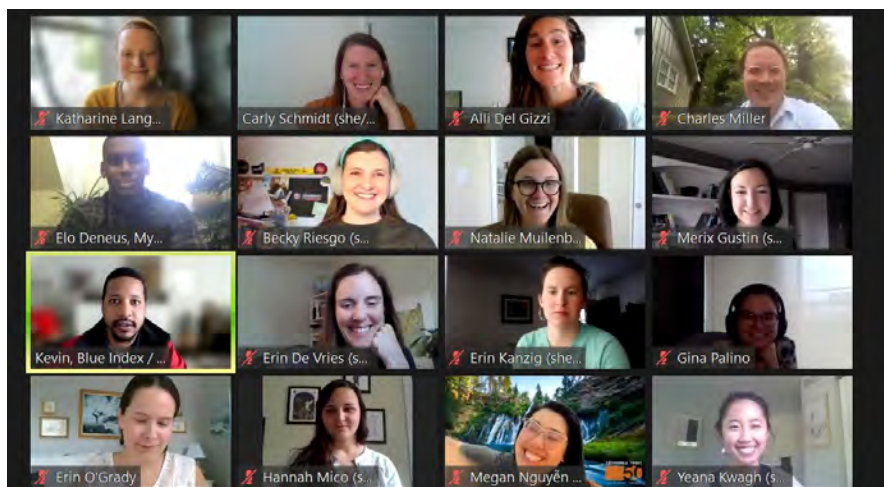




# 2021 RIVER RALLY IMPACT REPORT



## INTRODUCTION TO RACIAL EQUITY

### Equity as an Outcome

Everyone has what they need to thrive based on just systems and processes that distribute resources and opportunities fairly.

### Equity as a Process

People most impacted by unjust systems are engaged in decision-making and action to intentionally dismantle institutional barriers and improve the policies and practices that impact their lives.

Adapted from the Center for Social Inclusion



## BY THE NUMBERS

- 450 registrants + presenters from 45 states and 5 countries
  - » 27% of registrants identify as racially diverse
  - » 71% of registrants use she/her pronouns
  - » 46% first time registrants
- 8 awards—38% Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)
- 175 scholarship recipients
- 63 learning opportunities
- 65 hours of programming

## PARTICIPANT IMPACT

- 82% grew their knowledge
- 84% are likely to apply their knowledge
- 50% felt more connected to peers

## HIGH PRAISE

- Equity, Diversity & Inclusion programming
- Resilient Cities workshop track
- Wild & Scenic Film Festival
- Virtual event software & online registration



# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

**River Network opted for a virtual version of River Rally for the second year in a row, given health concerns regarding COVID-19.** Our second virtual River Rally included live content, on-demand learning opportunities, and brought together 450 registrants, presenters, sponsors, and other partners.

The event was highly interactive to stimulate and engage participants. From vibrant online chats and polls during live events, to open access to movies, small group engagement, and networking, our team brought the very best in online engagement forward.

River Rally 2021 was hosted in Mobilize, an online platform that also serves as River Network's Online Community. Though not primarily a conference platform, our team innovated and utilized this tool in creative ways, to rave reviews from attendees.

We are grateful to the passionate and committed speakers who shared their insights and knowledge with this year's audience, the water leaders who gave of their time and energy to attend, and our fabulous staff and board who worked diligently to execute another high value and inspiring event.

**52 WORKSHOPS** in **6 tracks** (**65%** with equity, diversity, and inclusion content)

**70+ MENTORS & MENTEES** connected for ongoing support and collaboration

**175 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS** thanks to our generous supporters

**1 NEW ONLINE PLATFORM** for continued network connection

**8 FILMS** thanks to the support of the Wild & Scenic Film Festival

**6 ADDITIONAL WEEKS OF ACCESS** with **427** on-demand viewing hours

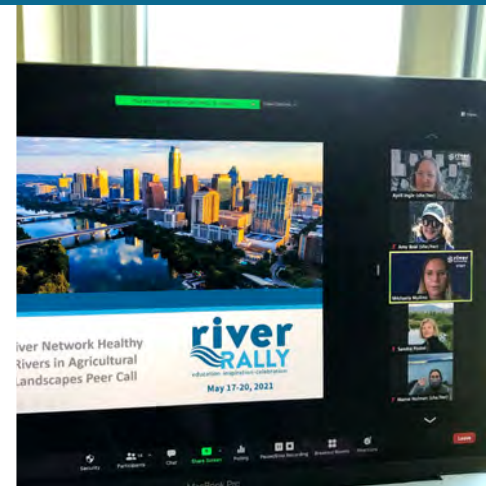
**6,610 UNIQUE PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENTS,** **1,056** workshop and program event RSVPs, and **763** posts, comments, and replies

