

# Voice of the River

## 2015 Annual Report

### Inspiring The Next Generation

AsRA & ADK Teen Workshop

### MIRROR LAKE

A Lake Placid landmark feels the effects of road salt pollution



**Inside:** Culvert Restoration - Invasive Species - Ride for the River



## WELCOME

# A New Look

## Focusing On Programs That Matter

Welcome to the Ausable River Association's Annual Report and Newsletter. Tailored for you, our members, we've expanded our coverage to better illustrate the difference your support makes for the Ausable River, its tributaries, wildlife, water quality, and its human communities. Read on to learn about our efforts to prevent the spread of invasive species, discover new details about road salt impacts on Mirror Lake, and rejoice with brook trout, wildlife, and human communities benefiting from our latest restoration efforts.

AsRA's staff reaches out to and informs donors and supporters through a variety of public media. Our website, [www.ausableriver.org](http://www.ausableriver.org), is a valuable and growing resource hosting detailed information for Ausable watershed residents, visitors, students, researchers, town leaders, and more. Our Facebook and Instagram followers increase, as does the number of subscribers to our monthly electronic Voice of the River mailing.

Our goal is to keep our supporters up-to-date on the challenges to the Ausable River watershed and to describe how our efforts protect and restore the health and resilience of the river and the ecosystems that depend on it. We hope to share the beauty, excitement, and incredible diversity of the river, its watershed, and our communities with an ever-widening audience.

Thank you for being a member of AsRA. Your support is essential to our work. Please consider sharing this newsletter with a friend, giving a gift membership, or pointing them to our website. Members help us grow our programs and expand our impact.

Thanks for your ongoing support,

Larry Master  
Chair - Board of Directors

Kelley Tucker  
Executive Director

Cover: AsRA led tour of West Branch stream restoration projects.  
Below: River Otter with a fish on the West Branch of the Ausable River.



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# Safe Passage

## A Model Culvert Is Installed In Wilmington

AsRA's Executive Director, Kelley Tucker, continues working with an array of partners to replace undersized culverts on rural roads throughout the watershed. Well-designed culverts are essential to stream health and wildlife habitat. They also ensure that high stream flows pass efficiently, minimizing damage to roads, homes, businesses, and land during floods.

Last summer, Kelley managed the installation of a model culvert on Courtney Brook, a tributary of the West Branch in the Town of Wilmington. This small stream supports a healthy population of native brook trout and meanders through a biodiverse forest. For decades, it has been interrupted, cut in two by a 30-inch plastic pipe. The undersized pipe caused regular flooding of the residential town road and blocked the passage of native fish to cooler habitat upstream. AsRA and our partners – the Towns of Wilmington and Jay, The Nature Conservancy's Adirondack Chapter, US Fish and Wildlife Service, NY State Department of State, and Essex County Soil and Water Conservation District – removed the old pipe and replaced it with a 15-foot-wide, open-bottom arch culvert that spans the width of the stream with room to spare.

Now a restored natural streambed runs under the road. Gently sloped rock banks inside the culvert's aluminum arch are extensions of the streambank up and downstream, allowing wildlife – including salamanders, frogs, snakes, mink, fisher, and fox – to pass under, not over, the road. In flood flows, the restored stream and banks help move water and debris through the culvert efficiently, as if the road were not even there. "Within hours of removing the pipe and restoring the stream flow," Kelley observed, "I stood in the stream watching brook trout move effortlessly under the road and upstream, free to migrate."

This project is part of an initiative led by AsRA and the Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. Our shared goal is to improve stream connectivity, fish habitat, and community flood resilience in the Ausable watershed by replacing road-stream crossings with designs engineered to allow for natural stream pattern and flow. Under rural roads throughout the watershed, streams are routed through plastic or steel pipes often significantly narrower than the width of the streams at normal flow. During high flow events, undersized culverts can become blocked by debris and sediment, flooding roads and



**Top:** Looking up at the culvert from downstream prior to replacement.

**Bottom:** Aluminum open arch bottomless culvert being installed over the brook.

property. High flows forced through undersized pipes can become water cannons, scouring away soil at the downstream ends of culverts, creating large dropoffs to the streams below. The force of water causes bank erosion and sediment pollution, creates flood hazards to property and infrastructure, and blocks native fish from moving upstream.

