

20
24

ANNUAL REPORT



WILD RIVERS

ST. CROIX CONSERVANCY NAMEKAGON





Wild Rivers Conservancy is the official non-profit partner of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway

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Our Vision

A thriving watershed, forever accessible, scenic and wild.

Our Mission

Inspire stewardship to forever ensure the rare ecological integrity of the St. Croix and Namekagon Riverway.

Staff

2025, Current

- Matt Poppleton, Executive Director
- Owen Anderson, Outdoor Program Coordinator
- Rose Armstrong, Environmental Educator, Seasonal
- Alex Bouthilet, Seed Farm Manager
- Presley Hasse, Native Mussel Technician, Seasonal
- Jennifer Hutchins Farrell, Business Manager
- Will Jenkins, Director of Development
- Hanna Mierow, Development Associate
- Alexis Monti, Climate Resiliency Specialist
- Katrina Schlicker, Environmental Education Coordinator
- Tanner Stofferahn, Communications & Marketing Coordinator
- Sierra Stukenholtz, Volunteer Coordinator
- Wendy Tremblay, Community Engagement Manager
- Kylee Wesbrook, Invasive Species Field Technician
- Marc White, Natural Resources Manager
- October Yates, Outdoor Program Specialist, Seasonal
- Maria Young, Invasive Species Coordinator



Photo: Craig Blacklock

A YEAR OF PROGRESS, PARTNERSHIP, & POSSIBILITY

As we reflect on 2024, we're filled with gratitude for the people, places, and partnerships that make our work possible. This has been a year of transition, growth, learning, and renewed momentum as we continue to steward the St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers with shared purpose and care. We celebrated the retirement of Deb Ryun after 15 years of dedicated leadership and organizational growth, and honored Bethany Cox as she transitioned from her role as Director of Development to serve as a Washington County Commissioner. In this spirit of change, we welcomed Matt Poppleton as the Conservancy's second Executive Director and hiring Will Jenkins as our new Director of Development, each bringing fresh energy and commitment to the work ahead.

We often describe the Watershed as an interconnected system, where every tributary, wetland, and forest contributes to the health of the whole. The same is true of our work. Like a living ecosystem, our impact depends on the relationships that sustain it, between the Conservancy and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, between volunteers and staff, and between supporters like you and the places you love.

This year, our community engagement efforts expanded meaningfully. Our volunteer program evolved into a strong, structured network supporting everything from invasive species control to education and outreach. We celebrated 10 years of our internship program, which continues to shape future conservation leaders. A new position was added to increase our capacity across our Explore Wild Rivers outdoor programming. New and inclusive programming, from fireside conversations to classroom connections created more ways for people to experience and care for the Riverway.

Our conservation work also reached important milestones. With the help of 20 trained volunteers (also known as Beetle Parents!), we released over 7,000 beetles to combat purple loosestrife. We expanded zebra mussel monitoring and collaborated with partners to protect high-priority lands through conservation easements and acquisitions. A major highlight came in August when the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway was designated a Climate Friendly Park—affirming our shared commitment to long-term sustainability and resilience.

While we celebrate these successes, we remain clear-eyed about the challenges ahead. The St. Croix watershed continues to face growing pressures that demand ongoing vigilance, education, and stewardship. Park visitation is rising, but federal support has not kept pace, creating uncertainty for the future of this national treasure. In response, we are doubling down on our values, on strong partnerships, and on the power of this community to create lasting change.

Every step forward this year has been powered by people—by you. Your belief in our mission, your passion for the Riverway, and your continued support drive everything we do. The St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers belong to all of us, and protecting them is both a shared responsibility and a shared joy. We're honored to be on this journey with you. Together, we'll continue building a thriving watershed, forever accessible, scenic, and wild, for generations to come.



Matt Poppleton
Executive Director
Wild Rivers Conservancy



Loralee DiLorenzo
Board Chair
Wild Rivers Conservancy



Craig Hansen
Superintendent
St. Croix National
Scenic Riverway

ANOTHER REWARDING YEAR OF WORKING TOWARD A THRIVING WATERSHED, FOREVER ACCESSIBLE, SCENIC AND WILD

This year has been full of inspiring moments across our environmental education, natural resources, and volunteer programs. From hands-on learning experiences in local schools to habitat restoration projects, our team and partners have made a real impact in the Riverway.

