

# RIVER CURRENTS

## The Value of Local Knowledge

By Rick Lofaro, Executive Director

Living in the Roaring Fork Valley, many of us have heard or used the term “local” when referring to a person who lives here permanently. Urban Dictionary defines locals as “prominent people who have lived in an area for an extended period of time.” But what else defines a “local”? What does it really mean to “live” in an area?

For many who have made their homes in tourist hotbeds of the Mountain West, becoming a local means more than simply existing in an area for an extended period of time.

It means one has lived here and participated in something unique long enough to know where all the best skiing/rafting/fishing/coffee/pubs/restaurants are located. In between visits to their favorite powder stash/rapid/reach/watering hole, true “locals” are engaged in their communities: the people, politics, and places that shape their home. The “locals” in Western Town, USA have personas that are desirable and sought after by both tourists and other residents. What does this persona look like? There is no single look or code that defines a local. One can be a ski instructor, police officer, teacher, fishing or raft guide, or a socialite. There is, however, a certain *je ne sais quoi* that brands a local as someone who can hold their own with the best of them and has the knowledge and experience to command respect.

We often rely on the advice of the local: Where’s the best skiing today? What’s hatching on the Fryingpan? Who’s bartending at fill-in-the-blank watering hole tonight? The observations of people who live, know and experience a particular area for long enough to be deemed a “local” are often more valid and reliable than information anywhere else. At RFC, we have come to value local observations, those not documented or studied per scientific method, to help us

understand both water and community needs. For example, an angler or guide who regularly fishes the same location is often the most reliable source for changes in insects, fish, or water levels. Without local anglers, the insights gained from the Comprehensive Lower Fryingpan Study, which is near completion, may never have happened as they first sounded the alarm that something was out of balance in the river.

Sometimes local water knowledge is found in a place where many would not look, for example, the agricultural community. The roots of many local ranchers run deeper than the years or decades of which other locals boast. Some have been here for generations, working the land with their families on the ranch their grandparents grew up on. Many local ranches have been irrigating for over 100 years, inextricably tying the water to the land, and the rancher to the water. Gaining local knowledge of these complex relationships

has been invaluable to RFC, as we continue to embark on the Crystal River Stream Management Plan.

Denis Diderot said, “There are three principal means of acquiring knowledge... observation of nature, reflection, and experimentation. Observation collects facts; reflection combines them; experimentation verifies the result of that combination.” RFC relies on locals’ observations so that we can reflect together, and follow up with experimentation and studies as necessary to confirm the local knowledge. In the process, we gather even deeper insights to the questions we ask. Without observation and shared reflection, there is no direction for experimentation, studies, or action.

Thank you to all the “locals” who call the Roaring Fork Valley home and are willing to share their observations with us as we work together to protect our watershed.



Photo Credit: Anson Fogel

## Didymo Research: Uncovering the Mysteries of Rock Snot

By Heather Lewin, Watershed Action Director

Rock Snot. The name alone alludes to the fact that this is not a nice thing to encounter. When hidden behind its scientific name *Didymosphenia geminata*, or didymo for short, rock snot gains an air of sophistication and mystique. While sophistication may be a stretch, didymo - how it works, where it thrives and how it spreads - continues to be surrounded by some mystery. RFC, in partnership with the Natural Resource Program at



Photo credit: Sarah Spaulding, USGS/U. of Colorado

Colorado Mountain College (CMC) in Leadville, is working hard to understand the unknowns that surround didymo, not only in the Fryingpan River, but throughout Colorado.

Here's what we know: Didymo is a native algae. It is found in the Fryingpan below Ruedi and, in much smaller quantities, in tributaries that feed Ruedi. At nuisance levels, didymo can negatively impact macroinvertebrate and fish populations. High flows that allow rocks to move and tumble can decrease the presence of didymo, much like putting dirty clothes in a washing machine.

