

VICTORY LAP



PHOTOS BY BRITTANY PETERSON / AP
Young native paddlers hold hands and cheer as they walk across a sandy stretch that separates the Klamath River from the Pacific Ocean on July 11 in Klamath, California.

Native American teens kayak major river to celebrate removal of dams, return of salmon

By BRITTANY PETERSON
The Associated Press

KLAMATH, Calif. (AP) — As bright-colored kayaks push through a thick wall of fog, voices and the beats of drums build as kayakers approach a crowd that has formed on the beach. Applause erupts as the boats land on the sandy spit that partially separates the Klamath River from the Pacific Ocean in northern California.

Native American teenagers from tribes across the river basin push themselves up and out of the kayaks and begin to cross the sand, some breaking into a sprint. They kick playfully at the cold waves of the ocean they’ve been paddling toward over the last month — the ocean that’s seen fewer and fewer salmon return to it over the last century as four hydropower dams blocked their ideal spawning grounds upstream.

“I think our ancestors would be proud because this is what they’ve been fighting for,” said Tasia Linwood, a 15-year-old member of the Karuk Tribe, on Thursday night, ahead of the group’s final push to the end on Friday.

The Klamath River is newly navigable after a decades-long effort to remove its four hydro-power dams to help restore the salmon run — an ancient source of life, food and culture for these paddlers’ tribes who have lived alongside the river for millennia. Youth primarily from the Yurok, Klamath, Hoopa Valley, Karuk, Quartz Valley and Warm Springs tribes paddled 310 miles (499 kilometers) over a month from the headwaters of the Wood



A kayaker begins the final day of paddling the Klamath River to reach the Pacific Ocean on July 11.

River, a tributary to the Klamath that some tribes consider sacred, to the Pacific Ocean.

The teens spent several years learning to navigate white water through Paddle Tribal Waters, a program set up by the nonprofit Rios to Rivers, to prepare local Native youth for the day this would be possible.

During their last days on the water, the group of several dozen swelled to more than 100, joined by some family members and Indigenous people from Bolivia, Chile and New Zealand who face similar challenges on their home rivers.

DAMS BUILT DECADES AGO FOR ELECTRICITY

Starting in the early 1900s, power company PacifiCorp built the dams over several decades to

generate electricity. But the structures, which provided 2% of the utility’s power, halted the natural flow of a waterway that was once known as the third-largest salmon-producing river on the West Coast.

With the dams in place, tribes lost access to a reliable source of food. The dams blocked the path to hundreds of miles of cool freshwater streams, ideal for salmon returning from the ocean to lay their eggs. Salmon numbers declined dramatically along with the water quality.

In 2002, a bacterial outbreak caused by low water and warm temperatures killed more than 34,000 fish, mostly Chinook salmon. That galvanized decades of advocacy by tribes and environmental groups, culminating in 2022 when federal regulators

approved a plan to remove the dams.

Through protests, testimony and lawsuits, the tribes showcased the environmental devastation caused by the dams, especially to salmon. From 2023 to 2024, the four dams were dynamited and removed, freeing hundreds of miles of the Klamath.

The renewable electricity lost by removing the hydropower dams was enough to power the equivalent of 70,000 homes, although PacifiCorp has since expanded its renewable sources through wind and solar projects.

Two dams used for irrigation and flood control remain on the upper stretch of the river. They have “ladders” that allow some fish to pass through, although

See KAYAK, 3C

Things I love

Homegrown tomatoes. I love them. All kinds. Heirlooms, beefsteaks, superstars, Better Boys, Burmese sours, Cherokee purples, double-Ds, you name it.

A tomato is a magical thing. A love story in nutritional form. A tomato connects you with real life in a way nothing else can.

I want them room temperature. Sliced thick. Salted and peppered. Or placed onto a slab of soft white Bunny Bread, coated with enough Duke’s mayonnaise to suffocate a small woodland creature. Eaten as a sandwich.