*"I was very impressed with this year's virtual River Rally! After attending every in-person River Rally held, I hope there will always be a virtual element given how much more inclusive the virtual Rally can be and the quality content that can be delivered on-demand."*

—Gayle Killam, Water Policy Pathways

*"Even though I'm not a big fan of virtual conferences, the platform and app that was used for River Rally was excellent."*

—Meredith McKenzie, Friends of the Mahoning River



## PLENARY PANEL: "RIVERS AND WATER FOR ALL - OUR EVOLUTION"

Moderator Ronda Chapman (Trust for Public Land) guided panelists Raj Shukla (The Nature Conservancy), Tom Kiernan (American Rivers), Nicole Silk (River Network), and Na'Taki Osborne Jelks (West Atlanta Watershed Alliance and Spelman College) through a reflective conversation about the evolution of river conservation and justice over the past 10-20 years, the biggest challenges and opportunities NOW, and hope on the journey ahead towards clean water and healthy rivers for all.

*"There's a joy in doing this work. Sometimes it does feel like an uphill challenge, but there's something about that support of community members and working collaboratively with others. We're not going to stop until we get what it is that we are seeking."*

-Na'Taki Osborne Jelks



## KEYNOTE ADDRESS: "ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IS ALSO RIVER JUSTICE"

Catherine Coleman Flowers, internationally recognized environmental activist, MacArthur "genius" grant recipient, and author of *Waste: One Woman's Fight Against America's Dirty Secret*, presented "Environmental Justice Is Also River Justice" at River Rally 2021. Environmental justice will protect rivers as well as ensure equity for communities that have been left behind. This talk connected the dots.

*"Inequality impacts rivers, too, because that's where it ends up ultimately."*

-Catherine Coleman Flowers



## KEYNOTE ADDRESS: "FROM RIVERS CATCHING FIRE TO RIVERS GETTING RIGHTS"

Sandra Postel, founding director of the Global Water Policy Project and author of *Replenish: The Virtuous Cycle of Water and Prosperity*, presented "From Rivers Catching Fire to Rivers Getting Rights," a brief look back at where we've been, where we stand today, and where we can go with this community leading the charge.

*"Given a chance, rivers heal, life comes back."*

-Sandra Postel



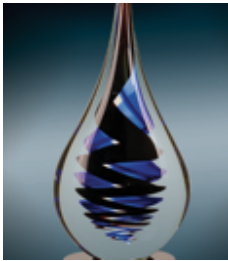
*"Thank you to River Network for putting on such a wonderful Rally. The sponsors, speakers, attendees, and sessions all made for great learning and sharing of support and encouragement. Thank you to all who participated!"*  
-Margaret (Peg) Jones, Save Our Rivers, Inc.

# AWARDS



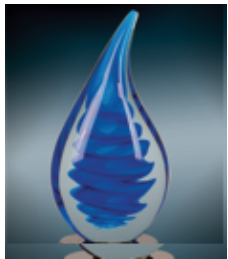
## **RIVER HEROES:**

River Heroes are nominated annually by peers, selected by peers, and celebrated with peers. Recipients of this award are those who bring people together to solve water problems, seek solutions that are inclusive and equitable, go “above & beyond,” never give up, and inspire and help others to make a difference too. Their efforts to protect and restore their local rivers and waters are extraordinary in scope, scale, impact and heart. The award is hand made. Four or five awardees are selected annually.



## **COMPTON AWARD:**

The recipient of this award is determined by River Network’s Board of Directors for their admirable and noteworthy achievements that have benefited multiple communities and rivers over many decades. This award was created in 2001 in honor James “Jim” Compton who inspired thousands of river activists and community members through his personal and professional contributions to river recreation and restoration. One awardee is selected each year.



