




OARS

Impact Report

2025

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a small amount of water over a stream. The water is being poured from the hand into the stream, creating a splash. The background is a blurred stream with green foliage on the banks.

OARS Mission

Protect, improve, and preserve the Sudbury,
Assabet and Concord rivers and watershed
for all people and wildlife.

Table of Contents

4 Letter From OARS

6 Water Science

7 Impact Numbers

8 New Studies

9 Ecological Restoration

10 3 Dams

11 Site Map

13 Financials

Photo, cover: Map of OARS' watershed by Meander and Flow
Photo, page 2: Child's hand from OARS' photo archives
Photo, page 3: Meander and Flow map, background removed
Photos, pages 4 - 14: Images from OARS' photo archives,
and Mayfly larva image lifted from the internet

OARS



FOR THE SUDBURY ASSABET & CONCORD RIVERS

watershed (noun)

: river basin or catchment, the area of land where all water – whether from rain, snowmelt or springs – drains into a river, lake, or ocean

: an event or period marking a turning point in a situation

June 2026

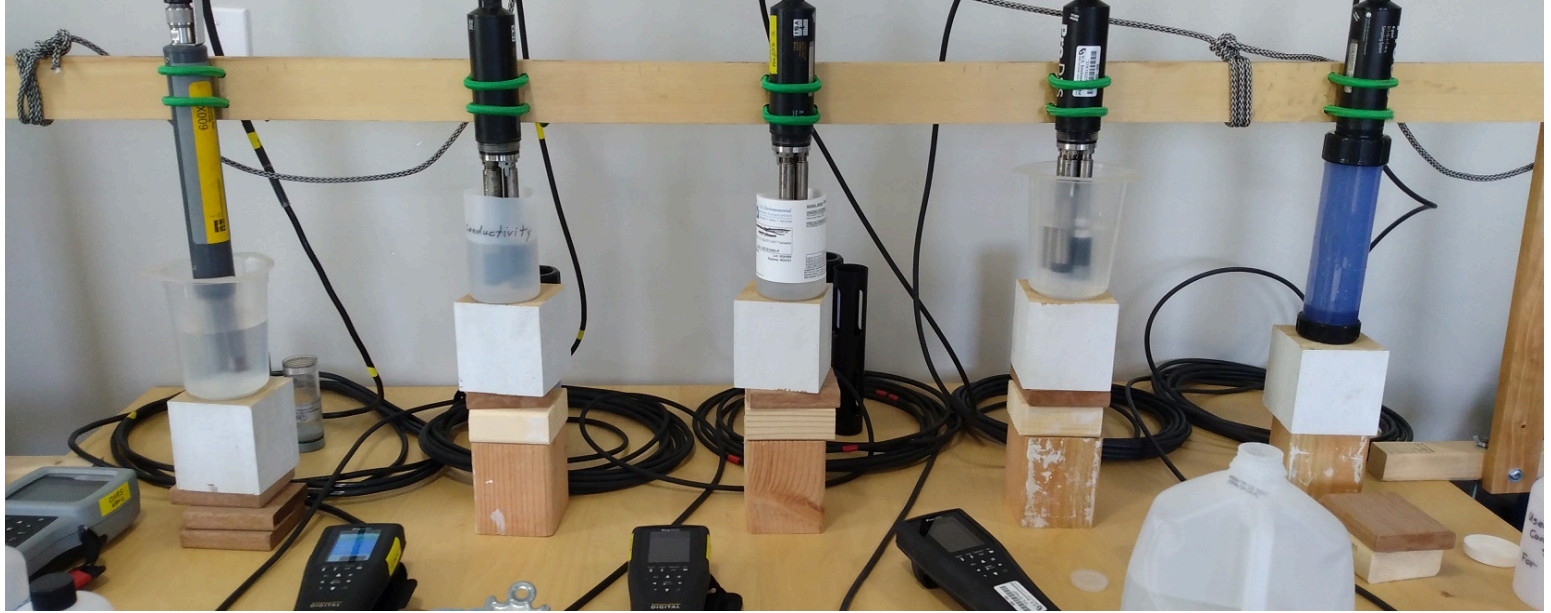
It has been a year of continued growth for OARS. Our Board of Directors expanded to 15 people, all donating their time and energy to the OARS mission. We received exciting new grants and opportunities, allowing staff scientists to expand their expertise and outreach into the area of culvert assessments, macroinvertebrate sampling, climate resilience planning, and continued dam removal and ecological restoration activities. A ruling in a civil lawsuit resulted in OARS working with the Nashobah Praying Indians to assess water and sediment quality in portions of our watershed.

