



American Rivers NATIONAL RIVER CLEANUP®



PHOTO: PETER BENNETT, CITIZEN OF THE PLANET

↑ **LOS ANGELES RIVER, CALIFORNIA.** The Great LA River Cleanup / La Gran Limpieza, April 20, 2019. Los Angeles, California.

ORGANIZER HANDBOOK

ABOUT AMERICAN RIVERS

American Rivers believes a future of clean water and healthy rivers for everyone, everywhere is essential. Since 1973, we have protected wild rivers, restored damaged rivers and conserved clean water for people and nature. With headquarters in Washington, D.C., and 300,000 supporters, members and volunteers across the country, we are the most trusted and influential river conservation organization in the United States, delivering solutions for a better future. Because life needs rivers.

With 3 million miles of rivers in the United States, many of us live within a mile of a river or stream. Rivers also connect us to our past, to nature and to one another. Unfortunately, each year millions of tons of trash end up in our nation's rivers.

Whether you're an individual, business, club, school or local river organization, American Rivers is here to help

National River Cleanup® launched in 1991 to help keep our nation's rivers clean and to give people a way to take action for their hometown river. Since then, more than 1.3 million volunteers have participated in thousands of cleanups across the country, covering more than 260,000 miles of waterways. These cleanups have removed more than 27 million pounds of litter and debris. National River Cleanup® provides guidance and support to anyone interested in hosting a cleanup on their local river.



PHOTO: JESSI A. JAMES

↑ **PEARL RIVER, LOUISIANA.** Pearl River Clean Sweep, September 26, 2020. Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge, Louisiana.

Start planning your cleanup today: Review this handbook for step-by-step tips and planning instructions. Then, once you've chosen your event date, register your cleanup at AmericanRivers.org/cleanup to receive free trash bags and additional support.

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

Thank you for including American Rivers' National River Cleanup® in your event. We are grateful for your commitment to keeping our nation's rivers clean and healthy for generations to come.

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PART 1: Planning Your Cleanup



PHOTO: BILL LIPFERT

↑ **WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VERMONT.** Connecticut River Conservancy's Source to Sea cleanup, September 28, 2019. Hartford, Vermont.

INTRODUCTION



By leading this effort, you will make your river or stream a safer, healthier place for wildlife and people. Beyond the cleanup's direct impact, your event is an opportunity to introduce people in your community to their local river and encourage and inspire participants to engage in future stewardship activities.

Why host 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 wildlife. Cleanups are also a great way to meet your neighbors and get some fresh air.

In addition, they provide an excellent way to educate volunteers about other problems your river is facing and how they can continue to help after the cleanup is over. After removing trash, volunteers will witness first-hand the results of helping the environment.

How much time will it take to plan and execute?

The amount of time varies from event to event and depends on the number of participants, the size of your targeted area, the amount of trash and the length of your event. On average, cleanups require approximately 10 hours to prepare, recruit volunteers and conduct. The event itself can last anywhere from a few hours to a full day. Smaller cleanups may take less time, larger ones more.



**Prepare for
cleanup**



**Recruit
volunteers**



**Conduct
river cleanup**

How do I get started?

This Organizer Handbook provides all the information you need to organize a successful river cleanup. Start by selecting a date and identify potential sites.



PHOTO: NICOLE COREY & NATURAL RESTORATIONS

↑ **LOWER SALT RIVER, ARIZONA.** American Rivers, Verizon and Natural Restorations cleanup, January 23, 2019. Goldfield Recreation Area, Mesa, Arizona.

SITE SELECTION

Selecting the right location is important. As you look at potential sites, you should consider the number of volunteers, convenience and accessibility, and the amount and size of the litter.

When selecting your site:

- Find a heavily littered area.
- Avoid areas with existing or potential safety hazards, such as chemical containers or steep or unstable banks.
- Walk the area to determine how accessible it is for a group effort. Identify an ideal meeting spot where volunteers can easily find you, check-in, obtain supplies and celebrate at the end.
- If possible, avoid busy roads or difficult-to-access areas.
- Plan a cleanup near mass transportation and/or ensure available parking. Encourage carpooling.
- Determine if you will clean 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 locations within the site that can be managed by individual team leaders.
- Consider who will be participating. If your event will be family friendly, pay special attention to proximity to roadways, bridges or other areas that could be dangerous for children.
- Ensure restroom availability. If your site does not have public restroom facilities or a portable toilet, ask a nearby restaurant or store if volunteers can

use their restrooms during your cleanup. If none are available, make sure to rent a portable toilet or clearly communicate to volunteers before the event and at the beginning that restrooms are not available.

Before making any definite plans, determine whether the land is public or private, and if you will need permission or permits to host your cleanup. Often, a quick Internet search will give you this information. If it is unclear 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, municipalities 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, highlight the positives. Explain that you want to improve the environment and that your group will be respectful of the property. If you have registered your event 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.

Use the Site Selection Worksheet (see Appendix D) to keep track of potential cleanup sites. For questions about site selection or help finding a cleanup site, contact your local city or county parks department, local watershed association or river outfitter. Or contact American Rivers at NRC@AmericanRivers.org or (877) 347-7550.

REGISTER

After you determine the date and time of your cleanup, visit our [website](#) to register your event. Your event will be added to our interactive, nationwide map of upcoming cleanups and given its own individual event page. This will allow volunteers to find and sign up for your event. Events can also be marked private. Events that are registered at least four weeks before their date will receive free trash bags and other day-of materials (while supplies last).

Why register my cleanup with American Rivers' National River Cleanup®?

National River Cleanup® is dedicated to helping organizers plan and implement a successful cleanup.

Benefits to registering your event:

- **Organizer network:** Access our expansive, nationwide network of over 325 cleanup organizers who plan cleanups of all shapes and sizes. Our collaborative approach allows organizers to share ideas and replicable strategies such as volunteer management and litter disposal.
- **Technical support:** Get personalized, one-on-one support and advice from our National River Cleanup® manager.
- **Materials and resources:** Receive free trash bags and access to event-planning tools.
- **Volunteer registration tool:** Once you register, your event will be reviewed and published to our [cleanup map](#) with an individual event page. Get the word out about your event and/or sign-up and inform volunteers through your individual event page.