With this knowledge, CMC students and interns, under the guidance of Jennifer Moore, the assistant project manager for Natural Resources Management at CMC, embarked

on a study of the lower Fryingpan River to determine how much didymo is present and when and where it is most abundant. Through intensive field work, the crew found the highest quantity of didymo during the spring, and, as hypothesized, the level decreased following high water. This information is useful when considering optimal environmental flows from Ruedi and justifying the need for a spring flushing flow (which has many other benefits).

The study seemed to be moving in a somewhat predictable manner until the third and final sampling when the rock snot did something unexpected: it virtually disappeared. Long strands and mats that were present even after peak flows were gone. But why? At present, we simply don't know. Is there a seasonality to the didymo bloom? Did something change in the river chemistry that made the environment unfavorable to didymo growth? Or was it something else entirely? Did we scare it off in the first two rounds field studies? Of course, I'm joking. Everyone knows that rock snot cannot be intimidated. Or can it? The truth is, we do not yet know enough about this algae, which seems to be everywhere and nowhere in the course of a year.

With contacts as high as the top didymo experts in the state, there are still no clear answers. But we are not done with didymo yet. RFC commissioned another study to look again at the Fryingpan's rock snot. Will it follow a similar pattern of high, low, gone, or will the trend change? Stay right there on the edge of your seat because the answer will not be known until at least one more round of sampling takes place. Both studies will be useful, not only to Fryingpan residents, anglers and managers, but to other areas statewide as we share our study results in this area of increasing concern with minimal previous research and "knowns."

RFC sits at the cutting edge of rock snot research. While we may have sat in places with nicer names, mucking around in the didymo may prove to be some of the most important research RFC recently completed.

## Clean, Check, Dry Your Gear

Our rivers need your help to limit the dispersal of nuisance species, such as didymo. On any weekend, you can find a wader washing station set up along the banks of the Fryingpan River by members of the newly formed Roaring Fork Valley Fly Fishing Club. Please stop by to say hello and to wash your waders and gear.



## Colorado River Watch Program - Did You Know?

By Chad Rudow, Water Quality Coordinator

Roaring Fork Conservancy has participated in the Colorado River Watch program for 17 years, generating long-term water quality data, monitoring the health of local streams and rivers, and training citizens on how to collect meaningful water quality data. Check out some of these facts!