OARS held our first NECKRA Point Series Race on the Concord River and welcomed Abby McCarthy as our new Water Quality Manager.

We are proud of the science-based environmental work on which the organization was founded, and are especially thankful for loyal volunteers, members, donors, partners, and two exceptional TerraCorps Service Members.

~ OARS Board and Staff '26





Water Science

From the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) website: "data from volunteer programs supports our efforts to assess surface waters, manage non-point sources of pollution (NPS) and calculate total daily maximum loads (TMDLs)... Volunteers collecting high-quality data can increase the number of waterbodies that MassDEP can assess, protect, and restore."

Water Quality Monitoring is the core of OARS' work to safeguard the health of the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord rivers and watershed, an area that encompasses 399 square miles, 33 towns, and 3 cities.

2025 was the organization's 34th consecutive year collecting water quality data and 7th year collecting bacteria data.

OARS' monitoring program provides sound scientific information on long-term trends in the condition of the rivers and is used to support regulatory decisions, including the federal Clean Water Act that requires states to submit reports on the status of their waterbodies every two years.

The Water Quality Program is generously supported by:

the **SuAsCo Wild & Scenic River Stewardship Council**,
the **Greater Lowell Community Foundation**,
the **Schaeffer Family Foundation**, and
the **Commonwealth of Massachusetts**.

The program is made possible by dedicated **volunteers** who spend many early-morning hours collecting and delivering water samples.



Volunteers

In 2025, OARS' water quality volunteer team collected 225 water samples from the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord rivers and their tributaries. Volunteers removed invasive water chestnut at 8 community pulls and removed debris from our rivers at 16 cleanup sites.

We thank our volunteers for their continued efforts to advance OARS' mission!

38

water quality volunteers

108

invasive species removal volunteers

54

river cleanup volunteers

117

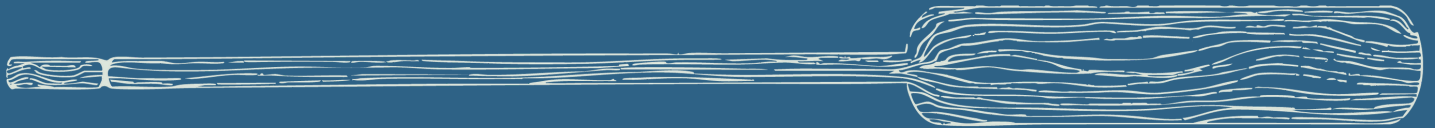
water quality volunteer hours

25

culvert assessment volunteers

1200+

OARS members



2025 Impact Numbers

126K+

water chestnut rosettes removed

400+

pounds of trash removed

225

water quality samples collected

14

bacteria monitoring sites

8

Hudson water quality special study sites

6

chlorophyll sites

8

water chestnut pulls

51

community events & programs

64

Concord River Race participants

3

macroinvertebrate study sites

3

active dam removal projects

3

impoundments monitored for biomass coverage



New Studies

Macroinvertebrates

OARS' Water Quality Monitoring and Ecological Restoration Program Managers launched a macroinvertebrate study as an additional water quality and ecosystem health indicator.

Team members took aquatic insect samples at 3 sites along Baiting Brook in Framingham and River Meadow Brook in Chelmsford to explore the diversity of macroinvertebrate species found in each location. Certain macroinvertebrates can tolerate polluted habitats, and their presence in a stream can be indicative of poor water quality, while other species require clean and healthy stream conditions to survive.

The composition of macroinvertebrates found at each sampling location can then be studied as an indicator of water and habitat quality. The 2025 sampling data is now being processed and reviewed.

macroinvertebrate (noun)

: any animal without a backbone and large enough to be seen with the naked eye



Remediating Industrial Pollution

In 2025, the Conservation Law Foundation won a civil lawsuit against a local company for decades of negligence and pollution of Beaver Brook, Mill Pond, Forge Pond, and the Assabet River. The ruling awarded \$485,000 to OARS and the Nashobah Praying Indians to launch a four-year study to monitor and remediate the affected areas. Monitoring is scheduled to begin in 2026.

