



Alabama Rivers Alliance
Water Is Life



2016 ANNUAL REPORT



"When protected, rivers serve as visible symbols of the care we take as temporary inhabitants and full-time stewards of a living, profoundly beautiful heritage of nature."

*--John Echeverria, Pope Barrow, Richard Roos Collins
Rivers at Risk: The Concerned Citizen's Guide to Hydropower*



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends and Allies,

As a nonprofit, we use words like impact, outcomes, results and successes at the end of the year to try and express the work we have done toward achieving our mission. We measure these impacts or outcomes in different ways depending on the kind of work we do. For the Alabama Rivers Alliance, your statewide alliance of river advocates, helping a certain number of local groups or getting a large number of our members to contact their elected officials are positive outcomes. For our rivers and streams, simply making sure they are not further degraded would qualify as a success for river advocacy groups.

You will read in the pages of this report about the important work we have done throughout 2016 and about the impacts we have made toward strengthening our Alliance and toward protecting our 132,000 miles of rivers and streams. Impacts such as reducing toxic pollution from coal ash by holding our electric utilities accountable, and impacts such as moving Alabama closer to a sustainable water management plan that balances the needs of our rivers and the needs of our

communities. This work has continued to inch forward in spite of resistance from powerful interests who fear increased regulation.

The challenge is that impacts are experienced differently depending on your perspective. If your backyard creek is being polluted, then you may not feel like any of our successes were important. It is easy to get discouraged when individual problems are not being solved, even if progress is being made overall.

However, we cannot let discouragement overcome our movement. Discouragement leads to inaction. It is this kind of thinking that has led us to a place in our country where almost half of the population did not even vote in the presidential election. This inaction has resulted in an administration that will certainly attempt to take away vital environmental regulations that protect all for the benefit of only a few. Inaction is in many ways selfish. Protecting clean water and healthy river systems is not only about you and me -- it is about future generations and the future of our planet.

Instead, we must come together like never before with our partners from all across the state, region, and nation to ensure that the Clean Water Act is protected and that other vital laws governing the protection of our environment are kept in place. We must put down our differences about how we go about doing the work of protecting the environment. There may be a need for all of the tools in the toolbox - civil disobedience, lawsuits, collaborative conversations, and, yes, compromise – just to hold the basic standards in place and resist attempts to roll back everything we have achieved.

Webster defines the word “resistance” as an action using words like “an act of” or “the power or capacity to” resist. These are active words. Resisting, whatever its form, is not a passive move. It must be organized, strategic, and action oriented.

2017 will likely bring significant changes in federal water policy with the new administration, which will facilitate changes at the state level as well. **Our work cannot stop just because our challenges may be greater.** Together, we will utilize the same successful strategies to continue resisting any efforts that would threaten clean, flowing water for all and we will incorporate new strategies when needed.

The Alabama Rivers Alliance has been leading a network of river protectors for the past 20 years and we are ready for any challenges the coming years may bring. Our board and staff approved a new strategic plan in 2016. This plan emphasizes three key components to our work – **Empowering Citizens, Building Partnerships, and Advocating Sound Water Policy and its Enforcement.** These three components are the building blocks that will guide our way through what may be the most challenging times our rivers have faced since our organization began in 1997.

I am grateful for all of the support we have received over the past two decades from individuals, organizations, foundations and businesses. Resistance to this new world of challenges will require new resources. **We hope you will stand with us both actively and financially as we move into the next 20 years of protecting Alabama’s amazing rivers and water resources.**

Cindy Lowry
Executive Director

ARA BOARD & STAFF UPDATES

TONY DILIBERTO, BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Tony Diliberto grew up on Cotton Creek in Gulf Shores, Alabama where he developed his passion for Alabama waterways. Tony spent much of his childhood exploring the woods and splashing in the waters nearby. His dedication to people and nature led him to scouting where he achieved the highest honor of earning the rank of Eagle Scout. With more than 20 years of experience in marketing and advertising, he brings a wealth of knowledge to ARA.

Tony has volunteered his time with organizations such as the Birmingham Advertising Federation, Birmingham Artwalk, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, Sidewalk Film Festival and more. Currently, Tony is president of the Alabama Cup Races which features canoe and kayak racing on the Locust Fork and Mulberry Fork. In his spare time, Tony enjoys whitewater kayaking, mountain biking, camping, photography and outdoor events. Tony lives on the campus of Indian Springs in the Coosa watershed with his wife Amelia and their two dogs, Tanner and Boodog.

