

AMERICAN RIVERS

National River Cleanup® Organizer's Handbook



American Rivers
Rivers Connect Us





American Rivers is the leading organization working to protect and restore the nation's rivers and streams. Rivers connect us to each other, nature, and future generations. Since 1973, American Rivers has fought to preserve these connections, helping protect and restore more than 150,000 miles of rivers through advocacy efforts, on-the-ground projects, and the annual release of *America's Most Endangered Rivers*®.

Headquartered in Washington, DC, American Rivers has offices across the country and more than 100,000 supporters, members, and volunteers nationwide. Visit www.AmericanRivers.org, [www.Facebook.com/AmericanRivers](https://www.facebook.com/AmericanRivers), and [www.Twitter.com/AmericanRivers](https://www.twitter.com/AmericanRivers).

With more than 3,660,000 miles of rivers in America, almost everyone lives within a mile of a river or a stream. Unfortunately, each year millions of tons of trash end up in our nation's rivers.

This program was launched in 1991 to help keep our nation's rivers clean and trash free. Since it started, more than 1,045,000 volunteers have participated in thousands of cleanups across the country, covering more than 205,500 miles of waterways. These cleanups have removed more than 13 million pounds of litter and debris from America's rivers and streams.

National River Cleanup provides support to individuals, organizations, and anyone interested in conducting a cleanup on their local river. If you are interested in holding a cleanup on your river, American Rivers is here to help. By registering your cleanup with American Rivers, you will receive free trash bags, assistance with online and print media coverage, volunteer promotion online and technical support.

This program is successful thanks to dedicated organizers like you and the generosity of our donors and sponsors who provide financial support, volunteer time, and online activism.

Thank you for partnering with American Rivers' *National River Cleanup* for your event. We are grateful for your commitment to keeping the nation's rivers clean and healthy for generations to come.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Planning Your Cleanup	1
Site Selection.....	1
Schedule Your Cleanup	3
Register with American Rivers	3
Volunteer Recruitment	3
Publicize Your Cleanup.....	4
Celebrate a Successful Cleanup.....	5
Waste Disposal Plan	6
Supply Checklist.....	7
Day of the Cleanup.....	8
Before Leaving for Your Event.....	8
Arrival and Set-up	8
Kick off your cleanup	8
River Cleanup Safety Tips	9
Protective Gear	9
On the Water.....	10
Handling Trash.....	11
Avoiding Hazardous Materials.....	11
Wrap Up and Celebrate	11
Cleanup Follow Up	11
Thank Yous.....	12
Report your results and return liability waivers.....	12
Share your photos	12
Templates and Samples.....	13
Liability Waiver.....	13
Data Results Form.....	14

Electronic versions and more information available online at www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup

PLANNING YOUR CLEANUP

The success of *National River Cleanup* depends on dedicated community leaders like you. Thank you for planning a cleanup in your community!

By leading a river cleanup effort, you will make your river or stream a safer, healthier place for wildlife and people while providing a fantastic way to connect citizens to their local river or stream. Most people see for the first time the harm caused by litter, specifically in their waterway. They are transformed by a great sense of accomplishment after removing bags of trash and can see the results of helping the environment in a relatively short period of time. Cleanups also provide an excellent way to educate volunteers about other problems your river is facing. Whether it be run-off, sewage overflow, gas drilling, or invasive species, your captive audience will want to know “what else they can do” after the cleanup is over.

Why Conduct a River Cleanup?

Cleaning a river helps solve the problem that millions of tons of trash cause every year. Trash is more than just an eyesore, it contaminates our drinking water and threatens the lives of all people, wildlife, and communities who depend on clean water. It is also a great way to meet your neighbors and get some fresh air.

How Much Time Will It Take?

The amount of time will depend on how long your cleanup will be and how many people will be participating. Most cleanups require approximately ten hours for preparation, recruiting volunteers and conducting the event. The cleanup event can last anywhere from a few hours to a full day. Smaller cleanups may take less time, larger ones more.

How do I get started?

American Rivers makes it easy for you to get involved. This *National River Cleanup Handbook* will provide all the information you need to organize a river cleanup. Start by selecting a site for your event.

SITE SELECTION

If you have any questions about your local site, please contact us at NRC@AmericanRivers.org or (877) 347-7550.

