



# 2025 IMPACT REPORT





“

In a year that stretched and strengthened us, we turned new beginnings into new impact and we're just getting started. We have big plans for 2026, more access programs, more youth cleanups, and a continued commitment to helping people fall in love with rivers.

”

- Sarah Nelson

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR STATEMENT

What a year it has been!

On March 29, 2025, my husband and I welcomed our first child, Ellie, into the world. She arrived a little early—right as our busiest season kicked off—which made for quite the adventure. Balancing new motherhood and our largest season yet wasn't easy, and wouldn't have been possible without our amazing volunteer-based team, who stepped up in every way to keep our mission moving forward.

This year tested and strengthened us in all the best ways. We learned a lot, tried new things, and turned ideas into proof of concept—some that worked great and others that taught us valuable lessons. Our goal was simple yet ambitious: to sustain our existing programs, successfully execute our river cleanups, and grow their impact. I'm proud to say we did just that.

We also launched a second Access Program on Clear Creek, and got 18 girls out on the river for the very first time. We've laid the groundwork for expanding this program even further next year, and have plans to execute three programs next summer on the Poudre River, Arkansas River and Clear Creek. Next year, we will also expand our focus on underserved communities and waterways that need our attention the most. We will also be seeking additional funding to support.

This year, we faced headwinds on the fundraising front, with our partners, and our enormously supportive tribe of volunteers facing unique personal and corporate economic challenges. Yet, through it all, our team, partners, and volunteers showed incredible resilience, creativity, and dedication as always in helping us accomplish our mission and move exciting new programs forward.

I'm filled with gratitude for everyone who has joined us along the way and excited for what's ahead: more access programs, more youth cleanups, and a continued commitment to protecting the rivers that connect us all.

Thank you for supporting us. We love you all!

**SARAH NELSON**

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 four years we've organized 162 river cleanups across five states. We've also educated thousands of people about plastic pollution, responsible recreation, rural and urban watersheds, and river health.



We've led 162 river cleanup events



Across 22 rivers and streams in six states



And removed 284,535 pounds of trash



12,785 people have volunteered with us



Totaling over 30,000 volunteer hours

# 2025

## HIGHLIGHTS

Every year, more people join us, fall in love with rivers, and turn that love into action—growing a powerful community of river protectors and amplifying our impact on river health.

- We once again grew the magnitude and impact of our river cleanup events, with record participation and a record pound-count! This year we organized 30 river cleanups and removed over 38,000 pounds of trash from waterways!
- We implemented another river access program, and got eighteen 5th-grade girls out on the water for a cleanup and their very first whitewater rafting trip. We also laid the groundwork to run three river access programs next year on Clear Creek, the Poudre River, and the Arkansas River.
- We got more kids out on the river than ever before through both cleanup events and access programs, and evolved our Elementary School Program. We already have three cleanups scheduled for Elementary School students in 2026!
- We grew our team and brought on passionate contractors to help support river cleanups, allowing us to increase attendance and make an even bigger impact.



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## RIVER CLEANUPS

Protect Our Rivers organizes 30+ river cleanup events annually throughout the United States. Our volunteer events take place on-river and on-land, and two years ago, we started organizing cleanups for Elementary School Field Trips to get more kids involved.

Our river cleanups make an immediate impact by removing harmful waste from waterways. Importantly, they connect people to rivers, give them a chance to learn firsthand about the problems that threaten river health.

Since we started in 2021, the Protect team has organized 162 cleanup projects on 22 waterways including:

- Arkansas River [CO]
- Big Thompson River [CO]
- Boulder Creek [CO]
- Clear Creek [CO]
- Cherry Creek [CO]
- Colorado River [CO]
- Green River [UT]
- Hillsborough River [FL]
- Madison River [MT]
- Poudre River [CO]
- New River [WV]
- Ralston Creek [CO]
- Salmon River [ID]
- San Juan River [UT]
- Skunk Creek [AZ]
- 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]



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## RIVER ACCESS PROGRAM



**WHEN YOU LEARN TO LOVE  
SOMETHING YOU WILL ACTIVELY  
WORK TO PROTECT IT...  
FOREVER.**

## PROGRAM IMPACT

Everyone deserves a chance to experience the joy, serenity, and healing that rivers provide. That's why we created an access program dedicated to breaking down barriers and giving at-risk and underprivileged youth opportunities to connect with rivers through fun experiences like whitewater rafting and fishing. We launched the program in 2024 and have since taken 38 kids out on the river for the very first time. We also use our fleet of rafts to get people of all ages out on the river during river cleanups. We hope these experiences are healing and help them fall in love with rivers like our team has.

- In 2024, we launched our river access program and brought 19 underprivileged youth out for a full day of watershed education and whitewater rafting — many experiencing a river for the very first time. Students learned about the Poudre River and the Big Thompson project, then capped the day with an unforgettable rafting trip down the Poudre River.
- In 2025, we implemented another river access program and took eighteen 5th-grade girls out on the water for a cleanup and their very first whitewater rafting trip. We also laid the groundwork to run three river access programs next year on Clear Creek, the Poudre River, and the Arkansas River.

# 2025 GOALS

## **Expand River Access Across Colorado:**

- Execute 3–5 youth new river access programs annually starting in 2026, focusing on major recreational rivers throughout Colorado.
- Get 60 kids out on the river for free in 2026.

## **Host Larger, High-Impact Community Events**

- Convert majority of events into multi-sponsor events that amplify our impact on river conservation and stewardship, potentially with multi-section cleanups happening simultaneously.

## **Expand into Regions Where Rivers Need Us Most**

- Identify and launch initiatives in new markets that are most in need of river conservation efforts, bringing our mission to communities that have historically lacked support.

## **Secure Grant Funding to Empower Youth Leadership**

- Obtain dedicated funding for youth-focused programs—including river cleanups and environmental stewardship days—to inspire the next generation of conservation leaders.

## **Grow the Protect Our Rivers Team**

- Bring on additional employee and increase brand ambassadors across Colorado and beyond. Grow Board of Directors with additional expertise and growth potential.

# 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 additional programs and support our organization.



## CLEANUP SERIES SPONSORS

These organizations funded a cleanup event that otherwise would not have been possible. Thank you 2025 cleanup sponsors!



## SUPPORTING PARTNERS

These organizations offered additional support through in-kind donations and collaboration, fueling our success!





# THANK YOU!

## CONTACT INFO

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