Because culvert repairs can be costly and because there are hundreds of culverts in the Ausable watershed, the Conservancy and AsRA have developed and field-tested a GIS prioritization tool that ranks culverts based on the degree to which they affect trout and other aquatic organisms, as well as local communities. For AsRA and local highway departments, the resulting map (available on AsRA's website) is a blueprint for action. Thanks to the Conservancy, AsRA's work in the Ausable watershed is a model already being used in other parts of New York State.

# Tackling Invasive Species

## AsRA's River Steward Is On Guard

In 2015, AsRA's River Steward, Nicole Pionteck, spoke with hundreds of anglers, paddlers, and other river users. Her message: help us protect the Ausable River from the spread of aquatic and terrestrial invasive and nuisance species that degrade water quality, decrease habitat diversity, and impair nutrient processing.

Invasive species disrupt ecological relationships by monopolizing food resources and outcompeting native species. Right now the river is free of aquatic invasive species (AIS). AsRA works to ensure that species such as New Zealand mud snail, rusty crayfish, and fish disease do not gain a foothold. Didymo, an aquatic organism that may be native to our region, is considered a nuisance species, challenging the aesthetic and recreational value of the river. Several terrestrial invasives, such as purple loosestrife, phragmites, and Japanese knotweed, are established in the watershed. Both aquatic and terrestrial invasives are typically introduced to new environments by people – by using gear such as boats or boots in infested waters and then using them in uninfested waters without a thorough cleaning, or planting non-native invasive plants in yards or gardens.

Nicole surveyed river users to learn about their equipment usage, determine where they previously fished or paddled, and what AIS spread-prevention measures, if any, they took, before getting wet in the Ausable. Anglers were asked how they last cleaned their gear: boots, waders, rods, and reels. Responses included using bleach, soap, hot water, salt, freezing items solid, or drying for 48 hours or more. Any of these methods will eliminate AIS or nuisance species attached to equipment. Only five percent did not clean or adequately dry their equipment. With

the health of the Ausable River at stake, these data, while promising, indicate a need for continuing efforts to ensure every river user is taking appropriate measures to prevent the spread of AIS and nuisance species.

AsRA maintains seven wader wash stations along the West Branch and encourages anglers to use them before entering the river. The stations contain tubs with a salt solution that kills AIS attached to anglers' gear. Located at parking areas or pullouts along the river, stations are found near trails that lead to popular fishing locations. This gives anglers a convenient option to clean their gear before entering the river.

The river steward also monitors terrestrial invasive species infestations and works to prevent their spread. When a new infestation is found, data on the species, size, and location is recorded and sent to the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program. Increasingly, the river steward is helping towns and landowners by removing invasive plants.

Besides being on the river during peak fishing times and looking for invasive species, Nicole attended events in and around the watershed last summer, providing information about the Ausable and how to protect it from aquatic and terrestrial invaders.

The river steward's role is expanding in 2016, with increased invasive species monitoring, eradication efforts, and outreach activities, and renewing AsRA's annual volunteer cleanup campaigns along the river. Nicole's skills support AsRA restoration and monitoring programs; she also provides GIS mapping for many projects. Your financial support of AsRA is essential to keeping this important outreach, education, and monitoring position year-round.

[Japanese Knotweed infestation along Haselton Road in Wilmington.](#)



# Mirror Lake & The Chubb River

## Establishing A Comprehensive Monitoring Program

AsRA's staff, in partnership with the Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI) of Paul Smith's College, is developing a comprehensive research and monitoring program focused on the Village of Lake Placid, specifically Mirror Lake and the Chubb River watershed. The goal is to establish a base-line monitoring program that will inform AsRA and other stakeholders and serve as the foundation for future research.

Leading the effort is AsRA's Science and Stewardship Director, Brendan Wiltse. "We're building a program that informs residents and community leaders about challenges their local waterbodies are facing. We also hope to produce science that can be a model for other areas and organizations, expanding the impact of this project beyond the Village of Lake Placid," says Brendan.

