

# River Rally 2018

## FINAL REPORT



### Summary

River Rally 2018 attracted 474 water leaders, scientists, nonprofit professionals, students, funders, and advocates from 43 U.S. states, Canada, and Australia to learn, celebrate, and gain inspiration toward a future of clean and ample water for people and nature. Participants gathered at the Resort at Squaw Creek in Olympic Valley, California from April 29 – May 2 to share practical solutions for keeping our rivers wet, clean, and healthy, as well as approaches for strengthening coalitions and organizations for greater impact. The event marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, with related programs, speakers, and field trips to celebrate this landmark legislation. **Thank you for your part in making River Rally 2018 a great success!**

River Rally participants included staff and board members of local, regional, and national NGOs, representatives of tribal nations, municipal, state and federal employees, engaged corporate leaders, lawyers and engineers, academic experts, community representatives, and college students. Thanks to more than \$80,000 in scholarship funding, 141 participants received financial support to attend.



*"I knew River Rally would be informative, but I was not prepared for it to be inspirational as well—I felt recharged and renewed to return to my work armed with greater access to data, increased connections within the field, and a more holistic perspective towards resource management. I also applaud River Network's efforts towards diversity, equity, and inclusivity in the field—it's a much needed conversation that I've found lacking in most other forums." --Jamie Ong, NYC Department of Parks and Recreation*

River Rally 2018 participants. All photos: ©Emily Tidwell unless otherwise noted.

## Highlights of River Rally 2018

### PLENARIES AND KEYNOTES

#### WILD & SCENIC RIVERS—AN AMERICAN LEGACY

The opening plenary keynote on Monday morning featured Award-winning author and photographer **Tim Palmer** presenting an illuminating portrait of the world's premier system for the protection of wild rivers, revealing the history and policies of the wild and scenic program and showcasing his spectacular imagery of designated rivers from all parts of the country. Understanding our history, we can build a movement for the future that is more inclusive, breaks through the barriers that separate us, and defines where we want to go together.

#### INVEST IN WATER —THE ROLE OF RIVERS AND LAKES IN OUR LIVES, ECONOMIES, AND FUTURE

Dedicated river champions around the country are working to bring rivers and other waterways back into the heart of their communities for economic growth, recreational opportunities, healthy ecosystems and wildlife, and urban revitalization. The Monday lunch plenary panel—**Suzanne Scott**, General Manager of the San Antonio River Authority; **Mike Affeldt**, Director of the LARiverWorks; **Jesse Patterson**, Deputy Director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe; **Virginia Madueño**, President of IMAGEN, LLC; and moderated by **Kirsten Evans**, Urban Water Lead of North America at The Nature Conservancy—highlighted successful river revitalization projects in San Antonio, Lake Tahoe, and Los Angeles.

#### WHY WILD MATTERS: OUTDOOR ACCESS, TRANSFORMATION, AND CONSERVATION

Throughout our lives, we experience moments that truly alter our perspective. When it comes to environmental conservation, what experiences have inspired you? This session explored personal water journeys and the importance of inclusive access to transformative moments on the water, featuring social entrepreneur **Ken Streater** and **Chad Brown**, Founder and President of Soul River, Inc.

#### THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER: HOW DO WE GUARANTEE IT FOR EVERYONE?

At a time when communities across the country continue to face water infrastructure challenges, contamination of rivers and other drinking water sources, and insufficient oversight to remedy problems and hold violators accountable, we assert that access to safe, clean, and affordable water is a human right. Panelists **Rosemary Enobakhare**, Director of the Clean Water for All Campaign; Winnemem Wintu Tribal **Chief Caleen Sisk**; UCLA Assistant Professor **Jon Christensen**; and **Jonathan Nelson**, Community Water Center Policy Director, discussed tribal, policy, and community-based strategies. The session was moderated by River Network Board Member **Jumana Vasi**.



Panel speakers for “Invest in Water” (top) and  
“Human Right to Water” Panelist Chief Caleen Sisk  
(bottom)

## FEDERAL PANEL: WHAT GIVES US HOPE & TABLE TOP DISCUSSIONS

Bob Ratcliffe (NPS), Susan Spear (USFS), and Sandra Connors (EPA) shared their insights regarding what gives them hope, opportunities to work with federal agencies towards clean water, healthy rivers, and access to wild places, and related topics. This breakfast program kicked off our Table Top Discussions, which included opportunities for small group discussion on a variety of topics, including partnerships and ways to collaborate with federal agencies.

