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## Press Release

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By Antoinette Lee Toscano

### **Diversifying Whitewater Boating**

*Whitewater kayaking and rafting community come together to support BIPOC*

**Fort Collins, Colorado – July 11, 2020** – Today, The nonprofit organization—Diversify Whitewater, brought the northern Colorado kayaking community together to introduce more Black, Indigenous, and People, of Color (BIPOC) to whitewater kayaking and rafting.

The organization held a community paddle event with a diverse group. The gathering encompassed 30 volunteers and 37 BIPOC participants who were all new to paddlesports, for a beginner-friendly paddle down a Class 2—easy to moderate section of the Cache la Poudre River, near Fort Collins, Colorado.

**“I am an Asian American and I have been whitewater kayaking since I was 10-years-old. Growing up, I almost never saw people who looked like me in boats. In fact, I can count the days I've paddled with other BIPOC on one hand, and those have been some of my favorite days on the river. I am so excited to be able to share my passion for paddling with such a diverse group of people.”**

**Lily Durkee—Co-founder, Diversify Whitewater**

Today’s event was truly a community effort. Diversify Whitewater teamed up with the National not-for-profit organization—Team River Runner, and its Fort Collins, Colorado, chapter to host the event.

And the local and national whitewater boating community responded. Residents donated money to support the volunteer effort. JAX Outdoor Gear donated gift certificates. Rocky Mountain Adventures donated gift certificates and merchandise. Immersion Research donated outdoor adventure clothing. CityWILD guides oared five rafts, accompanied by five additional rafts floated by other community volunteers. All of the donated resources went toward breaking down the many barriers that exist which prevent anyone—but especially people of color from participating in outdoor adventure sports.

A total of 11 guided rafts and 13 whitewater kayaking safety boaters paddled the Filter Plant section of the Cache la Poudre River. The rafts carried 37, socially distanced, first-time whitewater participants from as far as two-hours away.



Diversify Whitewater strives to encourage Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to explore the rivers, lakes, and waterways. This not-for-profit organization was co-founded by two women of color—CSU graduate student—Lily Durkee, and Freelance Writer and U.S. Army veteran—Antoinette Lee Toscano who love outdoor adventuring and want to spread the message that everyone, regardless of their appearance, should feel welcome and included in the whitewater boating community.

Outdoor adventure organizations like Immersion Research (IR)—a small, family-owned company making and repairing paddling gear in the most sustainable and eco-friendly way possible recognizes that there is a lack of diversity within outdoor adventure sports. Its donation of wearable gear helped participants to feel comfortable and protected from the elements on the river.

CityWILD and private whitewater rafters donated the use of rafts and guides. This necessary equipment made it possible to offer this free opportunity to the community. CityWILD cultivates deep connections between youth and the natural world, working with them to develop their full potential and achieve their wildest dreams.

**“Team River Runner—Fort Collins, Colorado, donated the whitewater kayaking gear and its members—U.S. military veterans’(serving as safety boaters and raft guides) toward this effort. This local, multicultural organization embodies inclusivity in whitewater kayaking within its membership and the larger community.”**

**Mark McWilliams—TRR-Fort Collins Chapter Coordinator**

#### **About Team River Runner**

Team River Runner — TRR is a national 501(C)(3) organization. TRR’s mission is to provide on river, recreational therapy for veterans, first responders, and their family members.

It provides kayaks, rafts, protective, adaptive, and safety gear. As well as training, outdoor skills, and whitewater kayaking and rafting trips. All at no cost.

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