Registering your event with us will also help expand our organizer network, share ideas and tactics and grow stewardship for rivers. We ask organizers to report their trash data to us to better understand the amount and type of waste you and/or your group collects. This data helps us, and others track our impact and identify ways to educate the public on waste reduction. Collecting data can also help you advocate for legislative measures for additional river protection and reduction of trash.



PHOTO: ERIN CORPINER AND WESTCHESTER PARKS FOUNDATION

↑ **BRONX RIVER, NEW YORK.** Bronx River Trash Boom Cleanup with Westchester Parks Foundation, May 4, 2019. White Plains, New York.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

Who can help?

Anyone and everyone. Most volunteers will be collecting trash by either walking or boating along the riverbank or beach. However, there are other opportunities that do not require significant physical activity, such as recruiting participants, handing out supplies, checking in volunteers or organizing lunch.

For any minors' participation, appropriate permissions should be obtained.

Where to recruit volunteers

Now that you registered with National River Cleanup®, your event will be posted on our interactive map of upcoming cleanups and given an individual webpage with information for volunteers to sign up. The next step is to get the word out.

Start promoting the cleanup in your community:

- Tell friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, community groups, schools and environmental organizations.
- Ask outdoor hiking, bird watching, climbing and paddling clubs to sign up and spread the word to their members.
- Create an event on Facebook or another social media platform.
- Contact your local farmers market and ask for permission to sign-up volunteers during market hours. Use a volunteer contact sheet to gather contact information from potential volunteers.

- Post fliers on local community boards. Look for them at libraries, grocery stores, coffee shops, schools, dorms, etc. Reach out to local retail outlets to post your event information in their store.
- Post your event on local online event calendars, Nextdoor, daily and weekly newspapers, neighborhood listservs and city blogs. Be aware that these deadlines vary.
- Enlist boat owners to join your team and pick up litter that is farther from the shore.

Prepare your volunteers

Let them know what time to arrive, where to meet, what to wear and bring and what to do in the case of inclement weather.

What to wear:

- Clothes that can get dirty or wet
- Sturdy, closed toe shoes (no sandals or flip-flops)
- Long pants or high boots to avoid scratches
- Hat with a brim to protect from the sun

What to bring:

- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Snacks
- Hand sanitizer
- Reusable water bottle

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

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Community sponsors

One way to gain publicity in the community and reduce the cost of a cleanup is to ask local businesses to sponsor your event. Your local outfitter might be an obvious first choice, but there are ways for all businesses in town to get involved. Sponsorship can range from cash and grants to a wide variety of donated goods or services, such as boats for the event, t-shirts, cleanup supplies like gloves, lunch or refreshments for volunteers, or waste removal and disposal.

Local businesses can benefit from both the publicity and the opportunity to have their employees volunteer and make a difference in the community. Offer to place the business' logo on event signage and be sure to thank them for their support during your remarks at the cleanup. Be creative when talking to local businesses about how you can work together to hold a successful cleanup and improve the community.

Use the Community Sponsors Worksheet (see Appendix A) to keep track of your potential sponsors.

Visit our [Fundraising Resource Guide](#) webpage for more fundraising tips, ideas and list of suggested national, regional and local supporters.



PHOTO: NICOLE COREY & NATURAL RESTORATIONS

↑ **LOWER SALT RIVER, ARIZONA.** American Rivers, Verizon and Natural Restorations cleanup, January 23, 2019. Goldfield Recreation Area, Mesa, Arizona.

Elected officials

Inviting elected officials is a great way to draw attention to the river and highlight its importance to your community.

- Ask your mayor, congressman, senator or any other elected representative who may attract a crowd. Invite them to speak briefly during your opening remarks and/or join the cleanup.
- Make sure to provide their schedulers with a specific time and any other pertinent event details.

PUBLICIZE YOUR CLEANUP

Garnering media attention can help raise awareness of your cleanup, attract additional volunteers and/or amplify your event after it has taken place.

As you plan your media outreach campaign, here are some helpful tips:

- Get your event noticed on social media. Create an event webpage or Facebook page with a link to your event and ask your sponsors to share with their networks.
- Encourage attendees to share the event and photos on social media, and encourage live posting or tweeting with a hashtag, such as #rivercleanup, during the event.
- Create a media advisory to invite reporters and bloggers to attend.
- Mention any sponsors and/or elected officials in attendance. You can work with the press office of elected officials, as well as get help from American Rivers.
- After the event, send out statistics on the amount of trash removed, a general summary of the cleanup and any photos to attendees, elected officials, social media followers or anyone in your network.
- Consider sending a press release to media contacts. You can create your own or use the National River Cleanup® [customizable press release](#).

- Set up an internet alert (such as Google Alerts) to track and save any media coverage you may receive.
- Share media coverage with your volunteers and on social media to celebrate your success.
- You can also use the media coverage the following year to help secure sponsorships and encourage elected officials to participate.

Visit our [Organizer Resources](#) webpage for more information on ideas and tips to promote your cleanup, including how to write a media advisory and press release.



PHOTO: ISABEL MURPHY

↑ **LOS ANGELES RIVER, CALIFORNIA.** Friends of Frogtown Cleanup Adventure, October 26, 2019. Los Angeles, California.



**Share on
social media**



Send out recap



**Highlight key
volunteers**

WASTE DISPOSAL PLAN

Waste removal

Identifying the types of trash and how much you anticipate collecting will help you determine what supplies or resources you may need.

Once you have completed your cleanup, the trash needs to be transported to a waste collection center. This can either be done by you and your volunteers or a third party.

Waste disposal considerations

- What types of trash or debris will we find and collect?
- What types of trash or debris will my event produce?
- What can be recycled?
- Where will volunteers put the trash collected?
- How will the trash get from the cleanup site to a waste collection center? Who will transport the trash?
- How will I assess the cleanup's impact?
- Will the disposal company weigh the trash for me?



