

# CLUB FOSTERED COMMUNITY GRANT REPORT 2025



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## ABOUT THE ACA

Founded in 1880, The American Canoe Association (ACA) is a national nonprofit organization serving the paddling public by providing education related to all aspects of paddling, stewardship support to help protect paddling environments, and sanctioning of programs and events to promote paddlesports competition, exploration, and recreation.

In partnership with L.L.Bean, we believe the CFC Grant program's role is to support paddling opportunities and access for underserved community members through the framework of existing paddling clubs, non-profits, and volunteer groups. By leveraging the existing clubs and projects that are already in place, this project will not need to “reinvent the wheel.” In 2024, the CFC funding was used to amplify diversity and inclusion efforts of existing groups/projects, rather than developing brand new programs from scratch. The new paddlers engaged by the CFC DEI efforts now have a community group or club to call “home,” which results in lasting relationships and a long-term interest in experiencing and exploring the paddling world.



# CLUB FOSTERED COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAM OVERVIEW



Since 2002, the ACA has partnered with L.L.Bean to sponsor the Club Fostered Stewardship (CFS) Program. The ACA is proud to help local paddling clubs and organizations build their communities and improve their waterways. Through funds provided by L.L.Bean, the ACA's CFS Program provided nearly \$175,000 to over 185 different stewardship initiatives since its inception. In 2021, The CFS grant was refocused as the "Club Fostered Community" program; funding is now used to amplify diversity and inclusion efforts of existing groups/projects through education, stewardship, competition, recreation, and waterway exploration events.

With the continued support of L.L.Bean, the ACA will continue to support paddling clubs and grassroots organizations around the country in their efforts to make this world a better place to paddle for everyone. For more information, please visit: [americancanoe.org/partnerships](https://americancanoe.org/partnerships)

In 2025, the ACA funded eleven (11) organizations and the following projects:



# CANYON RIVER INSTRUCTION

## NARI NAUKA II - WOMEN'S RAFT GUIDE SCHOOL



NariNauka—meaning “Boat Woman” in Hindi—is an initiative launched in March 2024 to advance women’s participation in India’s whitewater industry. The inaugural five-day guide school trained 14 women from the Uttarakhand region, revealing both strong interest in professional guiding and the significant systemic barriers women face in entering the field. Today, eight graduates of the first program are actively working as raft-guide interns or safety kayakers across India and abroad, with many preparing for the annual India Guide Exam.



NariNauka II, an advanced guide school, brought together nine participants (including seven return students) for intensive training in hydrology, advanced maneuvers, guiding skills, and Swiftwater Rescue. As a result, six participants upgraded their ACA Raft Guide Certifications and two earned new ACA assessments. Collaboration during this course—with trainees, industry partners, and the Uttarakhand Tourism Department—further revealed deep structural challenges that limit women’s ability to work as full guides on their home rivers, including infrequent exam opportunities, restrictive policies, and cultural bias.



# CANYON RIVER INSTRUCTION

## NARI NAUKA II - WOMEN'S RAFT GUIDE SCHOOL

These barriers persist despite strong individual achievements and community support. For example, Pinki—one of the program's most skilled participants—trains on the Ganga almost daily and comes from a family of accomplished river guides, yet she still cannot work as a lead guide on her own raft. In the history of the Ganga's commercial rafting industry, only one Indian woman has passed the India Guide Exam: Pinki's sister, Sunita.

Despite the obstacles, the women of NariNauka are determined, resilient, and passionate about their work. They report feeling empowered when trainers are present but struggle with limited support once the program concludes, underscoring the need for long-term mentorship and institutional backing. NariNauka aims to fill this gap by providing ongoing training and a durable support network. The program's impact is already evident, and—like ripples on water—it is expected to expand opportunities for women guides for years to come.

NariNauka II delivered eight days of advanced guide training supported by four volunteer trainers. The nine participants completed approximately 80 river miles of on-water instruction and contributed a combined 288 volunteer hours dedicated to guide training. Of the participants, six successfully upgraded their ACA Raft Guide Certifications.





