2024/25 ANNUAL REPORT

Willamette RIVERKEEPER®

PROTECT. RESTORE. ENJOY. SINCE 1996



FROM THE RIVERKEEPERS



This past year, Willamette Riverkeeper stood as the voice of the Willamette River — defending its waters, restoring its habitats, and connecting people across the basin to the lifeblood that sustains us all. In the wake of losing our beloved colleague and champion, Bob Sallinger, we faced deep adversity, yet his legacy strengthened our resolve and reminded us why this work matters. From the headwaters to the confluence, our efforts reflected one truth: a thriving river means a thriving community. Together with partners, volunteers, and allies, we advanced clean water protections, championed community access, and carried forward a vision of resilience for the river and everyone who depends on it. Through bold advocacy, we defended bedrock environmental laws, pushed for stronger protections on water quality and species, and shone a light on decisions that shape the river's future. On the ground, we restored floodplains, enhanced fish and wildlife habitat, and tackled invasive species, while on the water, our paddling programs and cleanups inspired hundreds to take up the call of stewardship. Whether in the courtroom, the statehouse, or the backwaters of the Willamette, we stood for our river — and for the truth that a healthy river reflects a healthy community.



Heather King
Co-Executive Director &
Lower Willamette Riverkeeper

Michelle Emmons
Co-Executive Director &
Upper Willamette Riverkeeper



LEGAL & ADVOCACY

Willamette Riverkeeper ensured the river and its wildlife had a strong voice in policy decisions throughout 2025. We joined partners to submit comment letters, provide testimony, and take direct action across several priority areas:



Water Quality & Pollution
- Called for climate change considerations in temperature TMDLs
- Opposed new pollutant permits on the McKenzie River
- Secured state designation of the Willamette River as impaired for trash, initiating TMDL language for future regulation
- Requested DEQ to ban suction dredge mining in salmon habitat
- Advocated for funding to support algal bloom cleanup and public ownership of Ross Island

Habitat & Species Protection
- Defended the Three Basin Rule
- Protected imperiled species in the National Flood Insurance Program
- Litigated for fish passage at the Carmen Trail Bridge
- Pressed BLM to align its management with habitat, recreation, and water quality protections



Recreation & Community Access
- Advocated for tribal voices, ecological restoration, and recreation access at Willamette Falls Locks
- Defended wake boat rules in the Newberg Pool
- Advocated for legislative funding to support conservation and water trail recreation

Climate & Energy
- Urged the end of hydropower at Willamette Valley Project Dams to restore free-flowing rivers
- Worked with stakeholders to address CEI Hub regulation

Land Use & Urban Conservation
- Opposed the siting of data centers on wetlands
- Protected the urban tree canopy in Portland
- Supported efforts to block expansion of the Coffin Butte Landfill

RESTORATION & HABITAT

Restoring Habitat, Strengthening Resilience - Together, we're restoring the Willamette from headwaters to confluence—reviving floodplains, supporting native species, and strengthening resilience for a changing climate. Over the past two years, Willamette Riverkeeper and our partners restored more than 570 acres of aquatic and riparian habitat, removing invasive weeds, reopening sloughs, and planting over 110,000 native trees and shrubs. These efforts are helping species like wapato, salmon, and lamprey return to healthier, more connected waters. Spanning over 250 miles of river and supported by conservation districts, local agencies, Tribal partners, and volunteers, each project moves us closer to a thriving, resilient Willamette—one that continues to flow clean and full of life for generations to come.



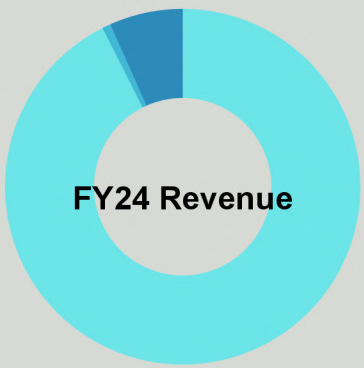
RECREATION & STEWARDSHIP

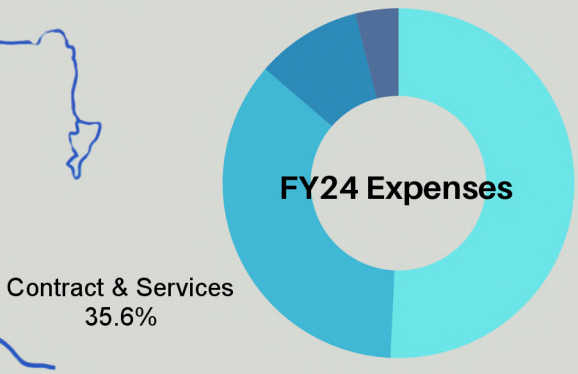
Over the past two years, Willamette Riverkeeper has strengthened its community of river stewards through hands-on experiences that connect people to the Willamette. From Salem to Eugene, nearly 1,300 volunteers joined Paddle & Pulls, planting days, and cleanups, while events like the Pinot Paddle —welcoming 127 paddlers and raising over $9,000—and the Willamette River Festival—drawing over 250 participants and 27 partner groups—brought people together to celebrate the river through learning, art, and recreation. In 2025, our Learn to Paddle Your Willamette Water Trail program provided 64 first-time paddlers with the skills, safety training, and gear to explore the river confidently. Through our River Guardians and Great Willamette Cleanup efforts, volunteers removed thousands of pounds of litter and invasive weeds, contributing more than $58,000 in in-kind value. Each paddle stroke and muddy pair of boots reflects a shared commitment to keeping the Willamette healthy, accessible, and full of life.





FINANCIALS





IMPACT SNAPSHOT



Willamette Riverkeeper
454 Willamette St. #218
Eugene, OR 97401



WILLAMETTE RIVERKEEPER STAFF

Heather King - Co-Executive Director & Lower Willamette Riverkeeper
Michelle Emmons - Co-Executive Director & Upper Willamette Riverkeeper
Vanessa Youngblood - Restoration Manager
Lindsey Hutchison - Staff Attorney
Jake Hastings - Restoration Associate
Theresa Tran - Lower Willamette Recreation & Outreach Coordinator
Luke Stuntz - Upper Willamette Recreation & Outreach Coordinator
Luke Weinstein - Seasonal Recreation Coordinator
Cate Chapelle - Seasonal Restoration Associate

WILLAMETTE RIVERKEEPER BOARD

Cathy Tortorici, Board President
Jessie Rohrig, Board Secretary
Tamara Madsen, Board Treasurer
Steve Hernandez, Board Member



THANK YOU

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the 650+ donors, foundations, corporate partners, and community allies whose generosity powered Willamette Riverkeeper's work this year. Your support made it possible to protect clean water, restore vital habitat, and connect more people to the river we love.

The accomplishments in this report reflect your impact, and remind us what we can achieve together for a thriving Willamette, now and for generations to come.

WRK also thanks our donors who together, dedicated $30,087 in memory of our beloved friend and late Conservation and Executive Director, Bob Sallinger. We miss you!

