

Curiosity at work

Our mission is to advance
science and stewardship
of Adirondack waters.

AUSABLE Freshwater Center

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PHOTO: B. Wiltse

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AUSABLE
Freshwater Center

2025
ANNUAL REPORT

Curiosity At Work



PHOTO: S. Longmire

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EDITOR: Stephen Longmire
PHOTOS: Where not noted otherwise,
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Rigorous science and lasting solutions start with curiosity, with questions that probe existing knowledge and push us to go out and learn more. Science looks different at the Ausable Freshwater Center. We ask questions; we don't take existing wisdom for granted. We go out and collect data in lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, forests, and floodplains, then we synthesize, share, and discuss it with our partners and peers.

The resulting knowledge guides our practice. Our projects are shaped by the need for solutions that benefit freshwater systems and Adirondack communities. And, once these solutions are implemented, we learn from them again. Even the best-informed interventions benefit from continued curiosity. They can teach us more, providing data for improvements we then apply to the next project.

2025 started out with an existential challenge to our ability to do our work. In late January, federal decision-making led to the temporary cancellation of our USEPA-funded Lake Champlain Basin Program grants, our largest funding source. While all our grant streams were eventually reestablished, the delay of incoming funds in those first few months pushed us to our financial limits. Then, in the autumn, just as income began to stabilize, the six-week federal government shutdown again caused delays in the management and processing of critical grants.

To survive, we turned to the community of supporters that has been with us for almost three decades. To the annual donations that fill every gap and enhance every project and program. We asked you for more.

And you stepped up. We asked you to help us build resilience, to double your donations, to match a \$100,000 gift. You met that challenge—the largest we've yet attempted. We dug out of the hole and ended the year in the black.

Thank you.

We owe you one. One more stream flowing freely under a road; one more river reach functioning efficiently, managing sediment and floodwaters; one more floodplain absorbing ice, sediment, and storm flows; one more deep, cool pool holding a diverse population of native brook trout; one more healthy lake; one more streamside freshly planted with hardy local plants.

Come see us this year. Ride for the River, raise a glass at our annual Shindig on August 27, come visit our Ausable Conservation Nursery, or just drop us a line...if you're curious.

Kelley Tucker
Executive Director

FINANCIALS

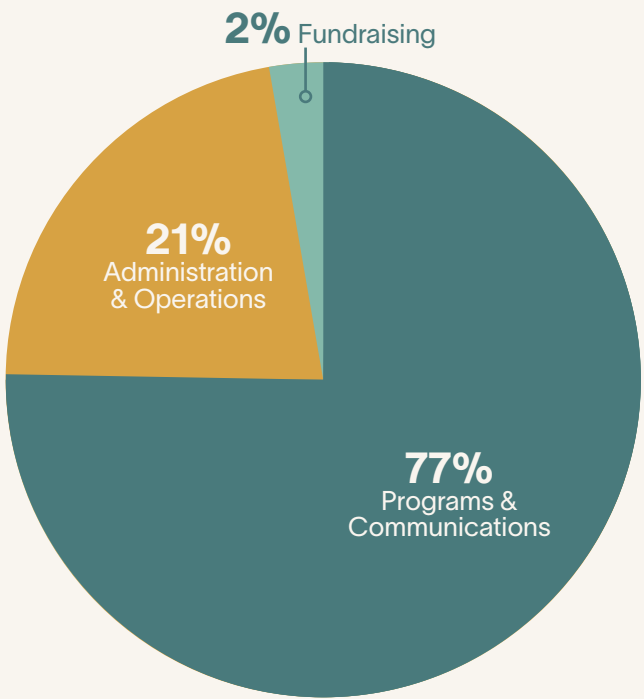
FINANCIAL POSITION

As of December 31, 2025

Assets	
Current Assets	\$ 312,105
Property & Equipment	\$ 281,897
Other Assets	\$ 44,432
Total Assets	\$ 638,434
Liabilities & Net Assets	
Current Liabilities	\$ 260,194
Long Term Liabilities	\$ 19,690
Net Assets	\$ 358,550
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$ 638,434



HOW SUPPORT WAS ALLOCATED



STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

As of December 31, 2025

Revenue and Other Support	
Contributions	\$ 378,707
Restricted Grants	\$ 877,071
Program and Other Revenue	\$ 130,032
Interest	\$ 62
Total	\$1,385,872
Expenses	
Programs & Communications	\$ 1,019,565
Administration & Operations	\$ 283,688
Fundraising	\$ 28,248
Total	\$ 1,331,501

This information is based on audited financial statements for the 2025 fiscal year, 1/1/2025 to 12/31/2025. The latest annual filing for the Ausable Freshwater Center, Inc. may be obtained, upon request from the organization (PO Box 8, Wilmington, NY 12997) or from the New York State Office of the Attorney General, Records Access Officer, The Capitol, Albany, NY 12224 (www.charitiesnys.com) or by contacting 212-416-8401. You can obtain a description of the programs and activities that your contribution will support by contacting us at the above address.

