



Alabama Rivers Alliance  
*Water Is Life*



Alabama Water Rally 2015  
photo by John Wathen

# 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

# ALABAMA RIVERS ALLIANCE 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

## BOARD OFFICERS

Eartha McGoldrick, *President*  
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Georgia Pearson, *Secretary*  
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## OF COUNSEL

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## STAFF

Cindy Lowry

*Executive Director*

Mitchell Reid, J.D.

*Program Director*

Adam Johnston

*Alliance Coordinator*

Kelly Marshall

*Development &*

*Communications*

Gilda Brame

*Administrative Assistant*

## FROM THE DIRECTOR, CINDY LOWRY

Dear Friends,

### River advocates have a great deal to celebrate this year!

This past year we saw some of the strongest actions taken to protect rivers and streams than we have seen in decades. These actions happened because groups like the Alabama Rivers Alliance and our national, local, and regional partners all across the nation worked together -- in some cases for **years** -- to achieve success.

### Some of the exciting steps toward clean and safe water for you and your family this year include:

#### 1. THE RESTORATION OF THE CLEAN WATER ACT.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finally issued their rule clarifying what we already know --that water flows downstream. Therefore, the tributaries and water bodies that are connected to our main rivers and streams will still receive protections from pollution and runoff.

#### 2. THE PASSAGE OF NEW COAL ASH REGULATIONS.

Two new EPA regulations issued this year will ensure that toxic heavy metals, such as arsenic and mercury, will no longer be allowed to be dumped into our waterways from the storage of coal ash, a by-product of burning coal for electricity. **This is a huge win for Alabama's rivers!** Until now, our rivers have had NO protection from this wet, toxic sludge.

#### 3. SUSTAINABLE WATER PLAN MARCHES FORWARD.

Governor Bentley launched a series of stakeholder focus panels to study the details and make recommendations for the development of a sustainable water management plan for Alabama. The Alabama Rivers Alliance, along with several other environmental and conservation partners, have a seat at the table and will ultimately decide how Alabama is planning for the future of water in our state.

**These landmark actions for clean, healthy water bring hope to our river movement, but we still face great challenges ahead to ensure that these and other important protections of our rivers remain in place and continue to be implemented and enforced.**

The Alabama Rivers Alliance helps achieve these successes and meet the current challenges facing our rivers and communities in three ways:

**BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS** – As a network of more than 60 dedicated groups across the state, we build and support strong local organizations that can be the eyes and ears for your community's water resources. Helping groups build their own capacity through planning and organizational development trainings is one way we support our Alliance partners.

**EMPOWERING CITIZENS** – Every river in Alabama does not have a local watchdog group and the Alabama Rivers Alliance is often called upon to help citizens diagnose a potential problem in their local creek or to help connect to the decision-makers who are responsible for ensuring their community's water is safe and clean.

**ADVOCATING SOUND WATER POLICY AND ENFORCEMENT** – The Alabama Rivers Alliance staff members meet regularly with elected officials, state agency personnel and other decision-makers to ensure that the laws and regulations impacting our rivers and streams are being enforced and that new laws are created where needed. We also bring partner groups together throughout the year to help determine our statewide priorities and build proactive strategies for achieving long term sustainability of Alabama's waters.

**This annual report describes in detail the specific ways our hardworking staff and dedicated board members have been working throughout 2015 to defend Alabama's amazing rivers and water resources.** We are grateful for the continued support of our strong and growing Alliance partners as well as the hundreds of individuals who support our work in so many ways. Thank you!!!



Cindy Lowry  
photo by John Wathen

# GROWING OUR LEADERSHIP & EXPLORING OUR RESOURCES

## BOARD EXPANSION, SPECIAL THANKS & FUN IN THE SUN

ARA is honored to announce two new additions to our Board of Directors for 2016. Please join us in welcoming Dr. Barbara Burke and Tom McLeod.

### DR. BARBARA BURKE



**Dr. Barbara Burke** is a graduate of Georgetown University School of Medicine. She is a board-certified emergency physician and holds a Masters Degree in Public Health from UAB. She brings a special interest in international humanitarian medicine to the ARA Board. Barbara has worked with esteemed organizations such as The International Rescue Committee and Doctors Without Borders. Barbara enjoys swimming, hiking and backpacking in the great outdoors. She advocates for clean water for all Alabamians.

### TOM MCLEOD

**Tom McLeod** is the most recent addition to the ARA Board of Directors. He brings a great passion for the work of the Alabama Rivers Alliance and equal passionate affection for shooting stars, campfires and paddling across the state. An employee of the University of Alabama, a member of the Alabama State Bar and a resident of Tuscaloosa, Tom is currently working on a revamped edition of the book Alabama Canoe Rides and Float Trips by John Foshee called Canoe Alabama. Keep up with his progress at Canoe Alabama's website [www.canoealabama.com](http://www.canoealabama.com).



