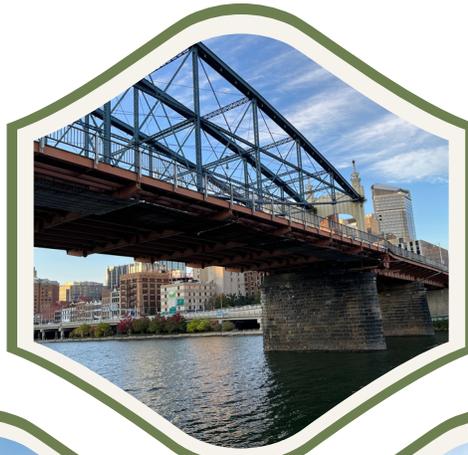


# 2022

## ANNUAL REPORT





2022 was a big year of expansion and growth for Three Rivers Waterkeeper. We are excited to share what we accomplished this year because of your support!

## ABOUT US

Three Rivers Waterkeeper (3RWK) was founded in 2009 and aims to improve and protect the water quality of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers. These waterways are critical to the health, vitality, and economic prosperity of our region and communities. We are both a scientific and legal advocate for the community, working to ensure our three rivers are protected and safe to drink, fish, swim and enjoy.

**OUR MISSION** is to protect the water quality of the Monongahela, Allegheny, and Ohio Rivers, and their respective watersheds.

**OUR VISION** is to have drinkable, fishable, swimmable water in the Monongahela, Allegheny, and Ohio Rivers, and their respective watersheds.

## FIND US ONLINE!

[ThreeRiversWaterkeeper.org](https://www.ThreeRiversWaterkeeper.org)

@3RWaterkeeper 



## We are your WATERKEEPER

We are a member organization of the Waterkeeper Alliance whose mission is to protect our right to clean water in communities around the world. The Alliance is a global movement of united organizations working for clean, healthy, and abundant water for all people and the planet. Together, we make up a vast network aimed at preserving and protecting our waters by connecting local Waterkeeper organization and affiliates worldwide. Waterkeeper Alliance unites more than 300 Waterkeeper organizations and affiliates that are on the frontlines of the global water crisis, patrolling and protecting more than 2.5 million square miles of rivers, lakes and coastal waterways on six continents.



