



# Alabama Rivers Alliance

*Water Is Life*



# 2014 ANNUAL REPORT



# ALABAMA RIVERS ALLIANCE 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

People often ask me, “how do you guys do it, how do you keep fighting when it seems like nothing ever changes?”

The only answer I have is to ask the question back, “how can we not do it?”

The dangers of water pollution and environmental degradation are not always tragic, in-your-face kinds of crises, but that doesn’t make them any less real. The gradual health impacts of pollution can be devastating to families and communities. The long term loss of species and entire ecosystems impacts our world in ways we don’t even know, but lately, the environmental damage we see is becoming more acute.

It is a crisis when the drinking water of hundreds of thousands of people is contaminated for weeks from a coal ash leak. It is tragic when the beautiful, vibrant, commercially successful Gulf Coast is contaminated for years from a disastrous oil spill. The necessity of clean water, clean air, clean soil, and healthy forests demands that we keep on fighting for them.

Admittedly, working for clean water, public health, and healthy river ecosystems is an uphill battle. In today’s political environment, it can seem impossible. That frustration and concern was exactly what the founders of the Alabama Rivers Alliance felt, but rather than fearing the worst, they imagined the best. That is why the Alabama Rivers Alliance was formed—a small group of concerned citizens and grassroots groups decided that the way to protect rivers in Alabama was to work together across the entire state.



*Executive Director Cindy Lowry*

*Photo by John Wathen.*

Sometimes it is difficult to see day to day success, but if we look back across our organization’s history, we can see how far we’ve come. Alabama has made great strides in protecting rivers since the Alabama Rivers Alliance was formed. Our founders knew that a strong network of local groups needed a leader to make things happen at the state level.

Pollution happens in your backyard, but often the answer to the problem requires change at a higher level, such as state government agencies or the state legislature. That is why the work of the Alabama Rivers Alliance continues to be important today more than ever. As our local partners become stronger and more capable of identifying and addressing local water problems, the need for systemic, long-term, state level changes becomes more evident.

As we look back to how far we have come, I am so proud to have been a small part of the success of the river movement in Alabama. Let’s challenge ourselves in the New Year to rise above the cynicism and bring more people to this important cause of saving our great rivers of Alabama for future generations!

Cindy Lowry  
Executive Director

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# 2014 BY THE NUMBERS

The Alabama Rivers Alliance is proud of its accomplishments from 2014. Here are a few numerical highlights:

**145,000+** River and stream miles flowing through Alabama. According to updated data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alabama actually has double the number of river and stream miles previously reported and ranks 18th among states for total stream miles.

**\$45,000** Dollars the Alabama Rivers Alliance was able to pass through to local river organizations in 2014.

**16** Alabama Water Rallies hosted since the inception of the Alabama Rivers Alliance.

**68** Local grassroots groups that are members of our statewide network, the Alabama Rivers Alliance.

**100+** Boats on the Alabama River during our 1st annual Defend Rivers Paddle in July 2014. These included canoes, kayaks, a paddle boat, a stand-up paddle board, and the patrol boats of the Black Warrior and Coosa Riverkeepers.

**364** Signatures so far on the Defend Rivers Pledge. We need 1,000! Help us get more by signing and inviting your friends to sign at [www.DefendRivers.org](http://www.DefendRivers.org)!

**9** Water policy symposia hosted by the Alabama Rivers Alliance and partners over the past two years to engage citizens in the state's effort to develop a water plan.

## ALABAMA WATER AGENDA: 2014 YEAR IN REVIEW

The *Alabama Water Agenda* is the Alabama Rivers Alliance's guide to achieving healthy waters in Alabama. It identifies four key solutions toward achieving this goal: Policy, Enforcement, Agency Coordination, and Adequate Agency Funding. Below are the areas in which we have worked toward these solutions in 2014:

### WATER POLICY & STATE AGENCY COORDINATION

Alabama is the only state among its neighbors without a water management plan, and the Alabama Rivers Alliance has long advocated the necessity of such a plan to ensure that our waterways are protected. When Governor Bentley issued a 2012 directive to the Alabama Water Agencies working group to develop recommendations for water management plan, the Alabama Rivers Alliance began spreading the word about this directive and educating stakeholders about the importance of having a sound water policy.

In 2014, we and our partners—the Alabama Chapter of the Sierra Club, Southern Environmental Law Center and American Rivers—organized water policy symposia in Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Birmingham, bringing the total to nine symposia hosted across the state since 2012.

The governor released the Alabama Water Agency Working Group's report in April of 2014, and the Alabama Rivers Alliance followed with the Tuscaloosa symposium, which offered citizens their first chance to ask members of



*Alabama Rivers Alliance staff at Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve. Photo by Kyle Crider.*



**All our neighbors have a water plan.**

**Shouldn't we?**

the Working Group about the report. The next symposium, held in Birmingham, featured a panel of leading water resource planning experts from across the US as well as Alabama legislators and state water use experts.

