

the source

CELEBRATING
50
YEARS
OF
AMERICAN
RIVERS

IMPACT REPORT 2023

Your Impact Runs Deep

Outstanding! That's the word that springs to mind as we reflect back on American Rivers' 50th anniversary year. The largest dam removal and river restoration project in the world. More funding to knock down dams than ever before. Thousands of pounds of garbage removed from rural and urban rivers. A growing recognition that rivers are essential to human health and the survival of nature.

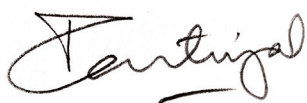
Our successes this year are thanks to you — our supporters. We are also grateful for our partners, whose work adds power to the movement. We are grateful to our allies and volunteers, who give the gift of time, passion, and voice. And finally, we are grateful to our rivers — for the clean water, food, traditions, nature, and the many other gifts they provide.

As we reflect on the past 12 months of opportunities and incredible wins, we feel pride in what we achieved for your local rivers. We also feel resolve: The future will be challenging. The summer of 2023 was the hottest in living history. Floods tore through the Northeast and California, while searing heat blistered the Southwest and Southeast.

None of us is immune. And yet, all of us have a role to play in creating a better future in the face of climate change.

As American Rivers enters its next 50 years, we are heeding the science: We must protect nature in order to save ourselves and the beauty and magic of our planet. Thus, our goals to protect 1 million miles of rivers and remove 30,000 dams aren't empty promises. With you by our side, we will be fearless in our efforts to protect the rivers close to your heart and others across the country. Because our communities, our health, our wildlife, and our survival itself depend on it.

So, take pride in what your support has achieved. And thank you for standing with us as we take on the challenges ahead.



Pallavi Phartiyal, Ph.D.
Chair of the Board of Directors



Tom Kiernan
President and CEO

Year in Review

Here's a snapshot of how we improved the health of rivers nationwide in our 50th year — thanks to your support!

REMOVE DAMS

65 **dams removed** by American Rivers and partners* (**9 dams** removed by American Rivers)
**Latest data, 2022*

430 **miles of new river habitat** opened to fish and wildlife thanks to dam removal



PROTECT 1 MILLION MILES OF RIVERS

1,059
river miles protected

316,480
acres of land conserved

BUILD A POWERFUL RIVER MOVEMENT

402,978
pounds of trash removed from rivers during National River Cleanup® events

73,039
people mobilized to **protect rivers**



ENSURE CLEAN WATER FOR EVERY COMMUNITY

18 **cities & communities** worked with to **secure clean water**

6,075,814
people impacted

My River Why

KAYELONI SCOTT

*American Rivers Communications Director,
Northwest and River Protection*



Kayeloni is a Spokane Tribal member and Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) descendant who grew up in the Pacific Northwest.

I've always been told that our Tribal history and culture are embedded in our songs and stories.

This was vividly brought into perspective when a friend told me about taking their father to an old fishing spot that no longer had salmon. Because there were no salmon, my friend hadn't been there in years.

Once there, their father sang a song my friend had never heard, and as he finished, he shared how the song had been forgotten. This piece of their culture may have very well been lost forever had they not returned.

What is the value of a single song? For a group of people who have fought for centuries just to retain their culture; a single song could be the difference between eradication and a path to healing. Blocked Nations — meaning salmon no longer reach their waters — are already experiencing this loss and directly feel the negative impact to their cultures.

The Tribes of the Northwest are not Salmon People without our cultures and traditions; salmon are the cornerstone of both. What happens when even fewer — or worse no — salmon return to their homelands? The songs and traditions of those places and people are lost with the salmon.

I can't grasp the idea of my nieces and nephews not being able to learn our traditions. I can't bear the thought of my dad no longer being able to partake in something that feeds his soul. That is my why. The reason I've continued to advocate. Not because I want to, but because it is my responsibility to help uphold our ancient covenant with salmon.

In a world where salmon are already in an uphill battle against climate change, we must make every effort to mitigate the impacts that we do have control over. The loss of a critical species such as salmon is unacceptable. The loss of a culture that is vital to the wellbeing of our country is unfathomable. The time to speak loud and clear is now.