## STAFF



**HEATHER HULTON VANTASSEL**  
Executive Director



**EVAN CLARK**  
Waterkeeper



**JESS FRISS**  
Water Advocate



**NATALIE DAVIDSON**  
Community Coordinator

## THANK YOU! 2022 SEASONAL STAFF



**KENICHI SHAY**  
Waterkeeper Assistant



**EMILY CUMPSTON**  
Legal Intern



**SAMANTHA LYNN**  
Legal Intern



**SETH BOOS**  
Legal Intern

## BOARD MEMBERS

**TIM FITCHETT**  
Board President

**SARAH QUESEN, PHD, MPH**  
Board Vice President

**RACHEL COOK**  
Board Treasurer

**KATE ZIDAR**  
Acting Secretary

**SEAN BRADY**  
Board Member

**JOSH POWELL**  
Board Member

**EMILY CONSTANTINE MERCURIO, PHD, PG**  
Board Member

## 2022 PAST BOARD MEMBERS

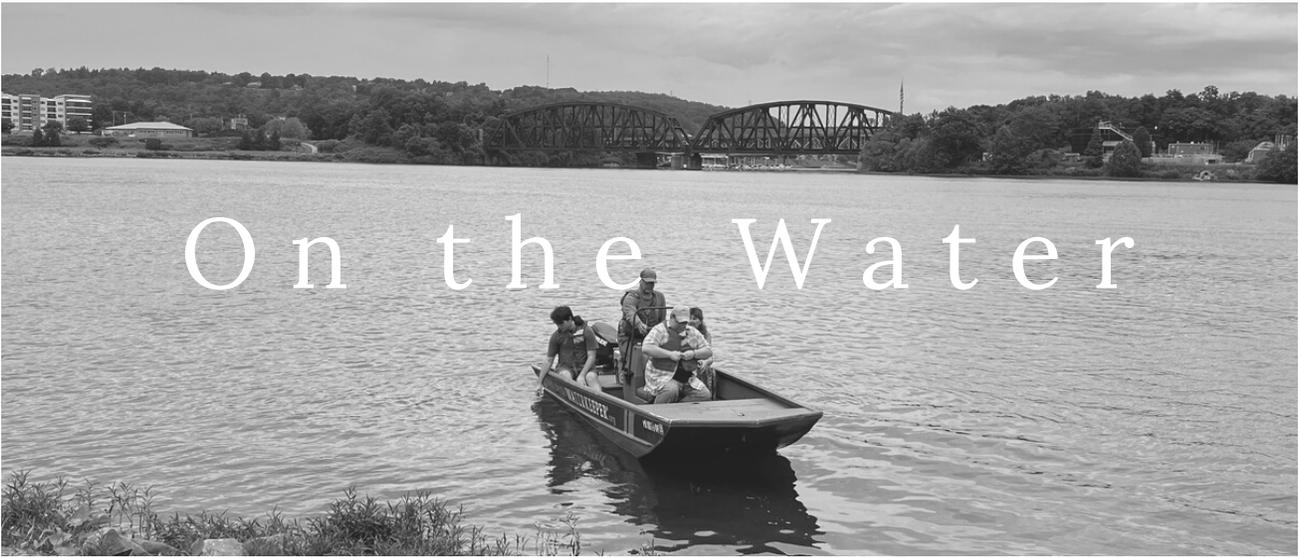
**REBECCA KIERNAN**

**KELSEY MCNAUL**

**LISA BROWN**

**KIM REFUSCO**

**JOSH EISENFELD**



# On the Water

Monitoring & Patrolling  
Pollution Response  
Baseline Data Collection  
Water Quality Analyses  
Mapping & Data Dissemination

**We patrol and monitor for pollution in our waterways by using high quality monitoring and sampling technologies to collect water sample.** We are part of an enormous effort by watershed organizations to collect and monitor water quality data in Western Pennsylvania. We partner with organizations to amplify efforts to create a scientific and legal approach to improving the water quality in our Three Rivers based on water data and our own patrols and visual assessments.

The presence of the 3RWK boat and kayaks on the three rivers is critical to improve the water quality through visible monitoring and patrols in areas where the threat to water quality is greatest. Threats that require rapid response and monitoring are reported to us by partner organizations, concerned community members, and community groups.

## BY THE NUMBERS

A breakdown of our On The Water initiatives for 2022:

**330** Hours Spent Patrolling the Rivers

**8** Pollution Reports Submitted to Regulating Agencies

**29** Targeted Sites Monitored

**7** Community Pollution Reports



Photo by Quinn Glabicki, PublicSource



Education about watersheds, clean water laws, and water quality issues  
 Community Engagement and Outreach  
 Educational Content & Resource Creation  
 3Rivers Watch Program

We aim to build lasting relationships with those who utilize the rivers for recreation and empower community members to become vocal water advocates. **We inform our communities of the threats to our waterways, involve them in the protection of water quality, and give them the tools to achieve our shared vision of fishable, swimmable, and drinkable water.** We also provide technical and legal assistance, mapping tools, and access to available information. We aim to educate and empower a new generation of river stewards.



## BY THE NUMBERS

A breakdown of our In The Community initiatives for 2022:

- 15 Outreach Events
- 17 Educational Programs
- 1,061 Total Program Participants
- 104 Volunteers
- 252 Volunteer Hours
- 5 3 Rivers Watch Trainings

We work in communities in Southwestern PA to address industrial pollution, stormwater pollution, habitat degradation, transportation of dangerous materials, oil and gas waste, and lack of enforcement of our clean water laws.



Monitoring permits and rulemakings  
 Advocating for clean water rights  
 Advocating for stricter regulations  
 Enforcing Clean Water Laws

Our model focuses on scientific and legal advocacy with the aim of holding polluters accountable to the law, particularly through the Clean Water Act. **We do this through regular review of water permits, collecting water quality data, and engaging in regulatory proceedings and permit applications.** We serve as an enforcer of the nation’s clean water laws where state and federal agencies have failed by combining scientific rigor with legal expertise .