### SPECIAL THANKS

to all of our hard-working interns who spent time with us throughout 2015!

Lauren Kinsey  
Marlena McConville  
Brandon Meyers  
Mary Claire Nabors  
Courtlyn Robinson

### WELCOME



In May, ARA welcomed **Kelly Marshall** as our new Development & Communications Coordinator!

### IN MEMORIAM

We are grateful to donor and friend Carolyn King who left a lasting legacy in the form of a bequest that will allow us to rebuild our reserve funding and enable ARA to become more sustainable.



For the second year, Board Member Robert Tate serenaded ARA members with a beautiful concert of Great Jazz Standards.



ARA Board of Directors and staff at Camp McDowell. *Special guest appearance by the blazing sun in our eyes.*



ARA & friends paddle the Upper Tallapoosa in July. Pictured: Kelly Marshall, Adam Johnston, Gilda Brame & Tom McLeod

# ADVOCATING SOUND WATER POLICY & ENFORCEMENT

## ALABAMA WATER PLANNING MOVES TO THE NEXT LEVEL

In July, Governor Bentley took action that moved Alabama closer towards a sustainable water management plan when he appointed stakeholders from across Alabama to participate in a series of **Focus Area Panels** to engage in discussions and provide reports and recommendations in the areas of:

- (1) Riparian Rights and Other Legal Issues
- (2) Instream Flows
- (3) Local and Regional Planning
- (4) Certificates of Use, Permitting, and Interbasin Transfers
- (5) Water Conservation, Efficiency and Reuse.



**We are proud that ARA has been asked to participate on all five panels.**

Cindy represents environmental stakeholders on the “Regional Planning”, “Permitting” and “Water Conservation and Efficiency” panels while Mitch is serving on the “Legal Issues” and “Instream Flow” panels. Additionally, many of our partners and members are participating including staff at the Southern Environmental Law Center, The Nature Conservancy of Alabama, the Alabama Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Cahaba River Society.

In September, Governor Bentley convened all appointees in Montgomery and gave them the charge to deliberate the key issues facing our state’s water resources and to provide written reports to the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group by the summer of 2016. The Governor, in his remarks, reiterated the need for Alabama to develop a statewide water management plan saying, **“We need a comprehensive water policy. We’ve never had one and it’s hard to engage in the water wars without one”.**

The Governor stressed that in developing this plan the state should reach out to and hear from all stakeholders and acknowledged that “anyone that uses water needs to be brought in to this process”

This process comes after several years of intense study by the Alabama Water Agency Working Group. In 2012, following an unfavorable court decision in the “water-war” with Georgia and Florida over control of rivers in the Mobile Bay and Apalachicola Bay watershed, the Alabama Rivers Alliance launched a strategic campaign to raise awareness that Alabama does not have a sustainable water management plan – nor a policy for protecting the flows essential for the health and productivity of our rivers and streams. In response to our campaign, the Governor charged the AWAAG with examining the state of water planning in Alabama and to provide recommendations for a **comprehensive statewide water management plan** by the end of 2014. As a result of their study of the many issues associated with water management in Alabama, the AWAAG published a detailed report and recommended that the state convene stakeholders in order to discuss many of the more complicated issues involved in moving Alabama towards sustainable water management.

The focus panels that ARA is participating on will tackle many of these tough questions. **We are being heard.**

As a participant on the Focus Panels, ARA provides the voice of the rivers asserting that Alabama **must develop a strong, scientifically sound policy for keeping the rivers flowing.** This policy must be enforceable and must be dynamic in order to account for the natural variations of flow that rivers must have over time and be flexible to allow for adaptive management as we grow as a state and learn more about how our watersheds function.

Moving forward, we see this as a very promising step to achieving sustainable water management in Alabama. We agree with Governor Bentley when he asserted:

**“This can be our legacy. I believe we can get this done”**



# BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS & EMPOWERING CITIZENS

## TRAVEL THROUGH 2015 WITH OUR PARTNERS

The staff at ARA knows we are lucky to get to work with the great citizens of Alabama and our dedicated Alliance partners each day to help them protect their local waterways. As part of our initiative to build partnerships and empower citizens, we work closely with citizens and grassroots organizations to educate and provide the tools for our local communities to further build and strengthen the collective voice of Alabama's river protection movement. Plus, we are fortunate enough to meet inspiring people and visit the state's most beautiful places!



### Here are some select highlights from each month of our travels in 2015:

**JANUARY:** Participated in the 4th annual Extreme Energy Extraction Summit in Biloxi, Mississippi alongside more than 80 attendees from communities across the nation who are impacted from energy extraction activities. Also met with Tar Sands allies from across the country to determine what ARA can do to help.