Since 1998, volunteers from the Mirror Lake Watershed Association (MLWA) have monitored Mirror Lake as part of the Citizen Statewide Lake Assessment Program.

In 2014, the lake was also enrolled in the Adirondack Lake Assessment Program (ALAP). Water quality analysis from that year showed Mirror Lake has elevated levels of sodium and chloride, higher than 97% of the other 70+ lakes in the ALAP program and 160-times higher than normal. The high levels of sodium and chloride are the result of road salt application for winter road maintenance that AsRA and many regional partners are working to reduce or eliminate.

AsRA took over the water quality monitoring efforts on Mirror Lake last summer, with financial support from MLWA. While continuing to collect samples for chemical analysis by AWI, Brendan also recorded profiles of temperature, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, and pH. In late spring, he documented reduced oxygen levels at the bottom of the lake. By late summer, much of the water deep in the lake lacked sufficient oxygen to support cold-wa-

ter fish species such as lake trout. At that time less than two meters of water provided ideal habitat for these fish. The waters above and below this barely two-meter strip were either too warm or lacked sufficient oxygen. Climate change will likely minimize trout habitat even further. As the lake stays stratified longer there is less ability for oxygen to be infused into the deep water.

Another finding of this summer's research is that conductivity, an indirect measure of salinity, showed a marked increase towards the bottom of the lake. "There are several reasons why this might occur," Brendan notes.

"One is the lack of oxygen, but the magnitude of the increase makes me think it may be the result of higher concentrations of sodium and chloride." After Brendan shared these findings with colleagues at MLWA, they noted similar results in reports produced by Paul Smith's College students in the late-1990s and early-2000s. Even then, the bottom of Mirror Lake had higher concentrations of sodium and chloride than the sur-

face. "Our concern is that if these concentrations continue to build up in the bottom of the lake, it will effect how the lake turns over and mixes in the spring and fall. Right now we don't think that is likely, but we need to do more research to find out if it is happening," Brendan says.

As of 2015, AsRA has committed to a long-term water quality monitoring program around the Village of Lake Placid. Together with AWI, and with funds from the NYS Department of State, we have installed two continuous monitoring stations on the Chubb River to understand how road salt moves through the watershed. These stations, along with information gathered from local and state highway departments, will allow us to understand how much road salt is retained in the watershed, where it can make its way into groundwater, and how much moves downstream.



Participants in the *Discovering the Ausable: An Aquatic Stewardship Program* sampling on Mirror Lake.



# Inspiring the Next Generation

Last summer, AsRA and Adirondack Mountain Club joined forces to offer an innovative educational program for teens: *Discovering the Ausable: An Aquatic Stewardship Program*. Teenagers from around the region experienced wilderness camping and canoeing while learning about watershed stewardship and the aquatic sciences.

**Top left:** Students learn how to define and delineate a watershed on the summit of Mount Jo. **Top right:** A morning of canoe safety and paddling instruction prepared students for limnological sampling on Heart and Mirror Lakes. **Bottom left:** Sampling macroinvertebrates on the West Branch of the Ausable River to determine the health of the river. **Bottom right:** The Adirondack Wildlife Refuge provides an up close view of the birds and mammals that call the Ausable River watershed their home.





## Keene Town Beach Weir

Tropical Storm Irene destroyed the old wood and concrete weir at this popular East Branch beach. Working with the town, the Essex County Soil and Water Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, AsRA designed and installed a repair using natural materials. The new weir and upstream log vane maintain the long popular swimming hole, improve water flow by moving water away from the banks - reinforcing the center channel, and create habitat for fish.

**Top left:** The damaged weir was an unsightly hazard for beach users. **Top right:** With funds from FEMA, the old weir was removed and the new rock weir carefully constructed with large natural stone. **Bottom:** The natural rock weir restores the stream's hydrologic function, provides habitat, and improves the quality and safety of recreational opportunities.





## EVENTS

# Ride for the River

This year AsRA took the Ride for the River to a new level. Over 80 cyclists and community members celebrated the Ausable River on a beautiful Sunday afternoon by riding along the banks and byways of the river. Afterwards, participants and others joined our after-party, listening to music from Back Porch Society, enjoying local brew from the Great Adirondack Brewery, and eating delicious food from the Hungry Trout.

