

PADDLE SPLASHES

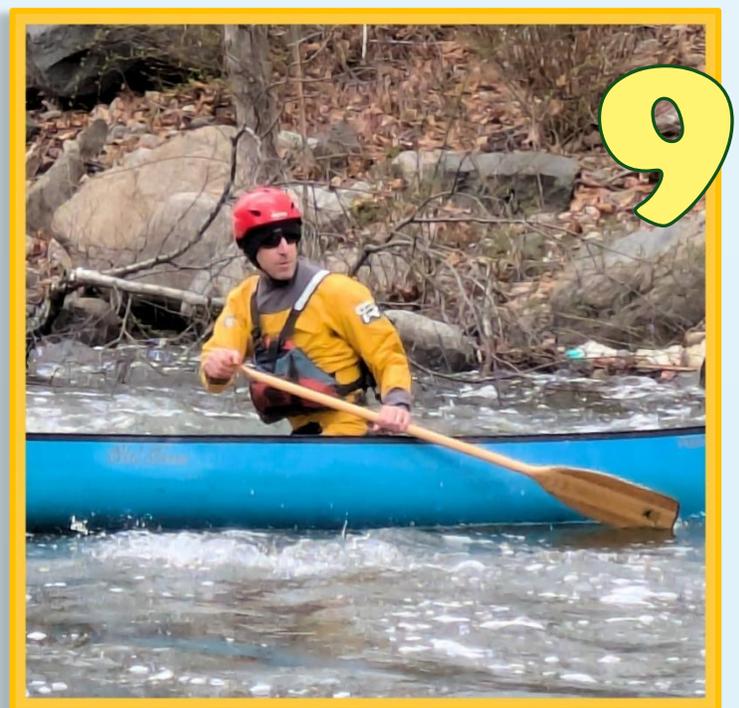
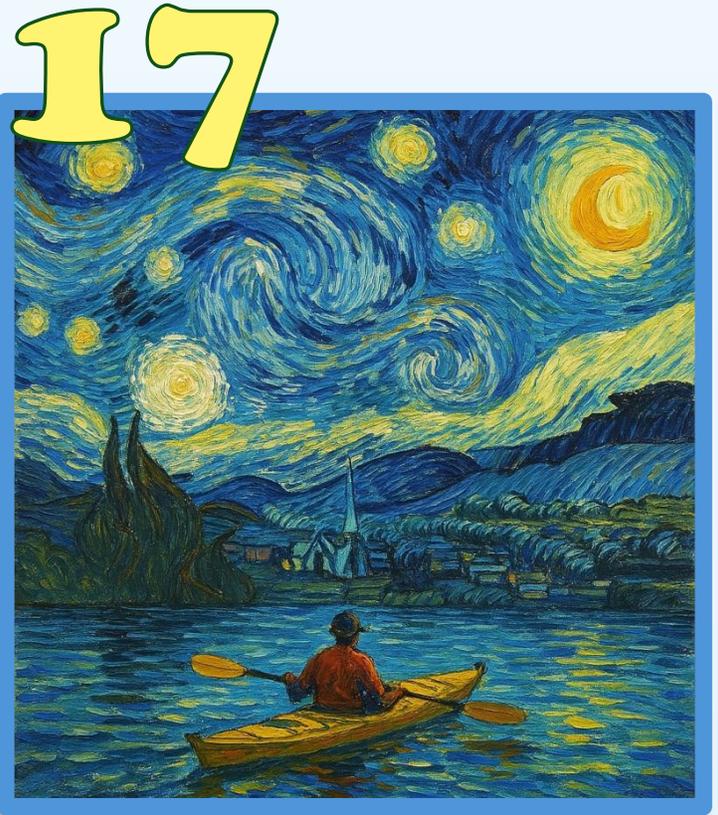
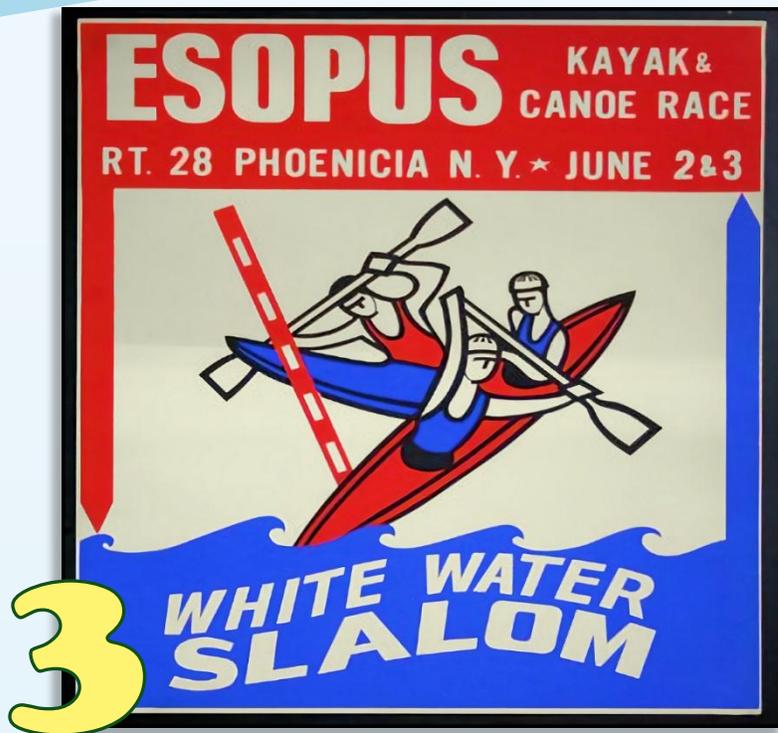
**Apr
2025**

