

2020 IMPACT REPORT

FROM EMERGENCY TO EMERGENCE





2020 IMPACTS



6,722

groups in the national network of water protectors across all **50** states

\$603,609

in direct financial support to **63** local groups

94,747

people informed through our website, newsletter, and social media

customized consultations





people trained and educated through **76** events



total viewing hours during River Rally, which went virtual in 2020

2

Just a few months into 2020, the pandemic brought our work and our outlook to a sudden stop. Instead of becoming paralyzed by uncertainty, River Network moved swiftly. We adapted our programs and projects, creating spaces for dialogue and exchange for our nation-wide community comprised of over 6,500 community groups, nonprofit organizations, agencies, tribes, and utilities working at the local level for clean water and healthy rivers.

In just six weeks, we transformed our signature annual conference, River Rally, from a three-day inperson event to a three-week virtual experience. We are proud that this choice positively impacted the network, delivering hope and inspiration for our highest registration and most diverse audience ever. Our creativity and innovation continued as we...

- ...created the go-to platform to address water shutoff threats and protect **ACCESS** to clean and affordable drinking water
- ...deepened our **PARTNERSHIPS** with local conservation groups and the agricultural sector to ensure a future with farms, ranches, and healthy rivers
- ...returned **POWER** to communities to build a future of their own design by lifting up local leaders to look at urban resilience in new ways
- ...built capacity and supported staff and volunteer **PERSISTENCE** for civic engagement and water policy.

The need for River Network during these extraordinary times – to deliver hope, connection, inspiration, and impact to local leaders across our nation - has never been clearer. Know that our staff will continue to respond courageously as we begin moving from emergency to emergence. What you can expect is our steadfast commitment to a future in which rights to clean water and healthy rivers are paramount, guided by a diverse and inclusive movement for our nation's waters. The context for our work has shifted, and we are ready to lead.

As River Network President and Board Chair, we are honored and humbled to be associated with this organization at such a pivotal moment in our history. We invite you to stand with us through this evolution and as we continue to learn, adapt, and transform even further to identify and address inequities that intersect with our work in river conservation and beyond.

With gratitude,

Now Sut

Nicole Silk President

Repecca Wodden

Rebecca Wodder Board Chair

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REBECCA WODDER



CONNECTION **AMID CRISIS**

River Network is dedicated to moving the network from connectivity to alignment and collective action and while COVID-19 shifted our context, it also elevated the need for an organization like ours in a time of crisis. In addition to our COVID-19 Drinking Water Peer Group (described on page 5), we responded swiftly in many ways this year, mobilizing in real time to the needs of our network, developing responsive programming, and creating spaces for connection and collective action. of trainees reported increased connection

VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLES

Our strength lies in connecting water protectors and advocates around the country to each other and

Planning Virtual Meetings & Conferences **River Network Staff** Carly Schmidt, Merix Gustin, Katie Murphy

with solutions that work, so this spring, we acted swiftly to launch a new event series in support of the network's new challenges: Virtual Roundtables. These convenings offered water leaders space to connect and discuss the immediate issues they struggled with. Fundraising During the Pandemic, Remote Community Organizing, Cybersecurity, Advancing Racial Justice, and Planning Virtual Meetings & *Conferences* all rose to the top, and due to popular demand, these roundtables will continue into 2021.

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This was a WONDERFUL starting point—the speakers and organizers were well-prepared and had put really good thought and care into developing this program."

-Advancing Racial Justice participant

CENTERING EQUITY

River Network believes all people have a right to clean and safe water and strives to be a catalyst and partner in building a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive movement for our nation's rivers. As the nation reacted to social injustice and racism this year, so did River Network, recommitting to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). We compiled resources for the network to connect racial justice to their water work. We prioritized diverse perspectives in our storytelling and trainings. We shared our own journey, and we created space for ongoing conversations among the network. At the same time, we acknowledge that work remains within our own organization, both in terms of our internal culture and expanding the diversity of our staff and board.

group or individual **River Network memberships**

volunteers engaged at virtual and in-person cleanup events

364

network members participated

in 6 roundtables

100%

to their peers, up 17% from 2019

63% of trainings addressed **EDI topics**

100%

of River Network staff have received training related to power, privilege, and racism

25% of River Network Board

51%

of digital storytelling included

diverse perspectives

Members and 19% of River Network staff identify as BIPOC

For more details on the diversity of our team, click here.