**FEBRUARY:** Hosted the 17th annual **Alabama Water Rally** at Lake Guntersville State Park. With more than 150 attendees, this was our biggest and best year yet! We are thrilled that the national River Rally will be held in our great state in 2016!

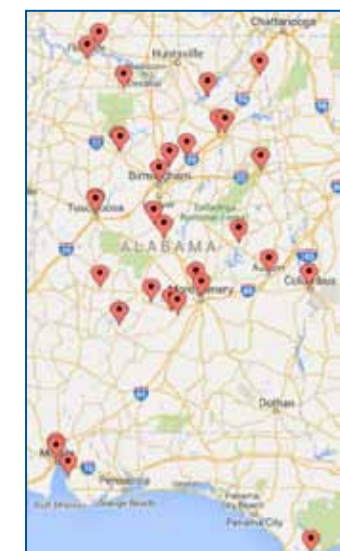
**MARCH:** Hosted environmental justice groups and allies from across the nation in Uniontown during the weekend of the 50th Year of the Selma Bridge Crossing.

**APRIL:** Created Earth Day programs for the University of North Alabama showcasing Southern Environmental Law Center's

Southern Exposure film series and an aquatics program for Brooks Elementary.

**MAY:** Participated in a panel on diversity in conservation at River Network's national River Rally in New Mexico.

**JUNE:** Assisted in continued efforts to improve the waste water infrastructure of Uniontown with special guests from Black Belt Citizens Fighting for Health & Justice, Earthjustice, the Tennessee Sierra Student Coalition and the Coalition of Alabama Students for the Environment.



**JULY:** Led an education program on Alabama's precious aquatic resources at Turkey Creek Nature Preserve with Fresh Start Family, City of Birmingham Stormwater staff and Village Creek Human & Environmental Justice Society.

**AUGUST:** Led a strategic planning session for Friends of Locust Fork River.

**SEPTEMBER:** Developed and helped lead the **Alabamians for Restoration Conference**, a day of community workshops and training to work towards social and climate justice. Host groups included Alabama Center for Rural Enterprise, Alabama Chapter of NAACP, Alabama Rivers Alliance, Center for Earth Ethics, Climate Speakers Network and Equal Justice Initiative.

**OCTOBER:** Met with Madison County Science National Honor Societies on water policy.

**NOVEMBER:** Presented the Alabama Coal Ash Stories tour with film screenings in Montgomery, Fairhope and Gadsden with special guests Working Films Group, Coal Ash Chronicles and Coosa Valley Sierra Club.

**DECEMBER:** Dived into heavy planning for 2016 River Rally set for May 20-23 in historic Mobile, Alabama! ARA will host a mini-version of Alabama Water Rally to kick things off on Friday, May 20. See more info on back.



We've traveled many miles across the state for events, presentations, listening sessions, community organizing and more. We'd love to fill in more of the state! To invite us to your community to speak or hear about your local issues, please contact us at [info@alabamarivers.org](mailto:info@alabamarivers.org) or 205.322.6395.

# #DEFEND RIVERS



On August 14, nearly 100 people in kayaks, canoes, paddleboards and even a DragonBoat (!) floated down the majestic Alabama River to send a strong message to our state legislator during the Special Session to **#FindTheFunds** to continue the important environmental management programs for our state. ARA followed up the paddle with a postcard sent to each member of the Senate and House urging them to **#KeepALStrong** and **#DefendRivers**.



## WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL



For the 8th year, Alabama Rivers Alliance partnered with Alabama Environmental Council to present a slate of films from across the country celebrating and exploring the environment around us. Nearly 400 people across the state were engaged in discussion about the film's topics ranging from the successes of solar power in India to the effects of stormwater on developing communities. We also celebrated the adventurous side in us all as we watched kayakers and mountain bikers tackle obstacles throughout the world. We were thrilled to bring this program to **Birmingham, Huntsville, Springville and Fairhope** in 2015.



**Would you like to help us bring the Wild & Scenic Film Festival to your group or community in 2016?**

Contact Kelly Marshall at [kmarshall@alabamarivers.org](mailto:kmarshall@alabamarivers.org) or 205-322-6395 to learn more.