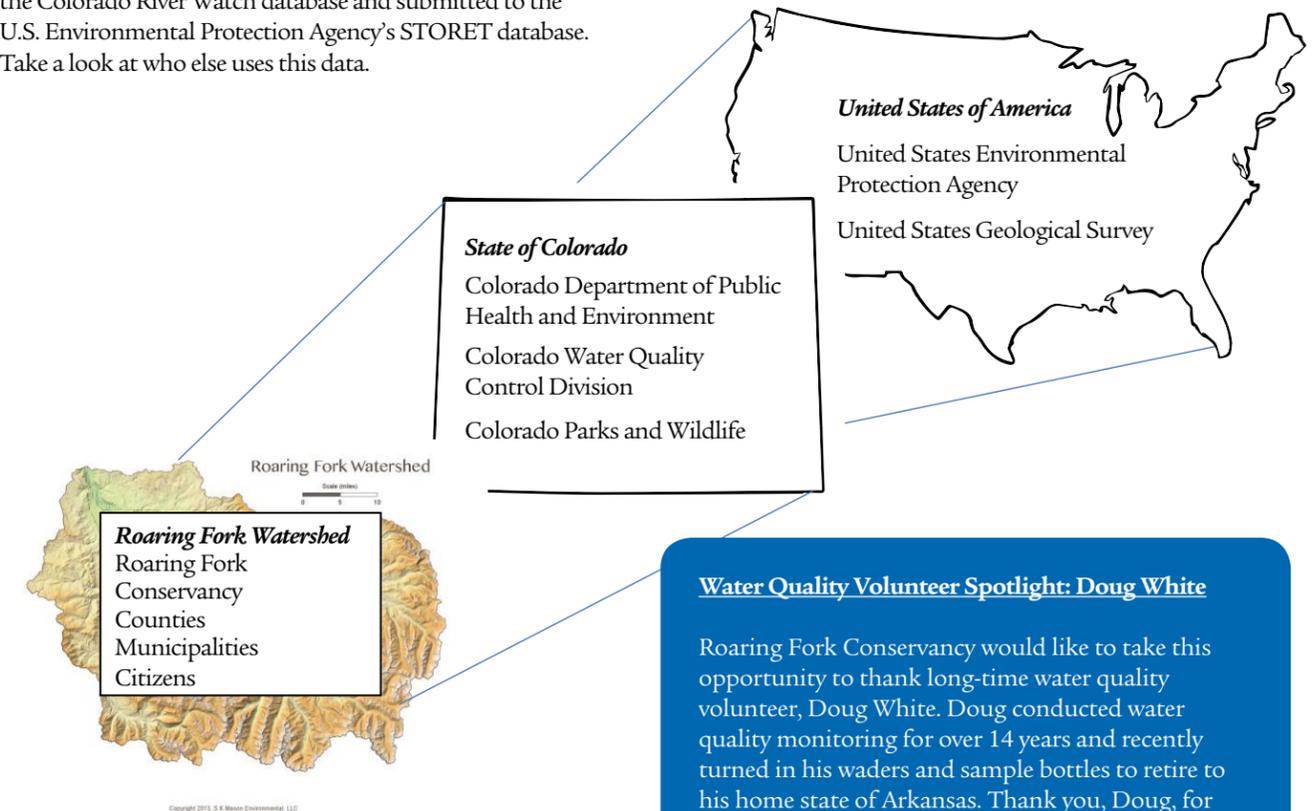
- RFC maintains 23 water quality stations, more than any other participant in the state-wide River Watch program.
- Through the River Watch program, RFC tests 25 different water quality parameters at each station.
- Nine Stream Teams, totaling 25 dedicated volunteers, conduct year-round water quality monitoring for RFC.
- Volunteer Stream Teams contributed over 240 collective hours monitoring water quality in 2014.
- Four Stream Teams have volunteered for over 14 years. Many have been active for at least 5 years.
- Aspen Skiing Company has hosted an employee-based Stream Team for over 14 years.
- Five local schools - Aspen High School, Basalt High School, Colorado Rocky Mountain School, Glenwood Springs High School, and Glenwood Springs Middle School - also participate in the River Watch program, monitoring a combined 8 stations.
- RFC staff, volunteer Stream Teams, and local schools collectively conducted over 152 sampling events in 2014.

### Who Is Colorado River Watch?

River Watch is a statewide volunteer water quality-monitoring program operated in cooperation with Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Their mission is, "To work with voluntary stewards to monitor water quality and other indicators of watershed health and utilize this high quality data to educate citizens and inform decision makers about the condition of Colorado's waters." Over 120 organizations participate in the River Watch program including a variety of schools, watershed groups, citizen groups and individuals.

### The Broad Reach Of Our Data

Roaring Fork Conservancy water quality data is uploaded to the Colorado River Watch database and submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's STORET database. Take a look at who else uses this data.



### Water Quality Volunteer Spotlight: Doug White

Roaring Fork Conservancy would like to take this opportunity to thank long-time water quality volunteer, Doug White. Doug conducted water quality monitoring for over 14 years and recently turned in his waders and sample bottles to retire to his home state of Arkansas. Thank you, Doug, for your many years of dedicated service and best wishes as you move on to new adventures!

## Conservation Easement Profile: Emma Open Space, Emma



Roaring Fork Conservancy acts as a land trust, holding 16 Conservation Easements, and protecting over 280 acres of riparian habitat in the Roaring Fork Watershed. Each issue of River Currents highlights one of these easements.

