
FRIENDS OF THE MAD RIVER
Impact Report 2025-26

How to Live Well With a River

For more than 35 years, Friends of the Mad River has helped people connect with the land, the river, and the natural systems that sustain life in this valley. We keep returning to the same question: How do we live well with the river?

Climate change makes that question more urgent. Floods, warmer water, and changing conditions for plants and wildlife are reshaping the watershed and our experience of living here. Meeting these challenges takes sound science, close observation, and practical work to restore the natural systems that sustain both people and nature. It also takes a community that understands its relationship with the river and is willing to adapt and engage as that relationship changes.



This is the work FMR is committed to: learning from the watershed, putting that knowledge into practice, and bringing people together through education, restoration, and community partnerships. We want to help build a future in which caring for the watershed is simply part of what it means to live in the Mad River Valley.

At the core of this work is our relationship with the community. We listen to our neighbors, share what we learn, and bring people together to consider what the watershed needs and how we can respond. Local knowledge and experience matter. Our work is to build the connections and understanding that help our community care for the land and water in this special place.

Ira Shadis

Ira Shadis, Executive Director

The river has shaped this community for generations.

How we care for it will shape the generations to come.





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STAFF

Ira Shadis, Executive Director
Luke Foley, Education Manager
Julie Frost, Watershed Project Manager
Michelle Krieg, Restoration Nursery Manager
Rohan Press, Watershed Engagement Coordinator
Lisa Koitzsch, Office Manager

WHAT IS A WATERSHED?

A watershed is all the land where rainfall and runoff flow downhill into the same river system. The Mad River Watershed is the Valley's connected land and water system. From the high mountain rills and bogs of Granville Gulf and across the mountain hillsides, water flows through the forests, neighborhoods, farms, and open spaces of the valley before reaching the Mad River. Everything that happens across this landscape affects the health of the Mad River Watershed.



WHAT MAKES A WATERSHED HEALTHY?

A healthy watershed depends on many interconnected systems working together, including creeks and wetlands, groundwater, soils, forests and grasslands, and the built environments where people live and work. These systems influence how water moves through the landscape, how habitats function, how the river behaves, and how the Valley responds to flooding, drought, and climate change. Through diverse partnerships of neighbors, businesses, towns, and other organizations, Friends of the Mad River works to better understand and restore these interconnected relationships between the land, water, and community.

LAND

Ecologically informed and collaborative land stewardship efforts are restoring the Mad River Valley for wildlife and for future generations.



Habitat Restoration

STEWARDED FIVE RESTORATION SITES

Removed introduced knotweed, honeysuckle, and barberry along the river corridor and upland areas, and maintained tree planting sites - helping to restore 17 acres of habitat for birds, fish, and other wildlife.

MRV Knotweed Project Partnership

PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS

Expanded partnerships with local conservation commissions to advance introduced species removal efforts and identify restoration priorities on town lands. Co-hosted the Mad River Valley Knotweed Project UVM interns for five field days throughout the Summer.

Tree Planting

CO-HOSTED FIVE PUBLIC TREE PLANTING EVENTS

Hosted community tree planting events at Lareau Park, Farley Memorial Park, Clay Brook, and Fayston and Moretown restoration sites in partnership with the Waitsfield and Fayston Conservation Commissions and private landowners.

Landscape Mapping

GEODATABASE TOOL

Worked with Stone Environmental to build a geospatial database for tracking restoration projects from idea to implementation to stewardship - ensuring stability in work that often spans many years.





NATIVE PLANTS

Planting native trees and shrubs increases biodiversity, improves fish and wildlife habitat, provides important food and nectar sources for birds and pollinators, and sequesters carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Nursery Design & Build

MAD RIVER RESTORATION NURSERY
Launched the Mad River Restoration Nursery in Spring 2026 with the support of local contractors, school groups, and volunteers. Hosted an open house celebration in July.

Growing Native Plants

SEEDLINGS
Propagated our first 500 native plants, including shrub and black willow, red osier dogwood, speckled alder, silver maple, red oak, white pine, balsam poplar, quaking aspen, and Eastern cottonwood.

Wild Seed Collection

LOCAL ECOTYPES
Collected native seed throughout the watershed to be grown in the native plant nursery. Also launched a public seed collection campaign to ask private landowners to collect native seed on their property.