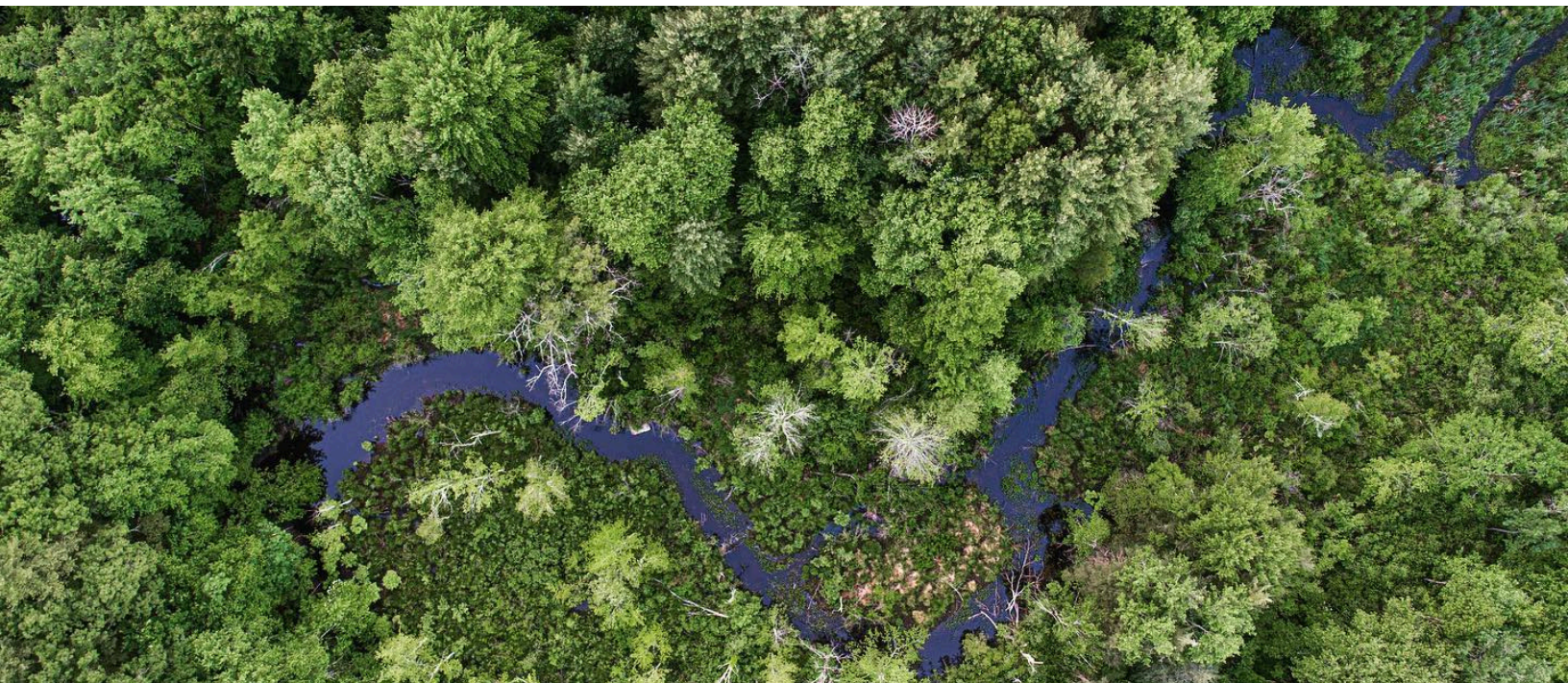
Ecological Restoration

OARS' commitment to ecological restoration started with annual volunteer-led river cleanups to remove debris from our waterways. Over time, that work expanded to include invasive species removal, culvert assessments, dam removal and river restoration projects, and, beginning in 2025, broader climate resilience initiatives across the watershed.