Selecting the right location is important. You should consider the number of volunteers, convenience and accessibility of the cleanup location, and size of the cleanup.

When selecting your site:

- Find a heavily littered area.
- Stay away from areas that have existing or potential safety hazards such as chemical containers or steep or unstable banks.
- Walk the area to see how accessible it is for a group cleanup effort. Find a good spot for your check-in station where volunteers will check in and obtain supplies and a place for your wrap-up celebration. Try to stay away from busy roads or areas difficult for your volunteers to access.
- Be sensitive to the ecosystem. Plan a cleanup near mass transportation, or make sure there is suitable parking and encourage carpooling.

- Decide if you will conduct a cleanup along the shoreline, in boats or both. If your group will be boating—identify safe “put in” and “take out” locations.
- Consider the size of the site. If the site is large, identify smaller sites within the location which can be managed by individual team leaders.
- Determine who will be participating. If your event will be family friendly, pay special attention to proximity to roadways, bridges or other areas where children might be particularly vulnerable.
- Ensure restroom availability.

Before making any definite plans, determine whether the land is public or private, and if you’ll need permission to host your cleanup. Often a quick internet search will give you this information. If it is not clear who owns or manages the land, call your county auditor or land title office.

Federal agencies, like the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Forest Service, or state parks often manage public land. When asking for permission to use the land, also ask for donations of supplies, disposal services and/or publicity.

When discussing the cleanup with private landowners, focus on the positives. Explain that you want to improve



the environment and participants will be respectful of the property. If you start by registering with American Rivers, you can also mention that the cleanup is part of American Rivers' *National River Cleanup* program, a nationwide effort to beautify rivers across the country.

If you have any questions about site selection or need help finding a cleanup site, please contact a local watershed association or outfitter. Or contact American Rivers at NRC@AmericanRivers.org or (877) 347-7550.

REGISTRATION WITH AMERICAN RIVERS

After you have determined the date and time of your event, register to add it to our online map of cleanups nationwide. This will allow people to find and participate in your cleanup. (Events can also be marked private.) In addition, events that are registered four weeks before their date will receive free trash bags and other day-of materials.

Why Register my Cleanup with American Rivers' *National River Cleanup*?

American Rivers' *National River Cleanup* is dedicated to helping our organizers plan and implement a well-run cleanup. To do that, American Rivers provides supplies, tools, and support to every registered cleanup. We help increase participation by listing your cleanup on our online map and by exposure through our magazine, email, and social media. Another important reason to register with American Rivers is data collection. Understanding the amount and type of waste that is being picked up is necessary to identifying key legislative and educational tools to reduce our waste.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

The more people at your event, the greater your impact can be.

Who Can Help?

Anyone and everyone. Most volunteers should expect to be able to walk and/or boat along a riverbank or beach and pick up litter, however there are many jobs that do not require significant physical activity. These include handing out supplies, on-site registration, organizing lunch, and volunteer outreach. Encourage everyone, regardless of ability or age, to participate in the manner in which they feel most comfortable.

Start promoting the cleanup in your community by:

- Posting fliers on all local community boards. Look for them at libraries, grocery stores, coffee shops, high schools, dorms, etc. Reaching out to all types of retail outlets to post your event information in their store. Visit www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup to download a sample flier.
- Asking friends, families, neighbors, co-workers, community groups, local scout troops, schools, and environmental organizations to get involved.
- Asking outdoors clubs such as hiking, bird watching, climbing, paddling, to get involved and spread the word to their members.
- Enlisting boat owners to join your team and pick up litter further out in the depths of the water.
- Post a cleanup "blurb" on area online calendar of events, daily newspapers, free weeklies, neighborhood listserves and city blogs. Be aware that these deadlines vary.

When you register with American Rivers your cleanup information is posted on our Interactive Map where other potential volunteers can find it.



What should volunteers expect? Prepare your volunteers by letting them know what time to arrive, what to wear, and what to do in the case of inclement weather on the day of the cleanup.

What to Wear:

- Clothes that can get dirty or wet
- Sturdy shoes (no sandals or flip-flops)
- Long pants or high boots to avoid scratches
- Gloves

What to Bring:

- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Snacks
- Reusable water bottle
- Hand sanitizer

In the case of inclement weather, include a rain date or cancellation information, such as a phone number to call before the event begins.

