

Modest river flows a good thing for rafting season

By Paul McHugh, Sacramento Bee

California must have some of the hardest-working water in the world. Our mountains scrape abundant snowfall out of the sky to offer a playground for skiers and snowboarders.

Then, as snow melts in spring, runoff gushes down river canyons and provides thrills to rafters and kayakers.

Ultimately, of course, the stuff offers habitat for fish (and anglers), generates hydro power, gives us working showers, irrigates farms and provides so many other blessings into the bargain.

Each whitewater season has its own profile. For 2012, late spring and summer river-running looks to be benign, filled with sun and fun, reasonably safe, and of surprisingly long duration. Especially if you compare 2012 with last year, when a double-deep snowpack created an embarrassment of riches. Too many rivers ran too cold and too high for too long. It was mid-summer before recreational users could really enjoy their sports. In contrast, this year the watchword is: Get out there right now, and begin enjoying yourself.

“Last season, all our whitewater outfitters had a pretty slow start,” said Dan Crandall, who runs Current Adventures kayak school and The River Store on the popular south fork of the American River at Coloma. “But this year, many rivers that have little or no dam control, like the Carson, are sweet and runnable right now. And other drainages that are metered with dams and reservoirs, such as the south fork and the Trinity, have enough water to provide good recreation all summer long.”

Known whitewater runs are divided into classes, based on the

difficulty of their rapids. Class II-III runs provide suitable fun for beginners and families; Class III-IV runs are better reserved for those with some experience; and Class IV-V drops are best left to experts.

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