



Alabama Rivers Alliance

2024 IMPACT REPORT

AlabamaRivers.org


Water Is Life

Alabama Rivers Alliance is a statewide network of groups working to protect and restore all of Alabama's water resources through building partnerships, empowering citizens, and advocating for sound water policy and its enforcement.

ARA'S IMPACT GOALS FOR 2023 - 2027

- ARA is a valuable resource to communities and partners in advocating to ensure clean water for people and nature.
- ARA and its members are recognized by decision-makers and can influence and help guide environmental policy.
- Alabama's natural and built water infrastructure is safe, equitable, resilient and ecologically healthy

ARA'S GUIDING STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Work **hand in hand, side by side** with communities
 - Build our collective power to ***influence change***
 - ***Diversify our movement*** - *speak outside of our "choir"*
 - Advocate for **equitable distribution** of infrastructure dollars and **environmentally sound** policy initiatives
 - Increase our capacity to **lead these efforts**
- 

2024 was a strong year for the Alabama Rivers Alliance

and for our river protection movement across Alabama!

At the start of the new year, the ARA team met to reflect on the past year's accomplishments and to set goals for the year ahead. We were so proud to see that not only did we accomplish ***nearly all of our strategic goals to protect Alabama's 132,000 miles of rivers and the communities that rely on them***, but both our Alliance and our organization continue to grow and have more impact across Alabama.

The Alabama Rivers Alliance believes in a long-game strategy. We know big change doesn't happen overnight, especially in Alabama! This past year, we celebrated major progress on long-term goals we set more than a decade ago, including:

- **An increase in the number of environmental partners engaging in the legislature**
- **Growing momentum around low-head dam removals across the state**
- **Strengthened relationships with elected officials, academic institutions and state agencies, thanks to our dedicated work on drinking water and wastewater infrastructure**

In 2024, we also welcomed several new community-based organizations to our movement particularly in areas that previously lacked a strong water protection presence. We've seen new coalitions developing by small volunteer-led groups and interested individuals in some of the fastest-growing cities in Alabama. Meanwhile, our tried and true programs, Alabama Water Rally and Southern Exposure Films, continue to educate, inspire, engage and have a powerful impact on new audiences.

This report highlights these achievements and more from an incredible year of Defending Rivers across Alabama! Thank you for reading and if you have any questions or comments about our work, please reach out to us!

Water is Life,



Cindy Lowry
Executive Director
Alabama Rivers Alliance



COLLABORATION

ARA is a valuable resource to communities and partners advocating to ensure clean water for people and nature.

As the statewide alliance of **100+** community-based and watershed-focused organizations all across Alabama, a core part of our mission is to ensure that the communities and partners we work with have the tools and support they need to succeed in protecting their watersheds.

We create opportunities for collaboration with other advocates so they know they are not in this work alone.

Alabama Rivers Alliance understands that collaboration isn't just essential between us and our partners — it's equally important for them to engage and support one another.

Alabama Water Rally

Our 26th Alabama Water Rally annual conference was held at wonderful, wonderful Camp McDowell. **The largest annual gathering of environmental advocates in the state**, Water Rally brought together more than 150 river defenders representing 57 organizations from all across the state, region and country. Each year groups and community members come together at Alabama Water Rally for a weekend to build relationships, celebrate successes, learn about emerging issues and how to keep their organizations strong, and collaborate on strategies to engage with state-level policy advocacy.



Partners collaborating about stream barriers.



V with friends at Water Rally.

150+

individuals attending
Alabama Water Rally

57

organizations represented
from across the region

22

new songs added to the
evolving playlist



BROADENING & DIVERSIFYING THE MOVEMENT

At Alabama Rivers Alliance, we build, strengthen and expand coalitions where multiple partners are working on the same issue or where challenges span multiple watersheds.

One excellent example is our **Alabama Water Infrastructure Advocates Coalition**, formed to ensure the equitable distribution of federal water infrastructure funding.

Last year, our efforts to connect with national partners in federal water infrastructure advocacy led to the addition of three new outstanding partners into our Alliance —

BlackBelt Women Rising
Southern Poverty Law Center Alabama State Office
and The Capacity Collaborative.

These collaborations also helped secure more than \$200,000 in new funding for Alabama, supporting multiple organizations dedicated to this critical work.