PUBLICIZE YOUR CLEANUP

Garnering media attention can be very beneficial to your cleanup, especially as you prepare to engage the community. Media attention will help raise awareness as well as draw additional volunteers.

As you plan media your outreach campaign, here are some things to keep in mind:

- American Rivers provides a press release template which you can customize and e-mail to reporters and bloggers who may cover your event. Visit www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup to download a press release template. If you have an event web page or Facebook page, include a link to your event.
- Invite reporters and bloggers to attend the event.
- Mention any sponsors and/or politicians who may be attending.
- Encourage your attendees to post information about your event on their social networks, and encourage live posting or tweeting during the event.
- Follow up after the event with statistics on trash removed, a general summary of the day and any photos. (See page 13.)
- Set up an internet alert (such as Google Alerts) to track any media coverage you may receive.
- Keep copies of all media you receive. You'll be able to use them the following year to help secure sponsorships and encourage elected officials to participate.

Encourage your attendees to post information about your event on their social networks, and encourage live posting or tweeting during the event.

Invite Elected Officials

Inviting elected officials is a great way to draw attention to the river and highlight its importance to your community. Visit www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup to download a sample invitation.

- Invite the mayor, your congressional representatives, or others who might attract a crowd to speak briefly during your opening remarks and introduction and/or to join the cleanup.
 - Make sure to nail down a specific time with their schedulers and provide whatever details they need.
 - Be sure to include in your press release if a member of Congress, government or an elected official plans to attend your cleanup. You can work with the official's press office, as well as get help from American Rivers. Contact the *National River Cleanup* Manager at NRC@AmericanRivers.org or (877) 347-7550.

Plan to Celebrate

Offering lunch during or after your event is a great way to thank your volunteers and build camaraderie. If you choose to include lunch at your event, ask a local restaurant or grocery store to sponsor your cleanup by donating lunch and snacks for participants. We encourage you to work with restaurants that support local farmers, which reduces your carbon footprint. If you're not able to supply food, but still wish to provide a lunch experience, encourage volunteers to bring a bagged lunch.

Volunteers will have just finished removing many plastic bottles, aluminum cans, styrofoam take-out containers, and plastic silverware from the river, so it's

important that the lunch does not create significant amounts of additional trash. Visit www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup to download the Trash-free Lunch Guide.

- Bring reusable items – such as non-disposable water bottles – that can be used during and after the cleanup.
- Provide food with minimal packaging that is made out of recyclable or compostable materials.
- Buy items in bulk rather than with individually wrapped packaging, which is a major source of litter pollution.
- If it is necessary to purchase plates, bowls, cups, and flatware, get plant-based, compostable products. Plastic flatware is not recyclable in most areas.
- Avoid Styrofoam. It cannot be recycled in most areas and is not biodegradable.
- Ask your food provider to wrap sandwiches and side dishes in foil rather than plastic wrap. Foil is recyclable in most areas.
- Label trash cans and recycling bins to ensure on-site recycling and educate volunteers about the importance (and ease) of waste reduction and proper disposal.

If possible, consider composting your lunch materials.

WASTE DISPOSAL PLAN

Free trash bags from American Rivers will be delivered at least two weeks before your event if registered four weeks in advance. If you do not need trash bags from American Rivers, please still register with us and share your cleanup data.

Trash Collection

At least two months in advance of your cleanup, contact your local waste management company. Tell them about your project and explain that it's a volunteer community service effort.

Ask your contact:

- If the company would be willing to sponsor the effort by hauling away the garbage for free or at a discounted price.
- What the proper disposal and cost of special/hazardous materials like batteries, tires, or chemical containers is.
- If they recycle. If they do not, reach out to local recycling haulers as well (see below).

Recycling

If the waste management company does not recycle, contact your local recycling facility to determine recycling practices for your area. Have different bags for recycled items to make waste separation clear to your volunteers.

Some recycling centers don't accept recyclables pulled from a shoreline area. Even if they don't accept recyclable material from cleanups, separating your trash gives your volunteers an idea of the amount that "could have been" recycled and also provides useful data. These are powerful numbers for a follow-up press release and media coverage. During your welcome and introduction, let your volunteers know what is considered "recyclable." It varies from state to state but is typically steel, aluminum, plastics, glass, and paper.