Act on Your Why!

**Help us usher in the next
50 years of clean, healthy rivers.**



Add your voice for advocacy.

Sign up to receive email action alerts.

AmericanRivers.org/SignUp



Sell your car.

Donate your old car or truck.

AmericanRivers.org/DonateMyCar



Make change.

Round-up everyday purchases and donate the spare change.

AmericanRivers.org/RoundUp

PETER BERNSTEIN

River Guardians member since 2021



What do rivers mean to you?

Rivers are peaceful and exciting, an expression of beauty, a place of friendship and bonding, somewhere to commune with nature, and unwind from the stressors in life. A day on the river —

running a difficult rapid

or surfing a wave — leaves me mentally refreshed and

physically tired in a good way.

What excites you about being part of the movement to protect and restore rivers?

Over 40+ years of paddling, I've experienced improvements in water quality, and I want those efforts to continue and expand. When I first ran the Cheat in West Virginia, water that splashed onto my face stung. Now it is much cleaner, and the Cheat has even come back to life.

How did you become a river advocate?

I want to help others enjoy rivers. When I was younger, I enjoyed introducing paddlers to a river. As I have gotten older, I don't lead like I once did, but I have been fortunate to be able to help river organizations in other ways.

Join the River Guardians
with a gift of \$1,000 or more at
AmericanRivers.org/RiverGuardians

The Biggest River Stories of 2023



American Rivers staff and supporters at the Klamath River's Iron Gate Dam, June 2023.

Katie Falkenberg

We are proud to have played an important role, alongside Tribal Nations and conservation partners, in advocating for the world's largest dam removal and river restoration project currently underway on Oregon and California's Klamath River. This time next year, salmon returning from the Pacific Ocean will swim upriver, past where four large dams once blocked their migration. These incredible fish will lay eggs in their spawning grounds and begin their species' long road to recovery. Even if you've never heard of the Klamath, the reality of salmon returning – and what it means to local Tribes and the ecosystem – is breathtaking.

► AmericanRivers.org/Klamath

WIN!

Turning Endangered Rivers Into Success Stories

The 10 rivers featured in this year's America's Most Endangered Rivers® report underscore how health and safety are threatened by climate change, pollution, dams, and other threats to rivers and communities. Together, we must continue to defend these 10 rivers — and demand greater protections for all 3 million miles of rivers across our country.

Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, Arizona

The Bureau of Reclamation released a simulated flood into the dwindling Colorado River below Glen Canyon Dam. 39,500 cubic feet of water per second were released over 72 hours (that's billions of gallons)



What does 39,500 CFS look like?

▶ WATCH THE VIDEO

to benefit endangered fish, restore wildlife habitat, rebuild beaches, and protect cultural resources in the canyon. Simulated floods like this one are extremely important to a healthy ecosystem in the Grand Canyon.

Lehigh River, Pennsylvania

State Rep. Joe Webster introduced a bill to protect riparian buffers — vegetated riverside land that provides habitat, reduces bank erosion, filters pollution, and lowers flood risk. One of our asks in America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2023, the bill is especially important because it will help protect the Lehigh and other rivers across Pennsylvania from harmful development and stormwater pollution.

Clark Fork River, Montana

The Clark Fork is threatened by toxic waste left after the Smurfit-Stone pulp mill closed in 2010. By advocating at the local and state levels, we convinced the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to speed up its testing at the mill site, which we are hopeful will help prompt the Biden administration to order a cleanup of the site.



Kynda Productions

WIN!

Translating Federal \$ Into Healthier Rivers



Nature's Charm, Shutterstock

Removal of a dam from West Virginia's Cheat River is closer to becoming reality thanks to funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

American Rivers played a leading role in drafting the legislative language and then securing \$1.6 billion for dam removals and dam safety in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in 2021. We are now leveraging that

funding and coupling it with your support to exponentially increase the number of rivers freed from dams.