St. Croix Youth Summit

450 students showed up to learn from experts about the nature around them and what they can do to help support their communities in protecting those resources. Our Keynote, Cash Daniels, gave an inspiring talk about what anyone, regardless of age, can do to protect their precious places.

Cash is a public speaker, author, photographer, nonprofit co-founder, and award-winning conservationist. Cash is all about taking action to clean up the Tennessee River. He has spoken at city council meetings, local authorities such as Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, state park rangers, and legislators, as well as schools to address the need for conservation and believes no matter your age or abilities, you can make a difference.

Learn more about St. Croix Youth Summit:
wildridersconservancy.org/learn-explore/rivers-are-alive/



10 Years of Summer Interns

Jaime Webb, a 2024 Communications Intern, told the story of 10 years of our joint intern program, through an online story-map. This program has not only supported the Riverway and the National Park Service, but many interns have gone on to have impactful careers in conservation work.

In 2024, we had 11 summer interns, building much needed capacity for invasive species projects, staffing the visitor centers, supporting field trips and education experiences, assisting the park's land use management initiatives, and creating inclusive programming.

Learn more about the joint Internship Program:
wildridersconservancy.org/internships

RIVERS ARE ALIVE

Rivers Are Alive is our K-12 environmental education program in partnership with the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. Field trips occur throughout the watershed at state and city parks, along the Riverway, and at schools engaging Riverway youth.

- 88 Field trips
- 4,290 Field trip participants
- 450 Youth Summit attendees
- 386 Wild River Journey Participants
- 5,126 Total youth served

Wild River Journeys

386 students and 74 teachers and chaperones came out on the river to experience the awe and wonder of our National Park by rotating through three science and history learning stations on paddle boats.





Photo: T. Stofferahn

72 Programs offered
58 General public (81%)
14 Partner events (19%)
1,319 Total participants



Photo: O. Yates

Programs for All

With a mission of outdoor adventures for all, our Explore Wild Rivers program connected over 1,300 individuals to Riverway recreation and learning. Our focus on offering accessible, affordable, and inclusive experiences.

Focused on first-time park visitors and under-served communities, participants have enjoyed birding, kayaking, camping, snowshoeing, hiking, ice fishing, and shore fishing.

Sharing Common Ground

Our Summer Campfire Connections series, a new style of events aimed to connect communities along the Riverway with local traditions, stories, recreation activities and art to promote equitable use of our beloved resource. Other initiatives to strengthen community connections included our Jr. Ranger Angler programs, Advancement of Hmong Americans overnight camping paddle and a fall paddle with the Intramural Friendship League.



Photo: Wild Rivers Conservancy

Riverway Volunteers

Our joint volunteer program with the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway continued to create a direct impact through projects and activities. Volunteers contributed to critical capacity building while also forging a deeper community bond with the Riverway. Every volunteer hour reported helps the program secure valuable funding that can be used to purchase tools and supplies, support training programs, and enhance our overall ability to serve the community and the Riverway.

302 Riverway Volunteers in 2024
5,894 Volunteer hours
\$197,390 Value of volunteer service

Learn more about our volunteer program:
wilddriversconservancy.org/volunteer/



Photo: S. Stukenholtz

Photo: P. Wintersteen



Namekagon River Cleanup

Over 80 volunteers came together to make the 2024 Namekagon River Cleanup our most well attended volunteer program to date. Each year this event provides to an opportunity to come together as a volunteer community for the Namekagon. Special thank you to our friends at the National Park Service and Hayward Fly Fishing Co. for making this a perennially successful event.

83 Volunteers
500 Volunteer hours
20 Large bags of trash removed

Join us for the 2025 Cleanup on Saturday, September 6th:
wilddriversconservancy.org/events/



Partners in Protection

Through our partnership with land protection organizations The Trust for Public Land and Minnesota Land Trust, we collectively permanently protected 5,622 acres of high priority wildlife habitat within the St. Croix watershed of Minnesota including 3,276 acres through conservation easements, 2,346 acres through fee-title acquisition, and 24.74 miles of shoreline.