If you are unable to secure free waste pick-up, consider recruiting volunteers who are willing to haul the waste to the nearest landfill, incinerator and/or recycling center. Make sure your drivers understand the time commitment and materials needed to properly dispose of everything.

SUPPLY CHECKLIST

Below is a checklist of useful supplies for your cleanup. Use this in the weeks leading up to your event to be sure you are fully prepared when the big day arrives.

Necessary Items

- Trash Bags - Regular trash bags are provided by American Rivers if you register four weeks in advance. If you do not need trash bags from American Rivers please still register with us and share your cleanup data. Trash Bags for recyclable items will need to be purchased locally or donated.
- Gloves - Volunteers can bring their own, or local groups or businesses may donate. It is a good idea to have a few extra pairs the day of the event. American Rivers recommends gloves with a plastic or rubber coated palm for safety and easy gripping when wet.
- Liability Waiver - Bring as many copies as there are expected volunteers. (See page 14.)
- Trash Grabbers (*optional*) - Some volunteers find plastic trash pickers or “grabbers” helpful in reaching difficult areas, and to prevent excessive bending and stooping. Avoid the steel-tipped, piercing variety if children are present.
- Empty laundry detergent container to be used as a “sharps” container.
- First Aid Kit - It is imperative to have a First Aid Kit at all volunteer events. They can be purchased cheaply at any drugstore. It’s also helpful to identify any members of your group who may have first aid, CPR or first responder training.
- Reflectors or vests (*optional*)
- Table for volunteer check-in and supplies
- Volunteer sign-in sheet (Visit www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup to download a volunteer sign-in sheet.)
- Volunteer and VIP contact sheet
- Customizable Press Release for any press on site – Visit www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup to download a sample invitation.
- “State of the River” information for volunteers to take with them
- Data Results* (See page 15)
- Have an emergency plan: prepare a tip sheet with emergency phone numbers and evacuation routes.
- Directional signs
- Boats/Canoes/Kayaks/Personal Flotation Devices (*optional*)
- Camera (for pre and post pictures)

* To be returned to American Rivers after completion of cleanup.

DAY OF THE CLEANUP

BEFORE YOU LEAVE FOR THE CLEANUP SITE:

- Check the weather for the day and the water levels to make sure it is still safe for volunteers. If appropriate, implement your Inclement Weather Plan.
- Make sure you have everything from your checklist.
- Fully charge your cell phone. Volunteers, reporters, VIPs and vendors may need to reach you throughout the day.
- Confirm the location/arrival of food and supplies.
- Confirm the arrival of trash collectors and caterers.

ARRIVAL AND SET-UP

- Arrive at least one hour before the scheduled start time. Plan ahead to have a few volunteers meet you there to help set up.
- Post directional signs for the event.
- Set up a check-in table with volunteer sign-in sheets. Have each participant sign a liability waiver as they arrive. (See template page 14, signed liability must be returned to American Rivers after the cleanup.) Include:
 - Extra pairs of sturdy work gloves
 - First aid and safety materials
 - Trash bags and cleanup supplies
 - Spare personal flotation devices if boating (i.e. life jackets)
- If you are collecting both trash and recyclables, make sure each volunteer has a bag for each.
- Take a final look for potential safety hazards. Block off areas as necessary.

- Post directional signs for the event.
- Station volunteer(s) at the put in and take out area(s) to assist boaters (if applicable).
- Take before pictures so you can see the results of all your hard work!

CLEANUP KICKOFF

Opening remarks are a great way to thank everybody that is involved and to get your volunteers excited. This is also the time to provide direction and any final safety tips.

- Thank everyone for coming. Let volunteers know that they are part of a larger effort coordinated by American Rivers' *National River Cleanup*.
- Acknowledge and thank elected officials in attendance and give them a chance to say a few words. Always have elected officials speak early in the program, and introduce them to speak in order of importance.
- Acknowledge and thank all sponsors (if appropriate).
- Talk about the importance of the river and helping the environment. (Visit www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup for river fact sheets.)
- Identify any team leaders.
- Emphasize to everyone: don't be afraid to ask for help; don't try to lift heavy objects alone.
- Outline what people should not pick up (leaky batteries, chemical containers, sharp items, etc). If volunteers come across these items, they should notify the cleanup organizer or team leaders.
- Go over the schedule for the day, including the location to meet back up at the end of the cleanup and where to place the bagged and loose trash.
- Make sure everyone knows where to focus their efforts and when to stop.