# PADDLESPORTS INSTITUTE

## QUEER AFFINITY INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP



This Instructor Certification Workshop brought together a small but exceptionally impactful cohort of emerging leaders in the whitewater community. Five individuals enrolled (four ultimately participated), representing organizations such as the North Carolina Outward Bound School, the National Outdoor Leadership School, Western Carolina University, and Clemson University's Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management program. Though modest in size, this group is positioned to shape the future of paddlesports education through their professional roles and influence.

This course was intentionally designed as a Queer Affinity Instructor Certification Workshop—an educational space for participants who share a specific identity and who have historically been marginalized in outdoor recreation. For LGBTQ+ paddlers, mainstream paddlesports environments often assume heterosexuality and a gender binary as the cultural default. Even well-meaning educators may use language, stories, or humor rooted in these assumptions, subtly or overtly signaling that queer identities are “outside the norm.” As a result, queer paddlers frequently navigate the emotional labor of deciding when—and whether—to address these dynamics with cisgender or straight peers. Affinity spaces counteract this burden by enabling participants to train without being a minority, without self-censoring, and without concern for how their identity will be perceived. Research shows that while bias-reduction training often fails to shift attitudes among dominant groups, meaningful contact with people of different identities is highly effective.



# PADDLESports INSTITUTE

## QUEER AFFINITY INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP



By developing more queer instructors, paddlesports gains both representation and an avenue for cultural change.

Thanks to support from L.L.Bean, this workshop created a safe, affirming, and transformative learning environment—many participants' first experience in any outdoor-oriented affinity space. Their testimonials highlight the profound impact: feeling fully accepted allowed them to focus deeply on their training, take up space without fear, learn from one another, and push their paddling to new levels. Participants described the freedom to show up as their whole selves, take healthy risks, and even rediscover joy in swimming rapids once they felt safe to fail. Their reflections underscore how vital it is for queer paddlers to be visible, supported, and celebrated in the industry. The support of L.L.Bean and the ACA is directly contributing to a more inclusive paddlesports community—one in which these future instructors will carry forward the skills, confidence, and visibility needed to create meaningful, lasting change.



# PIEDMONT PADDLESPORTS BREAKING BARRIERS PROGRAM

Funding from L.L.Bean's Breaking Barriers Grant enabled Piedmont Paddlesports—working with Latta Nature Preserve, the Lake Norman YMCA, and the Elysium School of Innovation—to deliver ACA-certified paddlesports instruction, equipment access, and outdoor learning experiences to youth in the Greater Charlotte region. The grant covered instructional staff and the rental of boats, paddles, and PFDs, ensuring that every student could participate safely and at no cost. Five youth also received scholarships to continue developing their skills through whitewater slalom training.

The program directly introduced paddling to 31 youth under age 13, supported by three kayaking instructors, five teachers, and four parent chaperones. An additional 137 students benefited from equipment, games-based learning, and outreach through partner-led summer paddlesports programs. All experiences emphasized water safety, teamwork, resilience, curiosity, and play.

Partnership with an innovative middle school brought science learning to life as students explored buoyancy, flotation, and Archimedes' Principle on the water. Youth also engaged in conservation and water-quality lessons with the Catawba Riverkeepers, deepening their understanding of environmental science through hands-on fieldwork.





# PIEDMONT PADDLESPORTS BREAKING BARRIERS PROGRAM



Programs took place at Latta Nature Preserve and the Lake Norman YMCA, where students encountered local wildlife—including slider turtles, a bald eagle, and a great blue heron—while learning about lake and river ecosystems and the importance of clean water stewardship. This blend of science, environmental awareness, athleticism, and adventure helped foster lasting connections to nature.

The program served a diverse group of participants, including students of color, neurodivergent youth, and students with physical disabilities. Scholarships ensured that five students—including four youth of color and two neurodivergent participants—could continue paddling through the Piedmont Paddlesports Club's whitewater slalom program, expanding long-term access and growth opportunities.

Some program highlights include:

- A once-hesitant student gained confidence and ended the day leading her peers, proudly stating she wanted to “work on the water” someday.
- Another called the experience “the best day ever.”
- An educator described the program as “where science, exploration, and joy intersect.”
- A parent shared gratitude: “I wish more kids could have opportunities like this.”



