



# RÍOS to RIVERS

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF RIVER STEWARDS

## 2023 Annual Report



*The fate and well-being of our rivers and the ecosystems that they nourish rests in the hands of future generations of river communities. Ríos to Rivers invests in underserved and Indigenous youth who are intimately connected to their local waters and supports them in their development as the next generation of environmental stewards.*

*2023 was an exciting year to broaden the reach of our programs and deepen our impact. We are grateful for the support we have received from our donors, which has been instrumental in helping us achieve the milestones outlined in this report. We are excited about all that is already underway in 2024 and eager to share what lies ahead.*



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*“Right now, we have more power than any of our ancestors, and they’re all counting on us to take that power and make sure that we’re protecting what’s important. As tribal people, we don’t have a choice. It’s not something you choose to be an advocate and choose to be an environmentalist. It’s in our DNA.”*

— Danielle Frank, Hupa Tribal Member, Yurok descendant and Ríos to Rivers Board Member

# Paddle Tribal Waters (PTW)

*Klamath River, California, and Oregon*

PTW offers a positive way to celebrate the historic removal of the dams on the Klamath River and support the sovereignty of the Klamath Basin Tribal nations. The program’s goal is to train a group of Indigenous youth to learn to whitewater kayak in hopes of becoming the first people to paddle the restored river from source-to-sea. As the young paddlers reconnect sections of the Klamath River that have not flowed freely for more than a century, they use kayaking to galvanize a movement while reconciling a stolen history and building a future of hope and healing.

With your support, we were able to continue the second year of whitewater and leadership training for the first cohort of 14 PTW youth that began in 2022, expand the intensive training to include another 16 Native youth in a second cohort, prepare five young adults as instructors in training, and engage more than a hundred community members in river-based activities. Here are some snapshots of what the PTW participants have been learning and doing.

## 2023 Milestones

### The dams start coming down!

The historic dam removal process – to be undertaken over several years - began in 2023, and our program ensured that Native youth received first-hand experiences learning about the process and what restoration can mean not only for the river but for all who depend on it.



Ríos to Rivers Board Member Danielle Frank (Hupa) presents to PTW participants about the dam removal process during a tour of Iron Gate, COPCO 1 and COPCO 2.



## Paddle Tribal Waters - Cohort 2

In June, we built on the success of last year's summer training and held a two-week course for a new cohort of 16 Native Youth and two Native kayak instructors-in-training from the Klamath and Deschutes River Basins. As a measure of the success of our first year's program and community outreach efforts, we had more prospective students than we had the ability to bring into the program - with 30 amazing applicants for 16 spots. This positive response reflects increased community engagement and support for the program and solidifies our commitment to providing more programming to meet this growing demand next year.

The Cohort 2 Summer Training was hosted at Otter Bar Kayak Lodge (Konomihu Shasta and Karuk ancestral lands) where professional kayak instructors taught the basics of whitewater kayaking. Students gained proficiency in foundational paddle strokes, river running techniques, and kayak rolling. They developed the confidence to successfully and safely paddle class II-III rapids on the Klamath River.

The students also engaged in leadership classes each day, where they learned about river stewardship and local Traditional Ecological Knowledge. The course also included community days in which students learned from local tribal members, and shared what they have been learning with family and community members.



Cohort 2 student Tasia (Karuk) kayaking her first rapids on the Klamath River.



Lead Kayak Instructor Ben Morton helping Carmen (Hupa) put her spray skirt on for the first time.



## Paddle Tribal Waters - Cohort 1

In July 2023, we completed a nine-day training for Cohort 1. They practiced their kayaking skills for four days on the Trinity River and then traveled to visit the Klamath Dams to see the beginning of the demolition process. After the visit to the dams the cohort headed up to the Upper Klamath to experience one of the biggest sections of whitewater on the Klamath River, “Hell’s Corner. Working with Momentum Rafting, the youth rafted the Class IV section of the Klamath River, which is currently the most challenging section of the river. This experience gave the young paddlers an idea of what is in store for their planned first descent of the free-flowing river, as this section is most similar to the potential whitewater hidden under the dams that are being removed. Exposure to this level of whitewater raised their understanding of the challenges ahead and inspired their motivation for continued training and skill-building.



