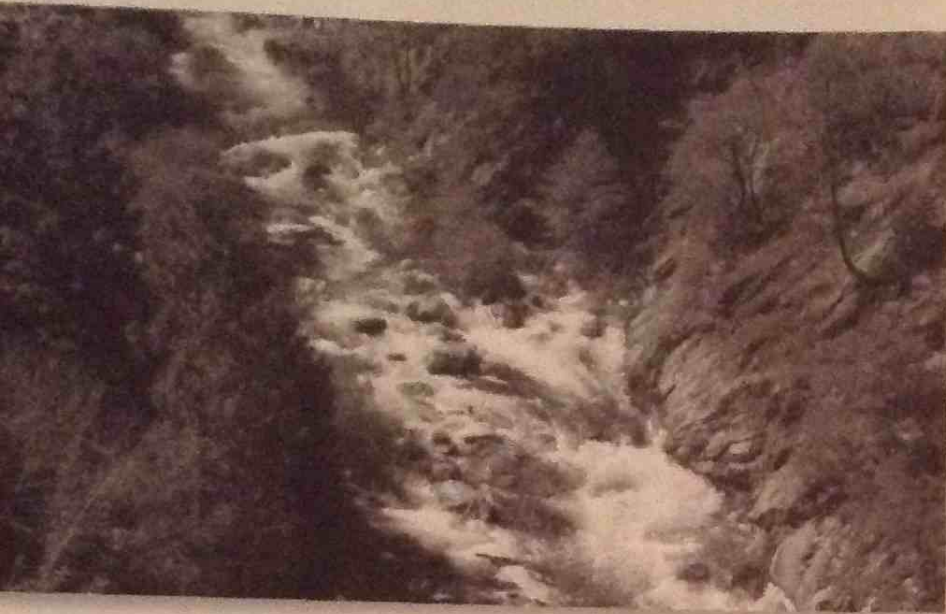


## River of Life

By Janice Kelley



Ben Ransom, compliance administrator for the Placer County Water Agency (PCWA), captured this image of an expert kayak team evaluating flow levels on the "End of the World" run on the American River's middle fork. It was part of a 2010 boating study the water agency conducted. Courtesy photo.

*"River was the daughter of Ocean and Mountain. As a young woman she said, 'I will join the worlds together of my mother the Mountain and my father the Ocean.'*

*"On her long journey from Mountain to Ocean, River carved canyons and valleys. She made sandy beaches, soft marshes and deep green pools. She was generous. She gave of herself to everyone, and so many came to live in the place made by River.*

*"Alder and reed, willow and fern grew in the rich soil beside her. Salmon and trout swam in her cold, clean flowing waters. Geese and ducks, great blue herons, beavers and muskrats filled her wetlands. The two-legged people, the human beings, came to live beside her as well.*

*"River, may we take some of these fish for our food? May we use the willow and reed from your shores and marshes for shelter and medicine?"*

*"You may take what you need," River said, "but remember, the swimming people live here because my waters are cold and clean and flowing. The willow and alder protect the soil of my shores and shade my waters. The marshes cradle many creatures. The wetlands swell with the spring snowmelt and store them until*

*I need them in the hot summer. If you are to live beside me, you must learn the ways of living here. You must live in a good and respectful way."*

Such are the words of Will Hornyak that were previously published in *Storytelling Magazine* (March/April 2007) titled "Making Ripples in Watershed Education" and in *Living Streams for Healthy Watersheds* in 2005.

Hornyak's narrative illustrates the connection of land, water and humankind. Water continues to be one of the most celebrated and most challenged natural resources on the planet. Stories and poems about living nearby or within water have been written and spoken throughout time and in cultures all over the world.

One story from Ecuador tells of a perilous journey to a magic lake capable of healing a dying prince. Other stories tell of water's power to heal women and of using water and its shorelines as a place for meditation, renewal and as a source of strength. Notable poets, such as Robert Frost and Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote poems that gave water its own voice. Even the classic Disney movie, "The Little Mermaid," reminds us of the rich and vibrant life that lives under the sea.

As a vessel for life, water contains activity below the surface that we cannot see – both trash in its many forms and treasured habitats. Water lives a delicate balance and is just as precious in times of plenty as it is in drought.

There is no magic when deciding how to allocate our water, how to care for and conserve watersheds, and assure cleanliness and safety for all. Clearly the deep story of our watershed is more than we can see with our eyes or taste in our taps. The real story of our watershed lies in the respect we show to River – daughter to the Sierra Nevada (Mountain) and the Pacific (Ocean). For the quality of our water is in truth a "reflection" of our individual and collective actions, both personal and political. These actions affect us all. ■