PHOTO: WINNIE CHEN

↑ **CHARLES RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS.** Annual Earth Day Charles River Cleanup, April 27, 2019. Newton, Massachusetts.

Before you make any decision, check to see if you can secure free waste pick-up.

- If your site is a park, contact the Park Service to ask if it will remove trash from your cleanup.
- If your site is public property, such as a roadside ditch or sidewalk, contact your city's or county's public works department. You may also contact your local independent waste management company and explain that your event is a volunteer community service effort.

QUICK TIP

Exchange phone numbers with your trash hauler to stay connected on the day of your event in case of unforeseen issues, such as event delays or cancellations. Your contact may be different than the person who is scheduled to pick up, so it's important to get the hauler's information as well.

WASTE DISPOSAL PLAN (CONT)

When calling about waste pickup, ask your contact:

- Is the company willing to sponsor the effort by hauling away garbage for free or at a discounted price?
- What is the proper disposal and cost of special/hazardous materials like batteries, tires or chemical containers? Do you need to separate trash and/or recycling by type or color into different bags?
- Do they recycle? If they do not, reach out to independent recycling haulers in your area (see below).
- How should trash be gathered and where should it be placed for pickup?
- Are they able to weigh the trash to obtain accurate data? (If not, be sure to estimate your impact before it is hauled away.)

If the waste management company does not recycle, contact your local recycling facility to determine recycling practices for your area. Recyclables vary from state to state but typically include steel, aluminum, plastics, glass and cardboard/paper. Be aware that some recycling centers will not accept recyclables collected from a shoreline area.

If you are unable to secure free waste pick-up, consider recruiting volunteers who are willing to transport waste to the nearest landfill, incinerator and/or recycling center, keeping in mind there may be disposal fees associated as well. Make sure your drivers understand the time commitment, potential costs and materials needed to properly dispose of everything.

Designated area for trash bags

The site and how litter will be transferred to the waste and/or recycling collection center will help inform where volunteers should pile collected trash and debris. This designated area may be a central location, your original meeting spot or several spots. If your site is long and narrow, it may be more efficient for you and your volunteers to have a few designated areas to pile trash and then use a vehicle or 4x4 to haul the bags to the final pickup area.

QUICK TIP

Coordinate closely with your trash hauler on where to pile your trash. Identify one or two ideal spots to pile everything. This could be beside a landmark such as a park sign. Make it as easy as possible for the trash hauler to locate your trash pile and position their vehicle close enough to safely and easily load the bags.

WASTE DISPOSAL PLAN (CONT)

Waste disposal supplies

If you register your event with National River Cleanup® at least four weeks in advance, we will ship you free trash bags while supplies last. If you do not need trash bags from American Rivers, please still register with us and share your cleanup data to be a part of our network of organizers and receive additional support.

If possible, provide different trash bags or buckets for recycled items to make waste separation clear to your volunteers. Even if you are unable to recycle, separating your trash gives your volunteers an idea of trash that could have been recycled and provides useful and powerful imagery and data.

Plan to bring a container such as an empty laundry detergent bottle with a lid to use as your “sharps” container. We suggest at least one container per 25 volunteers, or one container for each site if you have multiple sites. If you know your site will require more, please plan accordingly. Use the container to collect small objects such as nails, fishing hooks, broken glass and any other sharp items. This will help prevent ripped trash bags and keep volunteers safe.

Hazardous material

During your cleanup, you may come across hazardous material. You should immediately contact your state’s department of environmental and public health, pollution control or like agency. Hazardous materials need to be taken to special processing facilities. Examples of hazardous material are included under Cleanup Safety Tips in the Day of the Cleanup section.

Assessing your impact

We recommend each site leader bring along a Data Results Form to keep track of their findings.

There are several ways you can quantify your impact. Here are a few examples:

- Number of river miles cleaned
- Number of bags filled with trash
- Total weight of trash

Trash bags provided by National River Cleanup® hold an average weight of 25 pounds. Before using this average, consider the contents of each bag. Is one bag full of glass or plastic? Depending on the contents, your bag could weigh more or less.

Visit our [Organizer Resources](#) webpage for more detailed information and tips on waste disposal and recycling.

CONTINGENCY PLAN

No matter the size or location of your cleanup, we recommend creating an emergency plan. In addition, create and distribute an inclement weather plan to inform volunteers what to do if your event should be delayed or postponed. Include your cell phone number in case volunteers need to reach you the day of.

SUPPLY CHECKLIST



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

- Boats/canoes/kayaks/personal flotation devices** (optional)
- Bullhorn or amplification device** (optional): for large events or sites near an airport or major highway
- Camera:** for group and before/after pictures
- Clipboards** (optional): useful during volunteer check-in, especially if you are short on table space
- Data results print-out form** (see Appendix B)
- Directional signs** (optional)
- Empty laundry detergent container** to be used as a “sharps” container. At least one container per 25 volunteers or one per cleanup site.
- First aid kit:** These can be purchased cheaply at any drugstore.
- Gloves:** Volunteers can bring their own, or local groups or businesses may donate or lend you theirs. It is a good idea to have a few extra pairs on the day of the event. American Rivers recommends gloves with a plastic or rubber-coated palm for safety and grip when wet. These are also great because they can be washed and reused at future events.
- Hand sanitizer and/or hand soap**
- Information about your river** for volunteers to take with them
- Insect repellent** (optional)
- Liability waiver:** Bring enough copies for all participants.
- Pens**
- Sunscreen**
- Reflectors or safety vests** (optional): If your site is along or near a busy road, consider providing volunteers with safety vests. If you're unable to borrow or provide vests, ask your volunteers to wear bright or neon-colored clothes.
- Table for volunteer check-in and supplies** (optional)
- Tent for registration if it's sunny** (optional)
- Trash bags:** American Rivers provides trash bags if you register at least four weeks in advance (while supplies last). If you do not need trash bags from us, please still register with us and share your cleanup data to receive additional information and be a part of our national effort and organizer network.
- Trash grabbers** (optional): Some volunteers find plastic trash pickers, or grabbers, helpful for reaching difficult areas, and to prevent excessive bending and stooping. If children are present, avoid the steel-tipped, piercing variety.
- Volunteer contact information sheet**
- Volunteer sign-in sheet** (see Appendix E)
- Water cooler filled with ice water:** If you're unable to borrow or provide one, let your volunteers know and ask them to bring extra water for themselves.