These symposia have played a vital role in moving the discussion about water planning forward in Alabama by creating an opportunity for stakeholders to meet with state decision-makers and facilitate the development of a comprehensive statewide water policy that will protect all water users in Alabama.

## ENFORCEMENT & ADEQUATE FUNDING

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The Alabama Rivers Alliance works with partners across the state to ensure that our officials enforce the laws that protect our water ways. Two examples of that work from 2014 follow:

**Petition to EPA** - In 2010, we led a group of 14 petitioners asking the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to either reform Alabama's water pollution permitting program to bring it in line with the Clean Water Act or to remove permitting authority from the State. We cited 26 instances where the State was failing to meet the standards of the Clean Water Act under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).

While the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) publicly disagreed with our assessment, it nonetheless undertook a wholesale restructuring of its water program, beginning with the replacement of its director and chief of the Water Division. Under new Director Lance LeFleur and Chief of the Water Division Glenda Dean, ADEM instituted many changes to address the issues raised in the Petition.

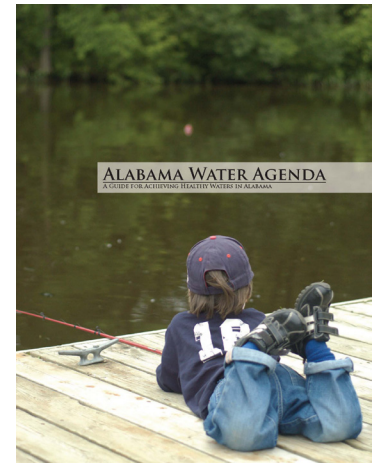
In April of 2014, the EPA responded with a partial ruling on the Petition noting that ADEM had corrected its programs for many issues. Notably, the EPA reserved authority over several key issues and tasked ADEM to demonstrate compliance. These include a requirement for ADEM to address weaknesses in its enforcement program and its method of assessing penalties for violations. Additionally, the EPA echoed the Petitioners' concerns that the State is underfunding and short staffing the water pollution program.

EPA is holding open the issue of whether these deficiencies violate the Clean Water Act and has placed the burden on ADEM and the State to demonstrate that the State can meet its obligations to protect Alabama's waters from pollution under such austere conditions. While EPA did not agree with the petitioners on every issue, the ultimate analysis is that the petition was successful in bringing about much needed changes to Alabama water pollution program and bringing a greater focus on the shortage of resources dedicated to preventing pollution in Alabama's waters. Moving forward, Alabama Rivers Alliance will remain vigilant to ensure that the State continues to improve its programs to meet the requirement of the Clean Water Act and that there is no backsliding to the conditions that forced the petitioners to take action.

**Hydropower Dam Relicensing** - In 2014, the Alabama Rivers Alliance took bold action to ensure that the licenses granted to Alabama Power Company to operate hydropower dams on Alabama's rivers address the damage to the rivers that result from these massive dams and the way that they are operated.

In its report on the biological conditions in the Coosa River, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service noted that the damming of the Coosa was the single largest extinction event in modern US history. Frustratingly, neither the state nor the federal agencies involved in the relicensing process required Alabama Power Company to do a better job of addressing the ongoing damage caused by their operations. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued a final license on the Coosa in the summer of 2013 and the Alabama Rivers Alliance, along with American Rivers and the Southern Environmental Law Center, immediately challenged the license on the grounds that the biological assessment of the project was inadequate and that Alabama Power Company was not being made to do enough to limit the damage to the downstream river.

Throughout 2014, we have worked to ensure that these deficiencies are addressed. Much progress has been made: FERC has required Alabama Power Company to release previously withheld data on the impacts that the dams are having on the oxygen in the rivers in contemplation of requiring that the power company adopt best management practices that are currently in use by other power providers throughout the region. As this process continues into 2015, we will remain engaged to ensure that the federal agencies met their responsibilities to balance the restoration and protection of the rivers with the use of the rivers for electric power generation.





# ALLIANCE COORDINATOR 2014 TRAVEL LOG HIGHLIGHTS

As Alliance Coordinator, it is my honor and duty to work with Alabama's citizens to protect their local waterways by leading the Alabama Rivers Alliance's Watershed Leadership Program. In this role, I work closely with citizens and grassroots organizations to educate and empower local communities and to further build and strengthen the collective voice of Alabama's river protection movement. Meanwhile, I am fortunate to meet inspiring people and visit beautiful places! Below I have chosen one of my many adventures to highlight from each month of 2014:

**January 9th, Gadsden:** Facilitated the Coosa Valley group of the Alabama Sierra Club's monthly meeting where we watched the Southern Environmental Law Center's Southern Exposure film "From the Ashes" and discussed how Alabama's coal ash is impacting local water resources.

