



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

AL COM Alabama ▾

The coronavirus is worse than ever in Alabama, as new cases hit all time high

Alabama leaves decision to utilities: When to cut off power for late bills in pandemic

Religious, social justice leaders urge utility to continue water service

Birmingham to resume cutting water service for overdue bills



FROM THE DIRECTOR

As I look back on 2020, I feel a profound sense of relief wrapped in gratitude.

Our Alliance weathered the challenges of the year. With the help and support of partners, members, and even new supporters just learning about us, we were able to continue the important work of protecting clean water and uniting Alabamians around sound water policies. Challenge can show us where we need to do better and it certainly shows us where our strengths lie.

[This is what happened at the Alabama Rivers Alliance in 2020.](#)

We learned that our team and our programs are quickly adaptable. By successfully pivoting our existing programs, like Alabama Water Rally and the Southern Exposure Film Fellowship, to virtual and even creating a hugely successful new program, our weekly Water is Life Zoom Talk series, we didn't miss a beat in informing and engaging the public about the work of our strong Alliance across Alabama.

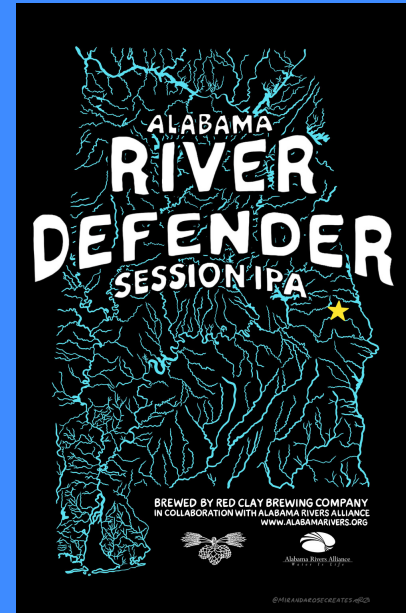
By adjusting our travel budget to acquire new technology for remote communication, we continued to participate in state agency meetings and brought partners together when needed around important advocacy campaigns.

However, the events in our country --from the pandemic to the continued racial injustices --taught us that we must do better as an organization and as a statewide Alliance, in addressing issues of racial injustice and inequalities both within our organization and within our movement. When we viewed our work through that lens, many opportunities were right under our nose. From stepping up our work with diverse regional coalitions that are working at the intersection of climate, justice, and jobs to working with utilities to seek relief for low income customers from water shutoffs and debt caused by the pandemic to doing deeply personal anti-racism work within our staff, we accepted the challenges and committed to do the work it takes to [be the change we want to see in the world.](#)

This report lays out our year in more detail. We could not have made it through this year so successfully without the steadfast support of partners, members and donors. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We are looking forward to continued success and heightened momentum in 2021!



Introducing ...
River Defender
beer from Red
Clay Brewing
Company!



*Ask for it wherever
you buy beer!*

SAVE THE DATES

Be sure to check our Events Calendar on our website for partner meetings and events happening throughout 2021.

April 9 - 11

Alabama Water Rally

April 13

Rivers of Alabama Day

June 14 - July 23

Southern Exposure
Film Fellowship

Welcome NEW BOARD MEMBERS

2020 BOARD OFFICERS

Tony Diliberto, President
Daniel West, Vice-President
Barbara Burke, Secretary
Jack Key, Treasurer

2020 DIRECTORS

Ben Ferrill
Michael Freeman
Maggie Johnston
Julie Lay
Charles Miller
Paul Perrett
Cory Pettway
Julian Walthall
Daniel West
Vickey Wheeler

OF COUNSEL

William L. Andreen, J.D.

JUNIOR BOARD

Charles Miller, co-chair
Dawn Lee, co-chair / treasurer
Laura Quattrochi, secretary
Matthew Bailey
Katie Fagan
Henry Hershey
Jess Lingle
Sam Norton
Laura Núñez
Alyssa Prater
Autumn Reynolds
La'Tanya Scott

MAGGIE JOHNSTON



Maggie grew up in north central Mississippi playing in the woods and streams. She attended the University of Southern Mississippi for her undergrad where she discovered paddling beautiful tranquil creeks such as Black Creek. She taught science at the Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD) in Talladega, AL where she lived on the banks of Talladega Creek in Waldo.