INNOVATING WITH CORPORATE SUPPORT

We make it easy for business partners to have local impact in the communities they serve. But, beginning in March, COVID-19 meant the turnkey volunteer events, workshops, and innovative water-stewardship activities we had planned were out of the question. Thanks to the steadfast commitment of our corporate partners, we were able to adapt to new social norms, while maintaining our commitment to helping communities positively impact their waterways. Our gratitude to Anheuser-Busch, Ball Corporation, and Coca-Cola for their enduring partnerships and dedication in these extraordinary times.

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We would definitely do virtual events again! It was a terrific experience and we had a fantastic partnership. We've already seen the impact of this on participants' conception of community litter."

-Cecilia Riviere, "Masks On, Litter Gone" virtual event *community partner*

DRINKING WATER FOR ALL

OUR IMPACT

COVID-19 has made it more apparent than ever that clean and affordable drinking water is essential to our daily lives and public health. We know all too well, however, that many individuals go without running water in their homes for extended periods after having their water involuntarily shutoff for late or nonpayment. We responded to our network's need to connect and share strategies on water shutoffs and other threats to drinking water during the pandemic by creating a new peer group, supported through an active email listserv and biweekly calls. Over 130 local leaders from across the country are now engaged in regular collaboration. We also mobilized groups across our network to act on water shutoffs in their own communities through customizable letter writing campaigns.

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Thank you to River Network... and to all the persons on the line as water advocates and water activists. As we're looking at COVID-19, one of the things that we have to continue to remind ourselves is that many of the communities that we're speaking with and active with are communities that we have represented for decades that have been experiencing these inequities."

-Monica Lewis Patrick, We the People of Detroit, Drinking Water Peer Group participant

300+

individuals educated at **15** trainings

\$9,000

in direct financial support to **9** local groups

13

articles and new online resources including a Spanish adaptation of our Drinking Water Guide

With 13.8 million US households facing unaffordable water bills, educating and aligning the network for action on this topic is not just a water issue, it's a social justice issue, and one further highlighted by COVID-19. We must dedicate more of our resources and expertise to ensuring access to clean, safe, and affordable water in the US and continue to develop our role as a thought leader, convener, and capacity-builder, connecting frontline, state, and national groups together as no other national organization can.



OUR CALL TO ACTION

AFUTURE WITH FARMS

OUR IMPACT

River Network works in Colorado to increase the number of farmers and ranchers who restore and protect the rivers that provide their irrigation water. In 2020, we did this through support for four local Conservation Districts, established under state law to carry out the conservation, use, and development of soil and water resources on private lands. In the Mancos River, we provided coaching and financial support for the Mancos Conservation District (MCD) to engage with local landowners about irrigation water use and river science, raise almost \$100,000 in grant funds for essential planning, and support MCD staff in facilitating collaboration between environmental and agricultural interests. MCD's learnings are now having ripples beyond southwest Colorado; we gave staff the necessary support to travel to statewide and regional gatherings, sharing the story of this important work with other environmental and agricultural leaders.

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River Network has been an amazing resource and has provided the opportunity to tell our story both at a state level and nationwide. We are better prepared to meet the needs within our watershed, address specific river health issues, and create opportunities for landowners that are facing challenges and barriers."

-Gretchen Rank, Mancos Conservation District





OUR CALL TO ACTION

600+ individuals educated at 6 trainings

\$131,800 in direct financial support to **5** local groups

articles and new online resources including a new video series

with Colorado Ag Water Alliance

As 80% of water consumed in the US is used by agriculture, a huge need and opportunity exists to build partnerships with farmers, ranchers, other local stakeholders, including those who have been excluded from financial and other opportunities due to race, ethnicity, and gender. We must use our expertise and experience to forge these partnerships and strengthen place-based coalitions to advance water- and climate-smart goals and objectives that can be replicated across the national network.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

OUR IMPACT

For years, members of the Urban Waters Learning Network (UWLN)—which we cofounded with Groundwork USA, thanks to US EPA support—have come to us with the same question: how do they ensure their efforts to protect and improve their communities' urban waterways don't lead to gentrification and the displacement of community members? In 2020 we established the Anti-Displacement and Equitable Development Collaborative to bring local leaders together to answer exactly this question. What's more, the Collaborative is building leadership within UWLN, amplifying more member voices as leaders. River Network's expertise in leveraging the power of the network and empowering local leaders gives those at the community level a larger platform to share their work, build their leadership skills, and have a nationwide impact.