**February 13th-16th, Central and South, AL:** Took a tour of central and south Alabama to visit some of our dedicated watershed groups. I visited the monthly meeting of the Coosa River Paddling Club in Wetumpka, the annual meeting of Lake Watch Lake Martin, and presented at the annual conference of the Environmental Educators Association of Alabama in Fairhope.

**March 7th-9th, Montgomery:** Organized the 16th Alabama Water Rally located along the banks of the Alabama River in downtown Montgomery. This year's annual conference was our biggest and best to date and it would not have been possible without the support of our dedicated members and volunteers.

**April, Florence, Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, Mobile, Birmingham:** Participated in 5 different Earth Day events around the state. On April 25th, I worked with teachers at Gwin Elementary of Hoover, Alabama, to host "Gwin Goes Green" where every student took part in fun festivities aimed at educating students about Alabama's incredible biodiversity.

**May 28th, Rainbow City:** Visited the Church of the Resurrection along with Alabama Rivers Alliance interns to lead a lesson on the Coosa River's resources. Interns Kapil Laddha and Aung Pyit Phyo from University of Alabama at Birmingham's School of Global Health, Alan Clayton of Birmingham-Southern College, and Misha Mitchell from University of Alabama's School of Law worked very hard all summer to produce data and information on coal ash and its impacts on water quality.

**On June 4th, Uniontown:** Joined the Black Belt Citizens Fighting for Health and Justice and welcomed the United States Military Academy to Uniontown, Alabama. During their annual civil rights tour, the West Point Cadets learned of the current environmental injustices plaguing the community.

**July 22- 23rd, Brandon, MS:** Traveled to join the Sierra Student Coalition's nationally recognized Summer Grassroots Leadership Training Program, Sprog. I joined over 30 youths from around the Southeast as a presenter during their workshop on tar sands mining, extraction, and transport in Alabama.

**August 12-13th, Uniontown:** Traveled to join Earthjustice and the US Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Civil Rights about the civil rights investigation into the Alabama Department of Environmental Management's role in approving the expansion of the Arrowhead landfill without adding proper protections for residents' public health.

**September, Mount Hope, Florence:** Involved much work in opposition to the current plans to strip-mine Northwest Alabama for (oil) tar sands including visits by national reporters, community meetings in Mt Hope, and a Citizens' Rally in downtown Florence with live music from some of the Shoals finest artists.

**October 7th, Alexander City:** Attended a presentation by citizen groups at a public hearing regarding Lake Martin's water quality. The groups Lake Watch of Lake Martin and Lake Martin Home and Boat Owners Association gave great information and data to ADEM in hopes they would deny the proposed permit to increase industrial waste entering Alabama's only water body designated as a "Treasured Alabama Lake."

**November 10th, Falkville:** Visited Tune Farm to attend one of a series of events organized by the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network. I had the honor to present to over 50 participants from around the state who believe in protecting Alabama's rivers and farmland.

**On December 4th, West Blocton in Bibb County:** Attended the wonderful annual holiday dinner hosted by the Cahaba River Authority, Bibb County Citizens for Wildflowers, Friends of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, and several other active groups working to protect the beautiful Cahaba River.



*Alliance Coordinator Adam Johnston speaks on the capitol steps in Montgomery.  
Photo by Cindy Lowry.*

# WE DARE TO DEFEND OUR RIVERS!

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In 2014 we launched a new campaign called Defend Rivers. Defend Rivers is a campaign to raise awareness about river protection, conservation, and recreation in Alabama by mobilizing individual citizens and community groups via online and offline activities. The goal of the campaign is to make clean, healthy water a priority for Alabama state leaders.



The campaign includes a way for citizens to take action by signing the Defend Rivers Pledge and also connects to various social media activities through the hashtag #DefendRivers. Our plan was to officially launch the campaign on Rivers of Alabama Day in April with a Defend Rivers paddle across the Alabama coupled with our annual lobby day at the state legislature. However, the river had other plans and reached flood stage the day of the paddle.

As all good campaigners do, we regrouped with an even more successful Defend Rivers paddle event in July on the Alabama River. We had over 100 boats including a fleet of canoes and kayaks as well as the Coosa and Black Warrior Riverkeeper patrol boats.

Thanks to a grant from Patagonia, Inc., we were able to hire Kyle Crider as a temporary Defend Rivers Campaign Coordinator. His main activities centered around the development of the Alabama river community's 2015 Legislative Agenda, obtaining Defend Rivers Pledge signatures, and the various social media programs that support those activities. Kyle is a former Geographic Information Systems Technician with the Jefferson County Storm Water Management authority, so he contributes his mapping skills to support our programs.

