
APPENDIX C – BLUEWAYS ASSESSMENT

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Blueways Assessment

Poor Fork of Cumberland River

Section above Kingdom Come State Park and Cumberland, KY

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In researching the Poor Fork of the Cumberland River, the most notable published information relating to the Poor Fork may be found in the Fifth Edition of [A Canoeing & Kayaking Guide to Kentucky](#), by Bob Sehlinger and Johnny Molloy. However, this Guide Book does not address the Poor Fork of the Cumberland above Kingdom Come State Park (Cumberland, KY). The contents cover only the segment of the Poor Fork from Kingdom Come State Park (Cumberland, KY) to Harlan, KY (*Refer to Items PF1 & PF2 for details*).

Because the Poor Fork of the Cumberland above Kingdom Come State Park (Cumberland, KY) was above the noted and documented section in [A Canoeing & Kayaking Guide to Kentucky](#), it may be assumed that it is not documented for a reason. Part of this justification is possibly due to the ongoing construction of KY State Highway 119. At this writing, construction is still ongoing and definitely impacts the river near the confluence of the Poor Fork with multiple feeder streams. Additionally, a number of temporary low water bridges cross the upper Poor Fork as part of the construction project for Hwy 119.

The higher one moves up the Poor Fork drainage, the more shallow and narrow the river becomes. The aforementioned Guidebook noted that Paddling the upper segments of the Poor Fork usually occur between the months of January to April (obviously not months suitable to inner tubing due to the cold) and after heavy rains. An important point here is that the authors note the minimum level to run the Poor Fork from Cumberland, KY to Harlan, KY is 300 CFS on the River Gage page of American Whitewater (Kentucky Rivers).



INVESTIGATION OF THE POOR FORK FOR LIVERY SERVICE

On July 16, 2013, the author paddled the Poor Fork of the Cumberland for approximately 4 miles in an area above Kingdom Come State Park (Cumberland, KY), for the purpose of assessing

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whether this section was suitable for canoe/kayak/tubing traffic and a possible future livery business as an added feature to a proposed campground being considered by Brian Eversole who owns five acres paralleling the river. The CFS Water level on the American Whitewater Page showed 4.0 for the river level that day and CFS was about 80...both below the recommended height for good paddling.

The paddle trip began from the Conway Drive Bridge just below Brian Eversole's proposed campground site to "Three Crosses" public access. A shallow draft, 14' solo canoe was used. This paddle trip was undertaken with the knowledge that July usually produces low water and, like most rivers across Kentucky, there would be numerous sections in which one would need to portage their boat. However, this has been a wet Summer and water levels were running higher than normal. There was, in fact, eight places in the four mile stretch that required one to get out of their boat and wade. Ideally, being able to paddle the Cumberland during the warmer months will be more advantageous to attracting boaters than colder weather floats.



As noted, a small solo canoe was utilized for this stretch which made access very doable. Despite being the middle of July with water levels running fairly low, this stretch showed promise for fishing, wildlife viewing, tubing and as a good float stream if small watercraft are used. Small kayaks and tubes could also make this stretch an enjoyable experience. Tandem canoes however should be discouraged as the shallow, narrow, and tight nature of this river would, in most cases, have negative results.

Even with the lower volume of water flowing this time of year, the four mile stretch of the Poor Fork was covered with very little effort as the current was continuous and enjoyable with numerous shoals (gravel bars) for one to pull up to if desired. Numerous bridges were in evidence as the river went under KY 119 six times during this stretch and under four other bridges on adjacent roads. Due to the river's close proximity to KY 119, one was never out of hearing range of highway noise and nearby residences.



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The takeout site for this exploratory trip was “Three Crosses” access, a very popular baptismal site for many of the nearby churches. The site has a wide visible entrance off of Hwy 119, ample flat open space for parking and maneuvering vehicles and trailers plus easy river access.



Take-out area at “Three Crosses” has ample room for parking and easy turn-around for vehicles and trailers.



“Three Crosses” also has easy access in and out of the river.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR A CANOE/KAYAK/TUBING LIVERY, BASED UPON RESEARCH AND THIS EXPLORATORY TRIP

Numerous considerations should be addressed if one was to consider using this section of the Poor Fork for a livery and tourism attraction. Some are positive... and some pose problems:

1. Problem: Cleanliness of the stream. The Cumberland has been noted as one of the more “trashier” rivers in Kentucky. Cleanup of this segment of river would help but it would require some organized effort even on this short segment of the Poor Fork due to the long time use of this river as a dumping site.
2. Positive: The water was crystal clear. This is fantastic! One can see clearly fish swimming by and even smaller water creatures crawling along the bottom which is very appealing to most river users. But this also allows one to view all the trash below the surface of the river making river clean-up all the more necessary.
3. Problem/Positive: Water Quality - While the Poor Fork of the Cumberland does not show up on Kentucky’s impaired stream list of 2010, the numerous residences along this stretch of river makes one wonder how much negative by-products are being sent into the river.

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Just 100 yards below the put-in on this trip, a dog kennel was on the river's edge and the smell lasted about 50 yards in either direction. Fecal matter had to be going into the river. It is recommended that this segment of the Poor Fork be adopted by citizens working with the Kentucky Water Watch program to be monitored for Water quality.