Invasive Aquatic Plants: The story goes that a Harvard professor accidentally introduced the invasive water chestnut (*Trapa natans*) to our rivers when looking for a decorative plant for a friend's backyard pond. This aggressive invasive plant spreads quickly, destroying ecosystems and taking over waterways. In 2025, 108 community volunteers removed upwards of 126,000 water chestnut rosettes from the rivers, an increase of over 20,000 rosettes compared to 2024 data.

Aging and Outdated Infrastructure: Every time you drive over a brook or stream, there is likely a culvert carrying water beneath the road. Many of these structures are decades old, undersized, poorly positioned, or have not been properly maintained, sometimes acting like small dams or causing erosion and flooding issues. In 2025, OARS staff and trained volunteers assessed more than 75 culverts using North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative (NAACC) protocols to evaluate aquatic organism passage and culvert condition, helping municipalities prioritize future upgrades that improve flood resilience, infrastructure stability, wildlife habitat, and stream connectivity.

The SuAsCo (Sudbury-Assabet-Concord) Climate Collaborative: 2025 marked the launch of a new regional effort to strengthen climate resilience across the watershed. Supported through a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant awarded to the Town of Concord, OARS, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the Collaborative is helping communities work together to build a long-term framework for coordinated watershed-scale planning, data sharing, and climate adaptation.





3 Dam Removal Projects

There are 163 documented dams in our watershed. In 2025, OARS advanced 3 dam removal projects in our ongoing efforts to restore river health, reconnect aquatic habitat, and bolster ecosystem resilience to climate change. OARS functions as the project manager for these dam removals, serving as the liaison between dam owners, project engineers, and stakeholders and organizing community outreach efforts.

TALBOT MILLS DAM, Billerica

Status: With the design and much of the environmental review process now complete, we are moving through final permitting and funding coordination. Construction, anticipated in 2027, will reconnect more than 135 miles of upstream habitat for migratory fish and improve climate resilience along the Concord River.








WHEELER POND DAM, Berlin

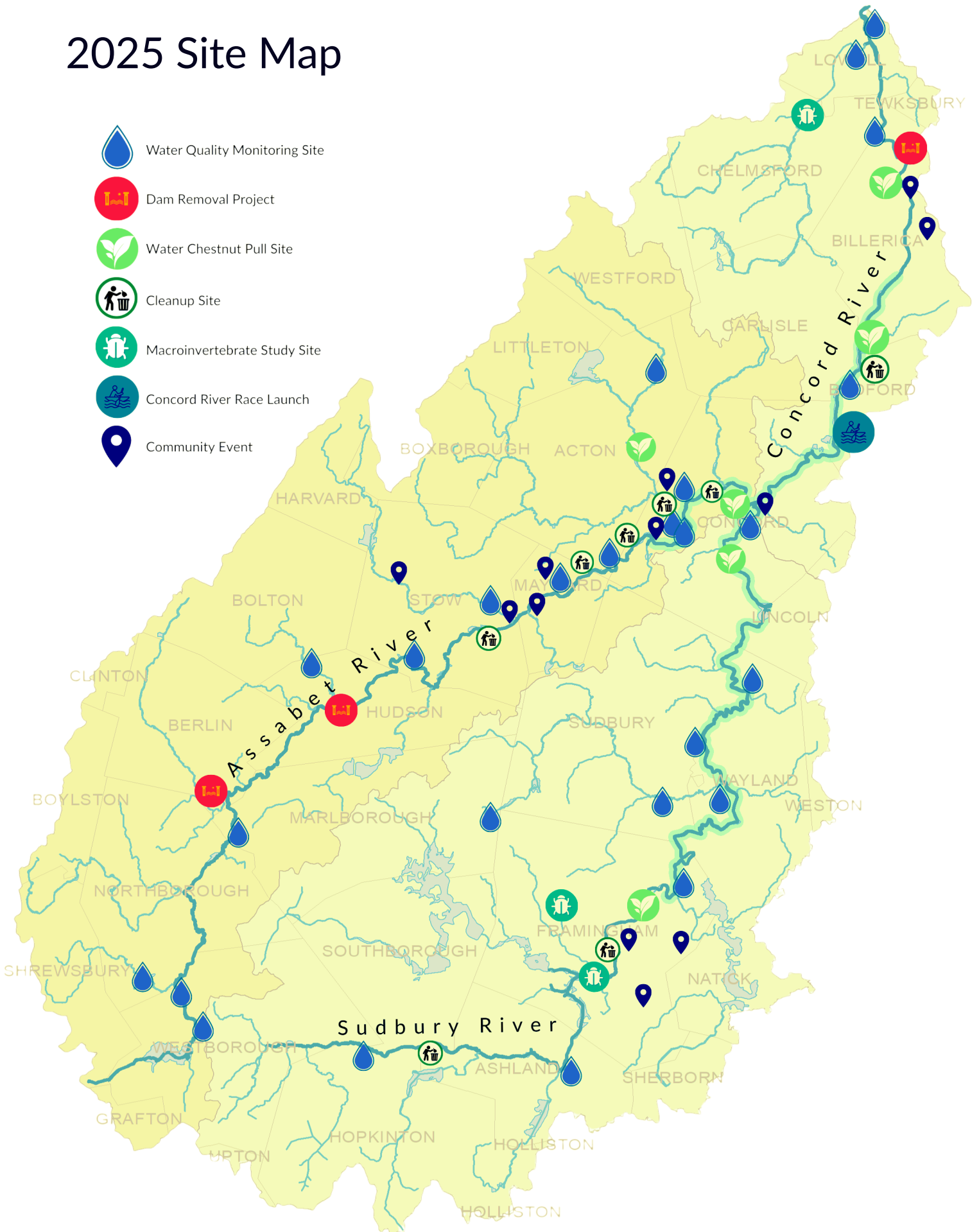
Status: After receiving an Order of Conditions from the Berlin Conservation Commission, a permit regulating and approving project activity, we will move through federal permitting in accordance with Section 106, which considers effects to historic properties, and Section 404, a mandate on dredge and fill material. Construction is set for 2027 pending final approvals and funding.