### Stats

Acres: 73.4  
 Date Acquired: June 20, 2000  
 Riverfront Protected: 2,000 feet of Roaring Fork River  
 Owner: Pitkin County Open Space and Trails  
 Public Access: Emma and Rio Grande Trails

### About the Easement

The acquisition of Emma Open Space was a true community effort, requiring the cooperation of several state, county, town and non-profit entities. In addition to protecting critical wildlife habitat, this property supports conservation, agricultural, and recreational activities. Historic agricultural parcels within the property are leased annually by Pitkin County. The property spans both sides of the Roaring Fork River, linking the wildlife areas on either side. The riparian and wetland areas along the Roaring Fork River are home to a wide variety of wildlife species. On the hillside, deer, elk, birds and other small mammals find a critical seasonal food source. A wildlife underpass supplements this popular migration corridor, allowing deer and elk to safely avoid crossing Highway 82 in their

## Watershed Action Study Updates:

### COMPREHENSIVE LOWER FRYINGPAN RIVER ASSESSMENT

**Start Date:** April 2014  
**Components:** Macroinvertebrate and Temperature Study, Didymo Survey, American Dipper Survey, Fryingpan Valley Economic Study  
**Status/Results:** The Macroinvertebrate and Temperature Study is complete. Results indicate that macroinvertebrate populations are healthy with little change since the previous study in 2003. The American Dipper Survey is also complete, finding that anthropogenic disturbance has likely impacted the population. Didymo results show abundant quantities in the spring, lesser amounts after peak flows, and virtually none in the fall. A follow-up didymo study is planned to better understand these results. At press time, we are still awaiting Economic Study Results.

### CRYSTAL RIVER STREAM MANAGEMENT PLAN

**Start Date:** June 2014  
**Components:** The Ecological Decision Support System (EcoDSS) involves modeling of various natural and anthropogenic scenarios and how they affect the Crystal River. The Ecological Functional Assessment (EFA) will evaluate resource management and prioritize future action. Stakeholder Engagement will facilitate understanding of community needs and build support for upcoming projects  
**Status/Results:** Work on the EcoDSS and EFA is proceeding on schedule, with preliminary findings available this summer. Stakeholder Engagement is ongoing through newsletter updates and Crystal River Conversations.

### CATTLE CREEK WATER QUALITY EVALUATION

**Start Date:** April 2015  
**Components:** Macroinvertebrate Analysis, Water Quality Sampling, Land Use Evaluation  
**Status/Results:** Water quality sampling began with spring runoff in early April. The first stakeholder meeting was held in late April and was well attended. Macroinvertebrate sampling will take place fall of 2015.

## 2015 Robert Billingsley River Conservators: Joyce & Bill Gruenberg

Moving to Aspen in 1972, Joyce and Bill immediately began volunteering in their new community. They live along the Roaring Fork River in Aspen, and Bill, an avid fisherman, has deep knowledge of all the best fishing spots on our local rivers.

Seventeen years ago, the director of Roaring Fork Conservancy, Jeanne Beaudry, asked Bill how a new non-profit organization could be successful in raising funds. Bill responded by arranging a meeting between Jeanne and his wife Joyce, who had significant fundraising experience. The River Rendezvous was the brainchild of that meeting and is still going strong today. The basic format remains—have a unique dinner party, preferably beside the river, with an auction. Over the years, we refined the details for what continues to be a very successful gathering. Funds raised collectively at our 15 River Rendezvous have exceeded \$3.4 million dollars.



In addition, Joyce suggested forming the Rivers Council, now the Roaring Fork Conservancy National Council. This group of dedicated individuals continues to raise funds and build awareness of Roaring Fork Conservancy's river projects and water education programs.

Bill served the Rivers Council as President and Vice-President and is currently the Treasurer. Along with Bill, Joyce has been on the committee since 1999. Both have been incredibly involved with River Rendezvous since its inception and are great supporters of Roaring Fork Conservancy. Congratulations, Joyce and Bill!

