



## **STRATEGIC PLAN REFRESH**

### **Fiscal Years 2023 – 2026**

All people and ecosystems depend on healthy rivers and clean water.

The challenges of this moment are extraordinary. Fire, floods, and drought are devastating communities, and people lack clean water. Freshwater species are going extinct at twice the rate of land or ocean species. **The three existential crises of climate change, loss of nature, and racial injustice threaten all we know.** And these crises have even greater impacts on people and communities who already disproportionately suffer the negative impacts of pollution and lack of access to rivers and nature.

We are at a critical juncture when it comes to the health of rivers and our communities that depend on them. American Rivers has a half-century of experience reconnecting rivers and reconnecting communities to those rivers. But our reach needs to grow so we are not only supporting people to act in their own backyard but also leveraging that support into bold national action — because if we don't, we will all lose.

American Rivers must expand and accelerate our work to meet the urgency of this moment because all life needs rivers, and this plan sets us on a trajectory to do just that.

### **OUR STRATEGIC PLAN REFRESH**

We are launching this new strategic plan to guide us towards our North Star of improving the health of rivers and their communities in the context of the concurrent crisis of climate change, racial injustice, and biodiversity loss.

- **Climate change:** No matter who you are or where you live, climate change is now impacting every drop of water in your life. Climate change threatens our safety and way of life on earth. Whether you are impacted by heat, flood, or drought, the future will be difficult and require unprecedented cooperation around water and rivers as we mitigate and adapt to a new and ever-changing reality.
- **Loss of nature:** Damming rivers, draining wetlands, drying up streams, and paving over floodplains have destroyed the habitat fish, birds, and wildlife need to nest, feed, reproduce, and thrive. As a result, global freshwater species are going extinct twice as fast as land or ocean species. We are losing nature — and protecting and restoring rivers is the best strategy to healing and repairing the web of life.
- **Racial injustice:** We believe healthy rivers are for everyone. Black, Indigenous, Latino, Tribal Nations, and other communities of color feel the impacts of pollution and other river threats disproportionately, due to policies and practices that maintain inequities. American Rivers will not achieve our mission until we change the policies that allow damaged, polluted rivers to flow disproportionately through communities of color.

Our vision is grounded in a deep-rooted belief that **healthy rivers are essential to all life** and that we must **accelerate and expand our impact to respond to the growing urgency**.

By expanding the number of American Rivers regional teams, we will work on more rivers and with more communities around the country. We are also connecting local river advocates to their counterparts in other communities to ensure they have the tools and support to get the job done. Finally, and maybe most importantly, we will double down on our commitment to collaboration, pragmatism, and getting results.

Here is how the strategies outlined in our Strategic Plan Refresh will directly improve the health of rivers and water:

**Protect 1 million miles of rivers by 2030 and remove 30,000 unnecessary dams by 2050<sup>i</sup>.**

We're committed to restoring and protecting one-third of all rivers in the United States with an emphasis on those that are close to communities that have not had access to healthy rivers in the past. To do this, we are advocating for federal and state protections for some of our healthiest, most scenic rivers across the country. We are also working with communities experiencing more frequent and damaging flooding to reconnect their rivers to floodplains. And we are tackling the looming dam crisis: Up to 85 percent of all dams in our country are unnecessary, harmful, and even dangerous. We must remove thousands of them quickly.

**Make water cleaner for everyone.** Low-income, Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color along with Tribal Nations are more likely to be impacted by environmental hazards, are more likely to live near contaminated lands and be affected by unhealthy water. Everyone deserves clean water and access to healthy rivers. We are deepening and broadening our community engagement so that no communities are left behind.

**Champion a powerful river movement.** American Rivers has always been known for our ability to work with local advocates and partners from the private and public sectors to do what's best for rivers and the people and wildlife that depend on them. We will deepen our efforts to engage more support to the cause of rivers and to work with others to lead a movement that restores and protects the rivers we treasure and the clean water we all need to live.

## **OUR VALUES**

American Rivers staff and volunteers will embody the following Core Values in all our work as these values are essential to successfully implement our Strategic Plan and attain our vision.