Photo: T. Stofferahn

A Healthy Watershed Vision

Permanently protecting high priority habitat within the St. Croix River watershed through conservation easements and fee title acquisitions, is a cost-effective strategy to conserve fish, game, and wildlife, including threatened or endangered species. Protected lands have been identified and prioritized through state, regional, and local natural resource plans due to their high biodiversity, connectivity, and ability to preserve habitat for species of greatest conservation needs. The project area has a mixed representation of extensive forestland, brushland, prairie, oak savanna, wetlands, and riparian habitats. These habitats are home to 195 documented endangered, threatened and special concern species including; lake sturgeon, wood turtle, Blanding's turtle, gray wolf, bald eagle, osprey, sandhill crane, trumpeter swan, yellow rail, and sharp-tailed grouse. The St. Croix watershed is globally recognized for its mussel diversity with 51 documented native mussel species, including five listed as federally endangered, and 23 state-listed species. The project area also contains a significant amount of high-quality brushland and regenerating forestland habitat critical to the breeding success of the golden-winged warbler.

Raising Beetles With a Big Appetite

The Conservancy and the NPS co-managed volunteer program, Riverway Volunteers, recruited 20 volunteers to raise and release *Galerucella* beetles as a biocontrol for purple loosestrife.

Galerucella beetles are a genus of beetles native to Eurasia that are known to consume only purple loosestrife. These beetles feed on the leaves and shoots of purple loosestrife and decrease their seed output. By helping to raise and release *Galerucella* beetles, volunteers are actively contributing towards a healthy watershed rich in native plant diversity.

In 2024, 20 volunteers dedicated 208 hours to raising and releasing over 7,000 beetles across eight high-priority sites throughout the St. Croix River watershed in Minnesota. Funding for this project was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources.

Learn more about the purple loosestrife biocontrol project:
wilddriversconservancy.org/biocontrolproject

Photos: S. Stukenholtz, E. McKeown

[Top] A purple loosestrife rootstock plant is dug up to for the 2024 beetle rearing season.

[Middle] Invasive Species Coordinator, Maria Young, demonstrates how to set up the plant netting the beetles will live in until release day, to our volunteer beetle parents.

[Bottom] Summer Invasive Species Interns Alyssa and Ajoy hold beetles as they prepare for a 2024 beetle release day.





Staying on Top of Aquatic Invasive Species

Each summer, Wild Rivers Conservancy partners with the National Park Service, the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources, lake associations, and others to conduct monitoring efforts for zebra mussels throughout the St. Croix watershed. Multiple spots along rivers and lakes are sampled through veliger tows, which help capture the microscopic veligers, or mussel larvae, at an early stage in their development. Since zebra mussels release their veligers when the water is at a certain temperature between late June and late July, early detection efforts during this time help inform management decisions and protect native species.

Our Invasive Species team sampled 66 lake and river sites throughout the watershed for zebra mussels and spiny water fleas

Thanks to this diligent focus on protecting the Watershed, these samples resulted in the discovery of four new populations of zebra mussel veligers, including Upper St. Croix Lake.

[Top] Summer Intern Ajo, sprays a collected sample, to ensure any zebra mussel veligers are washed free of the collection netting and into the sample vessel.

[Middle] Invasive Species Coordinator, Maria Young, notes samples collected. Multiple samples are collected from a body of water to ensure accurate monitoring.

[Bottom] Summer Intern Alyssa, holds the netting used during a veliger tow. This is lowered through the water column to capture any zebra mussel veligers drifting in the water.