In addition to great music, food, and beer, a variety of vendors brought their passion for the Ausable to attendees: The Hungry Trout Fly Shop shared their knowledge of the river and fishing; Rachel Finn was on hand to give fly casting pointers. Patagonia brought a tent full of great gear and they donated packs and duffel's for the raffle. Blue Line Design had a cool mobile camping cabin and an assortment of clothing. SubAlpine Coffee provided free iced-coffee and kombucha. Last, but certainly not least, Meg Parker from River Stone Wellness was giving chair massages, greatly appreciated by the folks that gave the Ride their all.

This event wouldn't be possible without the assistance of our many generous sponsors. We greatly appreciate their support of the Ride, the Ausable River, and AsRA. Each year, an event highlight is the AsRA Hornbeck Canoe raffle. Peter Hornbeck generously donates the canoe to AsRA and provides the winner with an opportunity to use the Hornbeck Boat Perfect Fit Program.

We envision this event as an annual celebration of the Ausable River and the vibrant communities it connects. We invite cyclists out for a community ride and to show their support for the river, but our after party is a celebration for the community. An opportunity for everyone to enjoy, celebrate, and learn about the Ausable River and AsRA; and an opportunity for us to share our excitement for this beautiful watershed.

Please mark your calendar for next year's Ride for the River; join us in our celebration of the magnificent Ausable River!

## Save The Date!

**Ride for the River**

**Sunday, July 31st, 2016**

**Hungry Trout Resort**

### 2015 Porta-John Program Sponsors

Ironman Foundation  
 Fallen Arch  
 Hungry Trout Fly Shop

Barkeater Trails Alliance  
 Tri-Lakes Chapter of Trout  
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## 2015 Sponsors

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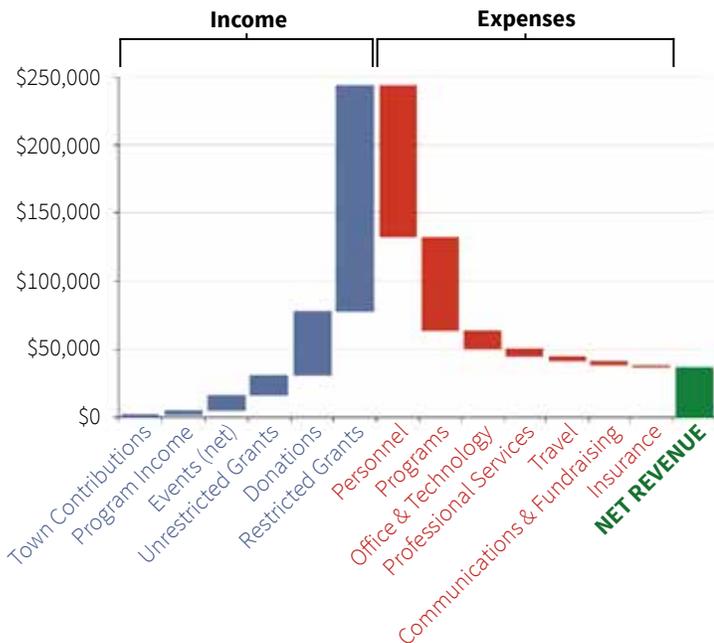
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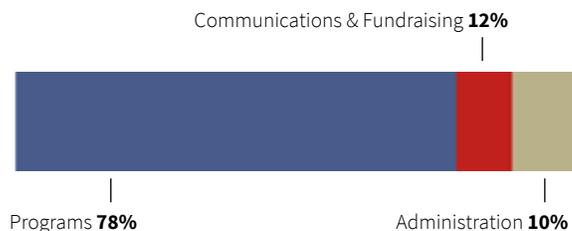
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 River's Edge Emporium  
 SubAlpine Coffee  
 AuSable River Two Fly Shop  
 Briggs Norfolk LLP



### Financial Activities



### How Your Support is Allocated



### Financial Position

As of December 31, 2015 (unaudited)