Our **Southern Exposure Films** series continues to make a significant impact in Alabama. In 2024, we produced five new short documentaries highlighting critical issues across watersheds and ecosystems statewide, while amplifying stories from real Alabamians. The films are screened for free in college classrooms, at community events big and small, with legislators and decision-makers, in film festivals all over the globe and more.

This year's series welcomed exciting and engaging new partners to the movement including the **University of Alabama College Republicans** and Alabama's own super celebrity native plant advocate, Kyle Lybarger with **Native Habitat Project**.

The momentum continues as we were thrilled to see our biggest audiences yet at screenings all over the state, including a packed house premiere in Birmingham, where more than half the attendees were experiencing Southern Exposure for the first time!



\$200,000

in new funding for Alabama, supporting multiple wastewater infrastructure organizations and individuals

68%

average open rate for our partner newsletters

16

partners featured across five new films

4

screenings of curated Southern Exposure Films in rural communities across the Coosa watershed

15

free public Southern Exposure screenings across the state from Florence to Mobile and Tuscaloosa to Auburn

600

students and adults who saw the new Southern Exposure Films at the two premieres in Birmingham

3

new environmental justice partners

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

ARA and partners are recognized by decision-makers and can influence and help guide environmental policy

ARA'S INAUGURAL ALSTARS

We launched our inaugural **ALSTARS** (Alabama Special Trained Advocates for Rivers) legislative training program in 2024, empowering more than 40 river advocates with knowledge and tools needed to build strong, personal relationships with their state legislators—an essential step in advancing river protection policy across Alabama. We reached our maximum number of participants within a few hours of launching the program. Alabamians are eager to advocate for our rivers!

LEGISLATIVE TOWN HALLS

Building on the success of our Community Conversation Town Hall events in 2023 with legislators in the Tennessee, Tallapoosa, Black Warrior and Cahaba watersheds, ARA was honored when Representative Bob Fincher (R-Woodland) asked us to help host a Town Hall to address concerns from the communities in the Tallapoosa watershed.

With a packed room of River Defenders, ARA led an in-depth discussion about water issues on the Tallapoosa, emphasizing the urgent need for an Alabama Water Plan and the steps needed to reconvene the Permanent Joint Legislative Committee for Water Policy and Management.



19

meetings with Alabama elected officials

1,537

of our total members actively engaged in civic activity through Water is Life Zoom Talks, tabling events and special ARA-led trainings.

30+

meetings with partners through Alabama Forward's 501(c)3 civic engagement table

22

bills tracked on Fast Democracy

30

speaking engagements by ARA staff on water policy issues

14

partner organizations represented at Rivers of Alabama Day



Alabama Light Beers consumed while bemoaning the challenges of working in the Alabama legislature

RIVERS OF ALABAMA DAY



What a RAD Day! On the second Tuesday of April, the City of Montgomery became the **first city** to also recognize Rivers of Alabama Day. The proclamation, signed by Montgomery Mayor Steve Reed, encourages “citizens, businesses, organizations and government agencies to celebrate our rivers through engaging in activities that promote and protect our rivers, such as cleanup efforts, educational events and conversation efforts.”

Designated by the Alabama legislature in 2007, Rivers of Alabama Day is always celebrated on the second Tuesday of April. ARA takes this opportunity to bring our members and partners to Montgomery to engage directly with our elected officials, while learning more about the legislative process.

This proclamation in Montgomery is a great first step as we encourage more cities and towns across Alabama to declare a day to celebrate our rivers -- building stronger, community-driven support for river protection all over the state!



ISSUE ADVOCACY

Alabama's natural and built water infrastructure is safe, equitable, resilient and ecologically healthy

DRINKING WATER AND WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE

The influx of federal funding for water infrastructure has provided much-needed relief to many communities and waterways by improving drinking water and wastewater systems. However, navigating these federal programs can be confusing and complex — especially for smaller communities needing the support the most.

Recognizing this challenge, national partners selected ARA as the Alabama state lead in a multi-state cohort focused on analyzing water infrastructure funding distribution policies and advocating for improvements to ensure more communities can access funding.

Our work included:

- Researching and publishing two policy analysis reports - one on the State Revolving Loan Fund program and one on Lead Service Line replacement in Alabama
- Developing the Alabama Water Hub website (ALWaterHub.org) as a clearing house for federal water funding & mapping investments
- Formalizing the Alabama Water Infrastructure Advocates Coalition consisting of 25 partners and individuals
- Strengthening the relationship with Alabama Department of Environmental Management's SRF staff and provided in-depth comments to processes through the Intended Use Plan (IUP) comment period leading to small, *but meaningful*, improvements in application procedures and transparency

Through these efforts, we are working to break down barriers, increase funding accessibility, and ensure all communities —especially those most in need—can benefit from vital infrastructure investments.