## WORKSHOPS

River Rally 2018 included more than 70 workshops with content drawn from a six-month recruitment and workshop submission process involving community members, content experts, and recommendations. All workshop submissions were reviewed by staff before inclusion in our final program. Five themes helped attendees navigate the content:

- **Reconnecting to Rivers Through Restoration and Recreation**
- **Mobilizing For Change Through Policy, Advocacy, and Civic Engagement**
- **Making Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Real**
- **Expanding Impact Through Science, Technology, and Monitoring**
- **Sustaining Strong Leaders, Organizations and Coalitions**



River Rally 2018 attendees

*"Rally has left me inspired, and in awe of the work being done around the US. I am leaving today with a rejuvenated attitude and stronger sense of hope for our shared work. I look forward to applying my new knowledge and networks with our partnering communities, and can't wait for Rally 2019!"—2018 scholarship recipient*

## FIELD TRIPS

Eleven field trip options provided participants with opportunities to get outside and experience practical application of the topics being discussed. Participants chose from multiple paddling trips on local waterways, restoration tours, and site visits highlighting Wild & Scenic designated rivers.

## INSPIRATION THROUGH FILM: WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL

River Network presented an evening screening of thought-provoking and beautiful documentaries that highlight our need to protect our natural landscapes and resources. With support from SYRCL, we screened films created to inspire possible solutions and re-ignite our passion to restore our environment. This event, which was open to the public, included:

- *A Letter to Congress* (3 min)
- *The Salmon Will Run* (16 min)
- *A River's Reckoning* (10min)
- *A River's Last Chance* (67 min) We welcomed filmmaker **Shane Anderson** for a special introduction of his feature-length film exploring California's Eel River and its legacy of and search for economic and ecological balance.
- *Every Bend* (8 min)
- *Granddad* (3 min)



## Celebration and Inspiration at the Annual River Heroes Banquet

River Rally 2018 culminated with the traditional River Heroes Banquet and celebration on Wednesday evening. In 2001, River Network created The River Heroes Award to celebrate rivers and those who protect them. River Heroes are peer nominated and selected. The James "Jim" Compton Award is bestowed by the River Network Board of Directors to recognize an individual's long-term or lifetime achievements in support of healthy rivers. This year's ceremony was followed by live music from Sacramento-based InnerSoul.

### 2018 River Hero Award Recipients:

#### **Tillie Walton, Strategic Environmental Consultant, Philanthropist, and Hydrologist--**

Tillie Walton has been instrumental in creating and implementing large river restoration projects and environmental conservation efforts, including the Yuma East Wetlands. Her love of rivers was inspired by over 20 years of guiding whitewater expeditions through the Grand Canyon and on other rivers across the planet. Tillie served on the board of the Walton Family Foundation for ten years, helping to develop their Environment Program.



Compton and River Heroes Awardees, from left to right: Lester Snow, Tillie Walton, Kira Davis, Bob Zimmerman, and Jim Wheaton (photo: R. Marcum)

**Kira Davis, Program Director for Conservation Resource Alliance** – Kira Davis grew up in Northwestern Lower Michigan in the quaint town of Petoskey (Bedaasige). Kira is an Odawa woman (Anishnaabekwe) and Tribal citizen of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. The Odawa culture and traditions teaches that it is the responsibility of the Anishnaabekwe to take care of the water. Kira takes this role to heart and has dedicated her personal and professional life to taking care of the water for the next seven generations. As Program Director Conservation Resource Alliance, Kira supports CRA's work to protect the "veins of Mother Earth" (river systems), ensuring the Great Lakes do not reach their tipping point of ecological collapse.

**Bob Zimmerman, Executive Director of the Charles River Watershed Association** -- Bob Zimmerman joined CRWA in 1990, and during his tenure, CRWA has become a leading authority on the science of water in urban watersheds, and has developed programs that address stormwater pollution, water quality, low instream flow, nutrient loading, habitat protection and restoration, community zoning, suburban sprawl, sustainable development and water demand, the economics of water infrastructure transformation, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Today, US EPA considers the Charles River the cleanest urban river in the nation.

**Jim Wheaton, President of the Environmental Law Foundation** – Jim Wheaton is currently the President of the Environmental Law Foundation, and runs a Free Speech Legal clinic at UC Berkeley and teaches Journalism Law at both UC Berkeley and Stanford. He is a former River Network Board member, former Chair of Friends of the River, and a founder of the Public Trust Project. Jim was the lead counsel in the Scott public trust case; counsel in the SF BayKeeper case, and has been honored 3 times as Attorney of the Year by 'California Lawyer.' With more than three decades of experience as a river guide, Jim is a trained whitewater rafting guide, and also enjoys kayaking and canoeing.