- We are overseeing or advising on large, complex dam removal projects around the country. The Albright Power Dam on West Virginia's Cheat River, for example. The project will open 75 miles of the Cheat and hundreds of miles of tributaries to fish species, including walleye, allowing them to secure habitat and food. And for the first time in 70 years, local communities will be able to boat, fish, and swim in this section of the Cheat.
- Thanks to our success in bringing together environmental groups, Tribes, and the hydropower industry for the benefit of rivers, American Rivers was selected to lead a \$3.7 million project for the U.S. Department of Energy. The goal is to develop recommendations on dam safety, inclusive workforces, the federal dam-licensing process, and greenhouse gas emissions from reservoirs.

STILL FIGHTING!

For 50 years, the Clean Water Act, enacted with bipartisan support, has served as our most fundamental tool for protecting waters across the country. Yet, this past spring, the U.S. Supreme Court released a devastating ruling that dramatically narrowed the act's scope. The court's decision in *Sackett v. EPA* erased critical protections for tens of millions of acres of wetlands and made the clean drinking water sources for millions of Americans vulnerable to pollution and harmful development.

We can't overstate the implications of the court's ruling: The rate and severity of flooding and flood damages will worsen, clean drinking water sources for communities will be threatened, wildlife habitat will be destroyed, and water treatment will become more expensive, driving up costs for millions of people. Additionally, when these wetlands are drained and paved over, they will no longer serve as carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide, making our fight against climate change even more of a challenge.

Cutting protection for half of our wetlands is the opposite of how to address the nation's water and climate crisis. Rivers should unite us, not divide us.

Supreme Court Ruling Puts Clean Water at Risk



Paul Morigi/Getty for Protect Our Waters

American Rivers will continue to stand with local partners and frontline communities to secure equitable protections for rivers and clean water nationwide. We will do everything in our power to work with Congress to rewrite the Clean Water Act and press states to enact tougher laws.

The Stream of Change

In celebration of our **50th anniversary** and a new strategic vision that will guide our impact into the future, we debuted a **new look and tagline: Life Depends on RiversSM**.



One of our highest-priority projects — **removal of Ela Dam** from North Carolina's Oconaluftee River — is moving forward to **open up 549 miles of stream**, allowing native fish like the sicklefin redhorse to reach spawning areas.

We **restored four high-alpine meadows** in California, **totaling 388 acres** in National Park and National Forest lands. Meadows store groundwater and help **clean drinking water to more than 75 percent of Californians**.



With our strong partnership, local groups successfully worked with Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) to **introduce legislation to protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat in the Connecticut River** and ensure future generations of New Englanders can enjoy this important river.

After years of our advocacy, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has embarked on **inventorying the number, location, and status of lowhead (small) dams**. Lowhead dams have killed at least 625 people, who have been sucked under by dangerous hydraulics at the base of dams.



American Rivers combines national influence with on-the-ground action. As part of our efforts to make a difference, **American Rivers opened two new offices — in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic**.

Sens. Steve Daines (R-MT) and Maria Cantwell (D-WA) introduced legislation co-authored by American Rivers to **protect the health of our nation's rivers and strengthen Tribes' ability to manage their own lands.**

At our 50th anniversary celebration, we honored the inaugural recipients of the **River Champion Award**, recognizing national leadership for healthy rivers: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID), Rep. Ann McLane Kuster (D-NH), and the Brunckhorst Foundations.

American Rivers began **demolition of Oakland Dam** on the Susquehanna River. It will be the **largest dam removal ever in Pennsylvania.**



For our 50th anniversary, we teamed up with artists around the country to explore how important healthy rivers are to our lives. Get hats, shirts, and more from the collection. AmericanRivers.org/WearRivers



In a huge win for the **Snake River in Wyoming**, we convinced the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to **abandon its plan to reduce flows from Jackson Lake Dam to a trickle**, which would have turned the famed Oxbow Bend of the Snake River in Grand Teton National Park into a giant mudflat.

