Features

Riches Under Water
By Matt Martens

A Grateful View from Downstream: The Wild & Scenic Rivers Act Turns 50
By Karl Malcolm

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By Maddie Vincent

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By Mike Adams

Feral Horses
By Maddie Vincent
Regardless of the target of devotion, worship is an exercise in humility – in acknowledging that there are things bigger and more important than ourselves. For some, a physical house of worship, with walls, a ceiling and some stained glass, is the right setting for this sort of reflection. For others there is no human-made substitute for quiet woods or wild rivers. While physical houses of worship may be built, rebuilt and improved through the collection plate generosity of dedicated parishioners, the wall-less places of divine experience are prone more to degradation than to improvement. And they are irreplaceable. A fragile church is the curse of spiritual dedication to natural ground.

Places like these are shaped over timescales humans cannot fully comprehend, yet in our era it is people who know and celebrate them who serve as the keys to their persistence. Huge effort can be expended just swimming against the current, trying to keep what we have as pressures for change ebb and flood through time. The investment of such energy is nothing new.

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In June of 1957, Montana Wildlife, the official publication of the then-named Montana Fish and Game Department, published a six-page letter by one of the great students of untamed places, making a well-reasoned case for holding against change on behalf of the nation’s last, best, free-flowing rivers. In his famous letter, biologist John Craighead provided his account of a five-day raft trip down the Middle Fork of the Flathead River during the preceding summer of 1956. He took the trip with a group of friends and colleagues to evaluate the wild river’s recreational potential – which must have been, at least a little bit, an excuse to claim fishing as serious work. It was a timely trip regardless of their motivations. The Army Corps of Engineers was planning to construct a dam on that stretch in the Flathead National Forest, between the Bob Marshall Wilderness and Glacier National Park – a project that would back the white river up for 11 miles, while also blocking the passage of fish species that evolved there over dam-free millennia.

Craighead’s article included three black and white photographs. One shows two distant figures in a raft floating toward the viewer, ant-like in the rugged white water canyon cliffs surrounding them. Another depicts a lone angler casting upstream in quiet water alongside a raft, resting beneath a tangled logjam. The third picture shows a hunched man in a wide-brimmed hat straining to lift a leg-sized fish, with a caption reading simply, “A big bull trout comes from the clear water of a wild river.”

Beyond praising the “unsuperpassed beauty,” “superb scenery,” and “abundant fish and wildlife” of the Middle Fork country, Craighead’s article included three black and white photographs. One shows two distant figures in a raft floating toward the viewer, ant-like in the rugged white water canyon cliffs surrounding them. Another depicts a lone angler casting upstream in quiet water alongside a raft, resting beneath a tangled logjam. The third picture shows a hunched man in a wide-brimmed hat straining to lift a leg-sized fish, with a caption reading simply, “A big bull trout comes from the clear water of a wild river.”

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