Piedmont Paddlesports expresses deep appreciation to L.L.Bean and the ACA for supporting youth access to paddlesports. This investment not only opened doors for new communities but also created lasting connections to nature, stewardship, and outdoor adventure that will continue shaping the Lake Norman region for years to come.



# PRIDE DAY ON THE RIVER

With support from grants provided by L.L.Bean, the American Canoe Association, and NRS, nine LGBTQ+ participants received two full days of free beginner whitewater instruction from Zoar Outdoor in Charlemont, MA (June 21-22). Four clinic spots were funded specifically through the L.L.Bean/ACA Club Fostered Community grant. Demand exceeded capacity, with an additional seven individuals joining the waitlist—an indicator of significant future interest.

Three professional Zoar instructors led the weekend, supported by a community volunteer serving as an LGBTQ liaison. For all participants, this was their first whitewater kayaking experience, and one participant used an assistive walking device. Instruction began with kayak orientation, wet exits, and basic strokes on flatwater, followed by on-river practice on the Deerfield River, where students learned eddy turns, peel outs, and ferries on Class I-II water. NRS donated life jackets, whistles, and nose plugs for participant use. The clinic created an environment where identities were respected and emotional, psychological, and physical safety were prioritized—allowing participants to thrive, build confidence, and form community.

The clinic concluded with a group debrief focused on next steps and opportunities for continued involvement. Participants also joined Zoar's "Pride Day on the River" After Party, connecting with the local paddling community and receiving donated gear from multiple partners. Many participants expressed interest in continuing their training, joined regional LGBTQ+ paddler mailing lists, and several went on to participate in AMC's "TGIF Paddle" affinity trip on the Deerfield River.





# PRIDE DAY ON THE RIVER

Post-clinic surveys showed unanimous satisfaction, strong feelings of community connection, and high interest in pursuing more river-based recreation. By the Numbers:

- 4 L.L.Bean/ACA-funded participant spots
- 9 total participants
- 3 clinic instructors
- 16 hours of instruction
- 1 volunteer liaison & 5 volunteer organizers

Participants praised the clinic's safety, inclusivity, and supportive environment, noting they would not have been able to attend without grant funding. Many expressed gratitude for the instruction, boosted confidence on the water, and enthusiasm to continue paddling.

## Participant Testimonials:

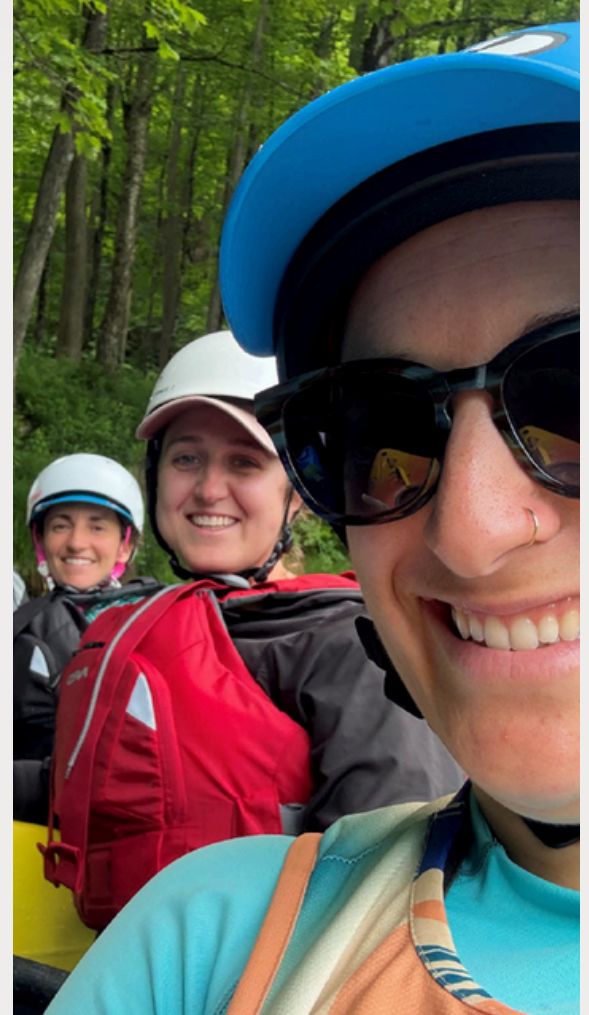
"I've been out on the water 3 times since and have practiced the skills I learned. I feel a lot more confident which makes it all more fun."

