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***Organizers ready for 51st Westfield River Wildwater Races***



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**HUNTINGTON** - It will be business as usual when the 51st annual Westfield River Wildwater Races kick off on April 17. Organizer Jeffrey M. DeFeo said this week that the winter's relatively light snowfall, which adds to the depth and swiftness of the Westfield River, should have little effect on the races scheduled April 17 and 18. "Heavy snowfall during winter months adds to the quality of racing, but the river currently is high and running fast," DeFeo said on Friday. "Conditions right now are good, and it will be business as usual when the race begins." Sponsored by The Republican and hosted by the Westfield River Canoe Club, the races usually attract more than 250 entries for the novice classes and between 50 and 100 entries for the professional and expert classes. DeFeo said that novices will run a customary eight-mile course starting at the state Highway Department yard in Huntington Center on April 17. Professional and expert racers will compete in a 12-mile run from the base of Knightville Dam, located off Route 112. Both courses offer two portages and end at Strathmore Dam, located off Route 20 at the Russell-Westfield line. DeFeo said that volunteers have scheduled three clinics for beginners and others wanting to familiarize themselves with the river on the three weekends preceding the race. The clinics will be conducted at 1 p.m. at the state Highway Department yard in Huntington on March 28, April 4 and April 10. Novice racing April 17 will begin at 10 a.m. at Huntington Center, and expert and professional racing will commence at 11 a.m. at Knightville Dam on April 18. Awards will be presented after racing both days at the Gateway Regional School District Complex off Littleville Road. The 12-mile race record of 1:12:30 was set by Paul A. Facteau of Easthampton and Edward P. Hamel of Southampton in 2001. The team of Facteau and Hamel took first place in the professional race last year with a time of 1:18:58. They have said they believe 30 seconds can be taken off their record under perfect conditions. Their race was slowed last year by a strong headwind and low water in some locations.

Registration forms and race information may be obtained by contacting DeFeo at (413) 354-9684.