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News and Updates

Riverside Chats: River Heroes Through the Generations
August 26, 2020 at 7:00 pm

Join us for the 4th installment of Riverside Chats. We will be joined by three families whose love for rivers has been passed down through the generations, and we'll hear exciting and personal stories from these lifelong river advocates. Hosted by FOR Board member Charlie Center and Moderated by Katie Scott. Panelists include Peter Sturges and son Rush Sturges, Robin Center and daughter Rebecca Foster, Scott Underwood and daughter Emily Underwood.

Registration is free!

The Origins of Visceral Stories

When I started the Storytelling Project back in March, I expected to receive some stories about the Stanislaus era. It was an important time. It is FOR's beginning. And we did
receive them. What I didn’t expect was to have the majority of the stories we received be from just that time. They almost exclusively covered the start of whitewater rafting and connected to the fight to save the Stanislaus. Why was that?

It made me question if our best work was done in that first decade or if our best stories are from then? How could that be true though? FOR has a persistent legacy of fighting and preventing dams since we lost the Stan to New Melones Dam. Now Wild and Scenic rivers cover our state with both federal and state protections. We have participated and litigated our way through important public processes.

We know history happened in the last 40 years. People submitted stories from time periods ranging from 1980-2020: here, here and here, plus our 2020 cohort of River Advocates submitted 6 stories. But, why do we not have as many stories from that time period yet on our Storytelling page? The following thoughts come from what you all taught me through reading your stories—with two invitations at the end.

What was so special about the Stanislaus days?
I first heard answers about this from Mark Dubois while rafting on the Stanislaus River in 2015 right as I joined the staff and later through talks at River Advocate trainings. But reading the stories submitted to the Storytelling Project expanded the palette of experience which made even more vivid the joy and sorrow from leaning in so far you are willing to fall or fail. When have you taken that risk in your life? I know I haven’t yet...

The flavor to the Stan stories have a different flavor to those in the next 40 years. Reading them and talking for hours with story writers gave perspective to why. The stories are intense, on the edge of discovery, about deep, heart-wrenching comradery to place and people, critical, urgent and driven by power of youth. People had fallen in love with a place and they were on the brink of losing it. Almost 50 years later, there remains a rawness, a vivid joy and unmistakable sense of presence in those stories—even when it hurts.

These stories were happening in the context as the US was erupting with a yearning for change. The Vietnam War was being protested. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1968 finally passed into law. Environmental legislation became a backstop to the rampant degradation people witnessed. The ‘Save the Stan’ fight was one domino being pushed over that had a national impact for the environmental movement. The intensity is to be expected. The stories met the time.

What about the other 40 years?
The Stan era was a spark, really a flame, that lit the way for the history about to be written. Smart, committed people built on the first decade’s work improving the playbook to stop other dams and to designate rivers as Wild and Scenic. And a lot has happened at FOR over the last 40 years. It is valuable to gather those stories with their different textures. Not all life can be lived at that visceral level. And some of the most profound geologic change has been through the persistence of time.

While at times the work has been intense (think: Auburn Dam campaign), our stories have the privilege of being less gut wrenching. FOR matured from a campaign to an institution steadfastly supported by you all. So much so that old timers will complain to us that, “We did all this for free!” The environmental movement has become a professional outfit. How incredible that one can make a (modest) living working to protect the environment now. Growing up in the 1980s & 90s, I was lulled by the legacy of environmental laws in motion, though far from perfect, and cradled by the stability and (false?) abundance of that time.

What’s different right now?
Just like the tectonic plates that lie under California moving quietly past each other at ~0.6 inches per year, we can feel them about to release the pressure causing earthquakes and eruptions. Actually, we have begun to see the jolts and warning signs. Climate change is undeniable—even if we look the other way with our actions and policies. Environmental rollbacks by the Trump Administration exacerbate the degradation. Protests about George Floyd’s death and the coronavirus revealed (more distinctly to everyone, but especially to white folks) how racial injustice in all our systems standardizes inequities and uneven impacts.

As we consider what FOR stories we might tell in this decade, what texture will they have? Will they tell of deep risks taken? Will we be brave enough to attempt to succeed even if it could make us companions to failure while trying?

