

California's statewide river conservation organization.



Volume 7, Issue 2

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- Get Involved! - Rafting, Canoeing & Volunteer Training Day - April 29th!
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## FOR News



**SAVE THE DATE - May 3rd | 8 am-5 pm - [California Rivers Day](#)**

Join us for a day at the Capitol talking to decision makers about current legislation that impacts our rivers. We want our representatives to know that we want to Point Positive towards water management solutions that are diversified and resilient in a changing climate.



**SAVE THE DATE - May 3rd | 5:30-8 pm - [Capital River Awards](#)**

The 9th annual Capital River Awards is being held on the evening of May 3rd to celebrate our treasured rivers and promote their protection. This festive event is a great chance to re-connect with old friends and make some new ones over great food and wine all while supporting a worthy



## RATS visit legislators at the Capitol

River Advocacy Training School (RATS)

On March 8th, RATS visited their representatives to discuss current legislation (SB 5, AB 18 and AB 975) that impacts rivers in a range of ways. The visits prepare them to support California Rivers Day on May 3rd. We hope you can make it too!

Thanks to the [10 RATS](#) for everything they are doing to support FOR's work! Keep an eye out for local events organized by these talented folks.

- **April 2, 2017 | 12:30 pm - River Play**—A free interactive, educational theatrical event for the whole family! | Ancil Hoffman Park, Carmichael (Sacramento) | Call/text Kristine - (916) 342-8076 to RSVP
- **May 12, 2017 | 5-10 pm - Keep The Merced River Wild!**—Join us for a great evening to celebrate the Wild and Scenic Merced River -music, information, food, friends! | The Alley, Mariposa, CA | For more information—[keepitwildmercedriver@gmail.com](mailto:keepitwildmercedriver@gmail.com)

Become a River Advocate!



- **Remembering David Kay** *by Eric Wesselman*

This winter we lost a legendary river hero in David Kay. Several years before David would help found Friends of the River in 1973, he came out west and fell in love with rivers. He

found a home at the American River Touring Association (ARTA), and became a skilled boatman and river guide. He quickly rose through the ranks and helped ARTA become a special outfitter by offering river trips that were much more than a Disneyland experience. They became special adventures into nature that connected people to rivers—the kind of experiences that stay with a person and change lives.

David loved introducing and sharing rivers with people and developed a unique ability to poetically and powerfully communicate their magic. It wasn't long before David met Jerry Meral and many others who were building a movement for rivers in California. These friendships and collaborations helped David leverage his gift for communicating to inspire activism on behalf of rivers. In 1973, the campaign to save the Stanislaus River from New Melones Dam was growing into a statewide effort. That fall, David and Jerry met with Rob Caughlan and David Oke—two legendary rough and tumble organizers—to start organizing a statewide initiative campaign to save the river. Of course they needed an organization to run it and Friends of the River was born.

After riding the campaign roller coaster that helped end the era of big dam building and established FOR as a statewide river protection organization, David returned to Ohio where he lived with friends and family and pursued his other passion for gardening. While he was far from California for much of the rest of his life, those around him knew that the magic of rivers always remained in his heart.

While it takes a team and community to build a movement, it is still the sum of individuals who step forward to be a part of it. David was an indispensable part. He was one of those individuals who served as a guide for the movement and a spark that put many on a path to a lifetime of advocacy for rivers.

Our heart goes out to his family and all who knew him.

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## Action Alert - Exciting and Modest: Improvements for State Wild and Scenic Rivers.



With the federal government's commitment towards environmental protection crumbling under the assault by the Trump Administration and the Republican-led Congress, it's time for California's state government to step up to provide more protection for our extraordinary free-

flowing rivers.