PLAN TO CELEBRATE

Offering snacks or a meal during or after your event is a great way to thank your volunteers and build camaraderie. Ask a local restaurant or grocery store to sponsor your cleanup by donating lunch or snacks. We encourage you to work with businesses and restaurants that support local farmers to reduce your carbon footprint. If you are unable to supply food, but still wish for participants to share a meal, encourage volunteers to bring a bagged lunch.

If providing food, choose your snacks or meal wisely. After the volunteers have spent time removing plastic bottles, aluminum cans and Styrofoam take-out containers from the river, eating food that creates significant amounts of trash will strike the wrong chord.

Here are some examples of ways to reduce your waste:

- Bring reusable items that can be used during and after the cleanup. Encourage volunteers to bring a reusable water bottle. Remember to bring a full water cooler so that volunteers can refill their bottles.
- Provide food with minimal packaging made from recyclable or compostable materials.
- Buy items in bulk rather than individually wrapped — a major source of litter pollution.
- If plates, bowls, cups and flatware are necessary, purchase 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.



PHOTO: BECKY MCCLATCHY

↑ **LITTLE MIAMI RIVER, OHIO.** East Fork Little Miami River Watershed River Sweep/Spring Litter Cleanup, April 21, 2018. Clermont County, Ohio.

- 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 lunch materials and food waste.

VOLUNTEER RETENTION

Your cleanup volunteers will be excited about making their river safe and clean. Keeping volunteers active and engaged after the cleanup is just as important as getting them there in the first place. Provide your volunteers with actions that they can take leading up to the cleanup, during and after.

Additional engagement ideas:

- Are you hosting another event or cleanup soon? Provide an interest sheet and ask volunteers to sign-up to receive more information from you.
- Photo petition: Make a sign with the name of your cleanup and organization. Ask volunteers to pose for photos and post them on social media with a hashtag and/or tag your organization. One option is to bring a dry-erase board and ask volunteers to write why they need clean water.
- Provide pre-written letters or postcards to elected officials ready for volunteers to sign and show they support your work.

Encourage your volunteers to:

- Continue their stewardship by taking the [River Cleanup Pledge](#) to pick up 30 pieces of trash in 30 days.

- Invite a friend to join them at this cleanup or a future one.
- Share photos and messages with elected officials to show community members care about their river.
- Visit AmericanRivers.org/take-action to find additional actions your volunteers can take.

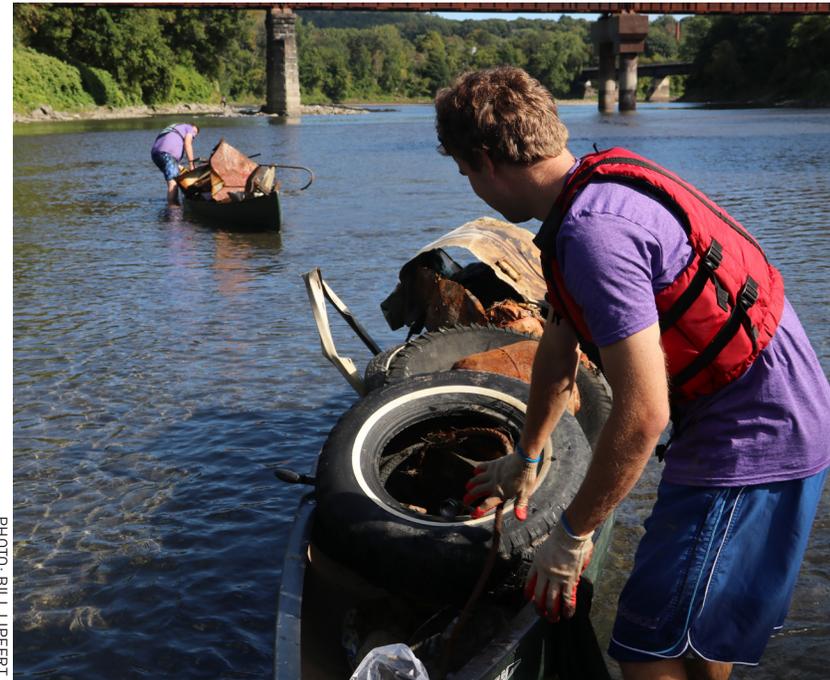


PHOTO: BILL LIPPERT

↑ **WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VERMONT.** Connecticut River Conservancy's Source to Sea cleanup, September 28, 2019. Hartford, Vermont.

QUICK TIP

Make note of volunteers at your cleanup who seem especially passionate about or interested in keeping the river clean. Talk to them about other ways they can regularly volunteer or approach them to see if they would be interested in helping to plan your next river cleanup.

PART 2: Day of the Cleanup



PHOTO: NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE

↑ **Klickitat Wild and Scenic River, Washington.** Klickitat Cleanup, September 22, 2018. Klickitat Trail, Lyle, Washington.

BEFORE YOUR EVENT

- Check the weather and water levels to make sure the site is still safe for volunteers. If appropriate, implement your inclement weather plan.
- Make sure you have everything on your [Supply Checklist](#) (Appendix H).
- 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 setup

Arrive at least one hour before the scheduled start time. Plan for a few volunteers to 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.
- Include these items for volunteers to pick up after check-in:
 - Personal flotation devices (PFDs), if boating
 - Trash bags and cleanup supplies
 - Work gloves
- If you are collecting both trash and recyclables, make sure each volunteer has a bag for each.
- Set up food, coffee, etc., if provided.