25

partners and individuals in the Alabama Water Infrastructure Advocates Coalition

7

organizations joined the Coalition as formal partners working to enhance local funding options

\$67MM

in water funding directed to communities meeting disadvantaged criteria

10,959

total words submitted across two State Revolving Funds comments

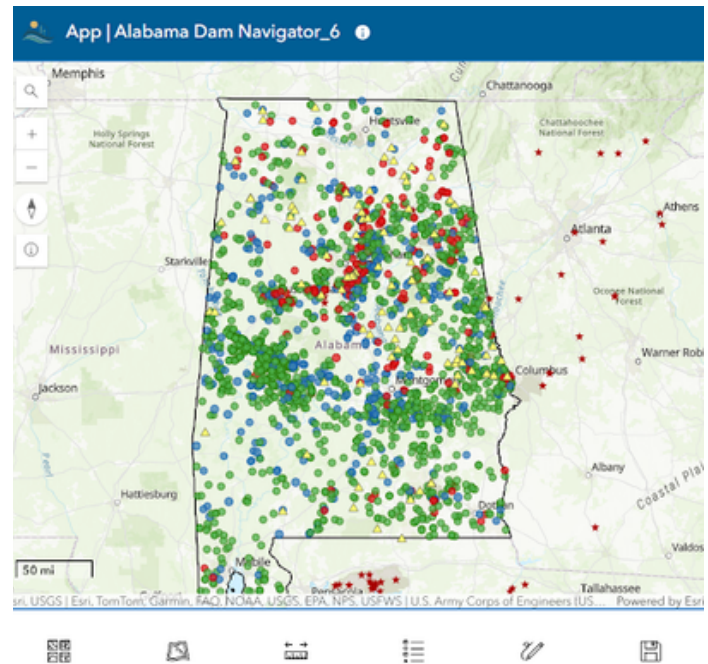
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conference presentations to uplift Alabama water infrastructure

DAMs!

Dams have drastically altered river ecosystems across Alabama. For more than two decades, ARA has helped lead efforts to mitigate dam impacts and *prevent any new dams* across the state.

In 2024, we were excited to see growing momentum toward collaboration with many partners including Riverkeepers, state agencies, and academic institutions to improve communication, mapping, safety and to prioritize potential removals of stream barriers and lowhead dams. Our leadership in bringing interested groups and stakeholders together has led to the formation of the **InBOLD (Instream Barriers and Other Lowhead Dams)** collaboration.



Big shout out to Fred Couch, Alabama River Hero and founder of the Alabama Scenic River Trail, for his persistent attention and dedication to recording the location of dams hazardous to paddlers enjoying Alabama's rivers. Interest in mapping Fred's detailed information brought multiple groups together for the bigger -- and much desired -- conversation around dams in Alabama.

The historic backbone of our dam advocacy work is our long-standing participation in the relicensing of Alabama Power's hydroelectric dams.

COOSA RIVER DAMS

In 2024, after more than two decades of stakeholder meetings, comment periods, and legal challenges, the final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the seven dams on the Coosa River System was released, recommending long-fought- for improved requirements for dissolved oxygen and aquatic species protection measures below the dams.

R.L. HARRIS DAM

On the Tallapoosa River, we worked closely with dozens of downstream landowners advocating for better flow and temperature management as part of the Harris Dam relicensing process. In 2024, our efforts paid off with the release of a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that included key recommendations aligning with our goals.