## 11th Annual River Float

Saturday, May 30, 2015

### 8am Educational River Float

### 11:30am - 2pm Lunch & Gear Demo

### at Coryell Ranch, Carbondale

Float and Lunch: \$40/ \$30 members  
 Lunch Only: \$15/ \$10 members

Spend a morning with Roaring Fork Conservancy staff and river ambassadors as we float the Roaring Fork River! After the float, join us at Coryell Ranch for a cook-out, live music, and the opportunity to try stand-up paddle boards, kayaks, fly rods and the latest gear from local outfitter shops.

Rafts and guides provided by Aspen Whitewater Rafting, Blazing Adventures, Blue Sky Adventures, and Elk Mountain Expeditions.

**Registration & more info at**  
[roaringfork.org/float](http://roaringfork.org/float)

Float is appropriate for ages 10 and up. Minors must be accompanied by an adult.

## A New Website Coming Soon!

Roaring Fork Conservancy's website is getting a new look. A BIG thank you to George Kelly and his team at Organic Returns for all their hard work. We are excited about the modern design and improved functionality. Stay tuned!

## Afterschool Exploring on Enrichment Wednesdays

By Megan Dean, Watershed Educator



Students at Sopris Elementary in Glenwood Springs were excited to get outside and explore the beautiful Roaring Fork Watershed every Wednesday for seven weeks this past winter. In collaboration with the Roaring Fork School District, RFC offered the afterschool enrichment class: River Awareness, Exploration, and Tracking. The 24 enrolled students enjoyed playing games to learn about animal and river ecology, and spent time observing and drawing the special places they found.

Students developed a sense of discovery and stewardship for our wonderful rivers. For example, one of the activities had students create an illustration of how they would develop a piece of land. Then, while outdoors, they built their 'development' and collected natural vegetation they found streamside, to create bank stabilization landscaping.



I witnessed an evolution in the students' awareness of rivers and human impact on ecosystems over the two months we worked together. On our first few treks down to the river, the students would sometimes forget their snack bags by the river. They also struggled to identify animal signs. By the last class, they were careful to not only pick up their own items, but also trash left behind by others. They were also able to observe key components of animal habitat and animal tracks. Students that started out saying bugs were gross later had to be coaxed with stickers to stop their macroinvertebrate investigations and put them back in the river.

It was great watching them view their surroundings with new eyes. While guiding the students to enjoy, understand, and bond with our wonderful watershed, I overheard the following:

*"I loved learning about how to look for animals and find their tracks by the river."* Maria - 5th Grade

*"What each person does adds up and makes a difference downstream. We should be careful not to put bad things in the river!"* Garrett - 3rd Grade

*"It was really fun to look for bugs in the river. They were really cool looking!"* Garrett - 3rd Grade

I look forward to meeting more student explorers this spring as RFC continues to offer after-school enrichment classes throughout the Valley.



RFC educators appreciate receiving kind, affirming notes from both teachers and students. We wanted to share this one with all of you. Thank you, Johanna!

February 27, 2015

Dear Roaring Fork Conservancy,

The instruction from your educators, Megan and Sarah, at our snow science day was excellent. The ladies presented the information in a professional manner and at all times, the kids were totally attentive. The class began with a local viewpoint on the importance of snow to our state and country and then they used the Roaring Fork watershed to connect the information to our area. I was as interested as the students, even though I have seen the presentation in the past. When the class went outside, the hands-on aspect of the instruction totally engaged the students. The kids were interested in the presentation and they loved the outdoor activities.

Climate change is impacting our lives and will increase every year. Educating students on these topics gives them information that will make them more sensitive to the environment of our area and the world. The content of the snow science instruction is incredibly important for the future. I will continue to support the snow science day and encourage more teachers to participate in the Roaring Fork Conservancy program at Aspen Middle School.