## **EMERGING LEADER AWARD:**

Established in 2019, this award recognizes someone early in their professional career (10 years or less) and in age (35 years or older) who deserves our attention for their work at the intersection of water and equity. This award was inspired by former River Network board member Leslie Lowe. Leslie was a strident supporter of investing in and recognizing new and younger voices and perspectives in the water arena. Candidates self-nominate themselves through the registration process for River Rally. One awardee is selected each year.



The 2021 Awards Panel was streamed on Facebook Live for hundreds of friends and family. [Click here to watch!](#)





**SKY JONES-LEWEY, River Hero (Uvalde, TX)** Sky Jones-Lewey has lived her entire life on the banks of the Nueces River in southwest Texas and has served as a formal river advocate since 2000. Jones-Lewey joined the Nueces River Authority as its first Director of Resource Protection and Education and has since touched the lives of thousands by pioneering a number of innovative and award-winning programs including Up2U and the Riparian Landowners Network curriculum.



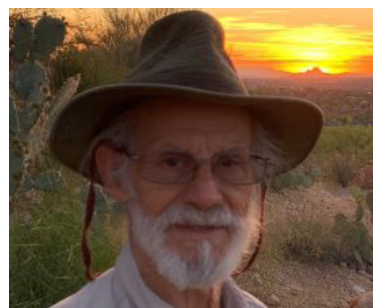
**COLETTE PICHON BATTLE, River Hero (Slidell, LA)** Founder & Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy, Colette Pichon Battle is a vehement defender of communities on the frontlines of climate change in the Gulf South. Despite serious challenges posed by COVID-19, Pichon Battle has anchored communities in Gulf South for a Green New Deal, which would advance long-existing work toward climate, racial, and economic justice in the region. She manages GCCLP's legal services for immigration law and disaster law and she was named an Echoing Green Climate fellow in 2015 and an Obama Fellow in 2019 for her work with Black and Native communities on the frontline of climate change.



**BETH STYLER BARRY, River Hero (Chester, NJ)** For more than 20 years, Styler Barry has worked toward watershed education and protection in New Jersey, including work with various stakeholders. Director of River Restoration of The Nature Conservancy in New Jersey, she leads the development and implementation of major on-the-ground river restoration projects in the Paulins Kill watershed and leads the NJ Statewide Dam Removal Partnership. Her efforts and accomplishments in restoring the Musconetcong River & Paulins Kill are tremendous in scope and impact. Her commitment to river restoration is contagious and she serves as a relentless voice for New Jersey's rivers and the surrounding inhabitants.



**EAN TAFOYA, River Hero (Denver, CO)** As Colorado Field Advocate of GreenLatinos and founder of the Headwaters Protectors, a mutual aid group serving the unhoused, Tafoya is innovatively fighting for clean and healthy water for all. Tafoya was raised a proud Xicano and his indigenous ancestors are Jicarilla Apache and Ohkay Owingeh from the Headwaters of the Rio Grande in Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico. Tafoya is a performance artist whose music, dance, and poems focus on themes of water and justice. Tafoya is a tireless advocate and community organizer, whose accomplishments converge in the area of bringing people together to recognize the intersectionality of water issues in Colorado and nationwide.



**TOM VAUGHAN, River Hero (Laredo, TX)** For 3 decades, Dr. Vaughan has made a sustained contribution to the conservation of the Rio Grande and the Rio Grande Watershed. In addition to founding the Rio Grande International Study Center, Dr. Vaughan is credited for creating a water quality data program with the city of Laredo, leading free kayak excursions on the Rio Grande, preventing the near destruction of Manadas Creek in the early 2000s, and collected 13,000 signatures to save the Casa Blanca wetland.

**DIANNE DILLON-RIDGLEY, Compton Award (Iowa City, IA)**



A lifelong advocate for human rights, female empowerment, and sustainability, Dillon-Ridgley made her first foray into the environmental field as a college intern during the early days of the EPA. Since then, the Dallas native has traveled around the globe promoting women's rights and fighting for environmental sustainability. For nearly a decade, she served as the United Nations representative for the World YWCA. She attended the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio by appointment of the White House, followed by the 1997 UN General Assembly and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa. She is the only person to have participated in all three US delegations.