**Appalachian Mountain Club
New York-North Jersey Chapter
Canoe & Kayak Committee**



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Whatever Happened to the **ESOPUS?**

“Only two recreational releases in the past six years,” surmises Marty Plante.

And the classic New England Slalom Series event has not been held here since 2015.

“Every release has been cancelled since then,” reports Mike Cook, race organizer for the New England Slalom Series (NESS).

A person wearing a green jacket and a black helmet is paddling a red canoe down a river. The water is turbulent with white rapids. The background shows a dense forest of trees on a hillside.

Eileen Yin on the Apr 2025 Esopus trip. Photo by Marty Plante.

This despite the NYC Reservoir Regulation ([Title 6, 670-672](#)) that encourages the goal “to enhance recreational uses, such as trout fishing and canoeing,” so long as adequate NYC water and power supplies are not impaired.

For decades, the DEC has invited four coordinated recreational release date requests from a consortium of regional boating clubs, NESS, American Whitewater, and the American Canoe Association.

Since 2015, nearly all dates have been declined. (See timeline sidebar.)

“It’s hard when your adversary is a fish,” say paddlers.

AMC continues Marc Hollander’s lead involvement in confronting this challenge.

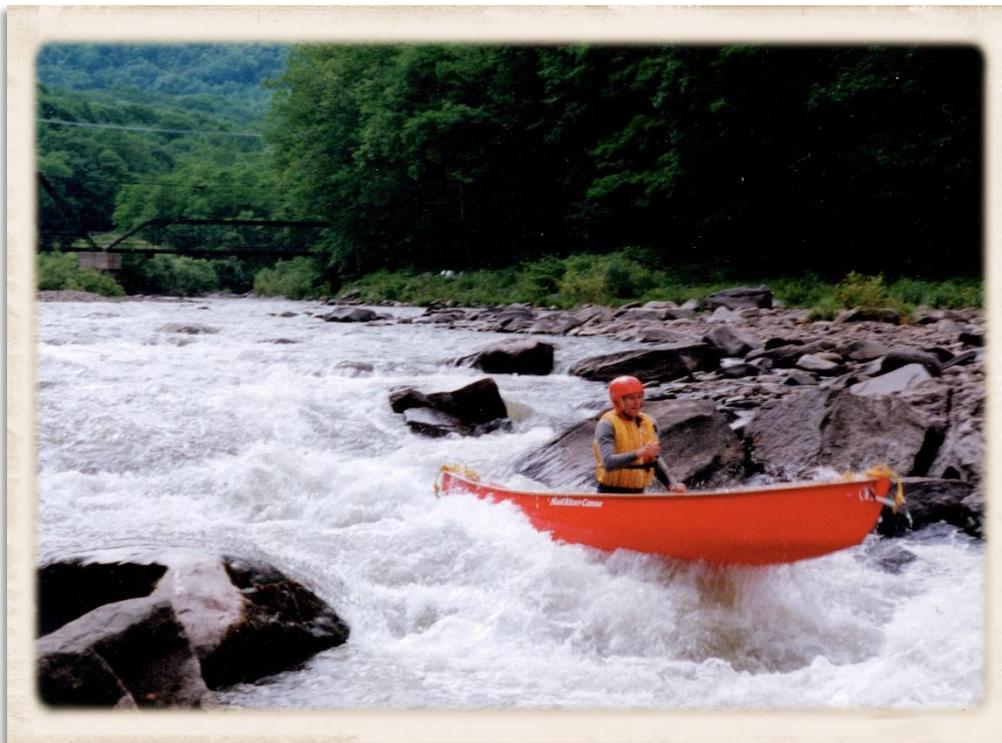
What have we done?