Sincerely,

Johanna Mueller

Teacher, Aspen Middle School

## THANK YOU to the 2015 Fryingpan River Cleanup Sponsors!

### LEAD SPONSORS:

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Wunderlich Family  
Robert & Sarah Woods



The River Stewards partnered with the crew at the 5Point Film Festival to help deliver much needed adult beverages to film goers. By volunteering in the bar, Steering Committee members were able to engage with the patrons and provide a connection between "The Important Places" film and the Fryingpan Cleanup, scheduled the following day, to help with community activation. Rivers Stewards had a great time and very much appreciate the crew at 5Point for allowing them to volunteer and interact with everyone.

## Eco-Products Showcases RFC in Sustainability Report

Eco-Products, Inc. is a Colorado-based company that makes sustainable disposable products, such as paper plates and cups, and each of their products is compostable. Eco-Products generously donates their products to non-profits, including RFC. If you ate breakfast with us before the Fryingpan Cleanup or joined us for lunch at the River Float, then you've used renewable products from Eco-Products. In 2014, Cleanup and River Float participants used Eco-Products to collect four cubic yards of compost and 100% of the recyclables. In recognition, Eco-Products has highlighted RFC as a case study in its 2015 sustainability report.

This report, released on Earth Day, highlights Eco-Products's 2014 initiatives to be an environmentally and socially responsible company. The report cites that Eco-Products selected RFC because we make it a priority to divert waste from our events.

The report is accessible on Eco-Products's website at <http://www.ecoproducts.com>.

## River Stewards Update – Spring 2015

*Catherine Berg,*  
River Stewards Steering Committee Member

The River Stewards had a wonderful 2014, continuing to promote awareness among the Valley's active, young adult community of the Roaring Fork Conservancy's mission. The River Stewards wrapped up 2014 with a November showing of Powderhore's latest movie "Something Else." It was a fun night with a packed house, great beers, and an even better raffle! It was a perfect end to the year and start to the winter season.



We began a new year of events by hosting another round of Jeopardy! in Carbondale. This was the River Stewards's second time hosting this event and its theme, "Snow2Flow Jeopardy!," reflected our effort to educate the public on the importance of the winter snowpack to our rivers. There was a full house for the event, hosted by Carbondale Beer Works, and thanks to many local businesses, there were ample prizes awarded at the end of the night.

The River Stewards are looking forward to a number of events as spring comes and the rivers begin to rise! We were at the Fly Fishing Film Tour hosted by the Wheeler in March. Many who came by our table in the lobby answered some trivia and won fun prizes. In April, we were at the 5 Point Film Festival in Carbondale, and recruited participants for the Frypan River cleanup that same weekend. On May 21, the Stewards will host the Reel Padding Film Festival. The films in this festival seek to inspire more people to explore rivers, lakes and oceans, and embrace the lifestyle and appreciate the heritage of the wild places we paddle. At the end of May, the Stewards will help host RFC's 11th annual River Float. The Stewards are looking forward to a busy spring!

The River Stewards are proud to welcome aboard Dan Berg, our newest River Steward. Now with 10 Stewards living and working across the Roaring Fork Valley, we are more excited than ever to be engaging young people around our rivers.

## Staff & Board Flows



### Sheryl Sabandal, Development Associate

Sheryl joined Roaring Fork Conservancy in May of 2015. A born and raised Midwesterner, Sheryl graduated from Indiana University with a BA in French, minor in Nonprofit Management, and certification in "Fund Development for Nonprofits," from the IU school of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) and The Fund Raising School - IU Center on Philanthropy. During her senior year she learned how to ski at Buttermilk here in Aspen, CO and moved west after graduation intending to stay a single ski season. Five years later she joins RFC from Aspen Skiing Company (ASC) where she

worked in Ski School Operations and interned with their Sustainability department. She looks forward to augmenting her skillset in the nonprofit and sustainability realm with a deeper understanding of water issues facing the Roaring Fork Valley and the American west. Sheryl is passionate about travel, learning new things, and good food.