Paddle Tribal Waters Cohort 1 on the Trinity River



Ruby (Quartz Valley) and ‘A:de’ts (Hupa) scouting Smoker Falls, a class III rapid, with Kayak Coach, Cole Moore



## Paddle Tribal Waters - Cohort 1 (Continued)

They then participated in a training with the nonprofit Diversify Whitewater. The PTW students were able to support the community members who were experiencing whitewater for the first time. PTW students were able to step into a position of mentorship for many of the Diversify Whitewater participants and shined as Native leaders on the water. The program deepened relationships with the community and among the cohort.



Professional kayaker Rush Struges providing students with pointers on surfing waves.

## Exposure to Different Rivers and College

In mid-April 2023, PTW collaborated with the University of Oregon in Eugene to host a four-day program focused on kayak instruction and an introduction to college opportunities. Students connected with various Native American programs on campus attended multiple events with the Native American Student Union (NASU), and engaged in a campus tour.



Eugene Program Cohort



## Deschutes River Training Program

In addition to overnights on the Klamath River, in early October, the combined cohorts of PTW students trained and deepened bonds over three days of overnight kayaking on the Deschutes River, located on The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs land in Oregon, the home river for four of our PTW students. From developing more reliable combat kayak rolls to stronger friendships, the confidence and connections formed over the 3 days of paddling together transcend far beyond navigating a river. Participants learned as a group and were provided one-on-one training that fostered their paddling skills, confidence, and excitement for their role as leaders to celebrate what will be the largest dam removal in history, and for their potential to start local Indigenous-led paddle clubs.



**Julian (Hupa) cooking salmon harvested from the Klamath in the Traditional form.**

## Continued Skill-Building

Throughout the winter, PTW hosted seven pool sessions in central locations across Oregon to provide opportunities for the Paddle Tribal Waters youth to continue to practice and improve their kayak skills. At these sessions, students worked with world-class kayak instructors on underwater composure, rolling, and specific whitewater kayaking techniques, such as paddle stroke practice, edging, and bracing. These pool sessions have had a huge impact on increasing students' comfort and ability when getting back on the river.



**Julia and Kiahna (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs) at the Hood River pool during one of seven roll sessions hosted this past winter by Paddle Tribal Waters.**





## Native Instructor Training Program

In October, 2023 we conducted a five day “Training for Trainers” program for our Native staff who are in the process of becoming kayak instructors. Staff were provided the opportunity to develop their river skills with one-on-one training. In addition to this, we were offered a no cost 10 day guide training course in Costa Rica to one of our Native staff members. We are excited to continue to develop our Training for Trainers program and provide more opportunities for more certifications and job opportunities.



Danielle Frank (Hupa) and Amada Lang (Karuk) participating in the Training for Trainers program in Hood River, OR.



## Film and Storytelling

We have been collaborating with Rush Sturges and River Roots Productions and a Native Storytelling Council that our team developed to document the PTW participants' journey as kayakers and leaders through a number of short films. The films have shown at numerous film festivals and used for recruitment and raising awareness. The film interviews with the students at the beginning, middle and end of programs serve as a means to collect testimonies on the impact of programming. Thanks to your support, we created an additional three short films conveying the experiences of the students and as well as providing information about the dam removal process.

**Below are links to the following short films we produced in 2023**

[PTW Cohort 2: "Bring the Salmon Home"](#)

[Short film made in collaboration with American Whitewater](#)

[Deschutes Short Film](#)

## Film Festival Awards

We are excited to share that our first "Paddle Tribal Waters" film won the "Best Short Film" at Wild and Scenic Film Festival, Shining Mountain Film Festival and International Avante Garde Film Festival. It was the best film at Documentaries Without Borders International Film Festival. It won the Peoples Choice and best moving film at La Crosse Adventure Film Festival and the Paddling Film Festival and it was awarded the best Indigenous film at Outer Banks Environmental Film Festival. The film has been part of the official selection of over 20 other film festivals.