IN ADDITION TO THE MANY GENEROUS INDIVIDUALS WHO MAKE OUR WORK POSSIBLE, WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING FOUNDATIONS, PARTNERS AND BUSINESSES FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF OUR WORK IN 2015:

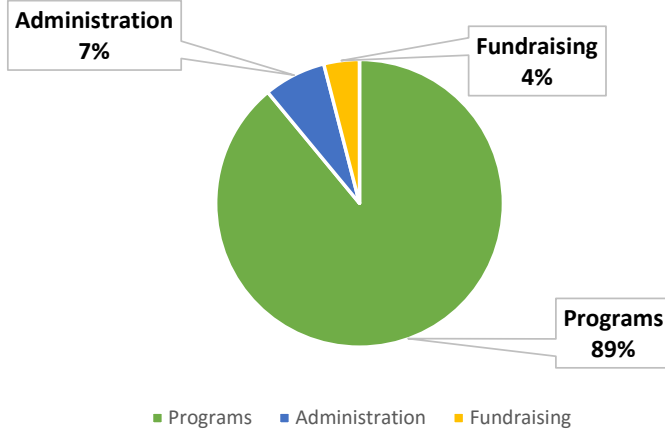
ABAHAC • Alabama Chapter of the Sierra Club • American Rivers • brick & tin Cahaba Brewing Company • Charles Stewart Mott Foundation • Coalition for a Greener Huntsville Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham • Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation • EBSCO • Energy Foundation • Fairhope Brewing Company • Flint River Conservation Association • Friends of Locust Fork River • Good People Brewing Company • Hancock Timber Resources, Inc • Hueytown Chiropractic Clinic Hugh Kaul Foundation • Naked Art Gallery • New Outlook Financial Orvis • Patagonia, Inc. • ROJO River Network • Stephens Foundation • Trim Tab Brewing Company • West Wind Foundation

# FINANCIAL INFORMATION

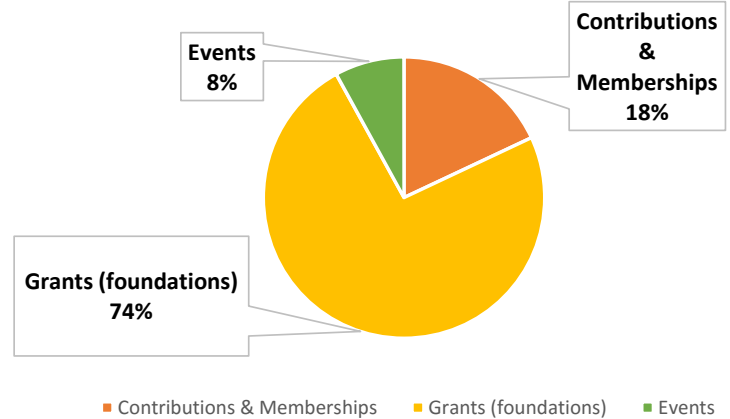
The Alabama Rivers Alliance operates an annual budget on the calendar year. Your individual contribution is very important to help us continue to provide essential statewide support to Alabama's growing Alliance of local river advocates and partners.

**89¢ of every \$1** you invest in the Alabama Rivers Alliance goes to helping protect Alabama's rivers.

## 2015 EXPENSES



## 2015 INCOME



*Detailed financial information available upon request.*

# YOUR SUPPORT HELPS US FLOW

Individual giving is essential because it allows us to dedicate funds where they are most needed. We are entirely privately funded and support from our members is essential to achieving our mission of protecting and advocating for all of Alabama's rivers.

Having a large membership base also helps us present a strong voice to our state decision makers when advocating for the protection of our waterways. **Your membership is crucial.** Please join or renew today, and tell your friends to join our alliance as well!

## I WANT TO BE A MEMBER OF THE ALABAMA RIVERS ALLIANCE!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Day Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

### INDIVIDUAL & FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

- Protector \$5,000   
  Sustainer \$1,000   
  Patron \$500   
  Supporter \$250  
 Friend \$100   
  Family \$45   
  Individual \$35   
  Other \_\_\_\_\_

### ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

- Watershed Network Supporter \$150   
  Watershed Network Partner \$100   
  Watershed Start-up \$50

Mail to: 2014 6th Ave North, Suite 200 • Birmingham, AL 35203 • Phone: 205-322-6395

**Join or donate online at [www.AlabamaRivers.org](http://www.AlabamaRivers.org)**



# ALABAMA WATER RALLY 2016

*in conjunction with national River Rally, presented by River Network*

**May 20 - 23, 2016 • Arthur R Outlaw Mobile Convention Center**

**Coming Soon - Registration Opens January 2016!** Scholarships are available.



Cindy Lowry & Paul Freeman at the River Celebration Awards Banquet as part of Water Rally 2015.

**We are thrilled to welcome River Network's River Rally to Mobile in 2016!** As part of the national conference, Alabama Rivers Alliance will host a special abbreviated one-day gathering featuring a river celebration awards luncheon, an update on statewide water policy work and interactive breakout sessions. The day will culminate with a special Earth Honoring Ceremony you will **not** want to miss. All Alabama citizens and anyone interested in river protection "**Bama style**" are welcome to attend to help us kickoff a great weekend of learning, networking and celebrating our 145,000+ miles of magnificent rivers and streams with our allies from across the country at national River Rally.

Learn more at [www.AlabamaRivers.org](http://www.AlabamaRivers.org)



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