### Pat McMahon

Pat joined our board of directors in the fall of 2014. Pat and his wife, Barb, split their time between Basalt and Iowa. Pat and his family are passionate about our local rivers and spend ample time on the water. Pat is an avid fly fisherman and enjoys upland bird and archery elk hunting. Pat sits on the board financial committee and the River Center working group.



### S. Chapin Lewis, Esq., Watershed, Action Volunteer

A native of the Roaring Fork Valley, Chapin concentrates his practice on water and natural resources law. He is helping RFC comment on the development of Colorado's historic state water plan.



### Ramsey L. Kropf

Ramsey Kropf accepted a position in Washington D.C. as the Deputy Solicitor for Water with the Department of the Interior which required her to relinquish her position as President of the Board of Directors with RFC. We wish her all the best in her next adventure. Ramsey's significant contribution to RFC's vision and leadership will be greatly missed.



### Jacque Whitsitt

Jacque recently stepped down from the board, serving since 2012 as the Town of Basalt representative. Thank you for your contribution to RFC!



### Sarah Johnson

Roaring Fork Conservancy would like to thank Sarah Johnson for 8 years of dedicated work on behalf of the rivers and streams in the Roaring Fork Watershed. During her time at RFC, Sarah coordinated school programs and Watershed Explorations, each year reaching thousands of students of all ages. During her time here, Sarah's impact rippled state-wide through her contribution to the Colorado Regional Environmental Education Leadership Council and Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education. The hard work, dedication, and passion she brought to RFC will be missed as she moves on. We wish you all the best in your future endeavors, Sarah!

## WATERSHED EXPLORATIONS

### Events Calendar

#### MAY

- 7 Heron, Eagle, Osprey Watching
- 13 High Altitude Heron Watching
- 20 Ruedi Reservoir Tour & West Slope Water
- 27 Birding Maroon Creek Wetlands
- 30 11th Annual River Float



#### JUNE

- 4 Northstar Roaring Fork River Float
- 9 Deer Hill Early Season Wildflower Walk
- 17 Northstar Roaring Fork River Float
- 23 Rio Grande Wetland Walk
- 26 Crooked Creek Wetland Project
- 29 Family Filoha Fireflies, Bats, and Bugs

#### JULY

- 1 Filoha Firefly & Rare Orchid Walk
- 7 Filoha Firefly & Rare Orchid Walk
- 9 Filoha Firefly & Rare Orchid Walk
- 13 Family Filoha Fireflies, Bats, and Bugs
- 15 16th Annual River Rendezvous
- 21 Family Filoha Fireflies, Bats, and Bugs
- 22 Filoha Firefly & Rare Orchid Walk
- 23 Family Filoha Fireflies, Bats, and Bugs
- 29 Holden Works Tour - Water, Salt, & a Thirst for Riches
- 31 Twin Lakes Tunnel & Diversion Tour

#### AUGUST

- 6 Filoha Meadows Family Exploration
- 8 Filoha Meadows Family Exploration

#### SEPTEMBER

- 10 Aspen Tap: Drinking Water Tour
- 12 Family Fall Exploration at Filoha
- 24 Filoha Fall Evening Walk

For more information and to register visit:  
[www.roaringfork.org/events](http://www.roaringfork.org/events)

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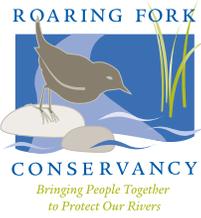
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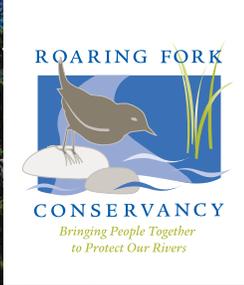


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