Also, chocolate. Love it. We went to Spain recently, and there is chocolate everywhere. They sell it at every tienda, mercado, and café. I even bought chocolate once at the police station.

Since being home, I’ve developed a crippling addiction to cocoa. I’m plowing through a bar of chocolate every day or so.

My wife sincerely believes that I would be easy to kidnap because I take chocolate from strangers.

Likewise, I love my dogs. I have three. Thelma Lou (bloodhound), Otis Campbell (alleged Labrador), and Marigold (American coonhound). They are not well-behaved dogs, mind you.

Whenever company comes over to our house, for example, within seconds our dogs have coerced them into throwing balls and playing tug-of-war with various chew toys that resemble deceased hamsters. After only minutes in our home, many of our visitors suddenly remember urgent dental appointments.

And I love water. Big bodies of water. I love the lake, the Gulf, the rivers, whatever. I need water in my life.

American music. The old stuff. Fiddle tunes. Folk ballads. Old school R&B, when bands still had horn sections. And classic country before grown men wore glitter jeans. Old hymns.

I’m crazy about hymns. They hold a power over me I cannot shake. Why don’t we write spiritual songs like this anymore?

Many of the historic spirituals are pure poetry. Whereas today’s church music contains four lyrics, a lead guitar hook, and a dance break.

Even so, when you read the text of the old hymns, it’s like reading Robert Burns:

“Here I raise my Ebenezer;
“Hither by thy help I’m come;
“And I hope, by thy good pleasure,

“Safely to arrive at home ...”

Also. I love my wife. Nobody has ever believed in me the way she has. Nobody ever had reason to. Nobody expected much out of me in this life, and for the most part, they have not been disappointed.

But somehow, Jamie Richburg Martin could see through me. She understood me. We’ve been married

COLUMNIST



SEAN DIETRICH

Most teens, girls especially, see college as key to jobs, life skills

By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY and LINLEY SANDERS
The Associated Press

PHOENIX — Most American teenagers say it is important to them to graduate from college, with girls especially describing it as a key step for accomplishing their life goals, according to a new poll.

Teenagers also generally are more upbeat than adults on college despite concerns about tuition costs, soaring student loan debt and the politicization of many issues in higher education.

Overall, about 6 in 10 teens say it’s “extremely” or “very” important to

them to graduate from college, according to the survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, which was conducted this spring among teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17. That compares with about 4 in 10 adults who said the same in a UChicago Harris/AP-NORC poll from 2022.

The survey also found that many teens think it will be harder for them to achieve major life milestones — like owning a home, raising a family or reaching a good standard of living — than it was for their parents.

For Ry-n Uyeda, 17, the biggest concern about college is the prospect of being

away from her home in Waianae, Hawaii. Uyeda is already taking college-level courses in high school and hopes to play softball at a university on the West Coast.

Uyeda said she wants to develop time management skills and endurance to handle the pressures of being a student-athlete. But she hopes the college experience does not change who she is.

“I want to remember where I came from and the values that I’ve learned from here,” said Uyeda, who attends Waianae High School. “Going to a new place with new people in a new environment, I just want to still be myself.”

Far more girls than boys



MENGSHIN LIN / AP
Ry-n Uyeda, 17, a senior at Waianae High School, poses for a portrait July 11 in Waianae, Hawaii.

see value in college

Seven in 10 teenage girls in the survey said it was at least “very” important to them to graduate from college, compared with 54% of teenage boys.

The disparity reflects a growing gender gap in college degree completion. In 1995, young men and women were equally likely to hold a bachelor’s degree. Since then, a gap has

emerged, with 47% of U.S. women ages 25-34 completing a bachelor’s degree compared with 37% of men, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of census data.

Teens raised in households with higher incomes and parents who went to college themselves also are more likely to view higher education as important.

Jalena Crawford, a 16-year-old high school junior, said she hopes to attend Grand Canyon University or Arizona State University to become a professional American Sign Language interpreter. She

See COLLEGE, 3C