RIVER CLEANUP SAFETY

It is important to prepare your volunteers for the hazards they might encounter on the cleanup site. Below you will find tips for on and off the water as well as how to handle various types of materials in your cleanup area. Instruct volunteers that when they are in doubt, they should notify the organizers and/or team leaders instead of handling the materials themselves. Visit www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup to download a sample safety speech.

Protective Gear

Protect your group from hazards by encouraging everyone to use:

- Work gloves
- Sturdy shoes with hard soles
- Life vest if on a boat
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Hand sanitizer

On the Water

Boating volunteers should follow these guidelines:

- Always use a Personal Floatation Device.
- Appoint a “lead” boat (front) and “sweep” boat (rear).
- Ask people to stay behind the lead and in front of the sweep. The lead and sweep should be more experienced boaters, and should both be equipped with first aid kits.
- No diving or jumping into the water, no deliberate boat tipping, etc.
- Stay within sight of each other: If you can’t see the last boat in the group, slow down or stop.
- Appoint at least one person on the water to make decisions in case of an emergency, as decisions by consensus don’t always work in emergency situations.
- Have an emergency plan: Prepare a tip sheet with emergency phone numbers and evacuation routes.
- Identify and avoid hazards: Look out for strainers (trees and debris buildups in the water). Also watch for drops, dams and other more difficult river features. Rivers are dynamic. Features may have changed since you first scouted the river when planning the cleanup.
- Steer away from fishermen, swimmers, and other boaters.





Handling Trash

Garbage can be dirty, rusty, slimy, and sometimes sharp. Use caution when handling trash to avoid cuts and abrasions. Emphasize to everyone: Don't be afraid to ask for help; don't try to lift heavy objects alone.

Avoid Hazardous Materials

If you discover hazardous materials contact your state's Department of Environmental Management, pollution control or like agency immediately. Do not attempt to handle hazardous materials on your own. Hazardous materials need to be taken to special processing facilities.

Examples of hazardous materials:

- Drums or containers that may contain toxic waste.
- Needles and other biohazard waste.
- Handle with caution: broken glass, aerosol cans,

gas cans, and other containers with chemical residues or traces of volatile materials.

- Live ammunition or explosives. Do not handle! Immediately alert the authorities if these items are discovered during your cleanup.

WRAP UP AND CELEBRATE

After your volunteers have collected all the waste and brought it to the designated area, separate the trash and recycling. Make all the requested data estimates for the Data Results Form (see page 15). Gather your volunteers and take a few pictures to document all your hard work! Help load the waste into the vehicles of volunteers who are hauling it away, if applicable.

The picnic celebration is the perfect opportunity to thank your volunteers. Share your estimated data with them so they have immediate results of their hard work to take home with them.

POST CLEANUP

FOLLOW UP

After your event, it is important to thank all your volunteers and guests. Send thank you notes to elected officials and reporters. Include photos and statistics on trash removed, and maintain this contact list for next year's events.

REPORT YOUR RESULTS AND RETURN LIABILITY WAIVERS

Report your results to American Rivers. We will showcase results in national reporting and statistics. Submit cleanup data at www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup.

Return signed liability waivers to American Rivers via:

Fax number: 202-347-9240 Attn: *National River Cleanup* Manager

Email: NRC@AmericanRivers.org

Address: American Rivers
Attn: *National River Cleanup* Manager
1101 14th Street, NW, Suite 1400
Washington, DC 20005

SHARE YOUR PHOTOS

Submit your favorite pictures to American Rivers' annual photo contest at www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup. Share photos on your social networks and tag us to share.



Green Mountain Coffee Roasters
2010 Winooski River Cleanup



Participant Release of Liability and Assumption of Risk Agreement

Return all waivers to American Rivers after cleanup
Fax: 202-347-9240
NRC@AmericanRivers.org
1101 14th Street NW, Suite 1400
Washington, DC 20005 Attn: NRC
Manager

Name of Volunteer (please print):
Address:
City: State: Zip:
Phone:
Email:
City, State of Volunteer Activity:

Organizer's Name:

No, American Rivers cannot add me to its mail or email lists following this event.