120 +individuals educated at **3** trainings

\$94,605

in direct financial support to **31** local groups

20

articles and new online resources including Waste in Our Waters: A **Community Toolkit for Aquatic Litter Removal**

THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CONNECTION

Elevating local leaders through UWLN Collaboratives builds on River Network's over 30 years of experience providing leadership and organizational development support to groups in our network. We are the only national group providing such support to community groups working on water issues and in recent years have become credible and well-respected for our work on EDI as well.

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We need folks standing in the trenches to say 'enough is enough.' I'm very thankful that the Urban Waters Learning Network is asking how we look at development differently and how we elevate the voices of these communities, bring to light the historical harm and reduce that harm."

-Alicia Smith, Freshwater Future, Equitable Development Collaborative leader





With 13% of the US population at risk from flooding along rivers, groups around the country look to River Network for leadership thanks to our decades-long track record as a trainer, convener, network hub, and capacity builder. Three additional collaboratives are launching under UWLN in 2021: Equitable Infrastructure, Water Equity & Resilience, and Environmental Justice, Learning, Literacy, and Leadership. River Network is committed to continuing our work building power across the network in response to the ever-changing challenges communities are facing.

A VOICE FOR WATER

articles and new online

resources including a new

in the Delaware River

OUR IMPACT

Water policy is complex and ever-changing, which is why we work alongside local watershed groups to support and empower their engagement in policy making and decisions. In the Delaware River Basin, with support from the William Penn Foundation, we work closely with local groups to build capacity of staff and volunteers to increase understanding and application of policies and promote civic engagement for clean and healthy water. The Delaware River Basin is fortunate to have so many impactful groups working for the health and safety of its river and streams. Our work promotes their collaboration to catalyze effective policy changes and is helping to build momentum to fully implement the promise of the Clean Water Act to protect and restore all of our waters.

individuals educated at 22 trainings

\$28,500

in direct financial support to 6 local groups



Data Products and Visualization Tools



STROUD

THE SCIENCE & DATA CONNECTION

River Network also supports groups throughout the Delaware River Basin in data management and visualization-moving beyond data collection and focusing on analysis and visualization to eventually share and communicate the data in ways that can inform policy, outreach, and future planning.



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The collaboration was so important because [River Network knows] policy and what agencies to go to in order to make change, which would have taken hours to figure out on our own... We would not have known any of that information without this partnership."

-Joanne Douglas, Bartram's Garden



OUR CALL TO ACTION

This year, the Trump Administration finalized its "Dirty Water Rule," opening the door for reduced protections for over two million miles of streams. We must build on our deep experience in building and supporting public engagement as part of policy development, translating policies for local adoption and enforcement, and synthesizing the state of the field in important policy areas.

RIVER RALLY GOES VIRTUAL

Recognizing the amplified need for connection and resources during the COVID-19 crisis, we stepped out with faith and determination to continue to serve our community in early March, taking on the monumental lift to pivot from a three-day in-person event to a three-week virtual experience that included thought provoking plenaries related to COVID-19, interactive workshops, peer engagement, happy hours, film nights, young professionals and leaders of color networking, and even birdwatching and litter collection.

Among the first in this space to host a virtual conference we are proud that this choice positively impacted our participants, delivering hope and inspiration. Virtual River Rally connected the national community of water protectors during a challenging time, both live and recorded learning opportunities and holding space for candid and safe discussions and processing of important current events such as the racial injustice protests happening around the nation.

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At this time, it is so difficult to feel connected to your colleagues and to your community. But [River Rally] offered opportunities not just to learn, but to connect with people, acknowledge the crises impacting our society, and think through ways to incorporate these needs into our work." –Anna Killius, James River Association 538 registrants and presenters from 45 states

100+

hours of programming across **73** learning opportunities

31%

of registrants identify as racially diverse

934,429

pounds of carbon dioxide, 18,938 kwh, and 86,798 gallons of water not emitted or used due to the absence of travel

66

River Rally opened me up to looking at water conservation through a more diverse lens. For my nonprofit, I hope to include more diverse opinions in our restoration projects. I am excited to bring these ideas to my board members to see what steps can be taken toward achieving these goals!" -Abigail Toretsky, Lolo Watershed Group



OUR TEAM

"I'm inspired by my 16-year-old daughter who has been

work somewhere where we are supporting similar civic

engagement efforts and connecting people for action."