### **Lead with Collaboration and Trust**

We believe in the importance of developing deep and abiding partnerships through authentic listening and humility. We build trusting and productive relationships inside American Rivers and with partners, including Tribal Nations and communities of color.

*We act in collaborative ways that build enduring partnerships.*

### **Infuse Equity and Justice**

We believe in just and fair inclusion both within American Rivers and with our partners where everyone has an opportunity to participate and prosper. We believe that all communities deserve access to clean water and healthy rivers; to be resilient in the face of floods, drought, and other climate risks; to have a role in decision-making processes for water and river management in their communities; and to share in the economic, social, and environmental benefits of healthy rivers and clean water.

*We act in ways that value and include all voices and perspectives.*

### **Deliver Results**

We believe there are pragmatic ways to solve every problem, and we are passionate about finding solutions that work for people and rivers. We work together to find new approaches, innovate, and seek continuous improvement in ourselves and our teams. We always seek the win-win, showing the way around obstacles and finding the path forward.

*We act in ways that hold ourselves and our teams accountable to results.*

### **Ensure Staff and Volunteers Thrive**

We believe in a culture that encourages hard work while recognizing self-care, revitalization, and joy for team members as essential in sustaining our leadership over time.

*We act in ways that support each other in our life journeys while on the American Rivers team.*

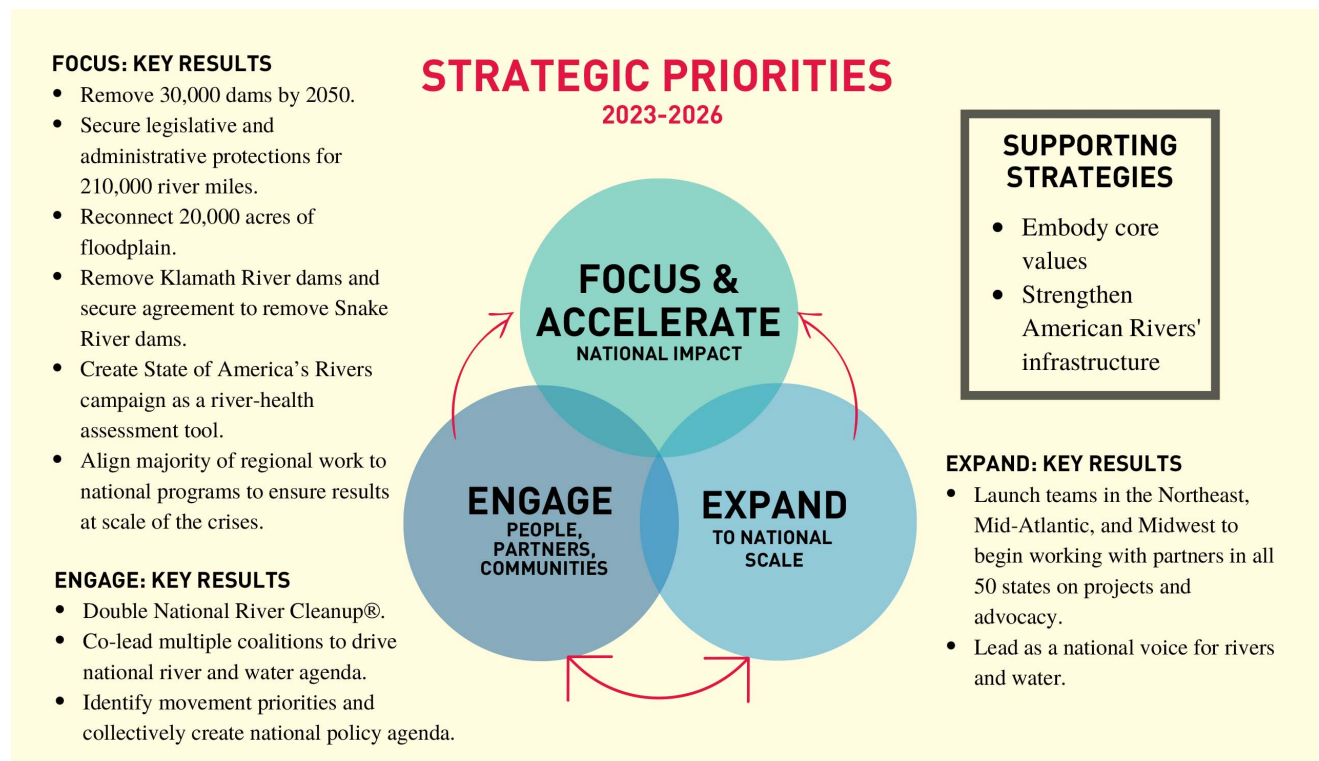
## OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Our Theory of Change flows from our values and starts with people, partners and communities. American Rivers will work to engage deeply and authentically with a greater number of people, partners, and communities to guide, inform, and fuel the movement to ensure clean water and healthy rivers for all.

