



IMPACT REPORT 2023





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Thanks to your unwavering support, we reached a remarkable milestone in 2023 by solidifying our foundation for river cleanups and setting the stage for new program growth. ”

- Sarah Nelson

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR STATEMENT

I am so inspired and moved by the efforts of our passionate community. Thank you for donating to our cause, volunteering your time, and spreading the word about our hard-working organization. With your unwavering support, we reached a remarkable milestone in 2023 by solidifying our foundation for river cleanups and setting the stage for new program growth.

This year, we had more people volunteer with us than the previous two combined and we amplified the magnitude and impact of our river cleanups by 65+%. We also started the production of a short feature film, established Protect Our Rivers Day, and ventured into new areas of impact with two new education programs.

In the upcoming year, we will ramp up our access pillar by providing opportunities for people who otherwise would never have a chance to experience rivers. We also have plans to expand our impact in more regions with an ever-growing tribe of volunteers. Importantly, we will wrap up the production of a short feature film that will take our message beyond just the people who volunteer with us. That message is that even small actions matter and everyone has the power to make a difference in protecting our rivers.

Read on to learn about our plans for the new year. Thank you again. Your love and dedication have made this progress possible.

SARAH NELSON

Founder, Executive Director

PROTECT OUR RIVERS

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to make a lasting impact on river health through active conservation, education, and access. Our programs connect people to rivers through hands-on conservation projects and experiences that inspire action, thus making a lasting positive impact on river health.

OUR PURPOSE

As individuals, we are inspired by rivers, and we believe in the transformative power that rivers have on all of us. We work to protect rivers so future generations retain access to them as critical resources and have opportunities to discover the solace, adventure, and harmony that healthy rivers provide us all.

OUR IMPACT

In the past three years we've organized 100 river cleanups across Colorado and beyond. We've also educated thousands of people about plastic pollution, responsible recreation, rural and urban watersheds, and river health.



We've led 100
river cleanup
events



Across 20
rivers and
streams in five
states



And removed
102,508
pounds of
trash



7,436
people have
volunteered
with us



Totaling
14,370
volunteer hours

2023

HIGHLIGHTS

Here are a few of the things we accomplished this year:

- We increased the magnitude and impact of our river cleanups with a 70% rise in attendance and a 65% increase in the amount of trash collected at each event.
- We established a new National Holiday thanks to the support of Governor Polis who proclaimed June 22nd as Protect Our Rivers Day. This day serves as a reminder that everyone has the power to make a difference protecting rivers for future generations to come.
- We got 42 people on their first river trip.
- We started working on a short feature film that follows the story of Sarah Nelson and her belief that even small actions matter. We have wrapped up filming and are working on post-production.
- We launched several interactive education programs to teach new river runners and volunteers about watershed conservation, responsible recreation, river health, and human-caused problems.
- We mentored and supported middle school students to host a river cleanup that engaged their local community.
- We received support from 24 new partners, 3,432 volunteers and 203 individuals who donated to Protect Our Rivers.





PROGRAM OVERVIEW

RIVER CLEANUPS

Protect Our Rivers organizes 30+ river cleanup events annually throughout the western United States. Our volunteer events take place on-river and on-land and most of them are open for the public to join. In addition to removing harmful waste from waterways, river cleanups are opportunities for people to connect with rivers, experience their beauty, and learn firsthand the problems threatening rivers today.

Since we started in 2021, the Protect team has organized 100 cleanup projects on 20 waterways including:

- Arkansas River [CO]
- Big Thompson River [CO]
- Boulder Creek [CO]
- Clear Creek [CO]
- Cherry Creek [CO]
- Colorado River [CO]
- Green River [UT]
- Madison River [MT]
- Poudre River [CO]
- New River [WV]
- Ralston Creek [CO]
- Salmon River [ID]
- San Juan River [UT]
- South Platte River [CO]
- St. Vrain River [CO]
- Ten Mile Creek [CO]
- Yampa River [CO]
- Yellowstone River [WY]
- Sloan's Lake [CO]
- Crown Hill Lake [CO]



EDUCATION & ACCESS



HANDS ON EDUCATION

We create interactive learning opportunities to teach people about river ecosystems, watershed conservation, and human-caused problems like pollution.

Some examples of our education programs include:

- A kids coloring activity sheet to educate kids about sustainable practices they can adopt to help protect rivers.
- Responsible recreation cards to educate new river runners.
- A watershed model that we've used to educate over 300 young river stewards about point source and non point source pollution.
- A traveling "raft full of trash" that we displayed across the front range to raise awareness about the types of trash that end up in rivers.



ACCESS

We host activities that give our followers opportunities to experience the natural power and beauty of rivers. After all, getting on the river connects people to all the possibilities of protecting them.

This year we got 42 people on a day river trip for the first time.

Next year, we have plans to build out our access program. The program will entail partnering with outfitters to provide more opportunities for underrepresented communities to enjoy river experiences that foster their love for river health and educate them along the way.



AWARENESS

We invest in programs that raise awareness around river health and encourage people to remember how important rivers are.

This year we were honored to establish Protect Our Rivers Day thanks to the support of Governor Polis. This day is a reminder that everyone has the power to make a difference in protecting rivers for future generations to experience and enjoy.

We are also helping produce a short feature film that follows the story of Sarah Nelson and her belief that even small actions matter. We have wrapped up filming and are working on post-production.

2024 GOALS

Continue to Increase the Impact of River Cleanups and Expand our National Footprint

- Focus Colorado efforts on larger-scale river cleanups and prioritize Protect Our Rivers events on Colorado's most heavily polluted rivers.
- Expand our National footprint by hosting river cleanups in 2-3 new states on the East Coast, in partnership with key sponsors.
- Increase the number of on-water cleanups in which the community can participate.

Make River Cleanups More Deployable

- Create comprehensive cleanup tool kits with all of the information, resources, and supplies for community leaders to run non-branded river cleanups independently.
- Train and educate dedicated brand ambassadors on how to lead Protect Our Rivers-branded river cleanups across Colorado.
- Empower people of all ages to lead river cleanups across the country by providing them with the support and tools to do so successfully.

Access

- Partner with outfitters to provide more opportunities for underrepresented communities to enjoy river experiences that foster their love for river health and educate them along the way.

Increase Education & Hands On Learning Opportunities

- Continue to educate new river runners on responsible river recreation and build out programs that teach people about river health, watershed conservation and human-caused impacts like pollution.
- Create and distribute compelling content that empowers people of all ages to make small, sustainable lifestyle changes that positively impact river health.
- Increase awareness around how trash makes its way into rivers.

Finish and Distribute a Short Feature Film

Grow & Diversify the Board of Directors

THANK YOU PARTNERS!

LEADING PARTNERS

These organizations made the most significant contributions to Protect Our Rivers this year. They donated a substantial amount of funds, time and resources to develop and fund custom education programs and support our mission.



SUPPORTING PARTNERS

In addition to partnering with us on cleanup events, these organizations made substantial donations to our organization. Thank you for going above and beyond to further our mission!



CLEANUP SERIES PARTNERS

These organizations sponsored river cleanups and fueled the success of our 2023 event series!





THANK YOU!

CONTACT INFO

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