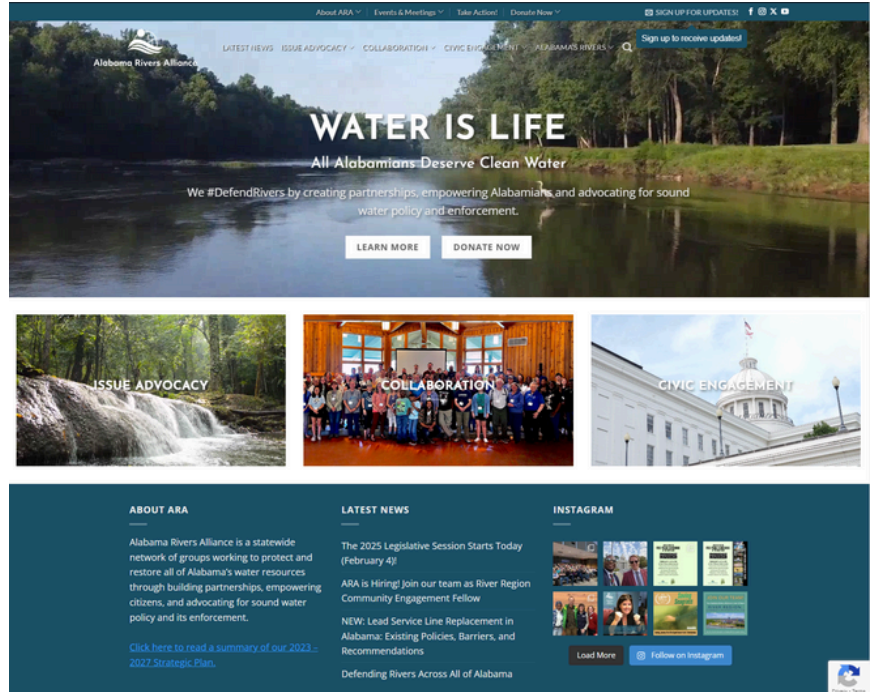
OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

BRAND NEW WEBSITE!

We launched a brand new website designed for easier navigation and to better showcase the vital work of ARA across Alabama.

The updated site features:

- current legislation we support (and don't)
- archive of partner newsletters chock full of info including funding and training opportunities, success stories, and more
- a robust Events Calendar highlighting ARA events, Southern Exposure screenings, and important events and meetings hosted by our partners and state agencies
- tools to contact your legislators and city officials plus how to take action on critical issues



Dive in and explore at AlabamaRivers.org

BRAND NEW OFFICE!

The ARA Team and our Board of Directors were so excited to move into a **brand new office space**, just outside of downtown Birmingham. After a months-long purge, we finally called Avonwood home in October of 2024.

With our staff traveling all four corners of the state for meetings and events, and half of us working remote from Mentone, Blount County, Auburn and Montgomery, the time was right to move into this beautiful brand new space more conducive to our hybrid and in-the-community work-style. **Come see us!**



**4439 5th Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35222**

STAFF CHANGES

This year we restructured our staff to better align with our new strategic plan and to strengthen our ability to #DefendRivers.

We were thrilled to welcome **Charles Miller** back to Alabama as Policy Director. Charles is a former board member and co-founder of our Young Professional River Defenders. **Jack West** shifted into our new role as Special Projects Director, where focuses on hydropower relicensing and other key issues at the intersection of energy and water.

SEASONAL STAFF

We are incredibly grateful for our seasonal and program-focused fellows and interns who help round out our team each year.

We were so lucky to have **Dr. Jillian Maxcy-Brown** and **Madelyn Cantu** join us as Wastewater Infrastructure Fellows, enhancing our research and communication efforts for water infrastructure funding. **Alexa Hightower** assisted with policy research involving lead in our drinking water, contributing to our policy analysis report for our partnership with Environmental Policy Innovation Center (EPIC).



Charles Miller



Jack West



Alexa Hightower



Dr. Jillian Maxcy-Brown



Madelyn Cantu

THE FILM FELLOWS

Our 2024 class of Southern Exposure Film Fellows was a trailblazing cohort, bringing fresh perspectives from Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Michigan, and right here in Alabama. They created a powerful collection of films, inspiring audiences across the country and sparking opportunities for direct action.