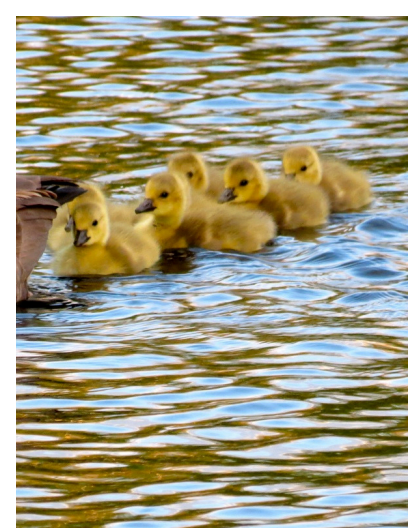
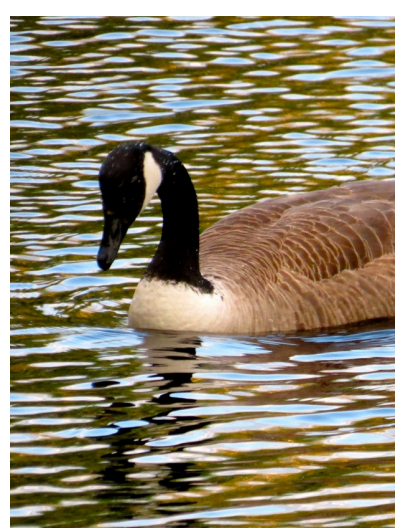
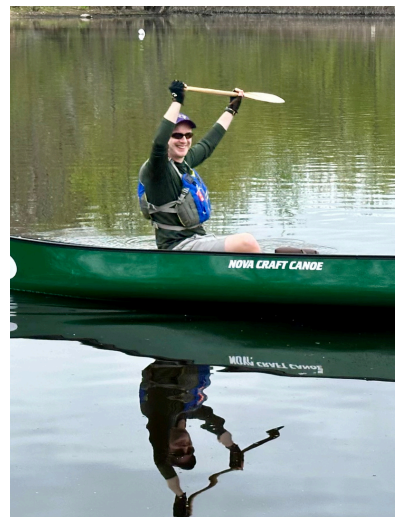
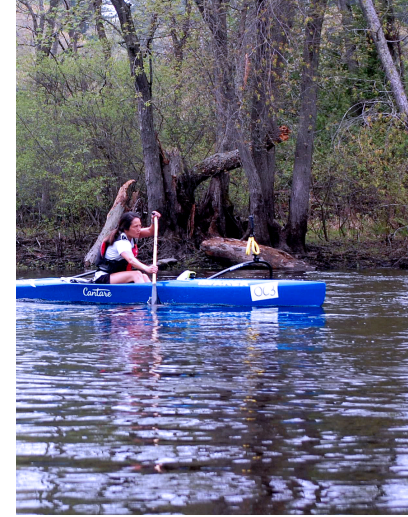
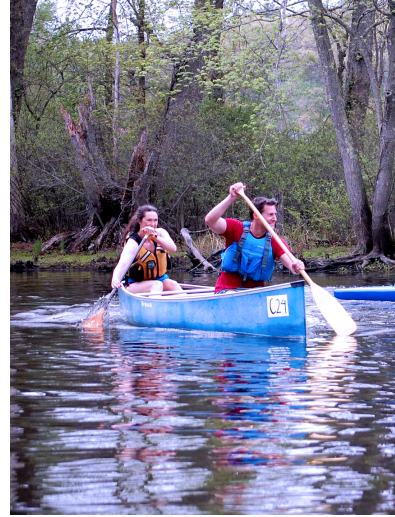
MAIN STREET DAM, Hudson