"I also want to thank the others in our group. I really enjoyed meeting you all and getting to share such a special event together. Lots of courage on display and I'm honored to have shared it."

"A special shout out for all the effort with the sponsors and warm welcome to whitewater kayaking for the LGBTQ community."

"That was all so much fun. I'm grateful to have met you all and have had this opportunity to try something new and challenging."

"You are a fantastic leader in this space and I'm so grateful for your work in bringing us all together."



# ROARING FORK KAYAK CLUB

## 2025 KIDS KAYAKING CAMP

The mission of the Roaring Fork Kayaking Club is to provide access, instruction, and an inclusive community for whitewater kayaking so that young people can build skills, confidence, and a deep appreciation for rivers and wild places. In 2025, we launched our first two week-long Kids Kayaking Camps, offered at a break-even rate of \$400 per camper to keep the experience as affordable as possible. Twenty local youth—14 boys and 6 girls—participated.

Thanks to the generosity of L.L.Bean, working through the ACA, we awarded seven scholarships to ensure equitable access for families facing financial or personal challenges. Three of these scholarships were fully funded by the L.L.Bean Breaking Barriers grant. Through partnerships with YouthZone and the Buddy Program, we identified children who would benefit most from this opportunity, many of whom had never participated in paddlesports or summer camps before.

### Key Areas of Impact

- 20 campers completed two week-long whitewater kayaking camps.
- 7 students received full scholarships, including 3 funded directly by L.L.Bean.
- Instruction was delivered by 3 certified coaches supported by 3 high school coaching assistants.
- Campers gained outdoor confidence, teamwork skills, and a lifelong connection to rivers and public lands.
- Families new to paddlesports became engaged in our river community, strengthening connections across the Roaring Fork Valley.

The L.L.Bean grant strengthened our ability to give all kids—regardless of income or background—a meaningful river experience.





# ROARING FORK KAYAK CLUB 2025 KIDS KAYAKING CAMP



Parents shared powerful stories about how much this opportunity meant to their children, from building confidence to discovering new passions to accessing outdoor experiences their families couldn't provide on their own.

Throughout each week, coaches watched campers learn to paddle, communicate effectively, and support each other. A highlight came from Coach Stan Prichard, who described watching three 10-year-old boys form a lasting friendship through kayaking—encouraging one another, embracing challenges, and progressing from hesitant beginners to confident young paddlers.

These moments of belonging, growth, and joy underscore the transformative power of getting kids on the water. Because of the success of these inaugural camps, we are doubling our offerings in 2026, expanding to four week-long sessions focused on skill development, safety, and river stewardship.

The partnership with L.L.Bean made these camps possible and created experiences that will continue to shape young river runners—and our community—for years to come.



## SEA TREK / OUTDOOR AFRO LEAD PROGRAM

WSea Trek and Outdoor Afro joined hands to deliver an ACA Leadership, Exploration, and Development (LEAD) program in Alameda and Sausalito, California as one of Outdoor Afro's annual Capstone opportunities for its volunteer leaders. ACA's LEAD initiative was established in 2022 as a transformative program specifically crafted to empower and uplift individuals of color by providing them with the necessary training, education, and skill development to make a positive impact in their local communities through paddlesports. Outdoor Afro is a national not-for-profit that inspires and connects Black leaders in nature. This collaborative event wasn't just about strokes, rescues, and navigation — it was about resourcing leaders who reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, and inspiring others to safely and confidently experience the water.



# SEA TREK / OUTDOOR AFRO LEAD PROGRAM



ACA Instructor & Leader Trainer Laura Zulliger facilitated the program alongside instructors Dierdre Dixon and Dana Dacus-Hare, and shared how powerful it was to see leaders come together in spaces that felt both challenging and affirming: "Representation matters. When participants see leaders who look like them, it sends a message: you belong here, your leadership is valued, and your presence changes the culture of the outdoors."