- Scan for potential safety hazards. Block off areas as necessary.
- 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!



PHOTO: NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE

↑ **Klickitat Wild and Scenic River, Washington.** Klickitat Cleanup, September 22, 2018. Klickitat Trail, Lyle, Washington.

DURING YOUR EVENT

Opening remarks are a great way to thank everyone involved, get your volunteers excited and provide instructions 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 in order of importance.



PHOTO: CATHY YI

↑ **WHITE CLAY CREEK, DELAWARE.** American Rivers, JPMorgan Chase and DNR, Environment and Conservation cleanup, October 3, 2018. Newark, Delaware.

- Acknowledge and thank all sponsors, if appropriate.
- Talk about the importance of the river and helping the environment.
- Identify team leaders and provide logistical instruction.
- Emphasize: Don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't try to lift heavy objects alone. Use the buddy system.
- Let your volunteers know what is considered recyclable.
- Go over the schedule for the day, including where to meet after the cleanup and where to place bagged and loose trash.
- Include instructions for any contests, such as craziest piece of trash found.
- Make sure everyone knows where to focus their efforts and when to stop.
- Identify restroom facilities, if available.
- Safety speech: 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. For reference, check out our Sample Safety Speech (see Appendix C).
- Ask volunteers how they heard about the cleanup and what issues they are interested in.

QUICK TIP

While you are signing up volunteers, keep track of how many volunteers responded to the different promotion and recruitment methods. You can use this information to find more volunteers when planning your next river cleanup.

CLEANUP SAFETY TIPS

It is important to prepare your volunteers for hazards they might encounter at the cleanup site. Below are tips for on and off the water, as well as how to handle various types of materials in your cleanup area. Use of boats is entirely optional and American Rivers recommends the use of professional outfitter if boating. Instruct volunteers that when in doubt notify the organizers and/or team leaders instead of handling materials themselves.

Protective gear

Protect your group from hazards by encouraging everyone to use:

- Work gloves
- Sturdy shoes with hard soles
- Sunglasses
- Personal floatation device, if boating
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Hand sanitizer

On-the-water

Safety Guidelines for Boaters:

- Organizers that use motorized boats should follow the applicable governmental regulations and guidelines.
- Always use a personal floatation device (PFD).
- Appoint experienced boaters to be the lead boat (front) and sweep boat (rear) and provide first aid kits for each.

- Ask people to stay behind the lead and in front of the sweep.
- Stay within sight of each other: If you can't see the last boat in the group, slow down or stop.
- No diving or jumping into the water, no deliberate boat tipping, etc.
- Have an emergency plan.
- Appoint at least one person on the water to make decisions in case of an emergency.
- Identify and avoid hazards: Look out for buildups of trees and debris in the water. Also watch for drops, dams and other more difficult river features. Rivers are dynamic and features may have changed since you first scouted for your cleanup.
- Avoid boating on fast-moving rivers or sections of rivers containing any known rapids.
- Steer away from anglers, 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. Do not open any containers, including plastic water or soda bottles as they may contain hazardous material.

CLEANUP SAFETY TIPS (CONT)

Avoid hazardous materials

If you discover hazardous materials, immediately contact your state's department of environmental and public health, pollution control or like agency, the event organizer should keep a copy of that contact information on-hand. Do not attempt to handle or dispose of hazardous materials on your own. Hazardous materials need to be taken to special processing facilities.

Examples of potentially hazardous materials:

- Drums or containers that may contain toxic waste
- Needles and other biohazard waste
- Weapons, ammunition or explosives. Do not handle! Immediately alert the authorities if these items are discovered during your cleanup.

Handle with caution: broken glass, aerosol cans, gas cans and other containers with chemical residues or traces of volatile materials.

Practice general outdoor safety

- Be weather wise: Know the signs of changing weather conditions. Cancel event if there is a high probability of lightning or extreme weather in the area.
- Pay attention for outdoor risks: snakes, insects, poisonous plants, other wildlife, etc.
- Use the buddy system.
- Remember to stay hydrated and take breaks.



PHOTO: ITALIA MILLAN

↑ **CLINTON RIVER WATERSHED, MICHIGAN.** Always wear gloves and sturdy shoes to protect yourself from sharp objects and hazards. Clinton Cleanup, September 20, 2019. Rochester, Michigan.

PART 3: After Your Event



PHOTO: BRITTANY MUSOLINO

↑ DELAWARE RIVER WATERSHED, NEW JERSEY. South Jersey Scrub cleanup, April 6, 2019. Cinnaminson, New Jersey.

AFTER YOUR EVENT

Wrap-up and report your results

After your volunteers have finished collecting trash, separate trash and recycling in the designated area. Using the Data Results web [form](#) or printout (see Appendix B), record all data requested by National River Cleanup®.

Documenting your results is helpful for many reasons:

- Future cleanup needs. Do you need more time to plan next year? Does this site need another cleanup? Maybe there were more tires than you planned for or expected? Or perhaps you came across debris you couldn't remove?
- You may find a lot of the same type of trash. This information can be used to identify the source and possibly prevent this type of littering in the future.
- Use the statistics on trash removed to write a general summary of the cleanup, insert photos and provide to media contacts, volunteers, elected officials, social media followers and others in your network to highlight your impact.
- Use your results the following year to help secure sponsorships and encourage volunteers and elected officials to participate.
- If the site is an area you plan to clean again in the future, compare your results and see your long-term impact.
- Provide National River Cleanup® with information to better understand your cleanup needs, create new organizer resources, highlight your effort and educate the public on trash pollution.



PHOTO: NICOLE COREY & NATURAL RESTORATIONS

↑ **LOWER SALT RIVER, ARIZONA.** American Rivers, Verizon and Natural Restorations cleanup, January 23, 2019. Goldfield Recreation Area, Mesa, Arizona.

Gather your volunteers and take a few pictures to document all your hard work! If applicable, help load the waste into the vehicles of volunteers who are hauling it away.