MARTHA HUNTER, ALLIANCE COORDINATOR

Martha Hunter is the latest addition to the Alabama Rivers Alliance team as Alliance Coordinator, where she will work to build and support our network of more than 60 grassroots partners across the state. Martha is a natural fit for the team as she has spent her life celebrating and protecting rivers throughout the Southeast. Her passion for sustainability and conservation of our natural resources is infectious and her enthusiasm for organizing partner groups for Alabama Rivers Alliance is unparalleled. A graduate of Auburn University, Martha is also an organic gardener and beekeeper. She believes in clean energy and live 100% off the grid with photovoltaics and solar hot water.



132,000+
miles of rivers and streams
in Alabama

125
paddlers at the
#DefendRivers paddle

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2016 INTERNS
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from Mitch Reid, program director

2016 was an extremely important year for protecting our flowing waters. The year kicked off with near record-high flows due to torrential rains that began around Christmas of 2015 and it ended with the entire state locked in a devastating drought that resulted in streams across Alabama setting record-low flows, and in far too many cases -- drying out completely.

With this as the backdrop, the development of a state water plan moved forward as the Governor appointed Focus Area Panels got into the heat of deliberations on five critical issues: the legal control of water resources in Alabama, instream flow, permitting water withdrawals, conservation and efficiency, and the role of local and regional government in water management. ARA staff, Alliance members and our partners participated in *each* of these panels. Altogether, the Focus Panels met more than 25 times -- not counting sub-committee meetings and working group calls.

Throughout the year, ARA convened a "conservation caucus" consisting of all of our staff as well as members and partners from each panel to discuss our progress and ensure that we all had the most current information. The joint effort allowed us to have a common message in each panel that the future of water management in Alabama must include protections for stream flow.

By October, each panel had produced a report which was compiled by the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group (AWAWG). The AWAWG will use these reports to prepare a final report to the Governor with recommendations for a way forward. While the rains were plentiful during the first of the year, there was a general sense among many panel members, particularly those representing industry, that the status quo was sufficient despite the absence of protections for water user and the lack of an instream flow policy. However, by the fall, exceptional drought conditions across the state revealed that there were virtually no provisions in the current policy for responding to drought emergencies and balancing water use throughout the State.

As the drought hit its peak in November, Alliance members and partners sent hundreds of letters to Dr. Nick Tew, the State Geologist and Chair of the AWAWG, asking him to include strong protections for our rivers in his final report to the Governor.

2017 will kick off with the AWAWG submitting its report and with the Governor's final decision. We expect that the effort will then shift to the Alabama Legislature which must revise Alabama's current legal regime to allow for better planning for and managing of our water resources.

ARA will be there every step of the way to ensure that we #DefendRivers.

In addition to our work on water policy, ARA joined with the Apalachicola Riverkeeper, the Flint Riverkeeper, and the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper to list the Apalachicola-Flint-Chattahoochee basin as American Rivers' Most Endangered River for 2016. With this listing, citizens from all across the United States called upon the state governors and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to work together and develop better management policies for this important watershed. ARA also joined the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper and the Flint Riverkeeper in a formal Amicus Brief to the Special Master overseeing the case before the Supreme Court of the United States between Florida and Georgia over each states use of water in the ACF basin. Our Amicus Brief provided a clear recommendation that the system be managed comprehensively with consideration given to the flow needs of the various ecosystems throughout the basin.

All of this work -- and more -- will continue into 2017 and we are very excited by the opportunities to not only restore our rivers but to help craft lasting policies that will ensure our rivers is protected into the future. **We are also keenly following developments at the state and federal level and are prepared to do everything we can to make sure that our clean water safeguards remain strong and effective and that our regulatory partners are upholding their responsibilities to ensure that our waters remain clean and safe and that our natural river systems are protected.**



Rivers of Alabama Day in Montgomery. ARA & partners spent the day with law makers reminding them of the importance of protecting our water for all Alabamians. Join us next time on April 11, 2017!

from Martha Hunter, alliance coordinator

One of the three pillars of our new strategic plan approved in 2016 is **BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS**. The ARA board and staff agreed that our work over the next few years *must* include a renewed emphasis on engaging and connecting with local watershed and community based organizations around the state. **We want a strong Alliance that is tightly networked from the bottom of the creek all the way to the statehouse!**

We began this work in earnest when we partnered with River Network and many of our coastal partners to bring the national River Rally to Mobile, Alabama in May of 2016. The national event, which is the inspiration for our annual Alabama Water Rally, brought 500+ river advocates to Alabama to learn, network, and celebrate. You can count on this: no one left our state without knowing that Alabama ranks number one in the nation in aquatic biodiversity!

