrease the number of backed up or leaking septic tanks that are overdue for pumping.



**Basin:** Green River  
**Organization:** Friends of Barren River Lake and Park  
**Project:** Lakeshore Clean Up Day

This project supports the expansion of Lakeshore Clean Up Day, which was greatly diminished during Covid. The 2024 Lakeshore Clean Up Day has a goal to remove at least 4 tons of trash with the help of 400 volunteers. The cleanup will prevent garbage floating downstream the following spring, and funding will also support clean water stewardship throughout the year.



**Basin:** Four Rivers  
**Organization:** Jackson Purchase Foundation (JPF)  
**Project:** Shoreline Stabilization

This project includes planting 400 Cyprus trees and plugging one acre of river cane at Land Between the Lakes and Clark River, and the establishment of a river cane patch in Race Track Hollow to reduce severe shoreline erosion and create a filtering system for agricultural nutrient runoff.



**Basin:** Salt River  
**Organization:** Louisville Nature Center  
**Project:** Beargrass Slow Flow and NPS Reduction

This project will improve the South Fork of Beargrass Creek by slowing the flow of water during heavy rain events and filtering out nonpoint source pollutants before the water reaches the creek located in the Beargrass Creek State Nature Preserve. The project site lies on and below a slope where runoff from surrounding roadways, parking lots, and mowed turf has caused significant erosion and degraded conditions. Funding will support the construction of 6-8 structures within and along the drainage streambed and the creation of a 0.25-acre wetland that includes native plants and grass seed.



**Basin:** Big Sandy & Tygarts River  
**Organization:** Pike County Clean Community Board  
**Project:** Levisa Fork Tire Removal

This project supports the expansion of a tire removal project that began in 2023 to address the removal of an estimated 5,000 waste tires that have been dumped over the years into the river. This project will target an eight-mile section of Levisa Fork located in the City of Pikeville. When tires deteriorate, harmful chemicals, microplastics, and heavy metal are released into water. Removal of this unnatural stream substrate will allow the stream bed to return to its natural gravel and stone riverbed, improving the ecosystem.

*This work was funded in part by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under §319(h) of the Clean Water Act.*



## Wild & Scenic Red RiverFest

Since 2017, Red RiverFest has celebrated Kentucky's only nationally designated Wild & Scenic River, the Red River that runs through the Red River Gorge and surrounding communities. This year's festival, held in May at Clay City Park, was expanded to three days to educate and build awareness about the value of keeping the river free flowing and protected. Over 120 people enjoyed floating down the Red River for a 4-mile float on the section of river known as the Clay City Loop. Hundreds more festival goers enjoyed live music, clean water environmental education, a farmer's market, food trucks, a variety of vendors, a rock wall, and general merriment in support of KWA and our co-hosts, Friends of Red River. An extra special thanks to our sponsors and all the volunteers that made the event run smoothly.



Made possible by the generous support of these sponsors:



## Celebrating Kentucky's Waterways Across the Commonwealth

This year Kentucky Waterways Alliance committed to reconnecting with communities across the state. We are energized by the partnerships we are creating and by the enthusiasm of so many people who are dedicated to improving water quality in Kentucky. Our community engagement this year has included a wide variety of events, activities, and celebrations!



### This is The Ohio Film Screenings

To build support for the Ohio River Restoration Plan KWA hosted five screenings of Morgan Atkinson's film *This is The Ohio: Life, Death, Rebirth of the Beautiful River* in Milton, Louisville, Boone County, Frankfort, and Ashland. Atkinson's film is a powerful tool that entertains, educates, and enlightens us about the value of the Ohio River

### Advocacy Efforts

KWA has been meeting with local, state, and federal lawmakers to promote clean water policies and resources to support protection and restoration of our waterways.

### Kentucky Businesses Support KWA and Clean Water

So many generous businesses and their owners support KWA and clean water in Kentucky through fundraisers and events. A special thank you to Quest Outdoors, Patagonia, West Sixth Farm, Belle of Louisville Riverboats, Aveda Corporation, Omagi Salon & Spa, Pure Salon & Spa, Copper & Kings, and Sky Bridge Station for hosting events for KWA this year!



Michael Washburn with Pam Mullins, ORBA Day on the Hill



Michelle and Ryan King, owners of Quest Outdoors, and Joshua Livasy, with Patagonia, present a \$15,000 check to KWA.

- Aveda Hair Jam fundraiser hosted by Omagi Salon & Spa in support of KWA.
- The Belle of Louisville cruise "Our River City" highlighted the work of KWA. Artist in Residence Al Gorman, joined KWA on the cruise to share his collections and creations all sourced from found items at the Falls of the Ohio River.
- Rock Skipping Contest at West Sixth Farm and Champion skipper Jon Jennings
- Quest Outdoors and Patagonia Check Presentation
- Brandy on the Banks at Copper & Kings.