Celebrate

A picnic celebration is the perfect opportunity to thank your volunteers. Share your estimated data with volunteers so they have immediate results of their hard work to take home with them. Hand out prizes or give recognition to volunteers who found the biggest or most unique piece of trash.

AFTER YOUR EVENT (CONT)

Follow up and thank yous

After your event, it is important to thank your volunteers and sponsors with photos and statistics on trash removed. Send thank you notes to elected officials and reporters. Maintain your contact list of volunteers, elected officials and media for next year's events.

Report your cleanup data results and photos to American Rivers so that it can be showcased nationally. Your results will help you and American Rivers better understand the amount and type of waste you and/or your group collects. This data can also be used to help you advocate for legislative measures for additional river protection and reduction of trash.



PHOTO: CATHY YI

↑ **WHITE CLAY CREEK, DELAWARE.** American Rivers, JPMorgan Chase and DNR, Environment and Conservation cleanup, October 3, 2018. Newark, Delaware.

If using American Rivers liability waiver, return signed liability waivers to us by:

Email

nrc@americanrivers.org

Mail

American Rivers

1101 14th Street NW, Ste. 1400, Washington, DC 20005

Attn: National River Cleanup® Manager

Share your photos

Submit your photos to nrc@americanrivers.org or through the Data Results Form. Share photos on your social networks and tag [@AmericanRivers](https://www.instagram.com/AmericanRivers). Save your favorite pictures for American Rivers' annual photo contest.



Questions? Contact our National River Cleanup® Manager at nrc@americanrivers.org or (877) 347-7550.

PART 4: Appendices



PHOTO: ELLEN M FRIEDLANDER

↑ **LOS ANGELES RIVER, CALIFORNIA.** The Great LA River Cleanup / La Gran Limpieza, April 20, 2019. Los Angeles, California.

FORMS AND WORKSHEETS

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Additional resources are available at AmericanRivers.org/Cleanup.

COMMUNITY SPONSOR WORKSHEET



Keep track of which local businesses you have contacted and who you have spoken with as you work to find sponsors. It's helpful to keep a list of your cleanup needs on-hand when contacting businesses so that you can tell them exactly what you need for your cleanup.

Cleanup needs: _____

Name of business: _____

Contact: _____

Position: _____

Contact information: _____

Notes: _____

Cleanup needs: _____

Name of business: _____

Contact: _____

Position: _____

Contact information: _____

Notes: _____

Cleanup needs: _____

Name of business: _____

Contact: _____

Position: _____

Contact information: _____

Notes: _____

DATA RESULTS FORM



American Rivers uses this data to effectively demonstrate the impact of trash and debris removal. Bring this form to your cleanup to record the results onsite and make note of anything else you would like to share. Afterwards, please submit your results online at AmericanRivers.org/report-back.

1. Name of your cleanup(s):
2. Number of volunteers who attended your cleanup(s):
3. Did any volunteers find your cleanup through the American Rivers interactive map?
4. Estimated total pounds of trash (bagged trash, bagged recycling, bulk trash & tires):
5. Estimated total pounds of recycling:
6. Estimated number of tires removed:
7. Were you able to recycle any items?
8. Estimated number of river miles cleaned:
9. How many hours did you spend planning the cleanup?
10. How many hours did your volunteers spend cleaning up?
11. Did your cleanup receive any media coverage?
12. What was the highlight of your cleanup? (best quote, funny story, interesting item found)
13. Did any elected officials attend your event? If so, who?
14. Make note of any other suggestions or comments:

SAMPLE SAFETY SPEECH



“Today is going to be a fun day; however, we need to take a moment to talk about safety.

Please be very careful with sharp items. Needles and pieces of glass can cut through your bag and therefore should be placed in our ‘sharps’ container. (Use an empty detergent bottle.)

Please do not empty out containers that are sealed tight. We understand that this might weigh down your bags however it is better that the contained liquid stays out of the water.

Use common sense when picking up items. Remember, you do not have to pick up anything you do not want to. Let me or a team leader know, and we’ll come remove it.

Keep your gloves and shoes on until the end. If anyone finds any type of hazardous materials like batteries, gas cans and ammunition please let one of the main organizers know immediately.

Thank you.”

SITE SELECTION WORKSHEET



Site selection is an important first step in planning your river cleanup. Use this worksheet to compare your notes side-by-side from your site visits.

Name: _____
Location: _____
How heavily littered is the area? _____
Are there any safety hazards? _____
How accessible is your cleanup? _____ Parking? Y/N _____ Public transportation? Y/N _____
Estimated number of volunteers needed _____
Is this site on public or private property? _____
Public restrooms? Y/N _____ Running water? Y/N _____
Will this cleanup be along the shore, in boats, or both? _____
Additional notes: _____

Name: _____
Location: _____
How heavily littered is the area? _____
Are there any safety hazards? _____
How accessible is your cleanup? _____ Parking? Y/N _____ Public transportation? Y/N _____
Estimated number of volunteers needed _____
Is this site on public or private property? _____
Public restrooms? Y/N _____ Running water? Y/N _____
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Name: _____
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How heavily littered is the area? _____
Are there any safety hazards? _____
How accessible is your cleanup? _____ Parking? Y/N _____ Public transportation? Y/N _____
Estimated number of volunteers needed _____
Is this site on public or private property? _____
Public restrooms? Y/N _____ Running water? Y/N _____
Will this cleanup be along the shore, in boats, or both? _____
Additional notes: _____