The course participants, Volunteer Leaders at Outdoor Afro, engaged in intensive on-water training, risk management, and group leadership development under the framework of ACA's new Community Paddlesports Leader (CPL) certification pathway. The CPL designation emphasizes safe, community-based leadership rather than formal instruction and technical skill demonstration.

DD Johnice, Chief Program & Innovation Officer of Outdoor Afro highlighted how the Leader Pathway program aligns with Outdoor Afro's mission: "Outdoor Afro's Volunteer Leaders are already community leaders and trusted voices who lead nearly 1500 outdoor trips for thousands of people in over 60 markets across the US. We provide expertise, a sense of community and belonging, and of course, the service of planning and organizing the events and removing any barriers to access to nature. Our annual Capstone events provide opportunities for Volunteer Leaders to expand their skill sets and get inspired to create a greater variety of trips in order to reach a greater number of people and communities. The CPL program is a good match for us— opening the door to continued growth if they want to advance further."

As Laura summarized: "This course wasn't the end point. It's the beginning. Each new leader will ripple out to influence their community, inspire new paddlers, and grow a more inclusive paddling culture."



# SHOW ME WOMEN PADDLERS PADDLE FORWARD SCHOLARSHIP

Show Me Women Paddlers, an ACA Paddle America Club, hosted a successful Intro to Kayaking event at Fellows Lake Recreational Area & Marina, engaging 20 participants in foundational paddling skills and safety education. The event was supported by four board members—including three Level 2 Kayak Instructors—a volunteer L2 instructor, and an outdoor photographer, contributing a total of 50 volunteer hours across instruction, administration, social engagement, and preparation.

Grant funding played a key role in reducing financial barriers, allowing the club to welcome new paddlers who may not have otherwise participated. The experience provided valuable lessons in event planning, highlighting the importance of coordinated logistics, defined roles, and detailed checklists to ensure smooth and safe operations.

The program strengthened the club's approach to inclusion, safety, and community building, demonstrating how small, well-supported introductory classes can create lasting impact. Partnerships with Fellows Lake staff also opened the door to future collaborative paddling opportunities that will continue to benefit the club and its participants.



# SHOW ME WOMEN PADDLERS PADDLE FORWARD SCHOLARSHIP

Participants shared meaningful insights about their learning experience, including:

- Gaining confidence to purchase properly fitted, women-specific life vests.
- Discovering how kayak design influences stability and performance through hands-on activities.
- Learning correct paddle techniques and the value of reflective safety stickers during on-water instruction.

These reflections underscore the event's success in empowering new paddlers, building community connections, and expanding access to local waterways.

Feedback from participants following the event was overwhelmingly positive, underscoring the program's impact on confidence, learning, and community connection. Many expressed gratitude for the supportive environment and high-quality instruction. Participants repeatedly described the event as fun, empowering, and exceptionally well-organized.

Several attendees highlighted how meaningful the experience was for them personally. One paddler shared that the day was "such a success" and "empowering," while another said it was "a huge success" and that everyone "had such a good time." Others emphasized the sense of community, describing the event as "a fun day with awesome women" and praising the "positive, encouraging team."

- "You all did a phenomenal job, and we had such a great time."
- "I always get something out of these events—yesterday definitely more so than others."
- "We really enjoyed this day... thank you to your amazing partners for grant funding!"

In follow-up correspondence, one participant shared that the class increased her confidence on the water, noting that it was "such a great educational experience" and that she was grateful for the instructors' guidance and support.





# TAMPA BAY KAYAK ANGLERS LA RAZA EXPLORERS



L.L.Bean's funding supported the La Raza Explore & Kayak Clean-Up event held on August 24 on the Hillsborough River. The grant enabled the purchase of new paddling and safety equipment and funded bilingual marketing materials that strengthened outreach to Hispanic community members. Due to safety concerns in the current political climate, promotion was intentionally directed internally to more than 300 Hispanic members rather than to the public, ensuring participants could enjoy outdoor recreation and stewardship activities without fear of immigration-related targeting. This approach helped create a culturally affirming, safe environment for all attendees.