Note: A list of streams and rivers in the State of Kentucky with poor water and noted as impaired streams may be viewed on the State of KY Water Watch web page.*

<http://water.ky.gov/waterquality/Pages/IntegratedReport.aspx>

4. Positive: Monitoring of deadfall/strainers - Only one significant deadfall/strainers (trees impeding the stream) was encountered on this stretch. The trees had been chain sawed at some time previously and was not a problem. However, monitoring of this stretch, if any type of livery were to happen would be necessary.
5. Positive: Type of water craft- kayaks, tubes and possibly solo canoes. Tandem canoes will be too large and, in most all sections, this stream is too shallow for a traditional kayak. Specifically, a livery operator should consider sit-on-top kayaks.
6. Positive: This section of the river would be classified primarily as Class I to Class II which is excellent for all skill levels but would not be challenging enough for whitewater paddlers. Description of Class levels is provided in a following section.
7. Positive: Variable trip lengths and possibilities - This trip was approximately 4 miles long. An additional half mile could be added by accessing the river higher up near Lewis Creek. Additional mileage could also be added downstream, below the Three Crosses Access near Cumberland.
8. Positive: Access and shuttle distances are easy and variable with Hwy 119 running always near the Poor Fork.
9. Problem: Water level is low when demand for tubing would be greatest.
10. Problem: Fishing would be a struggle due to shallow nature in most of this area. But a good fisherman (which the author is not) could probably have success in the few deeper holes. Smallmouth were seen but not caught!
11. Positive: Wildlife viewing. Numerous wild ducks were seen throughout this trip. Blue Heron and kingfishers accompanied throughout. Deer were seen browsing the shoreline.
12. Positive: Nice bluffs with rhododendron and hemlock cover produced beautiful shady areas.
13. Positive: Nice current flow keeps the boater moving with little additional paddling effort.

**Impaired Streams-The 303(d) List of Waters reports on streams and lakes identified as impaired for one or more pollutants; the term 'impaired' means these waterbodies do not meet one or more [water quality standards](#) and require a TMDL Impaired waters are identified through assessment and monitoring programs conducted by Kentucky Division of Water personnel, volunteer networks and other local, state and federal agencies.*

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RECOMMENDATION:

Once the proposed Eversole campground is operational, Brian might consider offering a short inner tube “lazy river run” from the east end of the campground (just below Lewis Creek) to the west end of the property (taking out just before the Conway Drive bridge) would provide a fun, entertaining activity for campers. Start-up costs would primarily be the purchase of a few large tractor tubes. Since tubes require very little clearance, low water levels would not be as much an issue thus extending the season into the warmer summer months when river use will tend to be more popular.



Livery service would not be required except in those instances where one might desire a longer float. If so, the take out at Three Crosses would be ideal although an extensive river clean-up would be strongly suggested prior to inviting guests to travel this section. As popularity in the river grows and the campground gains greater use, the addition of sit-on-top kayaks might be a wise investment and another entrepreneurial opportunity.

Remains of a hanging footbridge just before one gets to the take-out.

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CLASS LEVELS OF RIVERS

There are six classes of rivers denoting levels of difficulty. They are Class I to Class VI with Class I being the easiest. This upper section of the Poor Fork of the Cumberland is rated Class I to Class II. All six levels are summarized below:

- **Class I Rapids: Easy**
Fast moving water with riffles and small waves. Few obstructions, all obvious and easily missed with little training. Risk to swimmers is slight; self-rescue is easy.
- **Class II: Novice**
Straightforward rapids with wide, clear channels which are evident without scouting. Occasional maneuvering may be required, but rocks and medium-sized waves are easily missed by trained paddlers.
- **Class III: Intermediate**
Rapids with moderate, irregular waves which may be difficult to avoid and which can swamp an open canoe. Complex maneuvers in fast current and good boat control in tight passages or around ledges are often required; large waves or strainers may be present but are easily avoided. Strong eddies and powerful current effects can be found, particularly on large-volume rivers.
- **Class IV: Advanced**
Intense, powerful but predictable rapids requiring precise boat handling in turbulent water. Depending on the character of the river, it may feature large, unavoidable waves and holes or constricted passages demanding fast maneuvers under pressure. A fast, reliable eddy turn may be needed to initiate maneuvers, scout rapids, or rest. Rapids may require “must” moves above dangerous hazards.
- **Class V: Expert**
Extremely long, obstructed, or very violent rapids which expose a paddler to added risk. Drops may contain large, unavoidable waves and holes or steep, congested chutes with complex, demanding routes. Rapids may continue for long distances between pools, demanding a high level of fitness. What eddies exist may be small, turbulent, or difficult to reach. At the high end of the scale, several of these factors may be combined. Scouting is recommended but may be difficult. Swims are dangerous, and rescue is often difficult even for experts.
- **Class VI: Extreme**
These runs have almost never been attempted and often exemplify the extremes of difficulty, unpredictability and danger. The consequences of errors are very severe and rescue may be impossible. For teams of experts only, at favorable water levels, after close personal inspection and taking all precautions.