Dillon-Ridgley served four terms as the President of the Association of Iowa Human Rights Agencies. She has also served as the CEO of the Women's Environment and Development Organization. From 1997-2014, she served on the board of Interface, Inc., the world's largest manufacturer of modular carpet tiles and a global leader in sustainable design. She has contributed her expertise, insights, and boundless energy to the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) as a member of the Board of Trustees and the first female Chair of the CIEL board (2014-2015).

**SUZI WILKINS BERL, Compton Award (Black Mountain, NC)**



Wilkins Berl has dedicated her life to river conservation, accumulating over 40 years of experience in the nonprofit conservation field. Most recently, she served as an independent consultant assisting land trusts and river groups throughout the Southeast with organizational development, strategic planning, board development, and fundraising. Wilkins Berl has worked as River Network's Southeast Coordinator (2000-2005), American River's Director of State River Programs (1989-1994), Farmington River Watershed Association's Executive Director (1984-1989), Connecticut Land Trust Service Bureau's Executive Director (1980-1984), and Long Island Sound Task Force's Executive Director (1976-1980). Wilkins Berl is a previous Chair of the Board of Directors for River Network. In addition to her unwavering focus on river conservation, for the past 10 years Suzi has been active with regional nonprofit dementia efforts.

***"The secret sauce, the magic of River Network is that we connect to and nurture our souls, because our souls belong in those rivers and streams and tributaries and source waters; they're our source as well."***

***—Dianne Dillon-Ridgley, 2021 Compton Awards Reception***

**CHARLES MILLER, Emerging Leader (Birmingham, AL)**



Charles is a third-year law student at the University of Alabama School of Law and a board member at the Alabama Rivers Alliance. He has a strong interest in water law and democracy, with a focus on how this essential resource can be managed for the public good and with meaningful public input in the face of climate change. He has worked for One Roof, a non-profit dedicated to ending homelessness in Central Alabama, and at a local land trust. He has also interned at American Rivers in their Government Relations office and the Southern Environmental Law Center. Growing up on Green Mountain in northern Alabama, he gained an appreciation for the importance of wildlands and open space, especially in urban and suburban areas. Charles enjoys traveling, flatwater kayaking, and photography.

# PROGRAM DETAILS

## WORKSHOPS

Sixty-three learning opportunities were delivered at Virtual River Rally. Fifty-two of these were workshops spread across six themes, conducted through Zoom. Presenters flexed their virtual facilitation skills, honed over the last year, utilizing interactive features such as live polling, breakout rooms for deeper discussions, and real-time chat empowering increased connection between participants. These workshops provided practical knowledge, tools, and new approaches to participants to help address today's challenges related to people and water:

### Water & Agriculture

Learn what it takes for agriculture and healthy rivers to exist side-by-side, what is possible in collaboration with farmers and ranchers toward clean water and healthy rivers, the connection to soil health and crop diversification, challenges of equity and justice in rural America, and examples of communities that have stood up against bad actors. [7 workshops](#)

### Resilient Communities

Explore how rivers can be drivers of the social vitality and economic future of cities and communities, how to help communities become less vulnerable to the impacts of floods and droughts, lessons for avoiding harm to vulnerable populations caused by restoration and recovery, and connections between urban and rural landscapes and perspectives. [13 workshops](#)

### Organizational Capacity Building

Gain access to new ideas to help you transform your organization, lead change processes and inspire your team, become the staff or board leader that you aspire to be, identify and sharpen the skills necessary for the road ahead, become a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization, and expand your ability to tell your story and achieve fundraising success. [11 workshops](#)

### Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI):

65% of workshops across these six themes included content that intersects with EDI.

