

Life Depends on RiversSM

A campaign to transform the health of America's rivers



AMERICAN RIVERS

Campaign Progress Report

SPRING 2026

Thanks to your generous support, American Rivers is making exciting progress in our \$100 million campaign to transform America's rivers — protecting healthy rivers, restoring damaged rivers and waters, and uniting people for clean water. Together, we'll help heal the rivers that are vital to all life and our shared future.

PROJECTS

Restore damaged rivers and waters

Free-flowing rivers make clean water, healthy ecosystems, and resilient communities possible — and 2025 marked a milestone year in restoring rivers to their natural flow.

American Rivers and partners across the country reconnected nearly 5,000 miles of river — the most ever restored in a single year — by removing 100 unsafe and outdated dams. Such steady progress is a positive sign that we're on track to meet our goal of 400 dams removed by 2027.

States like Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Vermont continue to lead the nation in dam removal, while the Southeast, Great Lakes, and Central regions restored the most river miles.

Behind that momentum are powerful local stories. In Maryland, removing the Cypress Branch Dam reopened the river for migratory fish like river herring and made a once-dangerous site safer for the community. River herring underpin the local food web — supporting striped bass, eagles, and other wildlife along the river. In Pennsylvania, removing two dams on the Raystown Branch Juniata River reconnected 156 miles of habitat for fish and is helping Bedford revitalize its riverfront, reducing flood risk and creating new opportunities for recreation.

These results show what's possible — and what must accelerate — as we work toward removing hundreds of dams and reconnecting tens of thousands of acres of floodplains in the years ahead.



POTOMAC RIVER, WASHINGTON, D.C.
ALAN LEHMAN

PEOPLE

Unite people for clean water

Lasting transformative change for rivers requires people power — a broad, diverse coalition strong enough to shape policy and secure long-term investment.

This year, American Rivers helped launch an unprecedented effort to build such a groundswell — bringing together over 25 conservation CEOs and foundation funders to build a bipartisan, multi-year water campaign.

Water has always brought people together — across generations, geographies, and political lines. But until now, no coordinated effort has turned that shared connection into the momentum needed to secure clean water and healthy rivers. That's beginning to change. With support from the Life Depends on Rivers® campaign, American Rivers is elevating water and rivers as a unifying national priority.

The water campaign begins at the state level — advancing policy and funding — before expanding nationally to secure long-term investment in river

restoration and water protection. Already, \$1.6 million in early support from a consortium of funders is fueling this progress.

At the same time, we are strengthening grassroots support across the country. America's Most Endangered Rivers®, now in its 41st year, amplifies community voices and elevates local leaders — driving action to protect rivers when it matters most.

In 2026, the campaign has already generated over 400 media placements, bringing national attention to urgent threats and the solutions communities are advancing.

Recent campaigns have helped stop harmful development, hold polluters accountable, defend vital wildlife habitat, and advance protections for rivers that millions of people depend on. By bringing together leaders, funders, and advocates across sectors — from community organizing to national coalitions — we are ensuring clean water and healthy rivers remain a priority for generations to come.

POLICY

Protect healthy rivers and waters

Behind every river mile protected or restored is the policy work that turns advocacy into on-the-ground impact. Supported by the Life Depends on Rivers® campaign, we are advancing common-sense policies that strengthen protections and invest in river health at every level of government.

At the state level and through ballot measures, this work is already delivering results. **In Texas, after we championed Proposition 4, voters approved a measure authorizing a \$1 billion bond as part of a broader \$20 billion investment to restore floodplains, reconnect rivers, and strengthen water security.** The measure passed with 71% of the vote, unlocking the largest water investment in Texas history.

On Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., more than 80 advocates and American Rivers staff met directly with Members of Congress and their staff in February 2026. Over the course of 85 meetings across party lines, volunteers participating in River Action Days advocated for key priorities — including the Floodplain Enhancement and Recovery Act, which would streamline the permitting process for river

restoration projects, and efforts to restore and protect the Ohio River Basin.

Following last year's River Action Days, provisions from the Headwaters Protection Act are now included in the Farm Bill — a significant, hard-won step that helps safeguard the small streams and headwaters that feed our nation's rivers and drinking water supplies. Behind every victory are strong relationships, strategic coordination, and volunteer advocates who use their voices for rivers year after year.

“The Ohio River Restoration Program Act will safeguard the drinking water source for more than 25 million Americans across 15 states. The Ohio River Basin is the backbone of regional commerce, industry, and agriculture, and maintaining its health is critical to strengthening local economies and securing future growth.”

— Heather Taylor-Miesle, Executive Director,
American Rivers Action Fund



RIVER ACTION DAYS, WASHINGTON, D.C.
ALICE BRODERICK

CAMPAIGN DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Ned Whitney

Life Depends on Rivers® Campaign Cabinet Co-Chair

American Rivers supporter since the 1980s

What first drew you to rivers? Is there a memory that stands out?

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, I attended a school close to the Nashua River in Massachusetts. At the time, the Nashua was one of the 10 most polluted rivers in the U.S. The story went that if you fell in the Nashua, you needed to get a tetanus shot immediately, but nothing could be done to fix the river.

In 1962, a local resident proved otherwise, launching a grassroots effort to clean up the river. Nearly 60 years later, the Nashua was designated a Partnership Wild and Scenic River. That transformation proved that determined advocacy and effort can overcome obstacles and help rivers heal.

What first brought you to American Rivers, and what has inspired your support over the years?

I was introduced to American Rivers in the early 1980s. What struck me then — and still does — is that it is a science based, focused, and effective organization that delivers real impact. It's also a place where individual support truly matters, and that's what has sustained my involvement over the years.

This campaign invites us to think big — what's one of your biggest hopes for our rivers?

We've seen what's possible. In 1999, after years of effort by American Rivers and many partners, the Edwards Dam in Maine was removed — a milestone that helped launch a broader river restoration movement. At the time, conventional wisdom held that large dams could not be removed, no matter how harmful or unsafe they had become.

My hope is that we build on that momentum to create a national effort to protect and restore rivers — ensuring they continue to support our communities, our economy, and our future.

The Life Depends on Rivers® campaign reflects the scale of what's needed at the moment. As co-chair, I see it as an opportunity to accelerate progress and invest in the future of our rivers. I invite all past board members and supporters to join us in the campaign.



NED WHITNEY, HUDSON RIVER, NEW YORK



HOW YOU CAN HELP

For ideas and tools to inspire others to get involved in the Life Depends on Rivers® campaign, connect with Paula Wolferseder Yabar, Senior Vice President of Advancement.

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COVER PHOTO: JUNIATA RIVER, PENNSYLVANIA, MATT OTIS