Learn more about them,
and see all the films at
SouthernExposureFilms.org



Kaleb Manske & Hannah Schoettmer



Robert Boyd

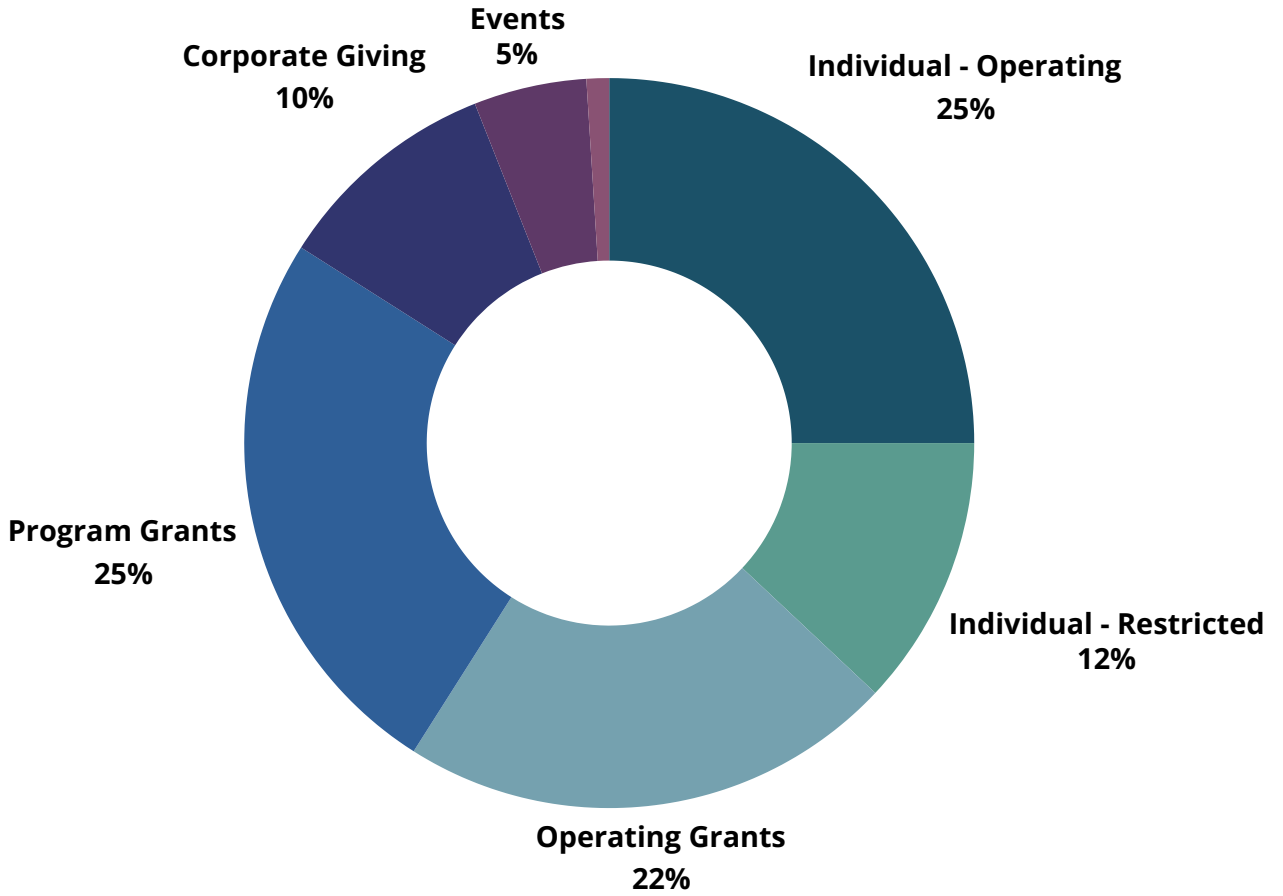


Olivia Hall



Charlie Connell

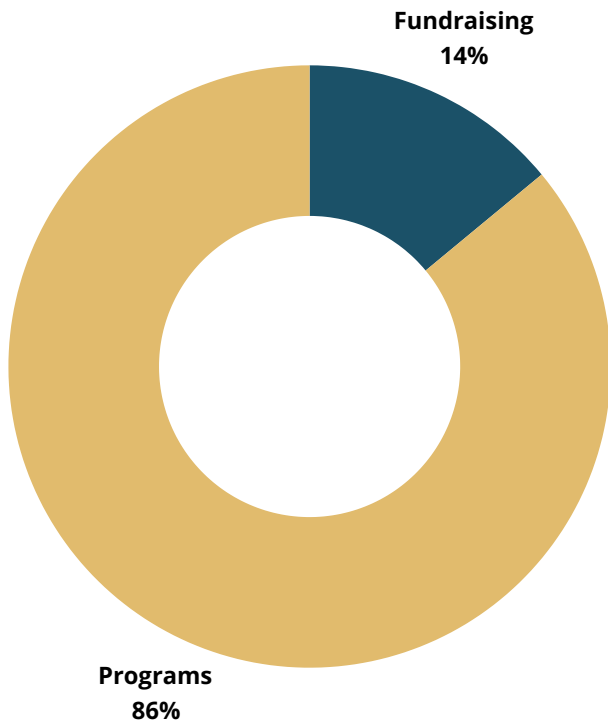
INCOME



\$728,571
TOTAL INCOME

\$685,665
TOTAL EXPENSES

EXPENSES



\$25,000+

raised by the ARA Board of Directors through new House Parties and more!