## BY THE NUMBERS

A breakdown of our Through Advocacy initiatives for 2022:

- 29 Formal Comments or Letters Written to Protect Our Right to Clean Water
- 3 Mediated Efforts with Agencies to Hold Polluters Accountable
- 9 Coalition Efforts on Supporting Clean Water Efforts

ADVOCATING FOR OUR  
 RIGHT TO CLEAN WATER

# 2022 Highlights



## **February 19th**

We held our first event of the year with the Pittsburgh section of Outdoor Afro where we went for an educational Walk & Talk at Duck Hollow Trail along the Monongahela River.

## **April 4th**

We expanded our Shell Cracker Plant monitoring efforts by increasing to monthly Nurdle Patrols with Mountain Watershed Association & water sampling with 3 Rivers QUEST to understand baseline water quality.

## **May 29th**

A train derailment in Harmar Township led to petroleum distillate and nurdles to spill into the mouth of Little Deer Creek along the Allegheny River. We rapidly responded to the incident and continue to monitor the impacts.

## **July 12th**

We submitted a formal letter to the EPA regarding a permit for a wastewater injection well in Plum Borough due to the risk it posed to ground and surface water quality from a legal and scientific perspective.

## **October 15th**

We celebrated 50 years of the Clean Water Act (CWA) at Pittsburgh's CWA Festival followed by a sunset cruise on the 3 rivers with Rivers of Steel! On the 18th, the actual 50th Anniversary, we partnered with Allegheny Cleanways and Friends of the Riverfront to have a riverfront cleanup in Millvale.

## **December 11th**

We were invited to a local scout's meeting to talk about watersheds & pollution sources! It's exciting to see our next generation in action.

## **March 22nd**

We celebrated World Water Day by engaging with students at the University of Pittsburgh and at 3 Rivers Outdoor Company about the Clean Water Act and our water protection efforts.

## **April 22nd**

We partnered with Allegheny Cleanways for a riverfront cleanup around the mouth of Sandy Creek along the Allegheny River.

## **June 4th**

We held our first 3 Rivers Watch event at Kilbuck Boat Launch where we trained volunteers on how to spot and report pollution. We then patrolled for pollution with community members out on the Ohio River on kayaks.

## **August 22nd**

Our 3 Rivers Watch program was highlighted in a PublicSource article that spoke on the importance of connecting people to our waterways.

## **November 13th**

We held a 3 Rivers Watch training in partnership with Mountain Watershed Association and Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Community on spotting water pollution and nurdles near the Shell plant. The plant announced that it was officially starting operations that following week.



# In the Media

Three Rivers Waterkeeper maintains an online presence on social media to help share information and connect people to the waterways!

## SOCIAL MEDIA

1,100 Facebook Likes

1,097 Instagram Followers

241 Twitter Followers

7,779 TikTok Views

9,456 Website Page Views

## MEDIA MENTIONS

This year, we were mentioned in over **30 media sources** ranging from online news articles, television broadcasts, journals, and reports. Some highlights were:

[Kayaking the healing, but polluted, Allegheny River system](#) by Clare Sheedy, PublicSource

[Surveying the Ohio River for plastic nurdles, as Shell readies to open cracker](#) by Julie Grant, Allegheny Front

[Chemicals linked to birth defects are being dumped in Pittsburgh's rivers: Report](#) by Kristina Marusic, Environmental Health News

[What the Shell cracker plant looks like: The visible and invisible](#) by Anya Litvak, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Photo by Kris Maher, Wall Street Journal



Photo by Clare Sheedy, PublicSource



Photo by Julie Grant, The Allegheny Front



# REFLECTIONS



**JESS, WATER ADVOCATE**

**Memorable moment:** One of my favorite moments was when we went to Harrisburg for the PA Climate Convergence. It was so great to meet other people who are also working on environmental topics in this state!