When I was hired in June, I hit the ground running. I was itching to get out around the state and meet with our alliance member groups. My philosophy is that our best conversations start face to face and our connections happen when we get to know each other and learn how we can help each other. I wanted to meet every group I could before the end of the year!



ARA spends a day with friends from the Autauga Creek Improvement Committee

Traveling to more than 20 cities and towns across the state -- some more than once -- I put together some highlights of the kind of work it takes to keep our Alliance strong and networked together:

- Planned and co-led with River Network a two-day Leadership Development training for the Flint River Conservation Association and Friends of the Locust Fork River, empowering them by helping them plan their leadership "pipeline", roles and responsibilities of the board and more.
- Began working with Bay Spring landowner, Jack Dudley, to develop a Friends of Bay Spring group to protect this beautiful spring in the Coosa Watershed.
- Facilitated a group at the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network's regional forum on Sustainable Farming amid Drought and Climate Change.
- Reunited with long-time Alliance member group: the Conecuh Sepulga Watershed Alliance and shared an update on the Alabama Water Agenda
- Presented to the Coosa Valley Sierra Club, informing them about our statewide work and updating them about Alabama Power's closure plans & dewatering of the coal ash pond at the Gadsden Steam Plant.
- Participated in a weekend conference and Onsite Wastewater Design Challenge in Lowndes County hosted by Alabama Center for Rural Enterprise. This event is part of our efforts to develop solutions for statewide wastewater challenges.

In addition to these highlights in 2016, the Alabama Rivers Alliance led coalition work around coal ash regulations and continued to bring partners together around other important issues, such as wastewater and fish consumption advisories. We hosted conference calls, webinars, and face-to-face meetings in our office and attended as many meetings as possible to keep our finger on the pulse and provide networking suggestions and guidance where possible.

This year, as part of our efforts to better serve the local groups who are members of the Alliance, we drew up a new Memorandum of Understanding. It lists the many great resources we have to offer our group members, as well as how they can contribute to strengthening the alliance. This document helps define what it means to be a member of a statewide network. **We are stronger together**, but we must have clear expectations for everyone if we want the best results. Look for me and other ARA staff in your watershed in the coming year and check out the Memorandum of Understanding to see all the ways we are here for you and all the ways we need you to help us #DefendRivers in 2017!

250+

letters sent by ARA members advocating for an Alabama Water Plan

140

elected officials contacted throughout the year

25+

Governor-appointed focus panels attended for the development of an Alabama Water Plan

18

engaging documentaries screened at Wild & Scenic Film Festival

60+

partners in our Alliance

4

new Lunch & Learn programs presented to members

#DEFENDRIVERS PADDLE



On July 9, more than 125 river defenders joined together in kayaks, canoes, paddleboards and boats to float down the majestic Alabama River with a clear goal: send a strong message to our elected officials to

Let Rivers Flow.

Join ARA to #DefendRivers on July 8, 2017!



WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL



For the 9th year, Alabama Rivers Alliance partnered with Alabama Environmental Council to present a slate of films from across the country celebrating, exploring and learning from the environment around us. The festival combined engaging conversation with actions any citizen can take to protect our most precious resources. We also proudly featured all of the Southern Exposure Film Fellowship program films highlighting issues right here in our own backyard!



Would you like to help us bring the Wild & Scenic Film Festival to your group or community in 2017? Contact Kelly Marshall at kmarshall@alabamarivers.org or 205-322-6395 to learn more.