Photos: Wild Rivers Conservancy



St. Croix National Scenic Riverway Designated a Climate Friendly Park

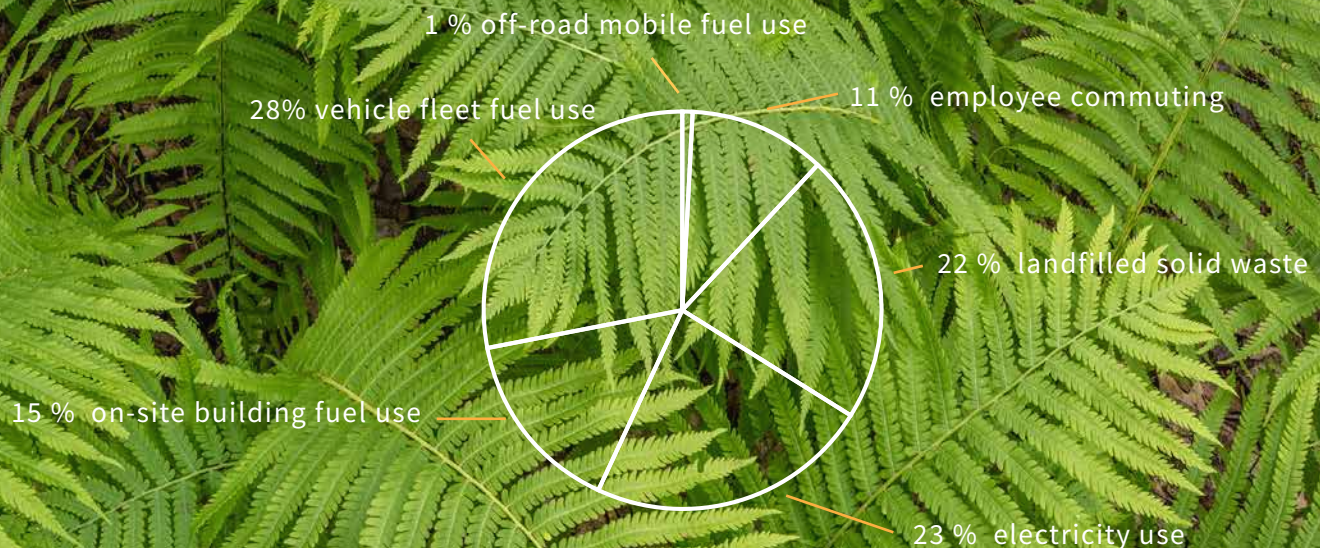


The Climate Friendly Parks program helped the Riverway create an action plan (planning session pictured left) to reduce negative impacts on the climate, served as the motivation to identify funding from outside the NPS, and helped establish a framework for modeling good environmental practices. By joining this program, the Riverway is making important efforts to become more eco-friendly and take better care of the environment. The park will work to reduce pollution, cut down on waste, and educate park workers and visitors about climate change and what they can do to help.

The status as a Climate Friendly Park gave the Park opportunities to apply for funding which has enabled purchasing of four electric vehicles and their charging stations, conduct an energy audit, and reduce reliance on gasoline powered equipment.

The Conservancy partnered with Xcel Energy and the National Park Foundation on the installation of charging stations for National Park Service vehicles. This drastically reduces the cost and emissions from traveling the Riverway.

PARK GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS





SUPPORTING OUR PARTNERS - THE ST. CROIX NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAY



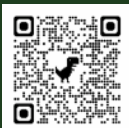
Comprehensive River Management Planning Process | 2024 Listening Sessions

In the fall of 2024, four listening sessions were held to give the public opportunity to comment on initial concepts of the Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP). Over 150 engaged members of the public attended the in-person presentations, and additional comments were able to be submitted through an online portal.

The plan, once complete, will guide NPS actions and decisions regarding the St. Croix and Namekagon rivers for the foreseeable future. Input and engagement from stakeholders, partners, and the public will help the NPS develop and build this plan.



Superintendent Hansen explains the management decision points the Park is considering when formulating the CRMP. Attendees were able to ask questions in an open house format.



Scan or visit the NPS website to learn more about the CRMP.

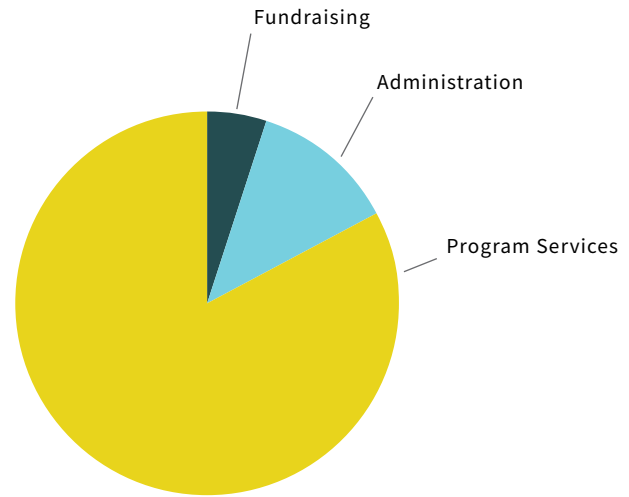
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/sacnriverplan>