Status: We are currently working with project engineers on feasibility and preliminary designs, conducting community informational sessions, and advancing environmental review with the aim of potential restoration of Danforth Brook.

2025 Site Map

-  Water Quality Monitoring Site
-  Dam Removal Project
-  Water Chestnut Pull Site
-  Cleanup Site
-  Macroinvertebrate Study Site
-  Concord River Race Launch
-  Community Event





Programs and Services Growth

OARS has seen substantial and impactful growth over the past four years for our programs and services. Below is a graph of funding growth passing through our programs and a breakdown of how much funding went to each of those programs in 2025.

\$98,123

2022

\$389,737

2023

\$516,006

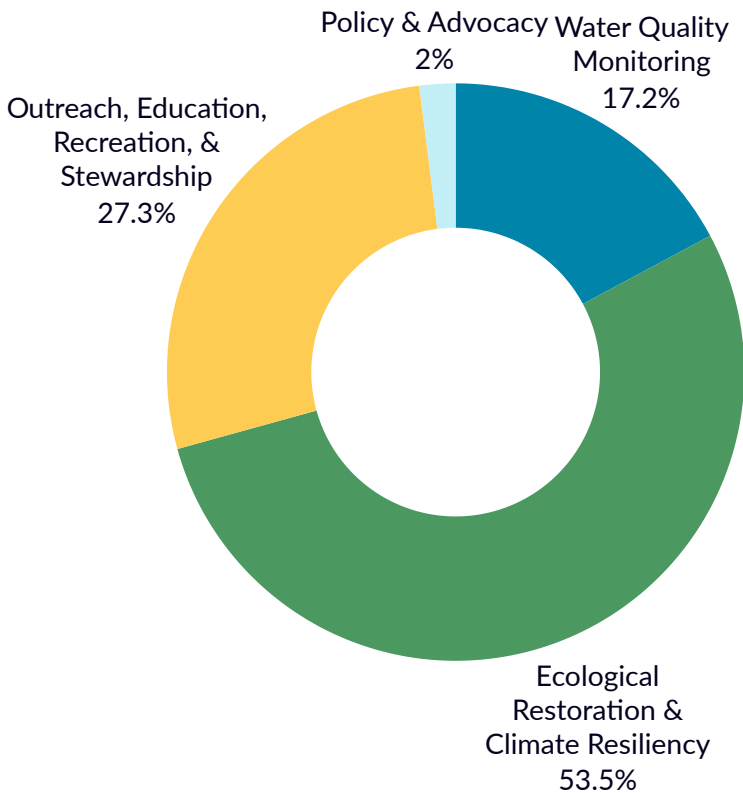
2024

\$578,678

2025

Financial Overview

Programmatic Expenditures for 2025 (by percentage)



Functional Expenditures, Programs and Services Total Funding Passing Through to Programs & Services, 2022-2025



OARS thanks you for your support, be it financial, in your community, or on our rivers.



For more information about OARS
visit www.oars3rivers.com or email
office@oars3rivers.com.