Nine participants took part in the paddle, representing members of the Hispanic and broader outdoor recreation communities. They learned about the ecological and cultural significance of the Hillsborough River, the primary water source for the City of Tampa, where 26% of residents identify as Hispanic.

Participants completed a clean-up along a two-mile stretch of the river, removing debris while learning about everyday water use and its connection to river health and local conservation efforts. The event helped deepen environmental stewardship and cultural connection to Tampa Bay's waterways.

One of the most memorable moments came from a participant who recently moved from Puerto Rico to the Tampa Bay area.



# TAMPA BAY KAYAK ANGLERS

## LA RAZA EXPLORERS



One of the most memorable moments came from a participant who recently moved from Puerto Rico to the Tampa Bay area. She shared that she once loved paddling along the rivers and coastlines of the island but had struggled to find a welcoming paddling community since relocating to the mainland. After joining the La Raza Explore & Kayak Clean-Up, she was deeply moved to reconnect with the water—and with a supportive Hispanic outdoor community. She expressed how meaningful it was to be back on the water, surrounded by people who shared her language, culture, and love for nature. For her, the experience wasn't just a river clean-up; it was a moment of belonging, a reconnection to home, and a reminder that nature can be a place of healing. Moments like this highlight the importance of culturally rooted outdoor programming. Despite the challenges of the current political climate, this event affirmed that the outdoors can remain a safe, restorative space where community, culture, and conservation come together.



# TEAM RIVER RUNNER

## OUTTASIGHT GRAND JUNCTION EVENT



The 2025 Team River Runner (TRR) OuttaSight Grand Junction clinic brought together blind and visually impaired veterans, along with sighted volunteers, for a weekend centered on adaptive kayaking, skill development, trust, and community. OuttaSight Clinics are designed to empower blind veterans to paddle independently while teaching sighted volunteers the systems, communication techniques, and safety skills required to guide visually impaired paddlers on lakes, rivers, and even whitewater.

The event began with participants and volunteers traveling to Whitewater, Colorado, where the group shared an Airbnb that quickly became a space of camaraderie, dark humor, veteran storytelling, and mutual support. All blind participants were military veterans, creating an immediate sense of common ground and shared purpose.



Each day started with a group breakfast before heading to a private lake reserved exclusively for the clinic. After an unexpected injury sent one organizer to the emergency room, the author stepped into a leadership role—training volunteers in guiding techniques, tactile paddle marking, safe boat handling, and communication strategies for blind paddlers. On the water, participants practiced paddling skills, orientation techniques, and boat control in a calm environment focused on independence and confidence-building.



Beyond the technical instruction, the clinic emphasized emotional connection and peer support. Conversations about blindness, mental health, resilience, and life as disabled veterans played a central role in the weekend, reinforcing the community-based mission of Team River Runner.

# TEAM RIVER RUNNER

## OUTTASIGHT GRAND JUNCTION EVENT



- 5 sighted volunteers were trained to safely guide visually impaired paddlers.
- 4 experienced visually impaired veterans attended and contributed to instruction.
- The lead instructor was TRR's most experienced visually impaired veteran, modeling independence and adaptive leadership.
- TRR's OuttaSight program has now enabled more than 50 visually impaired veterans nationwide to paddle whitewater independently in their own kayaks.

Training new guides expands access for visually impaired veterans, while also reducing isolation for participants who often face mobility and transportation barriers. This event strengthened a growing national community in which blind and low-vision veterans can build confidence, develop skills, and find belonging through paddlesports.

Zach Tidwell, Blind Marine Corps Veteran

"I'm completely blind and deaf in one ear, yet Team River Runner still sends me down whitewater in my own kayak—just like everyone else." and added, ""My disabilities come from a suicide attempt, and I battle severe depression. With that comes a lot of isolation. But with TRR, I'm just another paddler—another guy around the campfire. That normalcy is invaluable and directly improves my quality of life."