She and her dog friends hiked the Pinhoti and played in the Creek in her backyard. She developed a love for whitewater on Talladega Creek and NC creeks, but has settled into more of a drift and fish mentality with her husband, Mark Johnston, in the last few years. Maggie served as director of McDowell Environmental Center, helped to start the McDowell Farm School, and then started Alabama's first nature-based preschool, Magnolia Nature School at Camp McDowell. Maggie's latest adventure is as Executive Director of Wild Alabama. She is thrilled for this opportunity to protect and defend the waters that make Alabama special. Maggie and Mark have four children and four grandchildren, four dogs, and six chickens, wow!

JULIE LAY



Julie holds a B.S. Degree from Auburn University in Animal Science. Julie also completed an internship with USDA Forest Service Center for Aquatic Technology Transfer whose main focus was aquatic management issues. She has spent the majority of 16 years working in industrial agriculture food safety, quality assurance, and regulatory compliance. She resigned from her position in industrial agriculture in November of 2019. She is currently enjoying being a stay at home mom and turned her attention towards supporting and bringing awareness to sustainable agriculture methods. Mrs. Lay is a resident of Guntersville, Alabama where she resides with her husband and two sons.

CORY PETTWAY



Meet Qunelius "Cory" Pettway, Community Liaison for Birmingham City Councilor Darrell O'Quinn (District 5). He is currently a member of the Alabama State and Jefferson County Democratic Executive Committees and is co-founder of The Willing Family, a community organization aimed at revitalizing urban neighborhoods in Birmingham. Cory has been awarded the Jefferson County Committee of Economic Development (JCCEO) Early Childcare Community Outreach Award twice for his work on the Kingston site. Cory is also a member of Cahaba River Society Junior Board, The Birmingham Barbers Coalition, and Grassroots Coalition Birmingham.

Cory is an uplifting and vibrant "life-centered" person who is dedicated to being the change he wants to see in the world. His experiences in life and career have allowed him opportunities to truly make an impact and that is what inspires him each day. He regularly volunteers with churches and non-profit organizations throughout the area by organizing events. He's taught and volunteered in the Birmingham City School System and he works closely with elected officials developing policy and empowering power to rise above adversity. Cory believes in spreading a message of peace and love in efforts to encourage the unity of all life and looks forward to serving on the Alabama Rivers Alliance Board of Directors and working with the communities throughout Alabama which depend on our 132,000 miles of rivers and streams.

ADVOCATING SOUND POLICY & ENFORCEMENT

by Jack West

The world changed in March 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the globe and states of emergency and lockdowns became the norm in most countries. I joined Alabama Rivers Alliance just as the pandemic was gripping our country, and after two weeks in the Birmingham office getting to know the team, we shifted to 100% remote working, postponed plans for our annual conference, cancelled all staff travel, and quickly adapted to new ways to continue our work advocating for sound water policy and its enforcement in the new virtual world.



The pandemic brought into sharp focus the necessity of abundant clean water to address a public health crisis, and it laid bare the inequities of access to clean water as many lost jobs and faced water shutoffs for their inability to pay utility bills. Our policy work this year has been two-fold. First, we have continued our existing long-term campaigns to strengthen the laws and regulations that protect Alabama's waters. Second, we have responded to the havoc wrought by the pandemic, by working with our partners, urban and rural water utilities, the Governor's office, and the state Department of Finance to advocate for CARES Act relief funding that would allow water utilities to avoid water shutoffs during this crisis. No one should be without access to clean water, especially during a pandemic.

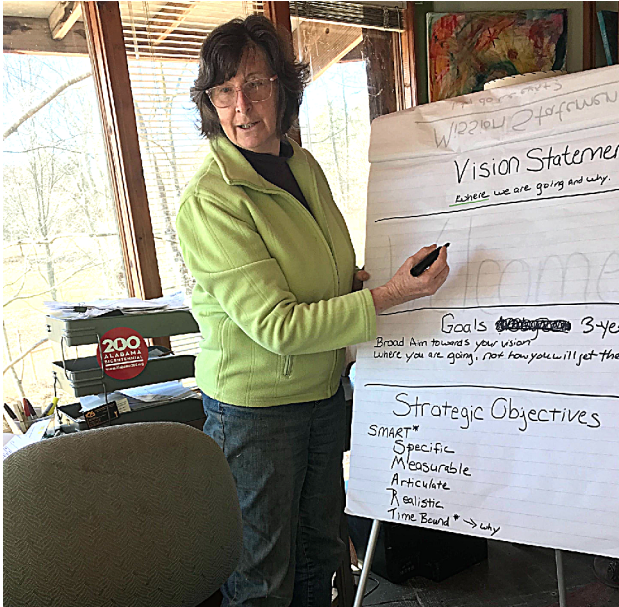
Despite the year's disruptions, we have stayed on target raising the alarms and confronting threats to our waters. After four years of playing mostly defense while the former administration attempted at every turn to dismantle our framework for protecting our waters, we believe a new era of public consciousness and concern for clean water is coming.