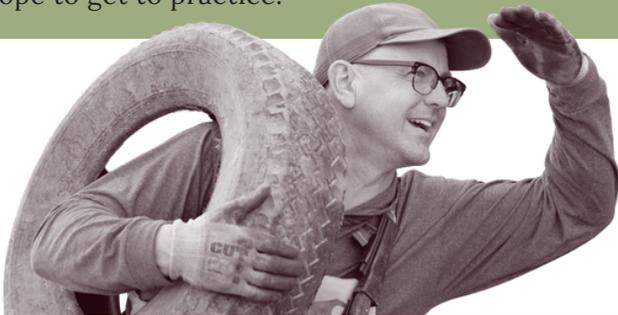
**Looking forward:** I'm looking forward to getting to spend time out on our rivers with others when it gets warmer! I got my boating license this year, and I hope to get to practice!



**NATALIE, COMMUNITY COORDINATOR**

**Memorable moment:** Tabling in Clairton for the first time gave me the chance to speak with children and parents from the community. It was great to see the kids excited to learn more about the Monongahela River.

**Looking forward:** Introducing more communities to the waterways. I want to help connect the neighborhoods that I work in with the rivers here in Pittsburgh. I am thrilled for my first time kayaking on the rivers when it warms up.



**EVAN, WATERKEEPER**

**Memorable moment:** I had so many huge moments as a Waterkeeper this year, from being asked to take on such a cool responsibility, to the train derailment, to meeting hundreds of Waterkeepers from around the world, reporting and "fixing" a huge continuing oil spill on the Monongahela. Ice on the Allegheny at night during a 14 hour sampling marathon, working with so many passionate staff, partners and volunteers and sitting in Fulton Commons with our staff and board and reflecting on how far we've come in a year.

**Looking forward:** Growing with our organization, building a stronger and farther-reaching network, and having a clear effect on the rivers and communities that are touched by them.



**HEATHER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**Memorable moment:** Celebrating 50 years of the Clean Water Act all year created a connection with our local community members and fellow waterkeepers across the globe, and that was inspiring. It reminds us of how far we've come in 50 years but also where we still need to go.

**Looking forward:** I am looking forward to seeing what our team can accomplish as we've grown our capacity!



Three Rivers Waterkeeper is a non-profit environmental organization working to hold polluters accountable and protect our water quality of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers. We can't do this without the generosity and support of our funders, supporters, volunteers, and sponsors. This work that we have been able to accomplish is because of you.

Thank you for all your support.

## Our Funders



**THE HEINZ  
ENDOWMENTS**



THE FORBES FUNDS



**POSNER  
FOUNDATION**  
of Pittsburgh

HOWARD HEINZ ENDOWMENT  
VIRA I. HEINZ ENDOWMENT

*Colcom Foundation*  
COMMITTED TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



## Our 2022 Sponsors



# YOUR DONATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE

**\$20** Print Materials

**\$50** Volunteer Supplies

**\$100** Community Work

**\$250** Water Sampling

**\$1,000** Monitoring & Patrolling

With direct support from our communities, we have the flexibility and capacity to respond to pollution incidents. We can't predict when and where pollution will happen, **but with your support, we can be there when it happens** and hold polluters accountable. Every dollar counts and goes towards protecting our waterways.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Hulton Vantassel".

**HEATHER HULTON VANTASSEL**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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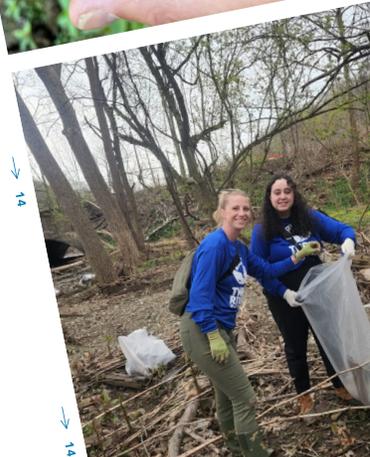
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HELP US PROTECT OUR WATER TODAY

[HTTPS://3RWK.ORG/DONATE](https://3rwk.org/donate)