5

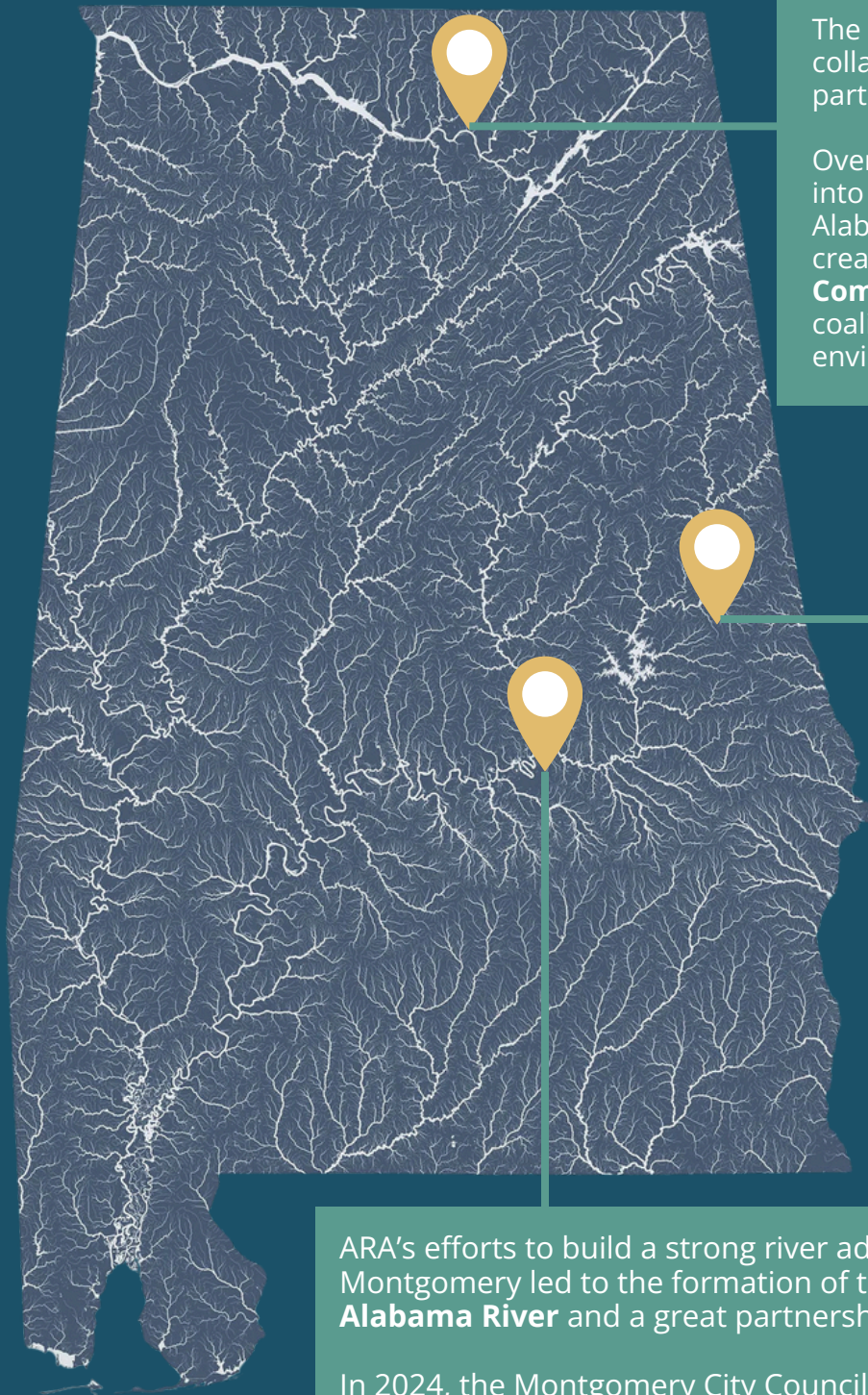
months worth of operating reserves

27

percent increase in ARA budget from 2023 to 2024

Alabama Rivers Alliance is funded by individuals, private foundations and environmentally-conscious businesses.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



The Huntsville Environmental Coalition, a collaborative effort supported by ARA and local partners, earned their 501 (c)(3) status in 2024!