It feels easy for conservationists to view dams as “disproportionately sinister,” to use John McPhee’s phrase.

Nor are the folks at the Stream Access and Recreation Working Group (SARWG) monsters. This watershed team gives us a seat at the table, (at the Zoom square?) along with Bob Nasdor of American Whitewater, who joins us at the semi-annual planning and assessment meetings.

The team is more like some Saloman-booted, nerdily-cool scientists who are as comfortable discussing invasive Joro spider threat levels as they are in proposing articulated arm mechanisms that might expand release opportunities.

Some of them even paddle with us when natural creek flows allow.



**Novice
paddler
Marty
Plante
cruising
Esopus
Creek
sometime
during the
20th century.**

Yet it's hard not to feel there's a lack of political will when it comes to resolving rec release challenges.

Each cancellation explanation has *prima facie* validity: trout temperatures must stay cool for breeding, the receiving Ashokan reservoir is overflowing already, the Shandaken source reservoir is “underflowing,” the portal’s being repaired.

You’d be forgiven for thinking paddling is the lowest priority on the list

Then last season, a suspect fresh excuse emerged. A new river-wide obstruction was deemed sufficient cause to cancel rec releases.

For the entire season.

Despite numerous boat access points downstream.

Bob reminded all that, “whitewater boating, like all outdoor activities, involves some risk. American Whitewater (AW) believes that providing the public with information on safe boating practices helps the public to assess those risks for themselves.”

His face—even in a Zoom square—telescopes the wisdom of his decades of policy-making experience. His bearing, both forcefully insightful and patient, assures you why he's an expert on incident management.

Mark Zakutansky, AMC’s Director of Conservation Policy Engagement, and staff lead on AMC’s river conservation efforts also actively steers our strategy.

With his guidance, we've alerted key legislators, polled the local business community, and stepped up direct communication with the DEC.

Last winter we researched and presented a document that points to analogous dammed rivers where releases are the binding agreement in compensation for dam construction. They surmounted similar barriers through an array of fixes and win-win-win scenarios.

The DEC has yet to respond to our recent requests for comment on those.

Esopus Creek Special Recreational Events		
Date	Organization	Status
May 4-5, 2024	AMC/KCCNY/ADK Whitewater Weekend	Declined
July 13-14, 2024	AMC/KCCNY/ADK Whitewater Weekend	Declined
Aug. 31 - Sept. 2, 2024	Shandaken Whitewater Weekend	Declined
Oct. 5-6, 2024	ACA Esopus Slalom - New England Slalom Series	Declined

Status of last year’s releases
[\(NYS DEC website\)](#).

Charles Michener on the Esopus in 2019. Photo by Marty Plante.



Most notably, the concern for safety in the face of looming strainers is of paramount concern for all. Leading the regional boating community, the AMC shared several proactive solutions employed at other dammed whitewater rivers. These range from aggressive safety signage to permits and certifications.

Rain Dates

The consortium of boating clubs does understand the deft juggling the DEC faces.

They juggle the needs of multiple stakeholders: thirsty NYC residents, avid anglers, flood-vigilant property owners, anxious local business owners, and passionate outdoor enthusiasts.

“Too often problems are seen in limiting either/or solutions,” say AMC advocates. For example, couldn’t release hours be limited to conserve water if needed, they suggested.

Diplomatically, the AMC NY-NoJ’s Canoe & Kayak Committee recently requested the compromise of rain dates for cancelled releases, if not for the following weekend, then at least one placeholder rain date if the whole season has been shot.

The ecological gods seem more favorable in the fall. Local businesses tell us they are loneliest then, besides.

The DEC has yet to respond to our requests for comment on this possibility.

Whitewater Matters

“We can’t just paint ‘Hands Off our Releases’,” explain club leaders, since in the case of the Esopus, rec releases are not a right, not a binding clause in a dam relicensing agreement.

