

## **The Beauty of Roaring Run**

by  
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The elegant wingspan of the great blue heron silhouetted across the late August sun that was setting over the glistening red rocks in the white water of the river. The colorful, piliated woodpecker was busy plying his trade in the gentle breeze that swooped through the tall, swaggering trees. Two fawns were surveying the area carefully under the camouflage of their snowy spots against the unspoiled foliage.

The air was crisp and aromatically pleasing. The water shimmered with remarkable clarity. The rocks dazzled like jewels. For a moment, the landscape could have been Sedona, Arizona or the Boundary Waters of Minnesota. But instead it was the Kiski River below an auspicious trail in Apollo, PA.

My dog, Zeus stared at his reflection wondering if he had a friend below the surface. My other dog, Thor stretched out her wet paws and rapidly wagged her tail. A flock of nearby geese kept a watchful eye alert to the playful antics of these gentle, golden retrievers. Downstream, I gazed quietly at the beauty God had bestowed upon the valley as I tried my hand at fly-fishing. Upstream, a young man played guitar under the inspiration of mother nature's colossal canopy. Along the trail, the faint patter of a runner approached. Life was good on this day.

Time passed and the seasons changed. The days grew shorter and the air became colder. Several inches of snow now blanketed the trail. The sun seemed to hug the horizon. The cobalt sky was a cloudless, vast expanse. The river slowed, as its edges formed icy patches.

The great blue heron had departed to spear fish in warmer ponds. The woodpecker was tucked away to sleep for the interim. Only a dozen geese remained from the flock that flew south. The fawns, now grown, made tracks to forage the turned over corn fields of the Smeltzer farm in Washington Township. No one was fishing the mighty Kiski. The sound of guitar was nowhere to be heard. The bicycles had been put away.

It was late December and although the inhabitants were fewer, the awesome majesty remained to those who wished to partake. Zeus stared at his distorted reflection in the large piece of ice that he found along the banks. Thor stretched out her paws and rolled in a snow-bath along the trail. The geese remained vigilant having learned that these retrievers were fearless swimmers in the cold. I silently reflected on the unmistakable connection between nature and God while cross-country skiing along the trail. Life was good on this day.

These wonderful experiences were principally made possible through the hard and often unrecognized work of the selfless warriors of the Roaring Run Watershed Association.

People like Bob Knepshield, Andy Schreffler, and Rich Dixon toiled many days in obscurity so that others could enjoy their vision that became reality.

I remember seven years ago when Bob and Andy came to Apollo Trust Company to talk to me about a fledgling organization that needed to borrow a few thousand to buy a little ground. It was three years ago that I watched Bob and Rich haul garbage out of difficult terrain without fanfare. "Why are they doing all this," I thought to myself. It appeared to be so futile. More recently, I remember Bob asking if he could put up a sign in our bank to raise \$120,000 to buy additional acreage. The price for the ground seemed too high to me and I thought it was impossible to raise that kind of money in the valley. But I greatly underestimated Bob's dogged determination. They reached their goal.

The success of the StrongLand off-road bicycle race this past September blew the lid off the best kept secret in the Kiski Valley. It was then that others came to realize what I had learned just a couple years ago. The Roaring Run Watershed Association ground is a resource that is to be treasured. But equally important, it a triumph of courage, foresight and resolve. Dedicated members of Roaring Run are all to be commended. The quality of life for Thor, Zeus and their master has been improved immeasurably through your efforts.



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