2024 FISCAL YEAR FINANCIAL REPORT

Expenses

- 83% Program Services
- 12% Administration
- 5% Fundraising

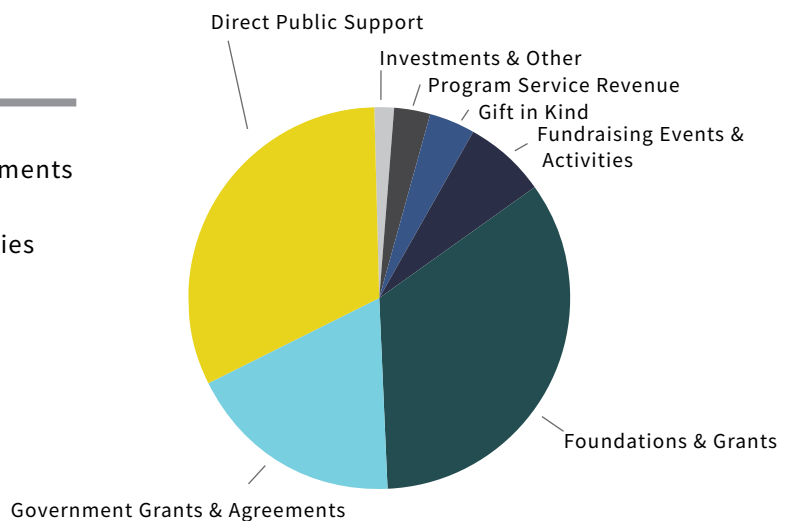
\$1,538,533 Total Expenses



Income

- 32% Direct Public Support
- 18.5% Government Grants & Agreements
- 34% Foundations & Grants
- 7% Fundraising Events & Activities
- 4% Gift in Kind
- 3% Program Service Revenue
- 1.5% Investments & Other

\$1,841,079 Total Income



Assets

- \$616,369 Current Assets
- \$234,461 Other Assets
- \$42,797 Property & Equipment

\$893,579 Total Assets

Liability & Equity

- \$14,084 Accounts Payable
- \$234,926 Other Current Liabilities
- \$249,010 Total Current Liabilities
- \$342,023 Net Assets

\$893,579 Total Liabilities and Equity

2024 FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS

Your support matters to us. This list represents gifts given from January 1, 2024 through December 31, 2024, and includes in-kind and memorial gifts. Every attempt was made to ensure the accuracy of this list. We sincerely regret any errors or omissions. You may call our Development office at 715-483-3300 with questions or corrections.

\$10,000 +

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We invite you to continue supporting our mission in 2025

Donate today with the provided envelope or by scanning the QR code for our secure online donation platform.



ENDURING SUPPORT FOR THE RIVERWAY

Since joining the Wild Rivers Conservancy in early 2025, I've been truly inspired by the incredible work we do. This annual report beautifully illustrates the vast impact we achieve, collaborating closely with our dedicated partners at the National Park Service. Together, we're ensuring the St. Croix and Namekagon Riverway remains a pristine and accessible treasure for all.

The past year, 2024, marked a pivotal moment for us. We celebrated numerous accomplishments, as you've seen in these pages, and navigated a significant leadership transition. With Deb Ryun and Bethany Cox moving on to much earned retirement and civic duties, Matt and I, alongside our entire leadership team, are now building upon their solid foundation. The Conservancy is a robust organization, brimming with deeply passionate individuals. Our National Park Service partners share this unwavering dedication, which is precisely why we can achieve so much vital work.

The enduring health of the St. Croix and Namekagon Riverway hinges on the commitment of people like you. Your involvement, whether you volunteer your time, share our story, or contribute financially, is absolutely imperative to our success. It is because of your generosity that we can continue to protect these irreplaceable waters, expand opportunities for everyone to enjoy them, and instill in future generations an appreciation for their significance.

Looking ahead, we sincerely hope you'll remain connected with us. Please continue to champion our work, amplify our message, and consider making a donation to help us advance our vision:
A thriving watershed, forever accessible, scenic, and wild.

Thank you for being a key part of our work.



Will Jenkins

Director of Development
Wild Rivers Conservancy



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Photo: Zori Yates Photography

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FOREVER WILD

Our Fall Fundraiser, Forever Wild, is returning to Rustic Roots on **Thursday, September 11th, 2025**

Don't miss out on this special night of giving for the Riverway. Purchase your tickets or sponsorship now: fundraiser.support/wildrivers2025