At a meeting with many of our member groups on Dec. 12, the priority issues for the 1st annual Defend Rivers Legislative Agenda were identified. Some of Kyle's other accomplishments include obtaining 350 (and counting) signatures on the Defend Rivers pledge at DefendRivers.org, launching the Defend Rivers Facebook page, Pinterest board, and Instagram account, and reaching out to churches with customized talks and slide shows that tie river stewardship to their faith traditions.

Kyle will continue working as a volunteer after his contract officially ends Dec. 31, 2014 and we will continue to lead the Defend Rivers campaign. Defend Rivers pledges signatures and the Defend Rivers legislative agenda will be delivered to the Alabama legislature on their first day of the 2015 session.

## WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL

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For the seventh year in a row, the Alabama Rivers Alliance has worked with the Alabama Environmental Council and local partners to bring satellite showings of the national Wild & Scenic film festival to cities across Alabama. This year marks the 7th annual showing in Birmingham, where we also premiered Hunter Nichols' feature-length film, *River Dreams*, about his 44 day canoe trip beginning on the Cahaba River in Birmingham and ending at the barrier islands along the Gulf Coast. We also hosted our 2nd annual showing in Huntsville in partnership with the Huntsville Green Coalition. A showing of the 2014 film festival is also planned for February 7, 2015, in Springville, AL in partnership with the Friends of Big Canoe Creek.

All of the 2014 showings also featured a selection of inspiring local films produced through the Southern Environmental Law Center's Southern Exposure Film Fellowship Program.

### **Would you like to help us bring the Wild & Scenic Film Festival to your community?**

Contact Katie Shaddix at [info@alabamarivers.org](mailto:info@alabamarivers.org) or 205-322-6395 to learn more about bringing Wild & Scenic to your community.

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:

ABAHAC • Alabama Chapter of the Sierra Club • American Rivers • brick & tin  
Cahaba Brewing Company • Charles Stewart Mott Foundation • Community Foundation of  
Greater Birmingham • Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation • EBSCO • Energy Foundation  
Good People Brewing Company • Hancock Timber Resources, Inc • Hugh Kaul Foundation New  
Outlook Financial • Orvis • Patagonia, Inc. • ROJO • River Network • Stephens Foundation  
Strain Foundation • Trim Tab Brewing Company • West Wind Foundation

# FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The Alabama Rivers Alliance operates an annual budget on the calendar year.

FISCAL YEAR JAN. 1 - DEC. 1, 2013	
<b>INCOME</b>	
Individual contributions	\$41,639
Organizational memberships and donations	8,975
Grants (all private foundations)	232,297
Events	32,302
Other	15,866
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$331,079</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	
Personnel	\$177,163
Overhead expenses	38,128
Travel and training	19,412
Professional fees (accounting, consulting, etc...)	18,042
Printing and postage	5,356
Events	19,052
Pass-through funding to local groups	41,000
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$318,333</b>

FISCAL YEAR JAN. 1 - DEC. 31, 2014	
<b>INCOME</b>	
Individual contributions	\$48,267
Organizational memberships and donations	3,500
Grants (all private foundations)	252,108
Events	25,554
Other	9,181
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$338,610</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	
Personnel	\$188,170
Overhead expenses	45,030
Travel and training	18,917
Professional fees (accounting, consulting, etc...)	7,900
Printing and postage	4,832
Events	28,522
Pass-through funding to local groups	45,000
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$338,371</b>

## WHY OUR MEMBERS ARE ESSENTIAL

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 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

*The Alabama Rivers Alliance is a nonprofit organization working to unite the citizens of Alabama to protect our right to clean, healthy water.*

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

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



## ALABAMA WATER RALLY 2014

*"Flowing together, growing together."*

17th annual conference of the Alabama Rivers Alliance

**February 27 - March 1, 2015 • Lake Guntersville State Park**

Registration is open. Scholarships are available. Deadline: February 14, 2014. Space is limited.



*Six years ago, I wanted to get involved in protecting Big Canoe Creek. It's my passion, my heart, and it's literally in my back yard. But I didn't know how to get started.*

*Then I heard about the Alabama Rivers Alliance and I went to Alabama Water Rally. I met the community of people working for Alabama's rivers so that I knew that I wasn't on my own—that it could be done and was being done by people in this state. I found access to the tools that I needed to protect the waterways that I love and I returned to work together with great folks in my watershed. The network of friends I made at the Water Rally six years ago continues to this day. One of the first phrases I heard at the Water Rally that really hit home with me was, 'we're all downstream from something.' So true.*

- Doug Morrison, President, Friends of Big Canoe Creek and Coosa Riverkeeper

**Register, sponsor, volunteer, and learn more at [www.AlabamaRivers.org](http://www.AlabamaRivers.org).**



**Alabama Rivers Alliance**  
*Water Is Life*

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