In consideration of being allowed to participate in any way in the program, related events and activities, I the undersigned, acknowledge, appreciate, and agree that:

1. I am donating my time and services without any compensation and shall at no time be considered an employee or independent contractor of American Rivers for this event. The risk of injury from the activities involved in this program may be significant, including the potential for permanent paralysis and death.
2. I knowingly and freely assume all such risks, both known and unknown, even if arising from the negligence of the releases or others, and assume full responsibility for my participation.
3. I willingly agree to comply with terms and conditions for participation. If I observe any unusual significant hazard during my presence or participation, I will remove myself from participation and bring such to the attention of the nearest official immediately
4. I, for myself and on behalf of my heirs, assigns, personal representatives and next of kin, hereby release indemnify, and hold harmless American Rivers, _____ and its officers, agents and/or employees, other participants, sponsors, advertisers, partners, and, if applicable, owners and lessors of premises used to conduct the event (RELEASEES), from any and all claims, demands, losses, and liability arising out of or related to any injury, disability or death I may suffer, or loss or damage to person or property, whether arising from the negligence of the releases or otherwise, to the fullest extent permitted by law.
5. Any dispute between American Rivers and me will be governed by the substantive laws of the District of Columbia. Any action or proceeding arising hereunder shall be brought in the courts of the District of Columbia.
6. I grant to American Rivers, its representatives and employees the right to take photographs at this event of me and of any minor participants for which I am the parent or guardian. I authorize American Rivers, its assigns and transferees to use such photographs, with or without names, for any lawful purpose, including for example such purposes as publicity, illustration, advertising, and Web content, and to copyright, use and publish the same in print and/or electronically.

I have read this release of liability and assumption of risk agreement, fully understand its terms, understand that I have given up substantial rights by signing it, and sign it freely and voluntarily without any inducement.

X _____
Participant Signature Age Date Emergency phone number

FOR PARENTS/GUARDIAN OF PARTICIPANT OF MINOR AGE (UNDER AGE 18 AT TIME OF REGISTRATION) This is to certify that I, as parent/guardian with legal responsibility for this participant, do consent and agree to his/her release as provided above of all the Releases, and, for myself, my heirs, assigns, and next of kin, I release and agree to indemnify and hold harmless the Releases from any and all liability incidents to my minor child's involvement or participation in these programs as provided above, EVEN IF ARISING FROM THE NEGLIGENCE OF THE RELEASEES, to the fullest extent permitted by law.

X _____
Parent/Guardian Signature if under 18 years Date Emergency phone number





Data Results Form

Please return this form by filling it out online at www.AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup after your cleanup(s) is complete. If you have any questions, please contact the *National River Cleanup* Manager at NRC@AmericanRivers.org or (877) 347-7550.

1. What is your name and/or the name of your cleanup?
2. When was your cleanup?
3. Approximate number of volunteers who attended your cleanup(s):
4. Estimated number of river miles you cleaned up (please round to whole numbers):
5. Estimated total pounds of trash:
6. Estimated percentage of trash that was made up of recyclable items:
7. What was the most interesting item you took out of the river?
8. Were the materials from American Rivers helpful?
9. Are there additional materials or is there additional support that American Rivers could provide that you would find helpful?
10. Will you hold another cleanup?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your cleanup?
12. Can we contact you to have you share your experience/photos with us?

Please share your photos with us on Facebook and Flickr if you have not already - tag us to share!



American Rivers
Rivers Connect Us

National Office:
1101 14th Street, NW
Suite 1400
Washington, DC 20005

Phone: (202) 347-7550
Toll-free: (877) 347-7550

www.AmericanRivers.org

Regional Offices:
California
Great Lakes
Mid-Atlantic
Midwest
Northeast
Northwest
Northern Rockies
Southeast

About American Rivers:

American Rivers is the leading organization working to protect and restore the nation's rivers and streams. Rivers connect us to each other, nature, and future generations. Since 1973, American Rivers has fought to preserve these connections, helping protect and restore more than 150,000 miles of rivers through advocacy efforts, on-the-ground projects, and the annual release of *America's Most Endangered Rivers*®.

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