The river flows through our work. The work has moved in its channel over time. We remember the Stanislaus so distinctly because the changes were dramatic. Look around and observe. How will the flood of current events cut new banks and pathways for our work in the next few years?

So what does that have to do with the Storytelling Project? A lot.

The invitations:

1. Get inspired! Read one of the stories by other folks. Write your story. No matter how big or (seemingly) small it is. We inspire and teach each other when we tell stories.

2. Get out of the eddy! If you have been circulating in the slow water of advocacy for the last few years, it’s time to paddle hard across the eddy line to get involved. The best stories are of when we were on our growing edge and taking risks.

Thanks for reading! If you have a comment, story to share or a friendly disagreement, I hope you’ll share! There’s always so much to learn. (Email me: tobybriggs@friendsoftheriver.org)

Toby

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**River Currents**

By Ron Stork, *Policy Director*

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**Reclamation tries to prop up the Shasta Dam raise — or sneak around California**

Well, it’s been a few months since we last heard from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) on their Shasta Dam raise proposal. Yes, in Bakersfield in February the President promised that he would bring the assembled farmers a “lotta water, a lotta dam” and in June issued an executive order to use emergency powers to speed up water project deliveries...

**Reclamation playing Alice in Wonderland Characters on the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act**

Reclamation’s new draft supplemental EIS’s treatment of the project’s impact is painful and pleasing to read.
The draft EIS states that it has no obligation to produce an EIS that examines whether the dam raise conflicts with the McCloud River provisions of the CAWSRA. Instead, it purports to only examine whether the project would impair eligibility for federal wild & scenic river status (the USFS had found the McCloud eligible in the last round of Forest Planning).

**States and environmentalists tell the courts they want to have a say in CA rivers**

The operations of some very important dams (non-federally owned hydropower dams) in California are regulated by Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Think Edison and PG&E dams. Think the big dams on the Merced, Tuolumne, Mokelumne, Yuba, and Feather Rivers. These dams are relicensed every thirty to fifty years, and with that California gets an every generation or two chance to have a meaningful role in how they are operated (or even where they will exist) in the future...

**Bringing back Temperance Flat Dam**

Attentive Currents readers will remember that the California Water Commission is proposing emergency regulations to give the proponents of the Temperance Flat dam on the San Joaquin River Gorge a favorable second chance of getting $8.5 million for environmental study and permitting costs.

Yep, this project, which we learned a few months ago had mothballed these efforts as not a priority. That meant, that the project might fail to meet the federal WIIN and Proposition 1 funding deadlines, drying up those potential sources of taxpayer subsidies..

**Sucking a lot more water out of the Delta — and I mean a lot**

We covered the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint in considerable detail in the July Currents (still available on our website). That’s the plan to increase Delta pumping by 50% and bring it to the thirsty fields of the southern San Joaquin Valley (where they long ago ran out of more local rivers to dry up).

Disturbing is that the Valley folks are holding major public conferences focusing on the Blueprint as the “solution.” The California Water Institute of Fresno State University and the Public Policy Institute of California seem to be part of the Blueprint team...

**The Governor plays on the right team on Klamath River**

When Pacificorp invoked an off-ramp clause to the settlement agreement it signed ten years ago to facilitate the removal of four of its dams on the Klamath River, it felt like “a disturbance in the Force” (think Star Wars and the Death Star).

In response, Governor Newsom sent Warren Buffett, the wizard of Omaha and owner of Oregon’s major electricity provider Pacificorp, a letter asking him to keep the company’s prior commitments...

**And the Governor stumbles a little**

Recently, Governors have been releasing their own “water plans.” Governor Newsom calls his the “Water Resilience Portfolio.” Here was my quick assessment of the parts of the plan of interest to me.

California is a green state, although the water buffaloes who enduringly have great influence here are not as green. Thus the Portfolio (not much changed from the draft) has some nice-sounding things for many in the state, including environmentalists. This memo will focus on the wins for the water buffaloes that would come on the radar screen of the SRG. Pay special attention to the last four bullets...

Click here to read the August *River Currents* article by Ron Stork
Thank you for supporting rivers by staying informed. We can't wait to see you at our next event!

Sincerely,
the FOR Staff: Eric, Ron, Brittney, Toby, and Kellie