Simultaneously, we will expand to more fully cover the nation with regional teams spanning the whole country. Our regional teams and work will be integral in building a movement and political power for healthy rivers and clean water, as well as driving river conservation nationally.

Building from this stronger and broader foundation, we will focus on impact that is equal to the threats of the climate, loss of nature, and racial injustice. Aligning our national and regional program impacts, we will accelerate the reconnection, protection and restoration of rivers and clean water.

Combining these three approaches, we will drive forward systemic and permanent change that will result in all people having thriving rivers that support thriving communities.



## **STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Strategy 1. Engage with People, Partners, and Communities**

- Objective 1:** Coalesce and strengthen a bold, transformative, and equitable movement for healthy rivers, river dependent species, climate resiliency, and clean water.
- Objective 2:** With partners, develop and implement national, sector, and multi-regional river and clean water legislative and regulatory agendas.

### **Strategy 2. Focus and Accelerate Program Impact**

- Objective 3:** Protect 1 million miles of free-flowing rivers by 2030 with an emphasis on communities where people of color live.
- Objective 4:** Reconnect and restore free-flowing rivers with an emphasis on areas that address climate impacts, benefit communities of color, and protect biodiversity.
- Objective 5:** Advocate for enough clean water for climate resilience for rivers and the communities who rely on them.
- Objective 6:** Design and launch “State of America’s Rivers” to create metrics that frame, assess, and scale the rivers and clean water movement.

### **Strategy 3. Expand National Impact**

- Objective 7:** Lead as a national voice for healthy rivers and clean water.
- Objective 8:** Create new regional teams and strengthen existing teams to fully cover the country.
- Objective 9:** Implement strategies for impact at scale for each of American Rivers’ national conservation programs.

### **Strategy 4. Strengthen American Rivers Infrastructure**

- Objective 10:** Strengthen internal capacity and infrastructure to support organizational growth.
- Objective 11:** Catalyze greater engagement with and investment by donors to enable implementation of this Strategic Plan.

*See Appendix for a detailed action plan of Strategies, Objectives, and Key Results.*

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<sup>i</sup> 30,000 dams removed by 2050 and 1 million miles of rivers protected by 2030 are ambitious goals grounded in American Rivers work to date.

- Prior to 2020 (pre-Covid), nationwide just under 100 dams a year were removed. 30,000 is approximately 1000/year which is a factor of 10 increase. On average every state would need to take out about 20 dams per year. When Pennsylvania was strong on dam removal, they took out approximately 30 dams a year. As a next step, we will be developing a strategy for reaching 30,000 dams removed with our Dam Removal Community of Practice and adjusting goals as needed.
- 1 million miles protected is goal that sets us on the trajectory towards our goal of protecting half of rivers in the U.S by 2050. As a next step, we will be defining and assessing how many river miles are already protected in the U.S and this will help us to better map out how we, with our partners, will secure the one million miles of rivers protected. Over the next four years we will be working towards securing 12,800 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers designations, 2,200 miles of Outstanding Natural Resource Waters designations and 200,000 miles of administrative protections of the highest quality rivers and streams on National Forests under the Watershed Condition Framework.