



NEWSLETTER

Thank you for an incredible 2025

As we close out 2025, we want to pause and say thank you. This year was filled with growth, momentum, and meaningful milestones and none of it would have been possible without you.

To celebrate, we've created a short "wrapped"-inspired highlights video capturing just a snapshot of what our community accomplished together this year. We hope it brings a smile and a sense of pride as you reflect on all that was made possible in paddlesports in 2025.

[Watch the 2025 "Wrapped" Video](#)

We also invite you to watch the recording of the 2025 ACA Annual Meeting,

where staff shared accomplishments from 2025 and some of the things we are looking forward to in 2026.

[View the 2025 Annual Meeting Recording](#)



Building Community Through Paddlesports

In partnership with L.L.Bean, we supported 11 barrier breaking projects this year through the ACA Club Fostered Community Grant. Across the country and around the world, these grants helped paddlesports serve as a powerful catalyst for connection, confidence, and belonging.

This year's report shares inspiring stories, from women becoming raft guides in the Himalayas, to queer paddlers finding joy and safety on the river, blind veterans gaining independence through adaptive kayaking, and youth discovering stewardship and community through their first time on the water. Each project is unique, but all demonstrate how paddling can be a pathway to empowerment, healing, and opportunity.

Read the 2025 Club Fostered Community Grant Report

Get to Know the ACA's New Membership Platform

We're excited to officially launch the ACA's new membership platform, powered by Sport:80 and designed to be cleaner, easier to use, and mobile-friendly. The new system brings key tools into one place, making it simpler to manage memberships, register for events, request insurance, and update preferences.

To help you get comfortable, we're offering live walkthroughs and recordings:

- Recorded walkthroughs available for [Instructors](#) and [Competition Members](#)
- Live walkthrough for Paddle America Club leaders and Affiliate Organization members on January 8 at 3:00 PM ET

We're excited to bring you a more user-friendly ACA experience and appreciate your continued support of the paddling community.

Register for the January 8 walkthrough



Take Action to Introduce Public River Access Legislation in Colorado

Colorado has some of the most iconic rivers in the country but it also has the most restrictive river access laws in the West. A decades-old court ruling leaves paddlers at risk of trespassing charges simply for floating through stretches of river that are bordered by private land, creating uncertainty for anyone who enjoys Colorado waterways.

American Whitewater, Colorado Whitewater, and the ACA are working together on a 2026 legislative effort to protect the public's ability to float rivers and to scout or portage hazards safely and responsibly. As river use grows and land ownership changes, clear and fair access protections are more important than ever.

You can help. Please take a few minutes to customize and send a letter to Colorado legislators, sharing your personal experiences on the state's rivers and why access matters to you.

Speak up for Colorado's rivers



Blackburn Challenge to Host 2026 USA Canoe Ocean Racing / Surfski Nationals

We are excited to announce that the Blackburn Challenge will host the 2026 USA Canoe Ocean Racing / Surfski National Championships on July 11, 2026, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Widely regarded as the “Boston Marathon” of open-water paddling, this iconic 20-mile circumnavigation of Cape Ann has tested endurance athletes from around the world for nearly 40 years.

Hosted by the Cape Ann Rowing Club, the championship course will challenge paddlers’ fitness, judgment, and open-water skills. Active ACA members will be automatically included in the National Championships category and eligible to compete for official national titles across overall and age-group divisions.

[Read the full press release](#)

Following Waters Podcast: Jed Hinkley on the Olympics, Youth Development, and the Evolution and Future of Competitive Paddlesports

In a recent episode of Following Waters, ACA Policy Director Brett Mayer sits down with ACA Competition Director Jed Hinkley for a wide-ranging conversation on the Olympics, youth development, and the evolving future of competitive paddlesports in the U.S.

An Olympian and lifelong multi-discipline athlete, Jed reflects on his journey from elite winter sports to sport administration, and shares insights from his work building athlete pipelines at USA Ski Jumping and now at the ACA. Together, Brett and Jed explore how stronger youth pathways, coaching development, community programs, and even summer camps can help grow a more connected and sustainable competitive paddling landscape while keeping the joy and culture of paddling at its core.

Listen in at the link below or wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts.

[Listen to the episode](#)



2025 World Rafting Championships

At the 2025 World Rafting Championships in Aluminé, Argentina, the United States was proudly represented by five teams, two Women's teams, two Men's

teams, and a Mixed team, competing against the world's best on the international stage.

Among those competitors, four teams came from Riff Raft Racing, the Colorado-based paddle club known for its strength and commitment to the sport, and the Women's Team 2 hailed from West Virginia, demonstrating rafting talent from coast to coast.

Congratulations to all USA athletes who proudly represented our country in Argentina!

[View the full results from the 2025 World Rafting Championship](#)



Congratulations to ACA Instructor of the Month for December 2025, Laura Kurup!

Laura brings curiosity, joy, and a deep respect for community to everything she does on the river. A Canoe, Kayak, and Swiftwater Rescue Instructor; she teaches primarily on the Potomac River near DC and the Lower Yough in Pennsylvania, working with everyone from first-time paddlers to experienced canoeists.

A lifelong “water creature,” Laura found her way to paddling through community, fell in love with the single blade, and has since dedicated herself to teaching, leadership, and building inclusive river spaces. In 2025 alone, she spent 60 days teaching and training on rivers across the country, with even more adventures ahead.

We’re proud to recognize Laura for her passion, resilience, and commitment to paddling education and community.

[Read more about Laura](#)

Happy New Year and thank you for reading our monthly newsletter! Cheers to 2025 and here is to making 2026 our most impactful year yet!

Sincerely,

Kaycee Maas, Communications Manager



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