## Films in production

The Paddle Tribal Waters Academy students are currently working in their media class to produce a film about their semester long experience. We are nearing completion of a sizzle edit for the feature film that we are producing about the Paddle Tribal Waters program and planned first whitewater source to sea descent of the Klamath River.



Jayden (Hupa) learning to use one of the professional cameras in media class during the 2023 Cohort 2 Program.



*Paddle Tribal Waters* won "Best Short Film" at Wild and Scenic Film Festival and was part of the official selection at MountainFilm Telluride



## WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2024?

### **Paddle Tribal Waters Academy**

Currently, our PTW semester-long program with World Class Academy is underway!

Launched in January 2024 in Alto BioBío, Chile, 13 youth from Klamath River Basin tribal communities are participating in five months of kayaking and academic studies as they travel throughout Chile and the Pacific Northwest of the United States. An Indigenized high school curriculum was developed in collaboration with World Class Academy and three indigenous members of the Ríos to Rivers team.

This extraordinary intensive experience will equip students with the river and expedition skills necessary to become the first group to paddle the Klamath River in its entirety once it is freed of dams.

### **Cohort 3**

In July 2024, 16 more students will be welcomed to the Paddle Tribal Waters program with a two week kayak and leadership program held at Otter Bar Kayak Lodge in the Klamath River Basin.

### **Raft Guide Training**

A group of Paddle Tribal Waters alumni will participate in a raft guide program.

### **Whitewater and Medical Certifications**

PTW Students will take part in American Canoe Association Swift Water Rescue and Wilderness First Responder certification courses.

# Kayakimün

*Biobío River Basin, Chile*

Kayakimün (“Kayak Knowledge” in Mapudungun) is a Ríos to Rivers program that trains Mapuche-Pehuenche youth and adults in whitewater rafting and kayaking skills and creates a platform where ancestral wisdom about the environment can be shared. The Mapuche-Pehuenche people have stewarded the basin for generations, living in community-oriented reciprocity with the land and water. After decades of struggle with mega dam development on the river, Kayakimün represents an opportunity for cultural reclamation, community-building, and reconnection to a sacred river. Combining conservation and Indigenous empowerment with watersports, the program aims to showcase and protect biodiversity and a traditional way of life.

In February of 2023, Kayakimün launched its first two-week program on the Biobío River in Chile. This program was a result of enthusiastic collaboration and commitment of many community members, and provided training in whitewater kayaking, river stewardship, and advocacy for 16 Mapuche-Pehuenche youth.



Chile’s Biobío River basin is enormously important as a bio-diverse ecosystem and to the culture of the Mapuche Pehuenche people, who comprise 85% of the Alto Biobío territory. This indigenous community is vulnerable due to a lack of economic opportunities, migration by young people, and scarce possibilities for sports or activities that promote their natural heritage. Yet young women are leading community revitalization and urgently working to stop further damage from hydro and mono-culture projects.



*“These youths are the voices of this territory. I want to help share the necessary tools so they can become the voices and guardians of this place. If there are people with the strength and energy to say ‘I’m going to defend my river. I’m going to help the community,’ things will change.”* — Fernanda Purrán, Director of Ríos to Rivers Chile

### **Year-Long Programming**

This intensive program was followed by a weekend trip to Pucón with Kayakimün students, a weekend trip to the “Ñuble Fest” river protection festival in the Ñuble River Basin, and ten other days of programming throughout the year for a total of 26 days of river training.

### **What’s in Store for 2024?**

We are excited to report that our Kayakimün program continues strong into 2024. For two and a half weeks in January, Mapuche-Pehuenche youths and adults gathered on the BioBio to learn kayaking, rafting, cultural values, and leadership skills. Ríos to Rivers staff and some PTW alumni from tribal communities in the USA were able to join in the experience, cross-fertilizing knowledge and passion for protecting rivers.



# Amazonian Rivers Initiative (ARI)

*Beni River Basin, Bolivia*

In what may be the world's most biologically diverse Protected Area, Madidi National Park, members from five Indigenous communities gathered to inaugurate a multi-year Initiative that would cultivate a new generation of local river stewards and leaders. In the face of extractive gold mining and mega dam projects, these Indigenous youth see an alternative future for their communities and territories; one that depends on a river that runs clean and free, and that uplifts their communities in a positive direction.