SUPPLY CHECKLIST



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

- Boats/canoes/kayaks/personal flotation devices** (optional)
- Bullhorn or amplification device** (optional): for large events or sites near an airport or major highway
- Camera:** for group and before/after pictures
- Clipboards** (optional): useful during volunteer check-in, especially if you are short on table space
- Data results print-out form** (see Appendix B)
- Directional signs** (optional)
- Empty laundry detergent container** to be used as a “sharps” container. At least one container per 25 volunteers or one per cleanup site.
- First aid kit:** These can be purchased cheaply at any drugstore.
- Gloves:** Volunteers can bring their own, or local groups or businesses may donate or lend you theirs. It is a good idea to have a few extra pairs on the day of the event. American Rivers recommends gloves with a plastic or rubber-coated palm for safety and grip when wet. These are also great because they can be washed and reused at future events.
- Hand sanitizer and/or hand soap**
- Information about your river** for volunteers to take with them
- Insect repellent** (optional)
- Liability waiver:** Bring enough copies for all participants.
- Pens**
- Sunscreen**
- Reflectors or safety vests** (optional): If your site is along or near a busy road, consider providing volunteers with safety vests. If you're unable to borrow or provide vests, ask your volunteers to wear bright or neon-colored clothes.
- Table for volunteer check-in and supplies** (optional)
- Tent for registration if it's sunny** (optional)
- Trash bags:** American Rivers provides trash bags if you register at least four weeks in advance (while supplies last). If you do not need trash bags from us, please still register with us and share your cleanup data to receive additional information and be a part of our national effort and organizer network.
- Trash grabbers** (optional): Some volunteers find plastic trash pickers, or grabbers, helpful for reaching difficult areas, and to prevent excessive bending and stooping. If children are present, avoid the steel-tipped, piercing variety.
- Volunteer contact information sheet**
- Volunteer sign-in sheet** (see Appendix E)
- Water cooler filled with ice water:** If you're unable to borrow or provide one, let your volunteers know and ask them to bring extra water for themselves.



Use these tips and resources to rally support for your river cleanup.

You've blocked off the calendar and gotten the permits. Now you're ready to figure out the dollars and cents of your river cleanup. American Rivers' created this guide to help you raise the support you need to host a successful cleanup event. Once you have a well thought out event plan, sit down and create a budget. Remember to include catering, technology and marketing costs. Next, you'll be ready to identify potential sources of monetary support and in-kind goods and services.

Start with your personal network — ask your friends if they know any local businesses that would be willing to donate needed goods, services or money.

Grow your network! The river is a great place to start. Talk to local retailers, outdoor guides, breweries, and riverfront restaurants that may be interested in contributing to your cleanup.

Think big! Regional and national businesses often look to support their communities through cash gifts, in-kind donations or staff volunteering.

Fundraising tips

Visit the business in person if possible, rather than emailing or calling, and share information about your cleanup. This also provides an opportunity to hang up your cleanup flyer at the business. Follow up by phone or email afterwards.

Be respectful and grateful for any help they can provide. Avoid visiting during busy hours and be ready to leave your contact information if the manager is unable to meet.

Plan ahead! Get your request in as early as possible to avoid missing deadlines.

Most importantly, **thank your sponsors** and highlight their support. Include them on your flyer and give them a shout-out before, during and after the cleanup.

Fundraising resources

National, regional and local companies and organizations want to support their home communities.

The following is a list of links to potential cleanup supporters. American Rivers is not affiliated with and does not endorse any business listed in this guide.

Resources on this page are provided for informational purposes only; the list is not comprehensive, and information contained on websites may change.

Financial and in-kind donations

C&S Wholesale Grocers: Accepts cash grant and food/product requests from community groups that are located within 20 miles of where they do business and where most of their employees live.

Captain Planet Foundation

EcoSolution Grants: Offers \$500-\$2,500 in support of youth-led projects that positively impact the environment. Their cycles end in mid-January and mid-July.

Costco: Supports their local community through cash and in-kind donations. Applications accepted any time.

Extreme Terrain: Offers \$250 through their Clean Trail Grant Program to trail or environmental groups working on trail improvement projects.

Home Depot: Grants are made in the form of Home Depot gift cards for tools, materials, or services. Requests accepted anytime, and gift cards must be used within six months of award.



LL Bean: Supports initiatives through their Outdoor Access Fund to improve public access, outdoor experiences and environmental stewardship. Apply online at least four weeks in advance of the cleanup.

Mazda Foundation: Supports environmental conservation work where they have offices (CA, NJ, IL, TX, FL). Apply between May 1st and July 1st annually.

MOM's Organic Market: Donates to local organizations in the mid-Atlantic that support environmental protection and restoration. Apply online.

Raley's Supermarkets: Offers grants to local groups in California, Nevada and Arizona who support the environment and conservation. Apply online at least 90 days in advance of the cleanup.

Whole Foods: Partner with your local Whole Foods to request a donation for cash or in-kind products. Applications reviewed once per quarter.

State-Run and Community Foundations: Investigate your local government agencies and community foundations for cleanup grant funding opportunities.

Walmart/Sam's Club: Awards local community grants (\$250-\$5,000) during their grant cycle from mid-February to the end of December.

Waste Management: Donates money to environmental and environmental education initiatives nationwide.

Host a fundraising event

Choose a fundraising event date and earn a percent of sales from these companies when customers present your flyer at their establishment.

Chipotle: Supports youth and university groups by donating 33% of event proceeds. Apply online at least four weeks in advance of the event.

Panera Bread: Supports local nonprofits by donating 20% of event sales. Apply online at least four weeks in advance of the event.

Sports/Concert Stadiums: Ask your local stadiums about fundraising opportunities during their events.

UNO's Pizzeria: Supports local nonprofits by donating 15% of event sales. Apply online.

Services and supplies

Ace Hardware: Contact your local Ace Hardware franchise to inquire about potential cleanup gear requests.

American Rivers: Donates trash bags to organizers who register their cleanups at least four weeks in advance of the cleanup date.

Bridgestone Tires 4ward: Offers free tire collection to cleanups. Apply online.

Budget Dumpster: Offers dumpster service donations and discounts to river cleanups.

Local Government Departments: Contact your local public works department, parks and recreation department, or waste removal service for cleanup support.

TerraCycle: The national recycling company offers extensive free drop-off locations and shipping options for hard-to-recycle items.

Snack donations

Clif Bar: Provides Clif Bar donations to community events nationwide. Apply online at least 80 days in advance of the cleanup.