#### Assets

Cash & Savings.....	\$53,596
Accounts Receivable.....	\$33,550
Other Current Assets.....	\$500
<b>TOTAL ASSETS.....</b>	<b>\$87,646</b>

#### Liabilities & Equity

Accounts Payable.....	\$2,241
Retained Earnings.....	\$48,535
Net Revenue.....	\$36,870
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; NET ASSETS.....</b>	<b>\$87,646</b>

### Activities

#### Support and Revenue

Donations .....	\$46,924
Unrestricted Grants.....	\$15,000
Restricted Grants.....	\$166,198
Events (net) .....	\$10,968
Program Income .....	\$2,825
Town Contributions .....	\$2,205
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$244,120</b>

#### Expenses

Programs.....	\$68,793
Communications & Fundraising.....	\$2,771
Office & Technology.....	\$13,403
Travel.....	\$3,588
Personnel.....	\$111,740
Insurance.....	\$1,498
Professional Services.....	\$5,457
<b>TOTAL.....</b>	<b>\$207,250</b>

### Restricted Grants

In 2015, AsRA received funds from two Local Waterfront Revitalization Program Grants (LWRP) through the New York State Department of State and Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund. These grants reimburse AsRA program and personnel costs under the terms of each grant contract and must be matched 1:1 with non-federal funds.

#### 2010 LWRP thru Town of North Elba

Total Grant.....	\$39,250
Funds Remaining.....	\$7,875

#### 2012 LWRP thru Essex County

Total Grant.....	\$220,450
Funds Remaining.....	\$87,828

A copy of the latest annual report for the Ausable River Association, Inc. may be obtained, upon request, from the organization or from the New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau, Attn: FOIL Officer, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

**606**  
Anglers and Others Educated About Aquatic Invasive Species

**13**  
Invasive Plant Infestations Discovered

**2,844**  
Water Quality Data Points Collected

**516**  
New Followers On Facebook

**630**  
Trees Planted

**28**  
New Members

**9.7 Miles**  
Of Upstream Fish Habitat Reconnected Through Culvert Replacement Projects

# Thank You

We rely on the support of members who care about the river, love its natural beauty, clean waters, the wildlife it supports, and the vibrant communities that call the Ausable watershed home. Together, we make a difference.



## Headwaters Council

Members of the Headwaters Council ensure the future of AsRA by providing annual contributions of \$1000 or more. Their donations safeguard the continuity of our programs, strengthen our position in the community, and allow us to leverage matching funds for grants from agencies such as the NYS Department of State.

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Evergreen Foundation, Inc.  
Cloudsplitter Foundation

### \$5,000-\$14,999

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Kelley Tucker & Stephen Longmire  
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Hurricane Mtn. Chapter of ADK



*AsRA's hands-on approach  
makes a meaningful  
difference for our watershed.*

- Susan Lacy, Board Member

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*Our mission* - is to identify, conserve, and restore the natural and recreational resources of the Ausable River watershed for their ecological value and for the benefit of human communities.



*2015 River Champion: Rachel Finn*

Noted fishing guide and angler Rachel Finn of Wilmington received the 2015 River Champion Award from Executive Director Kelley Tucker during AsRA's Annual Friendraiser held last year at High Falls Gorge. The award recognizes an individual for their exceptional contributions to the Ausable River—advancing its ecological health, helping to protect its resources, and promoting its value.

Rachel's enthusiasm and passion for the river as an angler is evident as soon as you meet her. Her many years of guiding and fishing the Ausable have led her to walk nearly every reach and many of its tributaries. But Rachel's passion for the river goes well beyond enjoying its fishing. She is a keen observer of the river's health and she knows that protecting the long-term viability of its fisheries requires users to be active stewards of the river. She shares that message with everyone she meets.

Rachel was an early member of AsRA and served on its board during its first years. She's been an active member ever since. Besides her celebrated reputation in the Adirondacks, Rachel is considered by many to be one of the country's leading guides. She is a Federation of Fly Fishers certified instructor, a Patagonia Fly Fishing Ambassador, and an accomplished artist working in mixed media. We're pleased to recognize her as AsRA's 2015 River Champion.

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