POLICY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR

- Formally challenged ADEM's new regulations concerning the land application of waste by-products including poultry processing sludge, with SELC and Black Warrior Riverkeeper
- Advocated for CARES Act assistance to water utilities and low-income customers facing water shut-offs amid a public health crisis
- Continued to work with partners and elected officials to improve the state's fish consumption advisory program
- Advanced efforts to designate some of our most special waters as federal Wild and Scenic rivers
- Reinforced those organizations fighting to move toxic coal ash away from the edges of our rivers
- Pushed for a battery storage study as part of the Harris Dam relicensing, which could have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for hydropower and its impacts to our rivers around the country
- Joined as plaintiff in the SELC's case challenging the gutting of the National Environmental Policy Act, a bedrock environmental law that gives the public a voice in major infrastructure projects like highways and dams and pipelines
- Worked with criminal justice organizations and local activists to oppose private mega-prison proposed in small towns across the state that could impact water supplies and tax already failing wastewater systems
- Participated in the national Clean Water For All coalition infrastructure working group advocating for funding and other improvements to drinking water and wastewater infrastructure

SUPPORTING & PROMOTING A STRONG ALLIANCE

by Martha Hunter



2020 started off like any other year. I was traveling to visit with partner groups, attending in-person meetings with regional groups, tabling at some events, attending a few conferences, and doing all the prep work getting ready for our annual conference, Alabama Water Rally. However, on March 12, things changed! My car was packed and I was heading to set up for Water Rally. As we listened with increasing alarm to the news across the globe, we made the hard - but necessary - decision to postpone the event.

The rest of 2020 was a learning curve for us all, but we are proud that we had the resilience to move forward and the capability to learn new tools that will prove valuable even when we eventually move past the pandemic.

In this annual wrap-up, I usually list how many tabling events or how many miles I've driven visiting partners across the state or how many groups I've connected at regional meetings. This year, my report is that I have spent MANY many many hours on Zoom, email, telephone, etc. to continue the work of building partnerships and coalitions to help us #DefendRivers across Alabama!

While 2020 has been a year full of challenges, I have been inspired by those community members who have continued advocating for what is right, sometimes even putting themselves at risk to attend public hearings, protesting, and standing up for the protection of our waters and the rights of ALL people! As an eternal optimist, I am hopeful we can see each other in person again soon! Until then, shoot me an email, give me a call, and I'll see you in those little Zoom boxes!

ALLIANCE HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR

- Successfully transitioned our keystone event, Alabama Water Rally to virtual! With more than 100 participants throughout the weekend, and more than 30% of our speakers as BIPOC, this event helped Alabama river advocates come together to *Build the Movement for the Future*
- Continued to work with landowners downstream from the Harris hydropower dam so they could participate in relicensing meetings virtually
- Stepped up our participation in the Gulf South for a Green New Deal coalition representing Alabama's rivers and water policy issues at the intersection of climate, justice and jobs
- Participated in the SCEN (Southern Climate Environmental Network) meetings and conferences
- Conducted campaign/issue planning and coalition building with community advocates around land application of waste, quarries, and ill advised mega-prison builds
- Conducted a planning workshop to produce a three-year strategic plan for a new group

SIX FEET APART FILMMAKING



The Southern Exposure Film Series is a film fellowship program bringing emerging filmmakers to live, work and play in Alabama while they create short documentaries that celebrate Alabama's natural beauty, break down wonky policy and scientific issues, and inspire action through storytelling.

In this unusual year, the four incredibly talented fellows worked remotely from their homes in Oakland, Chicago, Tulsa and Duluth, directing an on-the-ground in Alabama film "crew of two", to create compelling documentaries. This unique experience, while challenging, highlighted an innovative way of storytelling while amplifying the messages chosen by our partners.

Our films this year: updated audiences on the latest with A Fisher's Right to Know, the campaign from Coosa Riverkeeper that seeks to inform anglers in Alabama about fish consumption advisories; highlighted the turtles of Alabama and the special people working to protect them; introduced audiences to the issue of biosolids being applied to land through the eyes of a local advocate asking questions that deserve answers; and featured local organizations in Alabama doing the necessary and critical work to make sure BIPOC are included and creating more inclusive programs and opportunities.