PRIORITY

Assess and Restore Streams

What does a stream need to remain healthy? Why are some streams capable of managing storm flows predictably, while others seem quickly flood-prone or choked by sediment, rock, and wood? Can we help damaged streams adapt to the demands we make of them?

Award-winning model for community resilience and ecosystem health.

In 2025, we expanded the East Branch Ausable River Restoration Plan into the Town of Keene, asking questions and seeking answers in the river. AFC scientists walked the river, using satellite survey equipment to measure its profile from St. Huberts to the Town of Jay boundary—a distance of nearly 14 miles. Over the course of three weeks, we took over 2,000 measurements of streambed elevations and over 400 photographs documenting bank erosion and other symptoms of channel dysfunction. This past winter, we began the process of identifying projects to restore river health and function, with the goal of completing a restoration plan for the Town of Keene by early 2027.



Building a Toe Wood Bench

Toe wood benches narrow the channel and play a vital role as water rises. In a typical spring flood, water will move up onto the bench, slowing its velocity and providing protection for the road. The toe wood is resilient, easily withstanding high flows and ice, providing habitat for fish, absorbing stream energy, and slowing flood water.



Also in 2025, AFC received the New York State Adaptation and Innovation Award for its East Branch Ausable Restoration Plan in Jay. This award recognized the project as “a gold standard of climate-resilient infrastructure that enhances communities and mitigates hazards”. The NYS Adaptation Practitioners Network, which gave us the award, convenes nonprofits from around the state and is led by Rebuild By Design, the NY Water Resources Institute, and Syracuse Environmental Finance Center, in partnership with the American Institute of Architects New York, and others.

AFC’s staff provided geomorphic assessment and design recommendations for a project on the Boquet River in Elizabethtown, coordinated by the Boquet River Association. Goals for the project include removing degrading infrastructure (former bridge abutments) from the river channel, increasing aquatic organism passage, and restoring channel form and function to increase flood resilience.

PRIORITY

Remove Aquatic Barriers

How can we ensure roads cross rivers and small streams without impairing them? Where older stream crossings are too small or degraded, can we improve them? What are the benefits to communities? How can AFC science help Adirondack towns and our nonprofit partners get good work done?

Opening habitat. Securing community flood resilience.

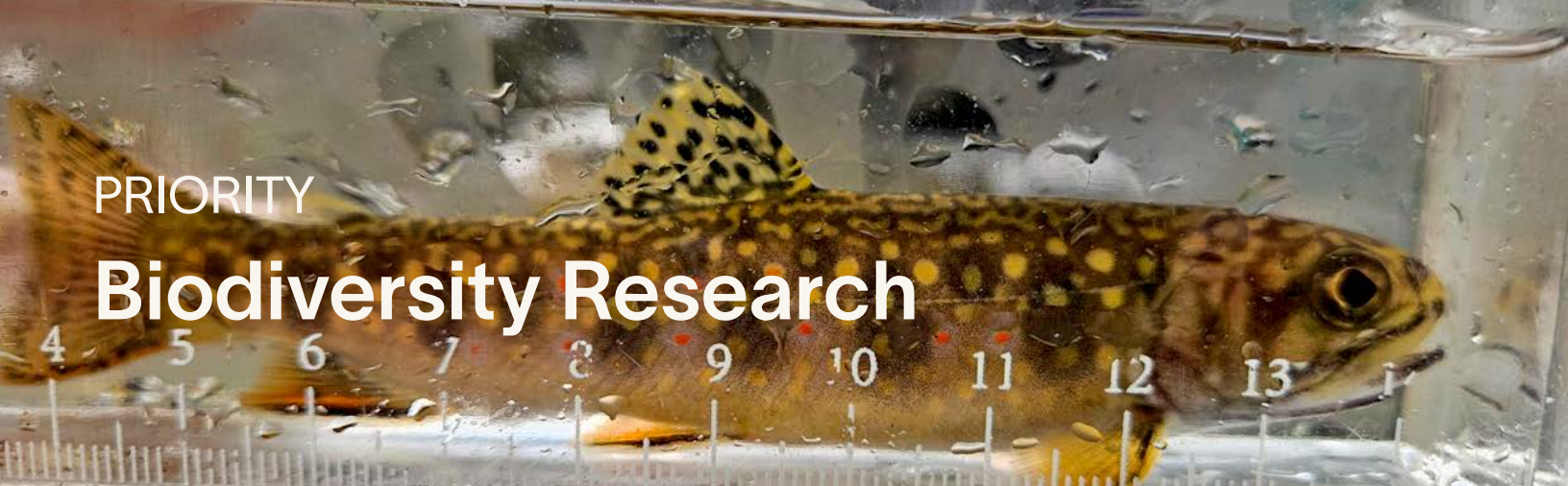
In 2025, we identified priority culvert replacements across the Ausable watershed, to reduce fragmentation of aquatic habitat and keep roads open and communities safer in storms. AFC's biodiversity and restoration staff met with town supervisors to learn about their priorities. Then, using digital tools and databases compiled by our partners, we created a list of the top 20 culverts for replacement in coming years. Next, we conducted fish surveys and stream profiles to hone that list to our top five sites. We'll fully engineer three of these in 2026 and work with towns to get them built.



