

Low water won't stop Westfield River races  
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HUNTINGTON - Hundreds of paddlers and thousands of spectators are expected to converge here this weekend as the 53rd running of the Westfield River Wildwater Races gets underway.

Although the water level on the river is low, organizer Jeffrey M. DeFeo said the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will try to make up for what Mother Nature has failed to provide. Engineers will turn up the volume both days by releasing water from the river's two flood control dams.

"We will have water, I am sure of that, but it won't be a record-setting year," DeFeo said.

The races, sponsored by the Sunday Republican and

MassLive.com, are the oldest continuously run whitewater races in the country.

Saturday's race, which begins at the state Department of Public Works, is eight miles long and for the novice classes of paddlers.

Registration begins at 8 a.m. and the race begins at 10 a.m.

One of the most popular stretches for spectators, especially for the novice races, is the so-called "Hill and Dale" rapids, which are about one mile north of the state police barracks in Russell.

Professionals and experts compete in a 12-mile race that begins Sunday at the base of Knightville Dam, located off Route 112. Registration begins at 9:30 a.m. and the race begins at 11 a.m.

The professional course record remains at 1:12:32, set in 2001 by Southampton's Edward Hamel and Paul Facticeau.

Participants need to show up with the appropriate equipment, including their own canoes or kayaks, DeFeo said. Cost for paddlers both days is \$17.

This year's races are dedicated to Jurgen G. Igel, a long-time co-chairman of the event with DeFeo, who passed away in July.

Opening ceremonies Saturday will include the presenting of a service award in Igel's name, DeFeo said.