Deep River Snacks: Donates bags of chips and event sponsorships to community groups. Apply online at least three months in advance of cleanup.

Insomnia Cookies: Donates cookies and gift cards to organizations near their stores. Apply online at least four weeks in advance of the cleanup.

KIND Snacks: Donates snacks to groups that promote kindness in the community. Apply online at least 60 days in advance of the cleanup.

MOD Pizza: Locations across the country. Offers food and coupon donations. Apply online at least two weeks before the event.

Nature's Path: Donates granola bars and snacks for events. Apply online up to one year prior to the event.

UTZ Snacks: The Pennsylvania-based company donates chip snack bags to local nonprofits. Apply online at least three weeks in advance of the cleanup if you can pick up donations from an UTZ facility.

Several types of support

The following companies donate to groups and organizations in multiple ways, from monetary donations to employee volunteer teams.

Bee's Wrap: The Vermont company supports local initiatives to end plastic waste and offers sponsorships, product donations and monetary donations.

Casey's General Stores: The Midwest restaurant chain supports local organizations through sponsorships, food and monetary donations. Apply online at least 20 business days in advance.

The Cheesecake Factory: The national restaurant chain offers a "Give Back Team Sponsorship" when staff volunteer at fundraising and community service projects. Request gift card donations at local restaurants at least 30 days in advance.

Fleet Feet: The national running and footwear store offers sponsorships, donations, and advertising. Contact your local Fleet Feet store for information.

H-E-B Grocery: The Texas grocery chain offers monetary donations, volunteers and product donations. Apply at least eight weeks in advance of the cleanup.

Kroger: Provides monetary support, gift cards and product donations through the Foundation to nonprofits that strengthen communities nationwide.

New Seasons Market: The Northwest grocery chain supports initiatives to protect the environment by providing donations and volunteers for cleanups. Apply online at least 30 days in advance.

SpartanNash Stores: The Midwest grocery chain supports community groups with sponsorships, product donations and fundraisers. Apply at least 30 days in advance.

Trader Joe's: The national grocery chain donates to nonprofits working in their store neighborhoods. Apply in writing to your local manager at least three weeks in advance of the cleanup.

PROMOTE YOUR CLEANUP



Getting the word out about your cleanup

Media attention can be very beneficial to your cleanup, especially if you plan to make it an annual event. The lure of media attention might help secure additional support from sponsors and attendees. Keep these tips in mind if you would like to incorporate media outreach in your event.

Print, radio, television, blogger promotion

Tips to attract and leverage media attention:

- Customize an e-mail or letter to reporters and bloggers who may cover your event using this [press release template](#). Include the link if you have an event web page or Facebook page.
- Invite reporters and bloggers to attend your cleanup.
- Mention any sponsors and/or community leaders and elected officials who may be attending.
- Follow up after the event with a press release summarizing the day including statistics on trash removed and photos.
- Set up an internet alert (such as Google) to track any media coverage you receive.
- Save copies of all media received. You'll be able to use them the following year to help secure sponsorship and/or encourage elected officials to participate.

Example blurbs for newsletters, blogs, calendars, etc.:

[Your organization] invites you to participate in the **[River Cleanup]** in conjunction with American Rivers' National River Cleanup®. Join us on **[Date, Time, and Location]** for a fun day of removing tons of trash from our **[River/Stream]**. For more information or to signup please contact **[Organizer's name and contact information]** or view our cleanup information at www.AmericanRivers.org/cleanup.

Tons of trash and debris are removed by thousands of volunteers every year and YOU can join them. Participate in the **[River Cleanup]** hosted by **[Your Organization]** in conjunction with American Rivers' National River Cleanup®. The **[River Cleanup]** will be held at **[Location, Date and Time]**. Visit www.AmericanRivers.org/cleanup to sign up or find more information or contact **[Organizer's name, contact information]**.

PROMOTE YOUR CLEANUP



Social media promotion

Tag **@AmericanRivers** in your social media posts so we can share, retweet and keep up with your cleanups!

Facebook

- Create a public Facebook event and send it out to your network.
- Encourage attendees to share the Facebook event and event photos on their social networks.
- Post in local Facebook groups such as fishing, paddling, neighborhood and citywide groups.
- Take advantage of paid advertising on Facebook and Instagram to increase your visibility.

Instagram

- Use or create a public Instagram for your organization and post photos of your river. Link signup information in your bio so interested volunteers can find you.
- Encourage volunteers to post photos of the river before and after and tag your group and/or American Rivers to inspire others.
- Include hashtags and location tags, which can lead to new followers and increase your visibility.
- Tag any sponsors you have and ask if they can post your event flyer or cleanup photos before, during or after on their page.

Twitter

- Encourage live posting or tweeting during the event. Use a common hashtag to make it easy for people to find posts from your cleanup.

NEXTDOOR.COM

- If your community has a com page, invite your neighborhood to your cleanup. Nextdoor.com allows residents to connect with their neighbors and share community happenings.

Flickr

- Post photos to a Flickr photostream. Be sure to share with American Rivers, too, and we'll add a link back to your organization's National River Cleanup event page. Share these photos on Facebook. Tag volunteers and American Rivers in the photos to help share with a wider audience.

YouTube

- Post videos of your cleanup on your YouTube channel.
- If you have a short video, please share it with American Rivers so we can post on our YouTube channel, too, and help you spread the word.

Logo

- For permission to use American Rivers' logo, please contact the National River Cleanup® manager by email at NationalRiverCleanup@americanrivers.org or by phone at (800) 347-7550.

Thank you to the sponsors of National River Cleanup®



American Rivers believes a future of clean water and healthy rivers for everyone, everywhere is essential. Since 1973, we have protected wild rivers, restored damaged rivers and conserved clean water for people and nature. With headquarters in Washington, D.C., and 300,000 supporters, members and volunteers across the country, we are the most trusted and influential river conservation organization in the United States, delivering solutions for a better future. Because life needs rivers.

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