But there are numerous under-appreciated benefits to a release that are lost.

Most obviously are the economic ones. There's no reason Phoenicia couldn't become the next Jim Thorpe, where, similarly, the variety of outdoor amenities that includes river running draws could launch a steady flow of tourist dollars.

Whitewater boaters are also the lifeguards and safety reps on rivers. "We remind folks to wear PFDs, and we show them what's possible once you have qualified instruction," offered another paddler.

"I remember so many swiftwater safety classes held at this ideal location," offered Lenny Grefig. "We used to see local firefighters and emergency workers train their staff there, too."

Myles Gordon, a club member and Phoenicia resident, reminds us how river boaters keep an eye out for trashed access points or blow-downs as imminent flood triggers.

The Esopus Creek's unique features make it a prime venue for paddling instruction, stepping up boating skills safely. "Without regular releases, we can't plan group trips," explained CKC leaders, "so folks must drive to northern Massachusetts or southern Pennsylvania for a comparable safe site," they continued.

"For decades, the Appalachian Mountain Club has been proud to play a leading role in securing and stewarding recreational whitewater releases on the Esopus Creek—a treasured resource for paddlers across the region," explained Mark.

Zakutansky speaks rapidly with a spring-coiled, disciplined energy. His dual demeanor of high skills and high responsibility—common to Class four boaters like him—counters the stereotypes of whitewater enthusiasts as reckless thrill-seekers. In actuality, river running requires some of the most obsessive planning of all the Mountain Dew Sports.

Esopus Creek's unique features make it a prime venue for paddling instruction.

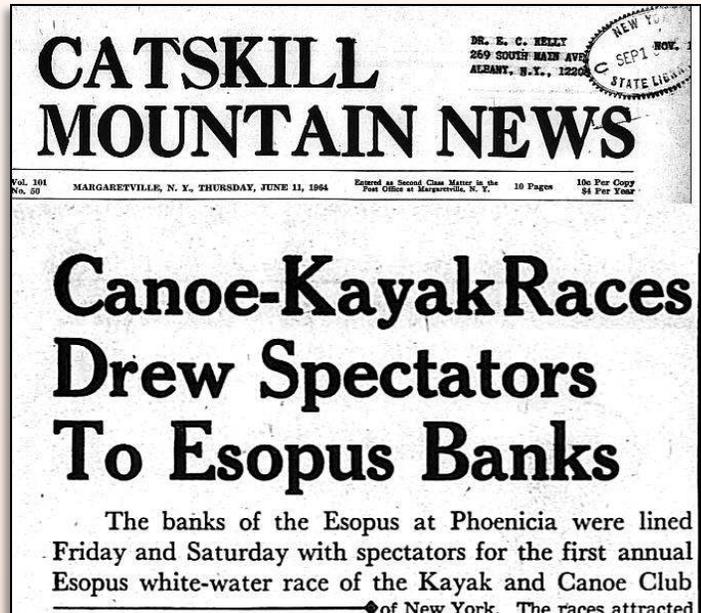
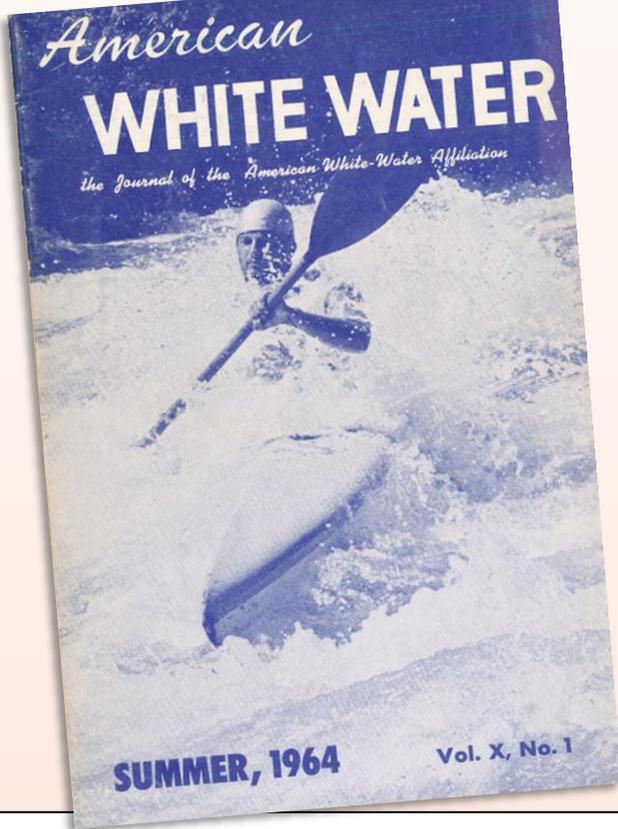
"I'm inspired by the dedication of our AMC

Paddling Committee volunteers, who are actively collaborating with partners to restore consistent, reliable releases. Their efforts reflect not only a passion for paddling but a deep commitment to river conservation that benefits both our community and the environment," Mark added.