AFC's staff assessed and designed two culverts in the Boquet River watershed and two culverts in the Saranac River watershed for our partners at The Nature Conservancy and Trout Unlimited. Sites range from low-gradient beaver meadow streams to steep mountain brooks. Increasingly, nonprofit partners working on freshwater issues in the Adirondacks hire AFC to provide affordable geomorphic design expertise.



Working with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Essex County Department of Public Works, we designed a new crossing at Moss Road over the North Branch Boquet River in Lewis, NY, realigning the river's path under a new 125-foot bridge. We'll assist with construction oversight in summer 2026. Once it's complete, 50 miles of high-quality aquatic habitat, blocked for decades, will be available again for Atlantic salmon and other native aquatic species in the upper North Branch Boquet watershed.



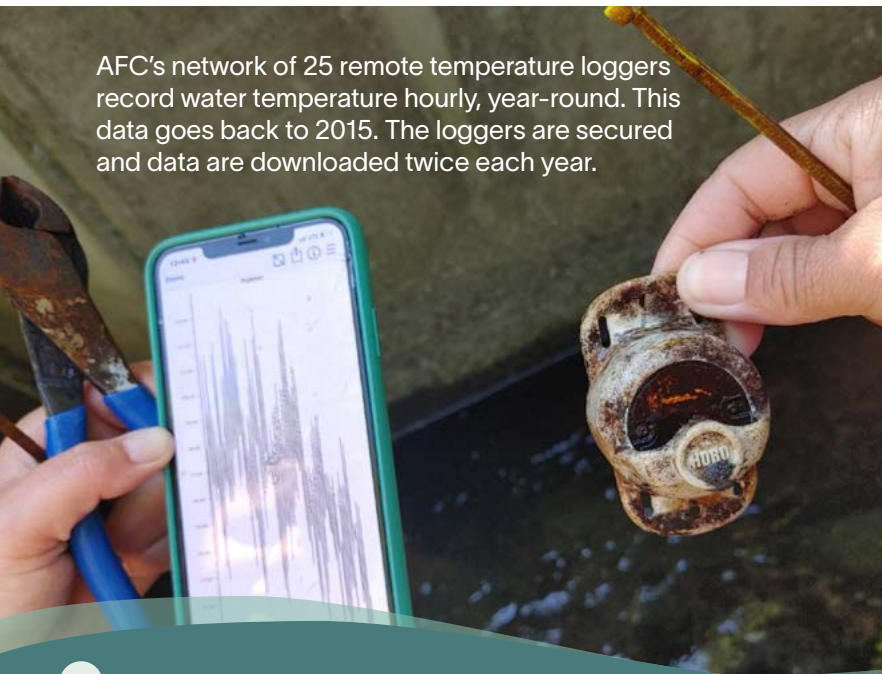
PRIORITY

Biodiversity Research

How do we help Adirondack waters stay clean and cold to support native fish, amphibians, reptiles, insects, and birds? What can we learn from studying the river and the effects of our ecosystem recovery and stream restoration efforts?

Stream restoration uplifting ecosystems.

AFC biologists completed their third year of research to measure and quantify the ecosystem benefits of stream restoration, building a foundation for long-term study. To uncover trends we combine geomorphic surveys, fish community assessments (via snorkeling and trapping), and macroinvertebrate collection. We investigated eight sites across the East and West Branch Ausable Rivers to quantify habitat improvement at restored versus unrestored river reaches. We collected and counted more than 5,400 macroinvertebrate specimens and 3,000 fish, using taxa richness and abundance as bioindicators. We’re refining our understanding of ecosystem responses to restoration and sharing the outcomes with partners across the country.



AFC’s network of 25 remote temperature loggers record water temperature hourly, year-round. This data goes back to 2015. The loggers are secured and data are downloaded twice each year.

To spot trends in stream temperature across the 90 square miles of the Ausable watershed, we have a network of 25 temperature loggers. This network gives us data about how native fish are faring during hot summers and unpredictable winters. With six years of continuous data, we’ve set the stage for the next phase of our biodiversity research: identifying thermal stressors on coldwater fish.