Over the past five years, this group has grown into a unified voice for the environment in Alabama's largest city, playing a key role in the creation of **Huntsville's Sustainability Commission**. With ARA's ongoing guidance, the coalition continues to grow, bolstering environmental advocacy in the region.

ARA is organizing partners and communities across the Tallapoosa watershed, from Wedowee to Auburn, identifying key needs and strengthening connections.

By fostering collaboration and resource-sharing, this effort lays the foundation for future collective action to protect Alabama's rivers and streams.

ARA's efforts to build a strong river advocacy presence in Montgomery led to the formation of the **Friends of the Alabama River** and a great partnership with the City.

In 2024, the Montgomery City Council awarded ARA funding to hire a community outreach fellow, who will recommend ways the City can provide more access and opportunities around the river as an asset to their community. With this momentum, ARA is excited to grow our presence in the River Region and support the growth of Friends of the Alabama River!



Top Left - Cindy was recognized with The Nature Conservancy's Alabama Women of Conservation Award. **Right Side Top to Bottom:** - Friends of the Alabama River visit the new Whitewater Park in Montgomery. The Tallapoosa Watershed Coalition works together for a strong and healthy Tallapoosa watershed; *River Reels & Tales: A Night of Film and Discussion about the Coosa River* was a successful partnership with Coosa Riverkeeper, showcasing Southern Exposure Films and highlighting ARA's work across watersheds; Martha with the 2024 Group of the Year, Huntsville Environmental Coalition. **Bottom Left to Right:** ARA staff met with the University of West Alabama Biodiversity Center team ahead of producing a film about native plants; snapped on a tour of Chandler Mountain with partners; ARA's YPRD led a highly praised session at Alabama Water Rally



ARA STAFF



ARA'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Cory Pettway, President



Jon McNair, Vice President



Dr. Barbara Burke, Secretary



Sam Stokes, Treasurer



Tony Diliberto



Cameron Handyside



Kelsey Herndon



Julie Lay



Dawn Lee



Maggie Johnston

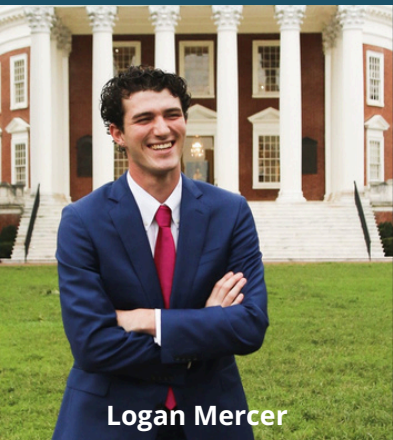
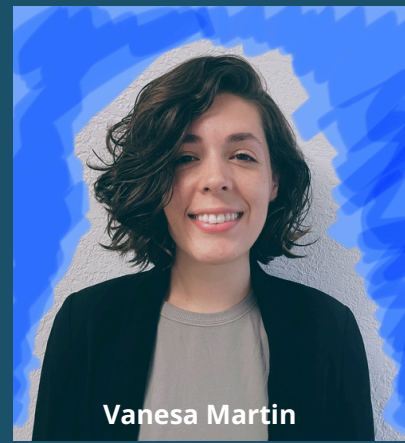


Alyssa Prater



Vickey Wheeler

YOUNG PROFESSIONAL RIVER DEFENDERS



We were excited to fulfill a decades-long dream for a rapid response small grants fund in 2024! In partnership with the newly launched Alabama Beer Company, **the DRIFT Fund became a reality in November.**

The fund provides rapid financial assistance to organizations facing urgent environmental challenges or unexpected financial needs.

Funded by proceeds from each Alabama Light Beer sold, the fund is managed by the Alabama Rivers Alliance and supported by a committee that includes the **Alabama Scenic River Trail, Waterkeepers Alabama and Alabama Cup Races.**

