
Westfield River Wildwater Races Committee

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69th Annual Westfield River Wildwater Races Come Back After Cancellation with Community Support

Huntington, MA – The country's oldest continuously-run whitewater kayak and canoe races announced that they are taking to the Westfield River once again this April 20th from 9AM to 4PM. This is a rapid turnaround after the races were canceled on March 8th due to lack of funds.

“We regretfully canceled as we simply lacked the financial resources and the volunteers to successfully run the race,” says Race Committee Chair and longtime-paddler Harry Rock. “Costs for permitting and safety have risen dramatically and cannot be covered entirely by registration fees.”

“What we did not expect was a rapid groundswell of community and business support for this historic race,” says Kathryn Koegel, Race Managing Director. “Our Facebook page blew up, not just with anger about the race going away, but with offers of volunteer help as well as sponsors stepping up. Champion racer Travis Wheeler created a [Gofundme](#) that to date has raised over \$4100 from individuals and racers who care about the event. Volunteers from all over the region are pledging to work the day of the race at everything from parking to set up and on water safety.”



Forty-nine year racer and former organizer Jeff DeFeo presented the challenge to local business contacts at Indian Motorcycle of Springfield and the Raymakers family companies (J. L. Raymakers & Sons, Inc. and ROAR, Inc. of Westfield) who joined as presenting sponsors covering the budget shortfall.

Pioneer Valley Waste Management offered to provide trash services free of charge and the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee stepped in to fund portapotties to keep the river clean.

Additional sponsors include Westfield Bank, Polish National Credit Union, Green & Clean Junk Removal and Greenfield Savings Bank.

The organizers are filing the necessary permits and expect to open online registrations by March 20th. “We are grateful for the thoughtful consideration and hard work put in by the select boards and police of Huntington and Russell to collaborate on a safety plan for the race,” says Harry Rock.

Over 350 paddlers will encounter a fun, fast ride on a river so beautiful and historic that 30 years ago it received [Wild & Scenic designation](#) from the US Congress. This annual rite of spring in the Hilltowns of Western Mass this year adds a stand-up paddleboard (or SUP) race class.

Expert paddlers begin at Knightville Dam north of Huntington at 9:30AM and make their way downriver with up to Class 3 rapids. They navigate around massive boulders as they are propelled by a rush of spring flowing water for five miles. The river is raised from its normal height due to a special water release from Knightville and Littleville Dams by the US Army Corp of Engineers.

The Classic Race begins in the center of the village of Huntington at 11AM and makes its way towards Russell with up to Class 2 rapids for eight miles. Paddlers must carry (portage) their canoes or kayaks over two sets of rock outcroppings to evade impassable waterfalls.

A River Celebration with awards, live music, a children's puppet parade and food trucks will be held from noon to 4pm at Strathmore Park in Russell. All are welcome to attend.

Online registration will go live at westfieldriver.org/races the week of March 18th. Early bird pricing of \$35 is available only during the month of March and includes insurance. The price rises to \$45 up until the week before the race. Those new to the race are encouraged to attend the two free clinics (April 6th and 13th at 11AM) that leave from the center of Huntington just off the green bridge on Rte 112. They will learn from expert paddlers how to safely navigate the course.

Sponsors are encouraged to contact wrraces@gmail.com for information on how to be integrated into the event. Volunteers for day of race tasks can reach out at wrraces@gmail.com.

The Westfield River Wildwater Races are a subcommittee of the Westfield River Watershed Association, a registered 501(c)(3).

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Photo credits: Inner Mountain Photography



Women's Open Canoe 2 person best in class 2023.

Photo credit: Kathryn Koegel