Using riparian bioengineering, we’re building and testing methods to revegetate disturbed areas, bringing stability to eroded streambanks and restoring ecosystems. Combining native plant seedlings from our nursery with inert materials (wood, compost, coconut fiber), we grow root-reinforced mats that improve habitat, provide shade, and increase biodiversity.



Native plants, supported by coconut fiber, help to build soil and stability on toe wood benches.

PRIORITY

Monitor Lake Health

Are lake ecosystems changing? Will shifts in clarity, temperature, and oxygen availability continue? What does this mean for fish populations, fisheries, ice cover, and recreational opportunities? How do we responsibly manage and care for our lakes now and into the future?

Protecting and Preserving Adirondack Lakes.

In the autumn of 2025, AFC began the collection of field data for the landmark Survey of Climate and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems (SCALE), an intensive effort to gather critical data from over 300 Adirondack lakes that will inform how we protect and manage lake ecosystems into the future. Our water quality field team tested 30 lakes, collected 227 eDNA samples, and established and launched eight new weather stations to track lake microclimates. Our SCALE partners include Cornell University, RPI, Syracuse University, NYS DEC, and CUNY.



We’re guiding management of private lakes. For the eighth year in a row, AFC biologists conducted extensive fish community research on headwater fish populations in the Ausable watershed. This data, combined with angler reports, allows us to provide detailed guidance to help private landowners protect native trout refugia, as well as lake and stream resilience.



AFC’s staff continues year-round monitoring of Mirror Lake in Lake Placid and maintenance of the AFC high-frequency sensor buoy with our partners at Paul Smith’s College. We continue to track the 122-year Mirror Lake ice record, the longest such record in New York State. Our weather station and live camera on the lake validate the monitoring and buoy data and give the public real-time local weather conditions. We’re tracking the challenges the lake faces and the success of community-wide efforts to protect it.

PRIORITY

Native Plant Abundance

PHOTO: Due West Photography

Can we recover the dense tree, shrub, and grass riparian zones so essential to the health of communities, human and wild? What tools can we develop to enhance recovery? How do we ensure hardy, native plants are available to streamside landowners, towns, and our partner nonprofits to purchase at reasonable prices?

Recovering Native Ecosystems. One Plant at a Time.

The second year of the Ausable Conservation Nursery (ACN) exceeded expectations. ACN's staff collected over 368,000 native seeds, propagated 61,697 native plants, and distributed 2,569 stems to restoration partners and local landowners. We built a 10-acre field nursery with a dedicated irrigation line and an eight-foot deer exclusion fence to protect growing native trees. It was a year for creating partnerships and community through nursery engagement, infrastructure for future growth, and expanding staff capacity through classes, training opportunities, conferences, and tours. The Lake Champlain Basin Program awarded us a second round of nursery development funds.

PHOTO: Due West Photography

We installed an experimental temporary irrigation system at one of our restoration sites on the East Branch Ausable River in Jay. In an exceptionally dry summer, it efficiently pumped water for young trees and freshly seeded areas next to the river, giving them a boost in their first year of growth. A new tool in our restoration toolbox!

With startup funds from the Lake Champlain Basin Program, we launched the Riparian Ecosystem Recovery team, or RECO, an outgrowth of the shared focus of our programs. Recovery of dense, native riparian buffers is essential to ecosystems and communities. The RECO team will be available to partners across the basin, bringing expertise in revegetating riparian ecosystems to maximize freshwater system health, flood resilience, and native species habitat.



Riparian ecosystems—transition zones between the terrestrial and aquatic—include stream and lake banks, floodplains, and wetlands. They support biologically distinct, diverse, and productive plant communities that provide essential ecosystem services: storm resilience (absorbing floodwater and ice, reducing bank erosion), temperature regulation, water filtering, dense food webs, and more.

PHOTO: Due West Photography



Thank You!

We rely on the support of donors who care about Adirondack freshwater systems. Together we make a difference.

\$10,000+

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- The Mountaineer
- North Woods Engineering
- The Mirror Lake Inn
- Bike Adirondacks

SENTINEL RANGE (\$500-\$999)

- Keene Arts
- Cedarhue Branding
- WIT Advisors

SODA RANGE (\$100-\$499)

- Long Run Wealth Advisors
- River Collective Co.
- The Bookstore Plus
- Adirondack Riverwalking
- NRS
- Origin Coffee Co.
- Rivermede Farm
- Ward Lumber

Ausable Freshwater Center makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of this donor list. If you find any errors, please contact us.

30 lakes sampled

113 anglers surveyed

8 weather stations launched

61,697 plants propagated

1,310 stewardship interactions

Your impact

558 wader wash station changes

368,000 seeds collected

5,400 macroinvertebrate specimens collected

50 miles of aquatic habitat opened

227 eDNA samples collected

2,569 plants distributed

8 Stream Wise assessments

20 priority culverts identified for replacement