17+

stories concerning the drought crisis featured in media across the country

183

NEW donors in 2016

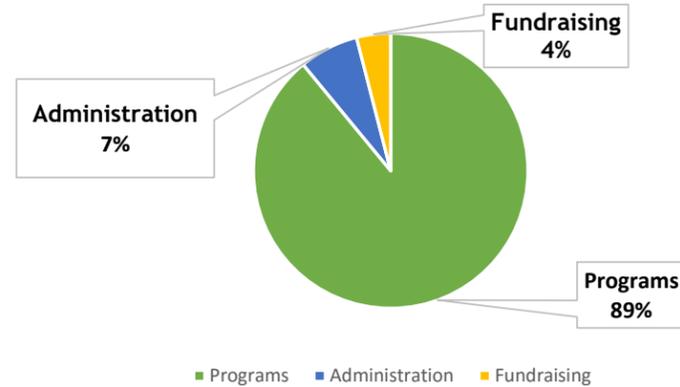
\$14,594

raised through joint fundraising to pass-through to local groups

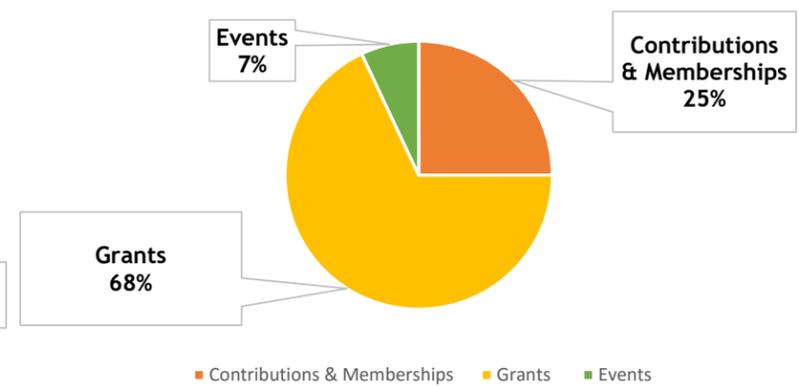
FINANCIAL INFORMATION

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.

2016 EXPENSES



2016 INCOME



Detailed financial information available upon request.

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 2016:

ABAHAC • Alabama Chapter of the Sierra Club • American Rivers • ARIA Foundation • Bham Now • Birmingham Recycling & Recovery • brick & tin • Cahaba Brewing Company • Canoe Alabama • Charles Stewart Mott Foundation • Coalition for a Greener Madison County • Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham • Curtis & Edith Munson Foundation • EBSCO • el barrio • Energy Foundation • Flint River Conservation Association • Friends of the Locust Fork River • Good People Brewing Company • Hancock Timber Resources, Inc • Hueytown Chiropractic Clinic • KW Plastics • Orvis • Paramount • Patagonia, Inc. • ROJO • River Network • Stephens Foundation • Westwind Foundation • Wright Choice Catering

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Day Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

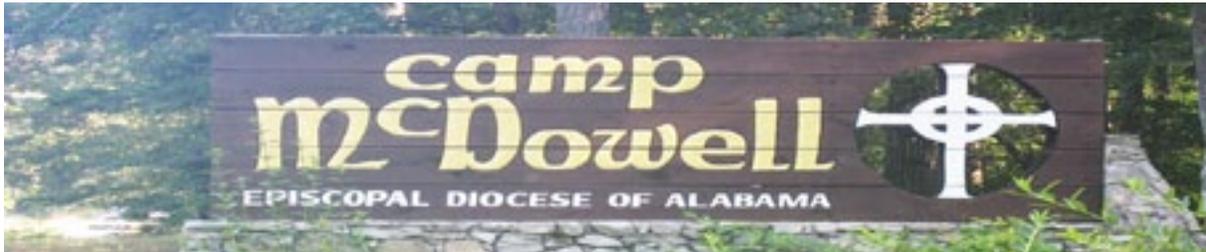
Email Address: _____

INDIVIDUAL & FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

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

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

Join or donate online at www.AlabamaRivers.org



ALABAMA WATER RALLY 2017

March 17-19, 2017 • Camp McDowell

Registration opens mid-January 2017! Scholarships are available.

RECONNECTING roots, rivers & allies

NETWORKING
TRAINING
ORGANIZING
EXPLORATION

NEW! FIELD TRIPS
INTRO CLASSES
STREAM WALK
SPEAKERS

Learn more and get involved at www.AlabamaRivers.org



Alabama Rivers Alliance
Water Is Life

2014 6th Avenue North, Suite 200
Birmingham, AL 35203