-Katherine Baer, Science & Policy Director • Carrboro, NC

phone banking for get out the vote—and it's a privilege to



"It's a great gift to spend my days alongside so many wonderful, passionate people who work to ensure our communities and waterways are healthy and thriving and that all people have access to plentiful, clean, safe water." -April Ingle, Science & Policy Manager • High Point, NC



"Being born and raised in the Great Lakes State, water has always been the largest part of my identity. I am inexplicably grateful to be immersed in a culture that unites to protect water in Michigan, and strive to share that culture with organizations and communities across the country. Ama Gvnida!" -Hannah Mico, Community Organizing Associate • Grand Rapids, MI



"Water has always been a constant in my life. Throughout my life local streams have given a calm space to reflect, access to water to irrigate fields, and a place to recreate. My work at River Network allows me to explore my passion of learning how people interact with their environments." -Mikhaela Mullins, Science and Policy Associate • Denver, CO



"A truth has remained the same across continents and millennia: Water is life. I am inspired every day working alongside colleagues and our network to protect every person's right to water as an essential part of human dignity, joy, and connectivity to our natural world and one another." -Katie Murphy, Director of Philanthropy • Boulder, CO



"Growing up as a swimmer and a river rat, the water shaped me and taught me resiliency, flexibility, and strength. River Network allows me to help people connect with the beauty of their local waters, while also working towards a healthy and equitable environment." -Karla Noboa, Community Engagement Manager • Philadelphia, PA



"Growing up on a lake in Minnesota afforded me an idyllic opportunity to feel the power of nature at an early age. I joined River Network so I could do my part in making access to water a reality for the next generations - especially those who have been unjustly and systematically deprived." -Lisa Runkel, Philanthropy Manager • Superior, CO





"I've turned to my local waters for comfort at every tough time in my life. Even when it's hard to stay motivated, it keeps me going knowing I'm ensuring communities across the country can access the essential resources and connection we provide, to care for and get comfort from their own waters."

-Amy Boal, Marketing & Communications Manager • Boulder, CO



"Water is essential to our daily lives and well-being. The pandemic has shone a bright light on our many inequitable systems that intersect in more ways than not. I show up each day to work toward a more just and equitable world that values water as life and a right for all."

-Sheyda Esnaashari, Drinking Water Program Manager • Chicago, IL



"Water has always soothed my soul; it centers me and brings me peace. I'm inspired and grateful each and every day for the support River Network provides me professionally but also in how we are able to encourage, train, and celebrate the amazing individuals and organizations in our Network." -Brenna Goggin, Mid-Atlantic Leadership Development Manager • Wilmington, DE



"Have you noticed backordered kayaks, overflowing trailhead parking lots, and booked up campsites? This year many of us sought more time in natural spaces. It's obvious that our rivers, trails, and public lands are critical to mental and physical health. We must work to ensure our natural resources are sustainable for our continued use and for future generations."

-Adam Griggs, Science Manager • Shady Side, MD





I do."





"As a child, my home river met the sea in the middle of our coastal town. We all gave it a wide berth to avoid the trash, smells and, at times, the dead floating fish. I work for clean water-in our streams, through our hometowns and out of our faucets—to build a safer and more just world." -Diana Toledo, Leadership Development Director • Asheville, NC





"Whenever I talk to a member of River Network, or sit down for a 'Meet Your Network' interview, I am reminded that connection and resource sharing are essential to success. I am honored to be a part of an organization that strengthens members through peer-to-peer sharing, learning, and connection."