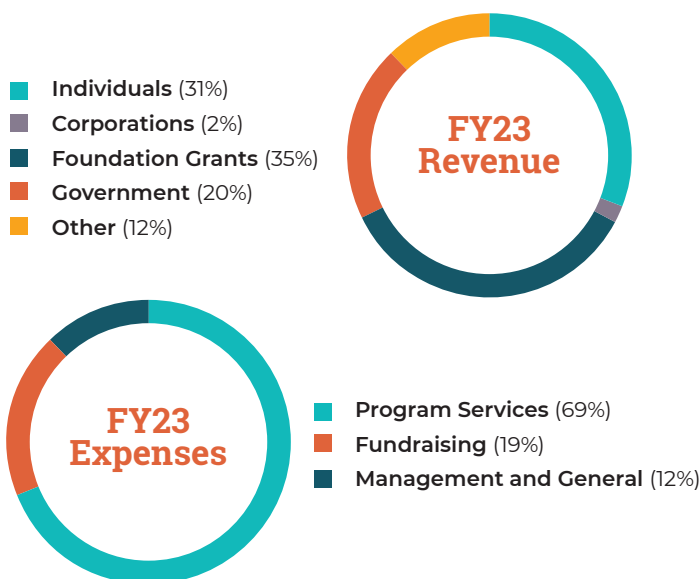


A Year of Growth

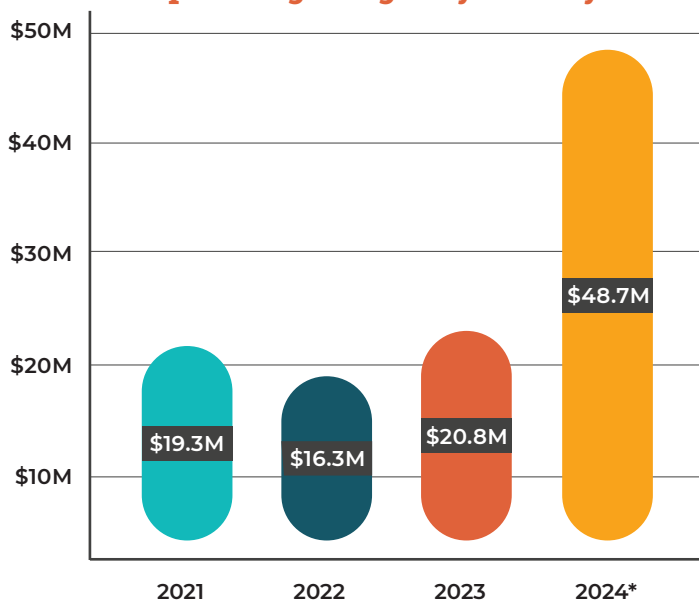
Achieving our goals of protecting 1 million miles of rivers, removing 30,000 dams, ensuring all communities have clean water, and strengthening a powerful river movement require we work harder, faster, and better.

Your support in our next 50 years is critical to our success. With you by our side, American Rivers is on track to double our budget and impact in 2024. We deeply appreciate the generosity of individuals, corporations, trusts, and foundations that donated their time, expertise, and financial support between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023.

Find complete financials at AmericanRivers.org/Impact2023.



Operating budget by fiscal year



*Projected, includes government grant funding



WATCH! Learn about the first 50 years of American Rivers and the impact we can have together on rivers of the future.

◀ Nashua River, New Hampshire, shortly after American Rivers' founding.

OUR PURPOSE

American Rivers is championing a national effort to protect and restore all rivers, from remote mountain streams to urban waterways. Healthy rivers provide people and nature with clean, abundant water and natural habitat. For 50 years, American Rivers staff, supporters, and partners have shared a common belief: Life Depends on Rivers. **AmericanRivers.org**

American Rivers acknowledges, works, and seeks to amplify Indigenous leadership in river protection and honors the traditional ecological knowledge and perspectives held by Indigenous People and Tribal Nations.

AmericanRivers.org/LandAcknowledgement



Members: We are here to help!
Contact us at 877-347-7550 to update your address or manage your membership preferences.



AMERICAN RIVERS

Life Depends on Rivers.™



@AmericanRivers



Make a \$50-a-month gift during American Rivers' 50th anniversary year. A recurring monthly gift allows more of your contribution to go toward saving rivers!

AmericanRivers.org/Donate

Cover: Taughannock Falls, New York **Photo:** Paul Massie, Shutterstock