

STANISLAUS

Dubois is a legend, and not merely because of his boating skills. Dozens of other powerful young men and women perform the same kind of routine every day from May-August. They ferry 30,000-40,000 raft passengers a season over what has become one of the nation's most crowded waterways.

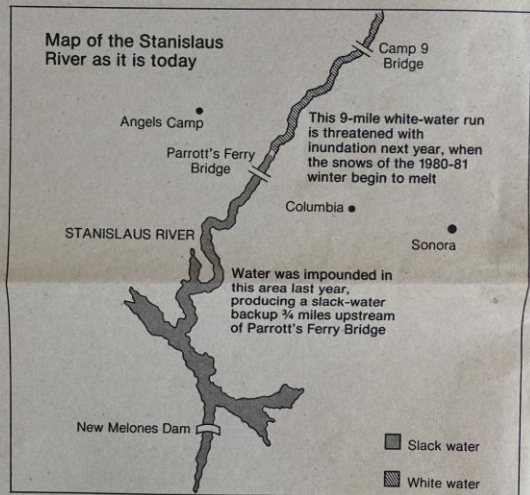
In the past decade, an estimated half-million commercial passengers have floated the series of 12 major rapids from Camp 9 to Parrott's Ferry Bridge, just northeast of the historic gold-mining town of Columbia. At least as many more private boaters have negotiated the run over the same span, in everything from rafts to kayaks and even rubber inner tubes, though the massive hydraulics—especially in spring and early summer—make it a dangerous sport. And this year they are doing it again, in record numbers. At least 20 boats a day ride the

needed to convert. But his is a unique brand of lobbying.

There would be time for that later, after the pulsating charges through the Devil's Staircase, Bailey Falls and the Widowmaker. And it would have to wait for a fascinating side trip up Rose Creek, a feeder stream that cascades gently through granite ridges.

Dubois led the way up the unique staircase of crystal-clear water, gentle falls and granite slides, down which scores of others slid into deep pools. By the time he had finished traveling up this priceless watershed and, later, free-climbing up jagged precipices at sunrise to pay his own special homage to the treasured canyon, there was really not much to say.

With his actions, Dubois had silently but graphically reiterated the basic values and treasures for which he and thousands of



crest of the white water, and the number often doubles on weekends.

Most are rushing to get their licks in while they can, fearing that this year may be the river's last. Others are there to rekindle their own flames of commitment. And still others are furiously striving to proselytize right down to the last minute, seeking converts that could make the difference in the final political nose-counting this summer.

Mark Dubois is at the head of the latter class. As president of Friends of the River, he leads a non-stop lobbying assault on congressmen and their aides. He speaks for the river wherever people will listen.

On this weekend, he was combining business with pleasure, taking time out from a demanding schedule to "come back to my roots for some personal renewal." There were some close friends with whom he had vowed to run the river again. And there were some politically connected friends, too, whom he

others are fighting. His brand of power politics was softly jawboning former state Assemblyman Charles Warren, the key contact of this trip, in between mouthfuls of yogurt.

Warren was chairman of the Council of Environmental Quality in the Carter Administration for nearly three years. He is still well connected in Congress and in Sacramento, a point not lost on Dubois. The task is to get Warren to help build pressure on Congress and the Carter Administration to undo the effects of an action now more than 13 years old.

The 63-story New Melones Dam was authorized by Congress in 1967 and completed by the Corps of Engineers just over two years ago at a cost of \$350 million. It is designed to dam the Stanislaus near the toe of the Mother Lode foothill country, west of Sonora, for irrigation water, flood protection and generation of hydroelectric power.

The foes of the dam fought a lonely battle

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until they finally developed enough support to take the issue to the voters in 1974. A coalition of river rafters, kayakers and other conservationists carried the battle.

To them, the Stanislaus has irreplaceable value as one of the few even comparatively wild rivers left in California. Two hydroelectric dams are located upstream of the popular Nine Mile Run, but the stretch still possesses enough wilderness flavor to qualify for wild-and-scenic river protection. A decision to that effect was made last June by Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus.

The dam's opponents have also seized on the National Historic Preservation Act in an attempt to protect the villages of early Miwok Indians and gold-mining sites of the robust '49ers in the state's only marble canyon.

The fight has gone on for most of the past decade. It has gone through a grass-roots education phase, an agonizingly close brush with total victory at the polls in 1974 and, since then, a constant flow of court suits, bureaucratic challenges and legislative sorties. But it is late in the game. Some compare it to being the bottom of the ninth inning, with two out and two strikes against the dam fighters.

So finally, the conservationists are down to their hole card—passage of HR-4223, the bill to make what is left of the Stanislaus a wild and scenic river.

Approval would limit storage behind the huge dam to about one-fourth its designed volume. Disapproval would give the federal Water and Power Resources Service clear and irrevocable approval to start the final phase of the inundation of the historic canyon.

Just over a year ago, hurt and angered by his inability to stop the project from flooding the lower canyon, Mark Dubois chained himself to a rock and threatened to stay there as the ultimate personal protest.

The threat worked. The Corps of Engineers opened the flood gates. After the intervention of potent state political forces, including Jerry Brown, the government agreed to hold the line at Parrott's Ferry Bridge—for a time. One deadline expired when the federal agency operating the project completed its exploration of historic Indian and mining sites, as required by law. Another, and presumably the last, went by the boards after Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus said he could no longer delay the filling of the lake because the California congressional delegation is badly split on the issue, and there is no assurance that Congress will rescue the river.

Water levels are now lower than in June, when nearly a mile of the upper canyon that houses the popular boating run was flooded. But if Congress fails to act, the final rites will spill over the canyon when next winter's snow begins to melt.

Dubois is convinced that momentum is now on the side of those opposed to the dam. When a friend expressed happiness over "what might be our last chance to say goodbye to the river," Dubois mildly rebuked him: "But it isn't going to be the last time. They're not going to win. We've got almost as many people with us this time as when Proposition 17 was on the ballot—only this time they know what it's all about."

In 1974, about 43 percent of the voters sided with the conservationists, but even

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Dubois agrees it was more for style and the "environmental fad" than for commitment to the substance of the fight.

To win, Dubois and his troops must rally major public support behind the Stanislaus bill, which is even now heading through committee hearings as part of an omnibus wild-and-scenic rivers bill.

Before the summer recess, the state's delegation was divided at 17 representatives against preservation of the river and 16 for. The 10 still on the fence included both California senators and, from this area, Rep. Leon Panetta.

President Carter boldly told a pro-dam audience in Merced on July 4th that "the Stanislaus is one of the most beautiful rivers on Earth." That followed calls to block the dam's construction when Carter campaigned in California for the presidency in 1976, and a more recent promise to sign a protection bill if Congress passes one.

The ball, and the future of the river or the manmade lake it would form, is now clearly in the court of the Friends of the River. □