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## River supporters take to the water

**The National Committee for the New River is leading its second expedition down the 320-mile not-so-new river.**

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RADFORD -- Three hundred million years later, and the New River continues to age gracefully.

Considered possibly the second-oldest river in the world -- the Nile being the oldest -- the river has seen a lot of history on its 320-mile trek through gorges and rocky mountain passes of North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia.

George Santucci, executive director of the National Committee for the New River, and other members of the NCNR set out last year to recapture that history and enjoy the beauty that still rests within and around it.

The members -- along with supporters, local residents and other New River enthusiasts -- gathered this summer once more for the second New River Expedition.

The expedition began July 20 in Watauga County, N.C., and will conclude Friday near the New River's confluence near Fayetteville, W.Va.

On Wednesday, Santucci and the rest of the river crew put in below the Claytor Lake dam to travel 11 miles to the Virginia 114 bridge.

Some were in canoes, some in kayaks and all were eager to start off a warm summer day on the river.

"Even when the weather's bad, it's still beautiful out here," said Santucci, referring to the previous week of downpours the group faced.

Traveling down a shallow section of the river, Santucci took his time, taking in the surroundings as a red-tail hawk floated across the skyline above.

Later, he would make his way over to the riverbank and catch a few minnows playing on the rocks.

"See, this is what you miss when you just paddle," he said.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the group had traveled about 200 miles.

John Copeland, fisheries biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, was one of the 13 participants for the day.

"I only have a small impact on the river with the job I do," Copeland said. "This has given me a chance to join with other citizens to make an even bigger impact."

For Santucci, the expedition is more than just an adventure; it's an opportunity for him and others to raise the awareness and importance of the New River.

"The real purpose of this trip is to make local governments realize that there [are] a lot of things they can do to enhance and protect the river," he said. "It is such a great resource."

He wants to keep the river at the forefront of their minds and for ordinances to be strengthened to improve water quality.

Santucci said that although there are no real new threats to the river, there are many national issues that have come to national prominence in recent months that could harm the river in the future.

Pharmaceutical and coal wastes rank high on his list of threats against river systems.

Pharmaceuticals can enter surface water through various resources and contain harmful pollutants, such as mercury and selenium.

According to Santucci, more research needs to be done on these wastes in order for the federal government to provide local municipalities guidance on how to control them. There are currently no federal limits on pharmaceutical waste, he said.

Copeland added that on the New River, bank erosion is a noticeable yet solvable problem.

"A lot of this erosion is from the removal of vegetation," Copeland said. "People need to realize that the river is a corridor of life, and these problems could be easily prevented."

Although both men said they are concerned for the future of the river, they also said they are optimistic that with continued education, personal conservation and joint efforts between local governments and residents, progress can be made on its protection.

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