WATER

Since 1989, we've monitored the health of the Mad River and taken steps to improve water quality, flood resilience, and habitat for native brook trout.

Water Quality Monitoring

MAD RIVER WATCH
Monitored water quality and river health at 23 sites throughout the Mad River Watershed through the support of 29 regular volunteers. Mad River Watch is the longest continuous volunteer water quality monitoring dataset in the country, started in 1985.

Flood & Fish Friendly Roads

WIDENING CULVERTS
Advanced three culvert replacement projects to the engineering design stage - paving the way for construction of fish friendly and flood resilient structures in 2027 and 2028.

Stewardship for All

STREAM WISE & STORM SMART CONSULTATIONS
Staff provided free technical consultations on more than 15 properties. We traced the path water takes and helped homeowners finds ways to manage water, restore habitat, and build flood resilience. We directly supported implementing projects on three properties.

Water is Everywhere

WATERSHED PROJECTS
Secured regional funding, including a $39,580 grant to expand ongoing watershed project development, from wetland restoration to flood plain reconnection. More than 20 projects have been identified, with several moving to design and implementation.



Our waterways are among the Mad River Valley's most precious natural resources. They provide habitat, sustain wildlife, and shape the living landscapes that make this place home.

Keeping our waters clean and healthy is a shared responsibility. Friends of the Mad River works alongside landowners to restore habitat, shares water quality data with decision-makers, and reconnects waterways so fish and other aquatic life can move freely.

At its heart, our work is about being a good neighbor: to the landowners and land managers who care for this place, to the families who wade into the water each Summer, to the people downstream who live with the consequences of our choices, and to the wild communities that call this valley home.


FISHERIES DIVISION
VERMONT

EDUCATING YOUTH

Exploring ecosystems, stewardship, and our ecological identity.

Field Trips & Classroom Lessons

PARTNERED WITH SIX LOCAL SCHOOLS
Partnered with 31 teachers to lead 85 classroom and field-based lessons that helped connect more than 500 students to the watershed.

Stewardship

SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS
Our service learning projects turn classroom learning into meaningful action, giving students the opportunity to make a tangible difference in their community. From planting trees to creating educational materials about ecological restoration, students put their knowledge to work in ways that benefit both people and place.

Conservation Job Training

YEAR-LONG AMERICORPS FELLOWSHIP
Hosted a year-long AmeriCorps Fellow who supported all education and restoration programming.

HARWOOD HIGH INTERNSHIP
Mentored interns from Harwood High School in both 2025 and 2026.





COMMUNITY

Conservation starts with community. When people are informed and empowered, they can care for the places they love.

Outdoor Exploration

CLIMATE & ECOLOGY SERIES
Led five community walks and talks in wildlife tracking, migrations, floods, floodplains, and foliage.

WATERSHED ED SERIES
Hosted our second annual Watershed Ed series, bringing volunteers, partners, and teachers together to build naturalist skills and strengthen community connections.

FORAGER SERIES
Hosted six foraging workshops from April to August 2026, engaging community members in the sustainable harvest of local foods, medicines, fungi, clay, and fire-making materials.

Community Resilience

IRENE AT 15
Hosted an event in partnership with the Mad River Valley Planning District at Bridge Street Marketplace to honor the 15th anniversary of Tropical Storm Irene and celebrate the strength and resilience of our community. Over 200 community members joined us.

Nature Writing

WRITER SERIES & BOOK CLUB
Led a monthly Ecology Book Club in partnership with all three Mad River Valley libraries, connecting community members through environmental literature and local ecology.



Continuing Education

PHENOLOGY FRIDAY SERIES
Published weekly videos about nature as it changes through the seasons.

FILMS
Hosted film screenings and community discussions of The Beavers of Allen Brook and People of a Feather.


Coleman
Coleman Outfitter 15

CELEBRATING PLACE

The Mad River Watershed is a recreational gem. We host programs that help people connect to the landscape through celebration and play.

Run, Paddle, Bike, Ski

MAD RIVER TRIATHALON
Our third annual Mad River Triathlon brought together more than 450 participants to celebrate the watershed by foot, boat, bike, and ski. By experiencing the Mad River Valley through its waterways, trails, and changing seasons, participants deepen their connection to this place.

