**2024 Mighty Mayo River Trip Combines Adventure with Community Impact**

STONEVILLE, NC, Jan. 29, 2024 - During one of this winter's coldest days, whitewater boaters and friends gather at Stoneville Memorial Park to launch the 19th Mighty Mayo River Trip (MMRT), a day filled with river adventure and community service.

MMRT is an annual event combining a food drive, litter clean up, and cold water river paddle on the picturesque Mayo River near the town of Stoneville, N.C.

Boaters, who traveled from across North Carolina and parts of Virginia, loaded more than 950 pounds of food donations into a waiting truck to benefit Lot 2540.

Located in Madison, N.C., Lot 2540 is a food bank, salvage, and recycling ministry serving western Rockingham County, N.C.

"I'm proud to say that our focus extends beyond simply enjoying the great outdoors," stated Joe Berry, the organizer of MMRT. "We're actively involved in gathering food and financial support for the community that hosts our adventures. Following our river trip, we're committed to a litter cleanup. It's all about preserving and caring for the rivers we hold dear."

In opening remarks, Berry expressed gratitude to Kathy Galvan, Stoneville Mayor, and Shannon Prillaman, Stoneville Finance and Human Resources Director, for their support of MMRT.

Berry recognized Jenny Edwards for her contributions to outdoor recreation in Rockingham County. Edwards is a key player in the newly formed Resilient Trails Network (RTN), a nonprofit dedicated to supporting trail projects in rural and underserved communities.

After the welcome speakers, the collection of food donations, and breakfast, the boaters headed out for the highlight of the event: a 3-mile paddle from Va. Route 629 on the North Fork of the Mayo River to NC Route 1359 just below the famous “Boiling Hole” rapid in the Mayo River State Park.

Thanks to instrumental figures like Ginger Bush, Zebidiah Downey, Jeff Johnston, T Butler, the late Dr. Lindley Butler, and many others, the Boiling Hole is now a treasured feature of Mayo River State Park. These visionaries played crucial roles in the establishment of the bi-state Mayo River State Park.

The Boiling Hole rapid on the Mayo River is characterized by turbulent and swirling waters. The rapid is formed by the confluence of currents and underwater obstacles that create a dynamic and somewhat unpredictable water flow. The water in this area appears to 'boil' on the surface due to the upwelling currents and eddies.

Navigating the Boiling Hole requires skilled maneuvering, as the powerful currents can create a range of conditions from large, rolling waves to deep, churning holes. Paddlers need to exercise precision and timing to avoid being flipped by sudden changes in the water flow.

Traversing the Boiling Hole is even more challenging on a cold winter’s day.

Anna Wheeler, North Carolina Program Manager, Dan River Basin Association, paddling a whitewater kayak, reports that icicles formed in some boaters’ beards on the river.

“It’s tough to get out there when it's 21-degrees and the wind chill makes it feel like 10 degrees, but Joe’s enthusiastic spirit is contagious, and he makes everyone at the event feel special. He encourages us to push our limits while having fun and looking out for each other on the river,” says Brian Williams, Virginia Program Manager, Dan River Basin Association (DRBA). Williams paddled his whitewater canoe during the event.

That encouragement goes both ways with this group of paddlers.

Berry, a seasoned whitewater boater, initially planned to take out above the Boiling Hole in light of the frigid air temperature. But as he approached his exit point, he was met by friends along the river bank holding signs cheering “Go Joe!” This show of support and camaraderie emboldened the accomplished waterwater paddler to take on the Boiling Hole.

After completing their journey on the MMRT, Shane Brown, former Conservation Chair of the Carolina Canoe Club, took the lead on the litter cleanup, continuing the legacy of Trent Fentress who had led this important effort for many years. The team, composed of volunteer boaters and other participants, removed nine tires, 500 pounds of trash, a mattress, an old toilet, and two wrecked car bumpers from the roadside near the river. This effort is crucial, as litter is not only unsightly but also poses significant risks to wildlife and leaches toxins that can degrade water quality.

Sam Koch, Superintendent, Mayo River State Park, and his team worked side by side with the boaters and other volunteers to load the debris onto trucks for the haul away.

Lloyd Dosier of the US Coast Guard Auxiliary, known for his involvement in various paddling events throughout North Carolina, set up a water-safety informative tent at the boat take out. His presence reinforced the event’s commitment to safety and highlighted the ongoing educational efforts of the US Coast Guard Auxiliary in promoting safe and responsible paddling practices.

After the cleanup, it was time for a riverside feast. Perched on kayak and canoe bows or settled into camp chairs with plates of hot food. They shared stories and laughter, bonding over the day's experiences.

“At MMRT, I witnessed a remarkable confluence of selflessness, kindness, preservation of natural resources,” says Gordon Allen, photographer. “This event is a powerful reflection of the deep connection people feel with this river and each other. MMRT is a demonstration of how deeply we can impact our environment and each other when we come together.”

Gordon Allen, a respected nature photographer in North Carolina, was one of two professional photographers present to document the event.

Lindsay Pegg, in her second year attending the MMRT since taking on the role of Rockingham County Tourism Manager in 2021, says she has “witnessed firsthand the tremendous impact that river recreation has on our community. It's not just about the economic boost, which is significant, but it's also about the sense of community and pride it fosters. When people come together on the river, whether they're locals or visitors, there's a shared experience that transcends the activity itself. River recreation isn't just a pastime; it's a vital part of our community's identity and growth.”

Wheeler adds that “local river lovers have been the backbone of DRBA for years. We are grateful to Joe Berry, the boating clubs, and the MMRT for their strong focus on giving back to the community.”

Sunshine Richardson, a professional photographer renowned in the whitewater community, was also present to document the event.

Richardson says the “MMRT is a fantastic fusion of thrilling action and community spirit, something I always aim to capture in my photography. Their commitment to giving back, through the food drive and cleanup, embodies the spirit of the kayaking community. It's a vivid reminder that those who embrace river adventures are just as passionate about caring for their environment and supporting the community around them.”

“As we look forward to our 20th year celebration of the Mighty Mayo River, marked for January 19th, 2025, the excitement is palpable,” Berry added. “With the Mighty Mayo River Trip and the Mighty Mayo Hiking Trip in 2025 fast approaching, I invite everyone to join us in this celebration.”

Learn more about the MMRT by contacting Joe Berry at jmbbmj@bellsouth.net.

This press release is provided by the Resilient Trails Network in support of the Mighty Mayo River Trip (MMRT).

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Photo credits in alphabetical order:

Photo credits: Gordon Allen, Wildlife Photographer

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Video Credit: Denise Mann, Lot 2540

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Photo credits: Brian Williams, Dan River Basin Association

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