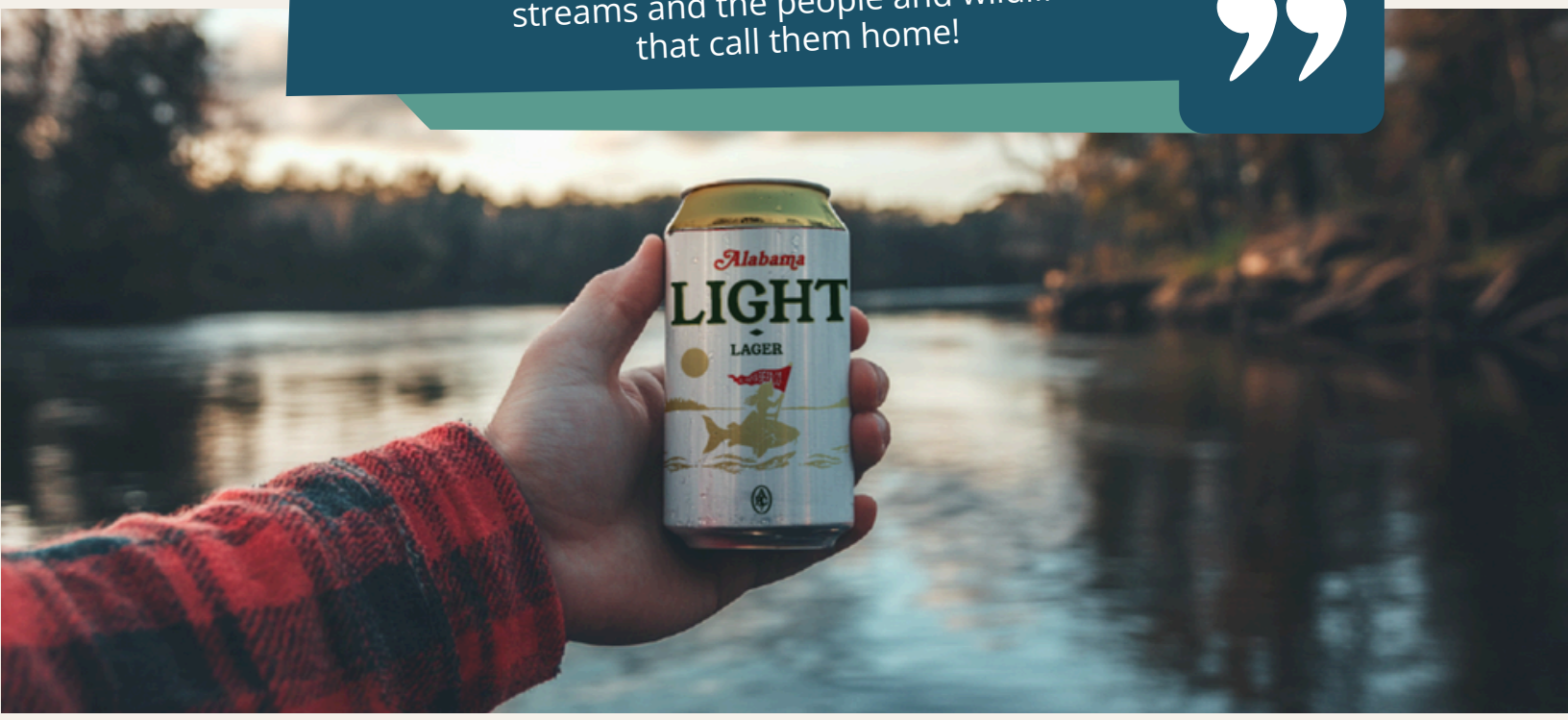


**LEARN MORE ABOUT THE FUND AND
APPLY AT [ALABAMARIVERS.ORG/DRIFT](https://alabamarivers.org/drift)**

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For years, I've dreamed of blending two of Alabama's best things — clean water and amazing local beer — to create a grant program that supports our partners in times of urgent need. Thanks to the passion and support of Alabama Beer Company, that dream is now a reality! We're thrilled to see this partnership make a real impact for Alabama's 132,000 miles of rivers and streams and the people and wildlife that call them home!

”



UPCOMING EVENTS IN 2025

February 23 - Southern Exposure in Mentone

March 6 - Southern Exposure in Auburn

March 28 - 30 - Alabama Water Rally

April 9 - Rivers of Alabama Day (Lobby Day)

April 15 - Southern Exposure in Montevallo

April 30 - Southern Exposure in Huntsville

May 15 - Southern Exposure in Troy

Keep up with where to see the Southern Exposure Films in Alabama or at film festivals across the country at AlabamaRivers.org/SE-Screenings



Alabama Rivers Alliance

Alabama Water Rally

Alabama's largest gathering of clean water advocates

MARCH 28 - 30 | CAMP BECKWITH | FAIRHOPE

Speakers & Workshops | Training Sessions
Deep Dives Into Current Topics
Music + Art Breaks | Networking & Celebrations



www.AlabamaRivers.org/WaterRally
or scan the code!