AMC, like AW, is in for the long game to expand safe boating opportunities.

We'll continue to train and educate the paddling community about risks and river safety so that, as Bob says, "the public can make informed decisions before venturing out on the water."

They persist.



Esopus Timeline

1980s-1990s

- 80+ boaters from ADK, AMC, KCCNY, NESS enjoy 4 releases annually.
- Local fire and rescue groups drill & practice rescue swiftwater safety.
- AMC holds annual swiftwater rescue trainings.

2000s

- Mark Hollander proactively represents regional clubs, especially with a PowerPoint presentation on raising strainer issue awareness.

2014

- Last approved release for New England Slalom Series event.

2016

- When father and daughter tubers ignore a commercial outfitter's cautions to put in at safer access points, it results in the tragic death of the teen. DEC is sued, resulting in an out of court settlement.

2016-2024

- Fewer than two recreational releases approved; ecological conflicts, and strainers are among the stated explanations for cancellations.
- Repairs and upgrades to the dam halt many releases, with promise that long term, capacity to release top and bottom water, temperature flexibility.
- Local club boaters periodically catch impromptu runs safely at natural flows.
- Riverkeeper and local landowners win a decades-long campaign to mitigate turbidity caused by large water supply releases.

of New York. The races attracted 155 entries from the metropolitan area and other parts of New York state.

Races were run Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning and afternoon over a 2½-mile course from the Woodland Valley creek junction to the Esso station below the village. In the course were 18 gates, through which the boaters had to travel, in the manner that skiers travel a slalom course. The contestants race against the clock, and are penalized for striking the gates or missing them completely. Complications are introduced by having several of the gates negotiated backward and others by reversing course upstream.

Events included races in canoes and kayaks singly by men and women contestants and in canoe by woman-man teams. A truck shuttle service was used to transport boats from the end of the course to the beginning.

Constable Robert Grennie reported that both banks of the Esopus were lined with spectators during the races. There were a few dunkings, when contestants were flipped from their boats, but the only casualty was a boy contestant who suffered a cut.

Contestants camped at the Simpson ski slope, where headquarters for the races were set up. A smorgasbord dinner was held in the parish hall Saturday night, prepared by the Phoenicia Ladies Auxiliary. Mrs. Vincent Somerville was chairman.

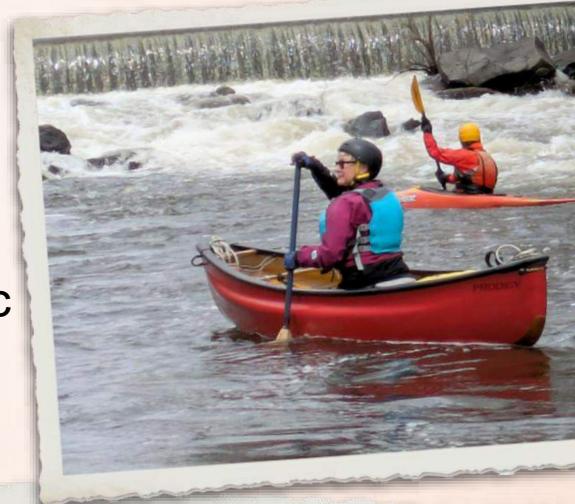
Assisting Thomas E. Asher of Englewood, N. J., race chairman, in arrangements for the race were Troop 69 of the Boy Scouts, members of the Phoenicia Fish and Game club, Shandaken Supervisor Ralph Bush and the New York city Department of Water Supply, Gas and Electricity, which opened the Shandaken portal from the Gilboa reservoir Thursday night to insure enough water in the Esopus for the races.