Rios to Rivers' Amazonian Rivers Initiative (ARI) is a cultural exchange program that provides Bolivian Indigenous youth with relevant skills to support them in protecting their ancestral lands and the threatened rivers of the Bolivian Amazon. Through this program, participants receive intensive training in leadership-building, athletic whitewater kayaking and rafting, multimedia, and stewardship and advocacy. Groups not only bear witness to unparalleled natural beauty and biodiversity as they travel the threatened tributaries of the Beni River, but actively participate in local conservation efforts by gaining critical skills that can help share their voices with the world. A powerful element of this program is that it connects Bolivian community members with Indigenous representatives (R2R alumni) from across North and South America in order to share lived cultural experiences and form empowering lifelong bonds.



## Building Momentum

In the Fall of 2022, we launched our program on the Beni River as well as Bolivia's first-ever Indigenous-managed whitewater sports club, made possible by the generous financial and gear support by your. Bolivian youth plan to use this club as a way to form local river stewards, pave the way for adventure tourism, and protect their sacred rivers. The program also cultivates a group of communicative and film-savvy local advocates dedicated to addressing the many issues their communities face. In 2023, students who participated in our program were inspired to create a song and [music video](#), sharing with the world their view of what is at stake, and thanks to your' support, Ríos to Rivers was able to create and release a [teaser](#) for the upcoming short film inspired by this program, Guardians of Rivers and Life. The film showcases local Indigenous leadership in the fight to defend these sacred waters.

*“On behalf of me and the Mancomunidad Indígena Communities of the Beni, Tuichi y Quiquibey Rivers, we would like to thank Ríos to Rivers for having had a great impact on our youth. Thank you for carrying out this program, which I now see is the best way to train new leaders for the future.” – Ruth Alipaz Cuqui*



ARI participant Claudia speaking at the ARI program closing hosted by the municipality of Rurrenabaque, Bolivia



Aerial view of an illegal gold mine on one of the tributaries to the Beni River



## Elevating The Issues

In October 2023, Ríos to Rivers brought Ruth Alipaz Cuqui (Uchupiamonas community), river defender and leader in the Beni River Basin, to the United States to share the concerns and activities underway to protect the Beni River, as well as the role of kayaking in doing so, including leading a discussion at the University of California Berkeley's Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and meeting with other environmental NGO's working in the Amazon to make space for future collaboration.



Ruth Alipaz Cuqui as guest speaker at UC Berkeley's Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies

## What's in store for 2024?

This February 2024, fourteen Bolivians traveled to the Biobío River in Chile to participate in an intensive 2-week whitewater paddling and leadership training course and cultural exchange experience with Mapuche-Pehuenche community members. There, they witnessed with their own eyes the impacts that mega-dams can have on a region and community, learned about adventure ecotourism and cultural resilience, and explored world-class whitewater sections on another one of South America's most important rivers.

Creating the physical infrastructure (gear and systems) and inspiring local enthusiasm for a whitewater club in 2022 and 2023 was a crucial first step. Now comes the multi-year investment of forming local whitewater experts and instilling a conscientious river sports culture that will enable the club to be self-sufficient and run year-round. 2024 is a huge step forward for the self-sufficiency of the club to take off. Alumni left our 2024 February program with the skills, knowledge, and capacity to begin to safely make river trips outside of our intensive R2R programs, representing a huge milestone for ARI's success.





# Advocating for Free-Flowing Rivers

*Ensuring Indigenous Voices Are Heard*

In 2023, Ríos to Rivers continued to raise concerns about the impact to the environment and the climate crisis from efforts to dam free-flowing rivers, supporting Indigenous alumni of our programs to provide clear and compelling evidence at local and global forums, and working in coalition with many other organizational allies.