Special thank you to Michele Forman, Jess Lingle, Matt Grcic and all our partner organizations for making Southern Exposure such a success!

SOUTHERNEXPOSUREFILMS.ORG

WATER IS LIFE

By the Numbers

Each Tuesday, starting on Rivers of Alabama Day (April 14) in 2020, we host a virtual get-together...with a purpose! The Water is Life Zoom Talk series highlights the role that water plays in our lives throughout Alabama.

10 watersheds in Alabama highlighted

31 hours of recorded Zoom Talks available to view or listen to at any time

46 partner organizations and individuals featured

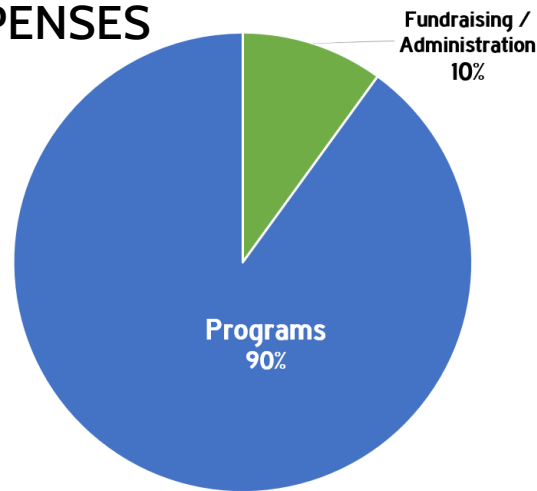
500+ people asking to receive Water is Life recordings each week

1 person caught on camera when they shouldn't have been ;)

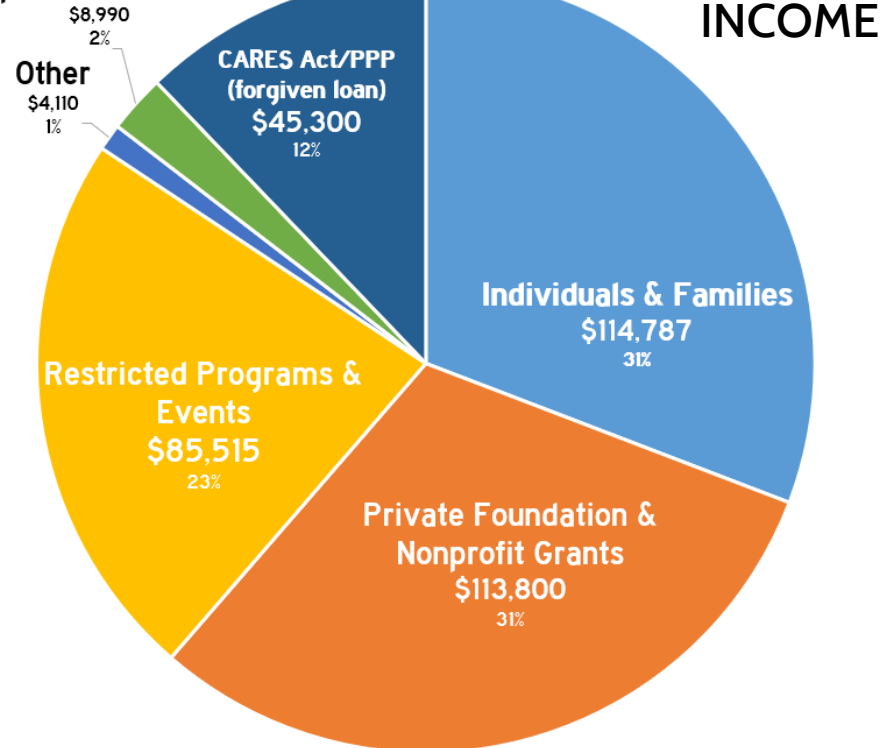
1,000+ views in three months

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

EXPENSES



Corporate / Business



Detailed financial information available by request.

In addition to the many generous individuals who make our work possible, we would like to thank the following foundations, partners & businesses for their support of our work in 2020:

ABAHAC • Alabama Chapter of the Sierra Club • Alabama Public Radio • Alabama State Council on the Arts • Bham Now • Clean Water for All Coalition • Curtis & Edith Munson Foundation • Daniel Foundation of Alabama • EBSCO • Higher Ground Coffee • LUSH • National Endowment for the Arts • Patagonia, Inc. • Phase Gym • Red Clay Brewing Company • REI Huntsville • ROJO • Royal Cup Coffee • River Network • Southern Environmental Law Center • Straight to Ale Brewing • Strain Foundation • Westwind Foundation • WLRH Huntsville