Members of the club expressed delight with the Esopus race course and said they will work to have the national races brought here next year instead of Vermont.

the Ramapo

apr 13,
2025

This year, the unpredictable Ramapo was, well, unpredictable. Our plans for the upper whitewater section were scuttled by unusually low water levels. We pivoted and made plans to paddle the lower flatwater section, from Hillburn to Mahwah. The portage around the low-head dam had a bumper crop of thorn bushes, but the great weather, enthusiastic participants and perfect river level made it a great day.



Dave Kaplan

Our dear friend and longtime AMC member, Dave Kaplan, has left us peacefully at the age of 97.

Dave was more than just a familiar face—he was a cherished presence on our trips, always quick with a joke or a warm smile. His remarkable sense of humor and easygoing nature brought joy to everyone around him, turning ordinary moments into lasting memories. His stories, laughter, and good company will be deeply missed. Dave's memory will live on in the hearts of all who had the pleasure of knowing him.



Lina and I were lucky to have met Dave and Arlene at the Fall Foliage paddles. As everyone said, Dave would go joke for joke at the campfire. He did talk to me about growing up in lower Manhattan which was rough in those days. I always wondered how a city boy ended up as a whitewater paddler and a ski instructor later in life? I would have loved to hear more.

- David Schwide

What a pair Arlene and Dave were. I was lucky to have joined them on ski and canoe-camping trips. They were ambassadors to the early years of my AMC adventures and always warm, fun, almost magical, and generous with their time and skills.

- Cath Kraft

Dave's wit and humor were part of the attractions of the Fall Foliage trips. We will miss him dearly.

- Zoltan & Kati

Dave's departure is one of those things you more or less expect, yet are still shocked when it happens. His humor was of that fearless kind that has almost disappeared in our times when people keep finding more and more things to be offended by. (My son, who was 10 at the time, still remembers Dave's straight-faced advice to save money on toilet paper by using both sides.)

I will miss him!

- Vadim





Dave and Arlene came on our Adirondack Fall Foliage trips from the first one in 1996 to 2015, plus many other trips and instruction programs. Arlene passed in 2016 and Dave came by himself until 2018. I called him each fall to ask if he could come again. He always wanted to continue, but occasional dizziness and care for his cat prevented that. He always told me that the trips and friends that he made meant the world to him. He paddled and exercised daily to maintain his good health. He showed us how to live well and enjoyably for 97 years. Now he will be happiest together with Arlene, his true love, again. They are both an inspiring example to everyone who knew them, and will be dearly missed.

- Rich Breton

My fond memories of Dave and Arlene are from many, many years on the Fall Foliage Trip - at least fifteen. Dave held court around the campfire while Arlene ruled the kitchen. But there is another part of my memories of them—as a new paddler, they were my instructors on a Class 2 Whitewater Instruction led by Bernie and Ann Gastrich. At dinnertime, Dave held everyone's attention with his stories and jokes, while Arlene ruled the kitchen. Years later, Dave and Arlene were still instructing and did so for several more years - this time as part of the team of instructors when Rich, Henry, and I led Basic Instruction at Mohican. Dave, true to his nature, kept everyone laughing, while Arlene ruled the kitchen.

- Lenny Grefig

Paddlers' Party

January 12, 2025

Our annual party and pre-party hike were a fantastic celebration, filled with laughter, great company, and unforgettable moments that our paddlers thoroughly enjoyed.