Ríos to Rivers' Board Member and Development Coordinator Danielle Frank (center) at the UN's COP28. Danielle participates in a demonstration with her grandmother, Kathryn Diane Horinek during the COP. - Photo The Associated Press

## On the Global Stage: UnDam the United Nations

Danielle Frank, R2R Board Member, spoke on a panel at the United Nation's Climate Change Conference in the United Arab Emirates (COP28 in Dubai), along with others from the World Bank, USAID, representatives from Madagascar, Gabon and Pakistan. More about Danielle's trip to COP28 in the press [here](#).

## Local Forums:

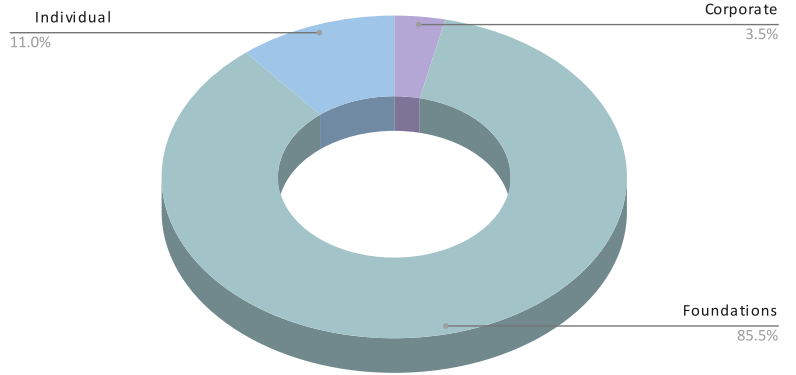
In August, Paul Wilson and Amada Lang attended a California Water Quality Control Board hearing on setting in-stream flows for the imperiled Scott and Shasta Rivers, where they provided testimony about how overallocation of water has harmed generations of their people's ability to harvest their traditional foods and engage in cultural and spiritual practices. In September, staff worked with students to share their thoughts and concerns on the emergency in-stream flow requirements with California Governor Newsom via video testimony.



# 2023 Ríos to Rivers Financials

## Income

Foundations	\$ 857,822.26
Individual	\$ 110,420.26
Corporate	\$ 35,250.00
Interest	\$ 8,701.06
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$ 1,012,193.58</b>



## Expenditures

### Program Expenses (88.7%)

Community Events	\$ 6,064.75
Filmmaking	\$ 42,186.27
Program Salaries	\$ 224,622.84
Direct Program Expenses	\$ 365,307.23

**Sub-Total Program Expenses \$ 638,181.09**

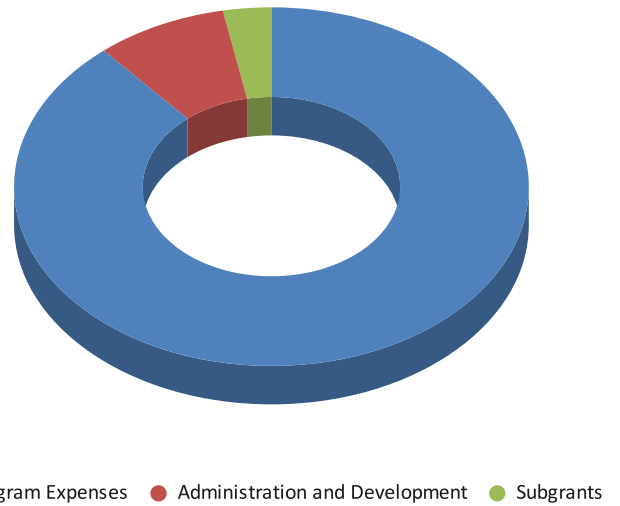
### Administration & Development (8.3%)

Operational Expenses	\$ 53,292.09
Fundraising	\$ 6,227.78

**Sub-Total Administration & Development \$ 59,519.87**

**Subgrants (3%) \$21,785.80**

**TOTAL EXPENDITURES \$719,486.76**



## Balance Sheet (As of 12/31/2023)

Current Assets	\$ 429,873.68
Fixed Assets	\$ 53,102.85
Total Liabilities	\$ 36,295.86

**Total Equity \$ 446,680.67**



**From all of us at Ríos to Rivers, THANK YOU!**

**For helping us to create an incredible year of programming!**



For more information on any of our programs, please contact  
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