### Science & Climate

Learn about how communities are engaging their residents in data collection, how data can help inform our understanding of both the overall health of rivers and water and also where harm is occurring (e.g., flood and drought impacts) and the impact of climate change, and opportunities to leverage what we are learning for bigger impact locally, regionally, and nationally. [7 workshops](#)

### Drinking Water

Expand your understanding of the challenges faced by water utilities seeking to upgrade their infrastructure and improve their services to deliver greater access to safe drinking water, the unequal implications of rate increases (for service upgrades and other purposes) to low income and racially diverse communities in urban and rural settings, and novel approaches for a more equitable path forward. [7 workshops](#)

### Policy & Advocacy

Grow your familiarity with laws and policies that protect healthy rivers and clean water in your community, new laws and policies that could help you strengthen protection for places you care about, how civic engagement for water may be what is missing in your community, and what you can do to enable activism and accountability moving forward.

[7 workshops](#)

*"Hearing and learning from folks who are organizing around the country is incredibly valuable, there was clear intention behind the series of workshops provided and I found those that I attended to be really valuable."*

–River Rally 2021 Participant



# PROGRAM DETAILS

## PEER CONNECTION

**An Innovative New River Rally Platform** Learning from our first virtual River Rally in 2020, we explored new options for virtual conference connection this year. Utilizing **Mobilize**, a digital connection platform not primarily intended for conference hosting, we innovated and put a new tool to use. And, the connection doesn't end with Rally: **Mobilize is also the home for our network-wide Online Community.**

The go-to event for peer connection across the national network of water protectors, River Rally 2021 offered attendees robust options and a mix of opportunities beyond those typical of other conferences:

- **Speed Networking**

Speedy 1-on-1 conversations revealed common interests and the surprising ways folks' work overlaps. All participants reported they had new connections to follow up with after Rally!

- **Rally Community Litter Cleanup**

Competitive individual action removed over 1,110 pieces of trash in local communities. Lucky winners took home prizes thanks to our sponsors Bridgestone Tires and Osprey Initiative.

- **Wild & Scenic Film Festival**

Thought-provoking films offered by South Yuba River Citizens League allowed attendees opportunities for live discussion and at-home inspiration with family and friends.

- **Young Professionals & Leaders of Color Happy Hours**

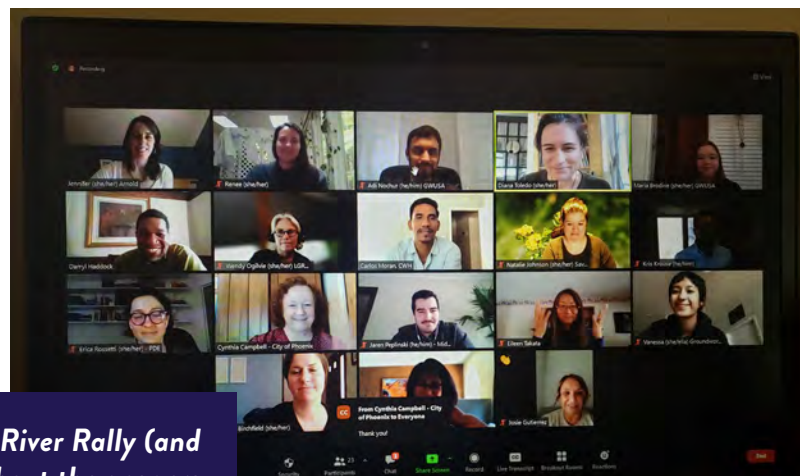
Welcoming spaces for connection, fun, and support created inclusive opportunities for younger participants and those who identify as BIPOC.

- **Trivia Night**

Interactive River Trivia night co-hosted by River Network and American Rivers to closed out Rally in style. Trivia included river facts as well as questions from this year's Rally program.

- **Mentorship**

Hugely popular at in-person River Rallies, mentorship returned this year. Over 70 participants met as mentor/mentee pairs, building relationships and sharing knowledge during Rally and beyond.



*"I think Trivia Night should also be a new tradition at River Rally (and that's not just because I won!) I loved learning more about the answers that I didn't know."*

*—Becky Riesgo, Bridgestone*



# THANK YOU!

## SPONSORS AND SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORTERS

### BASIN SPONSOR



### WATERSHED SPONSORS



### RIVER SPONSORS



### TRIBUTARY SPONSORS



### SUPPORTERS



SEE YOU IN WASHINGTON, D.C. IN 2022!