**Barbara Ullian, Executive Director, Friends of the Kalmiopsis** – For over four decades, Barbara Ullian’s passion, commitment, and tireless advocacy to protect the wild rivers of remote Southwest Oregon and Northern California have defined what it means to be a river hero. Barbara has worked quietly and effectively to defend and protect the largest concentration of wild rivers in the contiguous US, which flow out of or through the Kalmiopsis, a biodiverse and untamed ecological and river wonderland at the heart of the unprotected landscape of the American West. She has a deep love of wild rivers, a commitment to local grassroots organizing, incredible research skills, and above all else, tenacity. She has been an indefatigable advocate for Kalmiopsis Wild Rivers region since 1990, when she helped found the Siskiyou Environmental Council, which became part of the Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Project. She served as the conservation director of Siskiyou Audubon Society, and has headed up Friends of the Kalmiopsis for more than 15 years.

**James R. Compton River Achievement Awardee**

**Lester Snow**-- Lester Snow has been engaged in integrated resource management for more than 40 years ranging from implementation of the Clean Water Act in Arizona in the late 70’s to current efforts to remove four dams on the Klamath River. He was the founding director of the Water Foundation, where he continues to provide strategic policy counsel. In 2016 he was appointed to the board of directors for the Klamath River Renewal Corporation, responsible for decommissioning four dams and restoring fisheries habitat on the Klamath River. Previously, he served as Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency and chief advisor to the Governor on issues related to the state’s natural, historic, and cultural resources. Lester also directed the California Department of Water Resources, including operation of the California State Water Project.

***“This was a most amazing conference. I have been fortunate to work with a company and group of people who rarely make work feel like a chore, but my day-to-day work does still often feel like work. This conference, the attendees, and all the nebulous and well-defined aspects thereof felt much more like passionate activism than work. It was a pleasure and a privilege to share the time with such an incredible group of people. And the programming – the speakers, workshops, presentations, discussions – were all really impressive.”*** –Ari Daniels, Center for Watershed Protection



Attendees at Yuba River field trip (left, photo: K. Baer) and River Network staff at Lake Tahoe (right)



## River Rally 2018 Results

To evaluate the effectiveness of the event, River Network collects information from attendees each year and uses what we learn to improve delivery the following year. Survey results (n=132) indicated that:

- **98%** reported that their knowledge increased across multiple topics as a result of attending
- **98%** of participants reported that their confidence increased to work on specific water issues as a result of attending
- **100%** reported that they are likely to apply the knowledge gained at River Rally
- **94%** made new connections, people they expect to become part of their peer network moving forward

New subject matter will be included in next year's program based on feedback from 2018 participants. Participants expressed a continued interest in sessions about diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as interests in civic engagement, and the effects of climate change for consideration in the 2019 program.

We will continue to deliver a high-energy and fun event, rich in content, and brimming with opportunities to connect with other water champions and to the network of professionals doing intensive conservation and advocacy work.



Networking at River Rally

*"What a transformative experience it was to be in a group of nearly 500 people who all love rivers as much as I do! I learned so much from the other participants and was inspired by the amazing work being done to restore and protect rivers." Bridget Crocker, Journalist*

## Thank You to Our Incredible Sponsors, Scholarship Funders, and Volunteers!

River Rally 2018 would not have been possible without the generous financial and in-kind support of the following companies, foundations, nonprofits, government agencies, and individuals.

### **Lead Sponsor (\$50,000+)**

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### **In-Kind Sponsors**

Parks Project

### **Thanks to the 2018 River Rally advisory committee members:**

Melinda Booth

Chris Brown

Karen Buhr

Andrew Fahlund

Amanda Ford

Steve Johnson

David Moryc

Tim Palmer

Kimery Wiltshire

### **And to the big-hearted volunteers who contributed their time, energy, and expertise:**

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Barb Horn

Ellen Kohler

Laura Montanari

April Nishimura

Kristine Oblock

Mary Pelletier

Judith Petersen

Sarah Rascon

Andrea Savage

La'Tanya Scott

Beth Stewart

Suzi Wilkins Berl

**Thanks also to River Network's dedicated, hardworking staff and board members.**

## Save the Date for River Rally 2019

**June 21 – June 24, 2019**  
**The Westin Cleveland Downtown**  
**Cleveland, Ohio**

River Network's staff and board are already laying the groundwork for River Rally 2019 in Cleveland, Ohio where we will explore best practices, new ideas, innovations and collaborations from and for our community. In addition to maintaining our focus on themes directly related to clean water, ample water, and strong champions, we anticipate concentration around the theme of grassroots activism and civic engagement in response to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cuyahoga River fires. We welcome your feedback and suggestions as we further develop the themes for next year's River Rally programming.



Photo: Westin Cleveland Downtown

**Call for workshop proposals opens June 2018.**

**Sponsorship and exhibitor opportunities are available.**  
**Please contact [riverrally@rivernetwork](mailto:riverrally@rivernetwork) for information.**