-Carly Schmidt, Membership Associate • Denver, CO

"The labor to protect and restore rivers can seem neverending. River Network provides needed support, training and motivation to our peers across the country, so they are better equipped to bring their best selves to work every day. The gratitude and camaraderie they show is why I love what

-Nicole Seltzer, Science and Policy Manager • Oak Creek, CO



"What a joy it is to wake up every day doing what you love most, creating the possibility of a future with clean water and healthy rivers that excludes no one, alongside this phenomenal team. A more inclusive, diverse, and responsive movement for our nation's waters really is within our reach." - Nicole Silk, CEO/President • Boulder, CO



"From the oceans to my local streams, I have always found water to be a source of clarity, strength and inspiration. I am driven to work each day to give back to the spaces that have provided me such sanctuary and to protect the health and accessibility of streams and rivers for all to enjoy."

-Colleen Walters, Delaware River Basin Program Manager • Philadelphia, PA



SUPPORT A STRONG NETWORK

Your gift enables us to connect, empower, and expand the efforts of thousands of individuals, groups, and coalitions like those whose stories appear here. Learn more and support these water protectors at www.rivernetwork.org/giving

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"As my time on the River Network board came to an end, I was inspired to personally invite those in my life who care about me and who care about our nation's waters to join us in the fight for clean and ample water for all."



-Lynn Broadus

As River Network Trustee, Lynn Broaddus, approached her 60th birthday she knew she wanted to go "all in" to celebrate with impact. Her choice: a "60 for 60" GoFundMe campaign where she enlisted friends and family across the country to support River Network, which she described as, "her lifeboat" when she led Milwaukee Riverkeeper. While Lynn wore many hats during her board tenure with River Network, this was arguably her legacy project—introducing her own connections to the work of water advocacy groups nationwide and our work as a backbone organization supporting those efforts. The ripple effect of Lynn's efforts will no doubt be felt for years to come.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

SUPPORT & REVENUE





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during fiscal year 2020.

VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS

We are deeply grateful to the following individuals who donated their time, expertise, and services to make our work possible this year.

Frank Alfone **Julie Baxter** Heather Bergman Geoff Blakeslee Daniel Boyes Phil Brink Claudia Browne Jacques Corby-Tuech Sean Cronin Luke Gingerich

Ryan Golten **Danny Harms** Brian Hodge Radhika Kattula Adam Kremers Holly Loff April Long Lindsev Marlow Seth Mason

Individual—12%

Grants*—62%

Earned Revenue**-26%

* Includes Foundation, Corporate, and **Government Grants**

** Includes Registrations, Membership Dues, and Technical Assistance Fees

Program—78% Management and General—11% **Development**-11%

Holly Kirkpatrick

Michele Meyer Jessie Olson **Greg Peterson Gretchen Rank** Emma Reesor Mike Remke Laurie Rink **Kelly Romero Heaney** Scott Schreiber Jen Shanahan

Patrick Stanko Chris Sturm Louis Talesnick Kaitlvn Vaux Mark Williams

11

OUR SUPPORTERS

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to the following individuals, foundations, corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies for charitable contributions, grants, and awards to River Network during our 2020 fiscal year. Like our network, the collective power of our supporters makes everything we do possible and empowers our team to positively impact thousands of grassroots groups across the country.

FOUNDATIONS, **GOVERNMENT, AND NONPROFITS**

Amazon Smile Foundation Bullitt Foundation Colorado Water Conservation Board Community First Foundation The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation **Dixon Water Foundation Fresh Sound Foundation Gates Family Foundation Groundwork USA Keel Haulers Canoe Club Keith Campbell Foundation Kresge Foundation** Land Trust Alliance National Association of

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INDIVIDUALS

(UNDER \$1,000) **Anonymous Donors** Martin Albrecht Marc Alston Leann Arend Hilary and Seth Arens **Teresa Arthur Katherine Baer** Margery Bare Joel Barnes **Guy Bateman Judith Bell** Stacey Isaac Berahzer Liza Berdnik **Curtis Berkey** Raj Bhattarai Julia Blatt James Blose and Sarah Rubin Amy and Jonathan Boal

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fiscal year.

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Headwaters Donors are individuals and families who contribute \$1,000 or more annually to River Network. We thank the following Headwaters Donors for their generous support during our 2020

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River Network empowers and unites people and communities to protect and restore rivers and other waters that sustain all life. We envision a future with clean and ample water for people and nature, where local caretakers are well-equipped, effective and courageous champions for our rivers. We believe that everyone should have access to affordable, clean water and healthy rivers.

www.rivernetwork.org