Balancing Recreation & Conservation

CLIMB IT FOR CLIMATE
Co-hosted a growing series of outdoor adventures and community discussions with the Mad River Valley Backcountry Coalition, engaging recreation enthusiasts in climate education and inspiring collective action to build a more resilient watershed.

CONSERVATION & RECREATION VISIONING
Provided leadership in local initiatives balancing recreational use with ecological wellbeing in the Mad River Valley. Hosted a screening of Attitude of Gratitude and a community discussion about balancing our love of outdoor recreation with the need to protect ecological integrity.

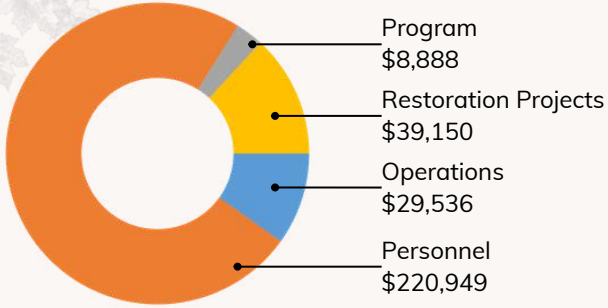
Connection to Place

RIVER FIRE
Hosted our second annual guided river cold plunge and fire ceremony with Drip Culture and Nordic Flow to bring groundedness and intention to the year ahead.

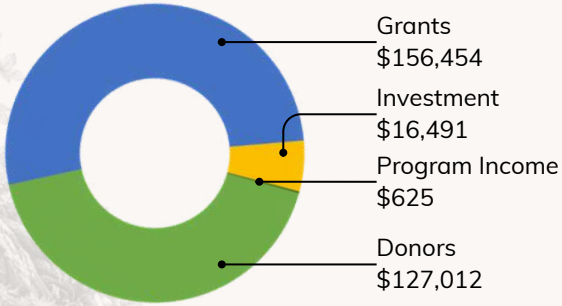


Finances at a Glance - Fiscal Year 2026

Expense - $298,523



Income - $300,582



A Growing Watershed Organization

- Since 2022, we've welcomed three full-time staff and an AmeriCorps member to join our team and enhance our education and restoration programs.
- We've expanded partnerships with local schools, libraries, and municipalities.
- We've helped dozens of landowners and hundreds of community members connect to the watershed and engage as stewards.

Our Goals for the Future

- We've built a strong foundation of donor support. We are working to improve our membership model and inspiring more people to join.
- We will continue to pursue grants with Federal and State funding partners as long as they are available. We are expanding our network of private and foundation-based grants.

A Moment of Gratitude

The work of Friends of the Mad River is made possible by the generosity, commitment, and collaboration of our funders, donors, volunteers, staff, board, and community partners. Each brings something essential to our shared effort to protect clean water and healthy land for the people and wildlife that depend on them. Thank you for being part of this work and helping build a healthier watershed for generations to come.

DONORS

- 25 donors gave more than $500 each
- 150 donors have given since November 2025
- 45 donors have been generously supporting FMR for more than 20 years
- Many of our newest members have joined after attending one of our community events

FOUNDATIONS AND GRANTMAKERS

- Lake Champlain Basin Program
- Watershed United Vermont
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Mad River Valley Rotary Club
- Bee App
- Lawson's Finest Liquids
- Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation
- Vermont Community Foundation

PROJECT PARTNERS

- Friends of the Winooski River
- Mad River Trails Alliance
- Audubon Vermont
- Lareau Farm
- Knoll Farm
- POW Alliance
- Sugarbush Resort
- Mad River Valley Backcountry Coalition
- LaRosa Partnership Program
- Joslin Memorial Library
- Mad River Valley Libraries
- Mad River Valley Schools
- Mad River Valley Planning District
- The Big Picture Theatre
- Winooski Wanderers
- Ondatra Adventures
- Vermont Master Naturalist

PROGRAM VOLUNTEERS

- 38 volunteers are part of a regular cohort
- Dozens of volunteers support our programs and events

Friends of the Mad River
is a 501(c)(3) organization

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