Friends of the River is sponsoring **AB 975**, introduced in the California Legislature by **Assemblymember Laura Friedman** (D-Glendale) and co-authored by **Senator Ben Allen** (D-Santa Monica). This bill will make modest but important improvements in the protection and management of the 1,362 miles of rivers and streams in the California Wild and Scenic Rivers System. AB 975 accomplishes this by bringing state management more in line with the higher level of protection provided to rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The bill is supported by Friends of the River, Sierra Club California, Natural Resources Defense Council, American Rivers and many other conservation organizations. Please show your support by writing

**Please take action TODAY - Email to your Assemblymember urging them to vote "yes" on AB975.**

[Learn more | Write a letter!](#)

## Get Involved!

- **April 2, 2017 | 12:30 pm - River Play**—A free interactive, educational theatrical event for the whole family! | Ancil Hoffman Park, Carmichael (Sacramento) | Call/text Kristine - (916) 342-8076 to RSVP
- **April 29th | 9 am-3 pm--Volunteer Advocacy Training Day--** The day prepares volunteers to be great advocates throughout the season--no matter what type of volunteering you do with us! Want to become more knowledgeable about current river issues and be able to talk more succinctly about them? [Register today!](#)
- **May 3rd--California Rivers Day** and the **Capital River Awards**
- **May 12, 2017 | 5-10 pm - Keep The Merced River Wild!**— Join us for a great evening to celebrate the Wild and Scenic Merced River - music, information, food, friends! | The Alley, Mariposa, CA | For more information - [keepitwildmercedriver@gmail.com](mailto:keepitwildmercedriver@gmail.com)
- **Want to volunteer this season?** Email [Toby Briggs](#)

## Rafting

We are excited to start the next rafting season! We wanted to let you know how you can be involved in the spring and summer and as well as share some important changes to the Rafting Program.

1. Come to the **Volunteer Advocacy Training Day**—April 29th 9 am-3 pm. A 1-day training for all FOR volunteers. [Register today!](#)
2. **Keep guiding and volunteering!** Email [Toby Briggs](#), Engagement Coordinator, to be added to the volunteer opportunities list.

Just as rivers change and guides adapt to conditions, some of the conditions have changed (staff additions) and we want to be dynamic with them. While much continues to be similar, FOR is working to be even more impactful with rafting to support our mission to protect rivers. As always, please reach out with any questions.

- **Friends and Family Weekends** celebrate our volunteers who contribute to making our program great and offer a chance for them to share the magic of rafting with friends and family.
- **Paddle to the Capital** is a great chance for anyone to join in the excitement of rafting and support FOR!
- The **Rafting Planning Team** will spear-head organizing the season.

- The **Guides and Activist Listserv** will be replaced by more specific opportunities to engage and communicate. See ListServ for more details.
- We will respond accordingly to **high-water levels** by adjusting our programming and training our guides for these conditions.

## Canoeing

The Canoe Program is gearing up for another season on the water! We hope you will join us for one of the 3 opportunities.

Keep an eye out for the chance to come on an **Advocacy Outing** (1 day paddle open to the public exploring a critical issue with experts), take the **Fundamentals of Canoeing** class (2.25 day class building basics of canoeing) or join us for **Paddle to the Capital** in August.

Want to volunteer with us? Contact [Toby Briggs](#) to learn more!

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## Volunteer Voice *by Kristine Aubert*

### One Small Imperfect Drop

It was November, 2016, just after the election. I was scanning Craigslist for a new job. I was feeling terribly uncertain about the world and my place in it. I decided to search the nonprofit sector heading, hoping to find some meaningful work. I found a post made by Friends of the River. They were accepting applications for their River Advocacy Training School. I didn't quite understand what "river advocacy" meant. I didn't really know anything about rivers, except the way they worked on my spirit when I was near them. My first reaction to the post was that it was exactly what I was looking for. My second reaction was that I was too old and financially broke to contribute much. I applied and was accepted.

I dove into a world of water policy that has expanded my perspective in ways I could never have imagined. I had no idea how nuanced the negotiation for water between humans and nature had become. I realized I have taken rivers for granted.

I began the River Advocacy Training School just three months ago and have barely scratched the surface of water. It feels like my little contribution to this one little issue of our great political machine is nothing more than a drop in a bucket. And it is. That's how we fill the bucket up. One small imperfect contribution at a time, until we turn the peloton wheel of history.