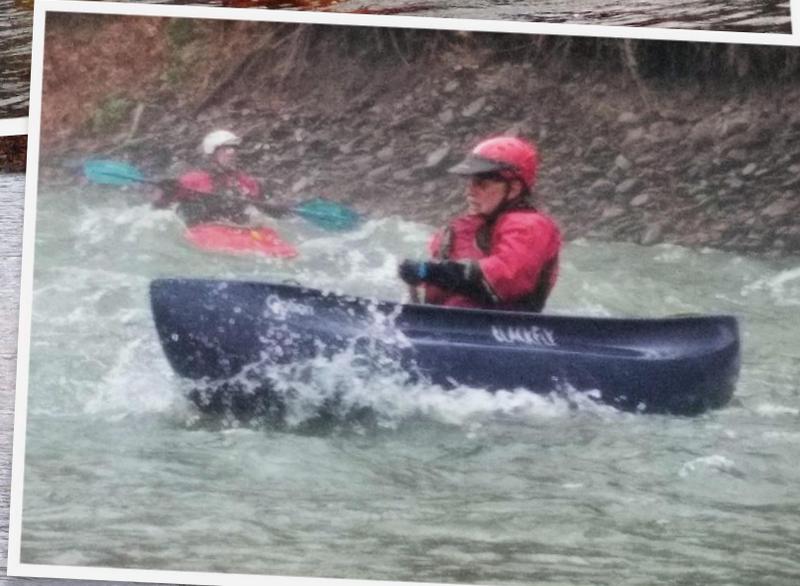
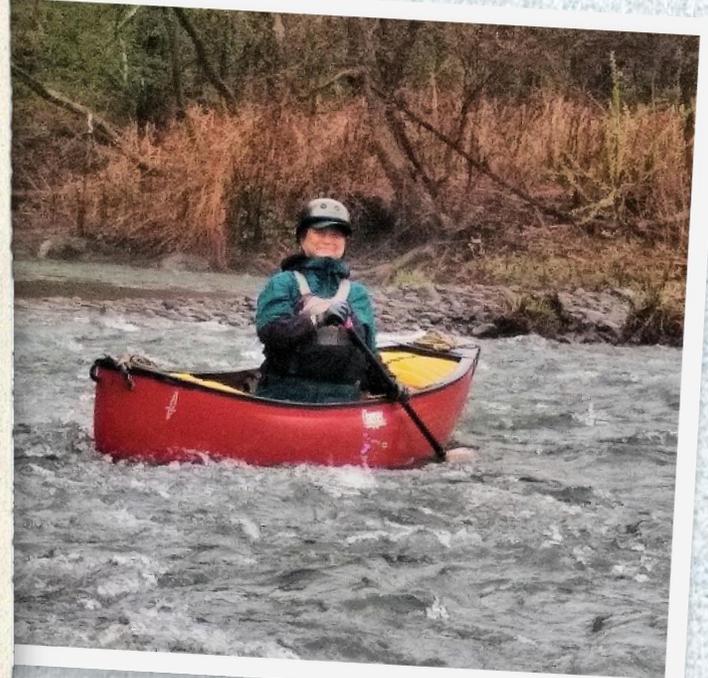


PHOTOS BY
MARY ANN HOAG

PHOTOS BY MARTY PLANTE
AND MARY ANN HOAG

The ESOPUS

Neil made plans for a Farmington River trip. Mother Nature had a different plan. The river levels were unusually low in Connecticut, but were high in the Catskills. He moved the trip to Esopus Creek, a river that's normally run only on a rare dam release. Light rain and fog made it an interesting day—we could hear the rapids, but not see them until we were on top of them – but it was a great day to be out on the water.



What's Happenin'

Click a square
to find out more

June 13-16, 2025
Saranac Lake, NY



**ADIRONDACK
PADDLING
SYMPOSIUM**

**Delaware & Raritan Canal
Canoe & Kayak Race**
Princeton, NJ
May 3, 2025



Paddle the Erie Canal
Sun, June 22, 2025



Delaware River Sojourn
June 14-20, 2025



**Adirondack Freestyle
Canoe Symposium**
July 17-20, 2025



**Zoar Outdoor
Swiftwater Rescue Clinic**
Jun 14-15, 2025



2025 Activity Schedule

Date		Quiet Water	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
May	3-4			Esopus <i>Plante</i> (Sun, May 4)	
	9-10	Oswego <i>Watters</i> (Sat, May 10)			
	17-18				
	24-25	Litter Pickup on Wappengers Creek <i>Faller</i> (Sun, 5/25)			
May 31-Jun 1		Mullica Family Canoe/Camping <i>Watters</i> (Fri-Sun, May 30-Jun 1)	River Canoeing Instr. <i>Brady</i> (Fri-Sun, May 30-Jun 1)		
			Beginner Whitewater Kayaking Instruction <i>Brady</i> (Fri-Sun, May 30-Jun 1)		
June	7-8	Expedition Canoe Camping Instruction at Mercer Lake, NJ <i>MacDougall</i> (Sat, Jun 7)			
		Chapter Picnic Harriman Outdoor Center Fri-Sun, Jun 6-8			
	14-15				
	21-22		Beginner Whitewater Canoe & Kayaking Instruction <i>Brady</i> (Sat-Sun, Jun 21-22)		
28-29	Foodie Hike/Paddle Wknd Harriman Outdoor Center (Fri-Sun, Jun 27-29)				

Lasting Image

The Art of Paddling

Photo montage by Marty Plante
using DALL-E 3 imaging software.