Steve Baskis, Blind Army Veteran

"As a blind veteran, mentoring other blinded veterans is deeply rewarding. Teaching sighted volunteers how to guide us on lakes, rivers, and even the ocean builds trust, awareness, and teamwork." Steve highlighted that the community is just as important as the paddling:

"The conversations we have—about our challenges and the strategies we use to navigate daily life—are as meaningful as running rapids."



# TEAM RIVER RUNNER 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL AFFINITY CLINIC



Team River Runner (TRR) held its 5th annual Affinity Clinic, a fully funded six-day paddling experience designed to provide historically underserved and marginalized disabled veterans with opportunities for healing, skill development, leadership growth, and community connection through adaptive outdoor recreation. Support from the ACA and L.L.Bean Club Fostered Community Grant eliminated financial barriers for all 11 participants and helped expand leadership pathways for minority veterans within TRR's national network.

Held June 29-July 4 on the Deschutes River in Central Oregon, the clinic covered 46 miles from Warm Springs to Maupin—waters that flow through the ancestral homelands of the Tenino, Wasco, and Northern Paiute peoples.

# TEAM RIVER RUNNER

## 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL AFFINITY CLINIC

The new location offered participants the excitement of unfamiliar terrain and meaningful opportunities to connect with the natural and cultural history of the region.

The participant group reflected the diversity the Affinity Clinic was designed to support:

- 8 women veterans
- 2 Chicano/Puerto Rican veterans
- 8 African American veterans
- 4 LGBTQIA+ veterans
- 2 Indigenous veterans

The clinic provided instruction in river safety, adaptive paddling techniques for veterans with disabilities, and environmental stewardship. Participants chose each day whether to paddle inflatable kayaks or join a raft team. Evenings brought time for camaraderie, shared meals, games, short hikes, and camping under the stars—creating a supportive environment where veterans could unwind, reflect, and build deep bonds. Through intentional recruitment and a commitment to representation, TRR continues to address disparities in paddlesports and outdoor recreation. This clinic offered minority veterans a psychologically safe space to grow as paddlers while developing leadership skills they can bring back to their home communities and local TRR chapters. The diverse makeup of the cohort fostered visibility, belonging, and empowerment—core goals of TRR’s Affinity programming.

Veterans described the Affinity Clinic as transformative, validating, and deeply restorative:

- “The river didn’t just carry me downstream; it carried me home... My identity is something to honor.” — A.P.
- “Conquering challenges with a group of minority individuals with whom I felt comfortable was priceless.” — V.J.
- “At a time when these programs are under sociopolitical attack, the Affinity Clinic is a radical form of protest. Representation and visibility matter.” — M.K.
- “It gave me a rare opportunity to reconnect with nature and peers who truly understand our struggles.” — S.S.
- “This reminded me of my value as a human being and what I’m capable of... lessons I’ll carry for life.” — M.P.

These reflections demonstrate the clinic’s profound impact—offering empowerment, healing, community, and renewed purpose for historically marginalized disabled veterans.



# WILD SCIENCE EXPLORERS NEZ PERCE TRIBE TEEN RAFTING



Through support from L.L.Bean, Wild Science Explorers delivered a series of conservation-focused rafting experiences that engaged youth—particularly Nez Perce tribal members—in hands-on environmental education and cultural connection. Across two trips, the program conducted nine conservation education activities, involving 23 youth in lessons rooted in Nez Perce traditional ecological knowledge. Four returning participants served as guides-in-training, including three Nez Perce teens, strengthening leadership pathways within the community. Participants helped clean over 12 river beaches and monitored two creeks, building environmental responsibility and practical ecological skills while deepening their appreciation of the Salmon River ecosystem. Nez Perce tribal member and Wildlife Division technician James Holt offered a powerful reflection on the program's impact:



"It was a blast! Macroinvertebrates, raptors, local and migratory birds, bighorn sheep, tribal cultural connections, youth empowerment, and the magnificent lower Salmon River. We Nimiipuu have a beautiful, ancient, and powerful Homeland. As my elders always said, 'We must tell our own story.'"

His words underscore the importance of culturally rooted outdoor programming—connecting youth to science, stewardship, and their ancestral lands while empowering the next generation of Nez Perce storytellers, scientists, and river stewards.



Thank You!

L.L.Bean