*Kristine Aubert, River Advocate*

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## River Currents *by Ron Stork*

### Twenty years ago no one cared

#### Some reflections on when the media comes knocking on your doors

After the 1997 Central Valley floods, Friends of the River worked even harder to get better flood management in the Central Valley. That meant mastering issues and working on life and death, as well as river protection issues — and they are often the same — things that one puts one's heart and soul into.

We know we made some difference, but not as much as we would have liked.

One of those places was in the Feather River Basin. We made progress. Levees have been set back from the river and improved. But the core of the Yuba-Feather Workgroup, three environmental groups and two counties, became concerned about another, darker threat: the use of Oroville Dam's auxiliary spillway would cause havoc downstream and perhaps endanger the very life of downstream communities.

We tried our best to raise the alarm in writing in 2001. The environmental groups (FOR, Sierra Club, and SYRCL) started making formal filings in 2005. A few others added their words too. But by 2007, we had failed. No one would listen to us.

Over time, the FOR staff who had once worked on this dwindled to just me. But I never forgot and would

dredge up the issue more than perhaps others cared for.

It was a Tuesday when the main service spillway at Oroville Dam broke a few weeks back. It caused me some serious unease. It's a big water year, and water is going to have to leave that huge reservoir somehow.

I started contacting reporters. After all, I knew the relevant infrastructure well. On the weekend, I helped lead a field trip to New Exchequer Dam on the Merced River for FOR trainees. The design is similar. The dangers are too.

When I got back from the field trip, my Yuba City neighbor told me that DWR thought they might lose the emergency spillway in an hour. Not good. I knew that well. He needed to get his elderly relatives out.

It was after midnight when I finally put my laptop away for the night. Lots of emails back and forth with a Bay Area reporter who had begun to sink his teeth into the issue earlier that week.

The story of our effort to warn the Department of Water Resources and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission was going out. Our labor that few had cared about was now not just obscure history.

The next morning started with a phone call from a KCBS radio reporter in San Francisco. Fortunately, it doesn't take me long to wake up in the morning. She got the interview and warned that there would be others that would follow her.

She was right: there would be more. I went into the office early. Voice mail messages that still have not been listened to, email requests for interviews, telephone requests that had to be fielded by my colleagues as I tried to handle the onslaught. Radio, newspapers, television. Local, regional, national, international.

I handled all I could. I spoke softly, authoritatively, and with some emotion. What else could I do? Our filings turned out to be foretellings of the real havoc of water running over a steep hillside next to the tallest dam in the United States — and of a catastrophic release of the top of the reservoir that fortunately was averted just in time by cranking up releases down the spectacularly broken main spillway.

It took five days for the press inquiries to die down. The next week still was spent providing background for press inquiries about the Oroville drama and the slow-moving onslaught of water moving into San Joaquin Valley reservoirs that in one case meant releases had to be cranked up to the levels Friends of the River and Governor Wilson's 1997 Flood Emergency Action Team had recommended be the floodway be "built" for but had never really been prepared for.

There are powerful lessons to learn from what happened and nearly happened at Oroville Dam and the last couple of decades of progress or lack thereof. Dams hold much power, and when they go wrong, they can really go wrong. They often have design deficiencies. Those have to be addressed. Maintenance is essential. To be safe, they take money. Lots of money.

Floodwater management lessons are forgotten during droughts. Floodplain management lessons are often never learned. We can do better. It starts with more civic honesty. Solid, meaningful, substantive facts. No alternative facts. We can't learn to live more safely and better with our rivers and dangerous pieces of infrastructure unless we can commit to that.

People need to know that. Sometimes the press and people are ready to listen.

**We don't always have a chance to make our world a better place. And sometimes it starts with an early morning phone call — and often two decades of prior work.**

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Thank you for supporting rivers by staying informed. We can't wait to see you at our next event or talk!

Sincerely,

*the FOR Staff--Eric, Ron, Mandi, Steve, Bob and Toby*

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