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Photos - front and back cover: Susan Griffin Ward

# NewsStreams

Because Clean Water Can't Wait - Spring 2023

Spring 2023

# NewsStreams

Because Clean Water Can't Wait



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## We Protect What We Love:

### 30 Years of Kentucky Waterways Alliance

By Susan Griffin Ward

Thirty years ago, the Nobel Peace prize was awarded to Mandela and de Klerk, hundreds of levees failed along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers during the Great Flood of 1993, the first Beanie Babies were sold, the European Union was established, Al Gore was talking

about climate change, the Clean Water Act was 20 years old, and the Kentucky Waterways Alliance (KWA) was founded.

The world has changed a lot in the last thirty years. What hasn't changed is the KWA commitment to protect, restore, and celebrate

Kentucky's 90,000 miles of waterways as a source of cleaner and safer drinking water; to protect wildlife and endangered species; and to preserve the beauty of our greatest natural resource.

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# A Message From Michael Washburn

Executive Director, Kentucky Waterways Alliance

Dear Friends,

Kentucky is water. We at KWA say this all of the time. We tag our social media posts with the phrase. We print it on shirts. This sentiment is the lens through which KWA views our beautiful state. Through protecting, restoring, and celebrating our waterways, we see ourselves as defending not only our streams, rivers, and wetlands, but also defending and serving the individuals, communities, and animals that comprise the Commonwealth.



As most of you know, I have only been with KWA since December 2022. Over the past five months we have been busy. From Beargrass Creek in Jefferson County to the Redbird and Red Rivers in Eastern Kentucky, and many places in between, we work daily to ensure the health of our precious waterways. We are particularly proud of the work we have done to launch our new State Watershed Network and that so many people have participated in our cleanups and other community engagement activities.

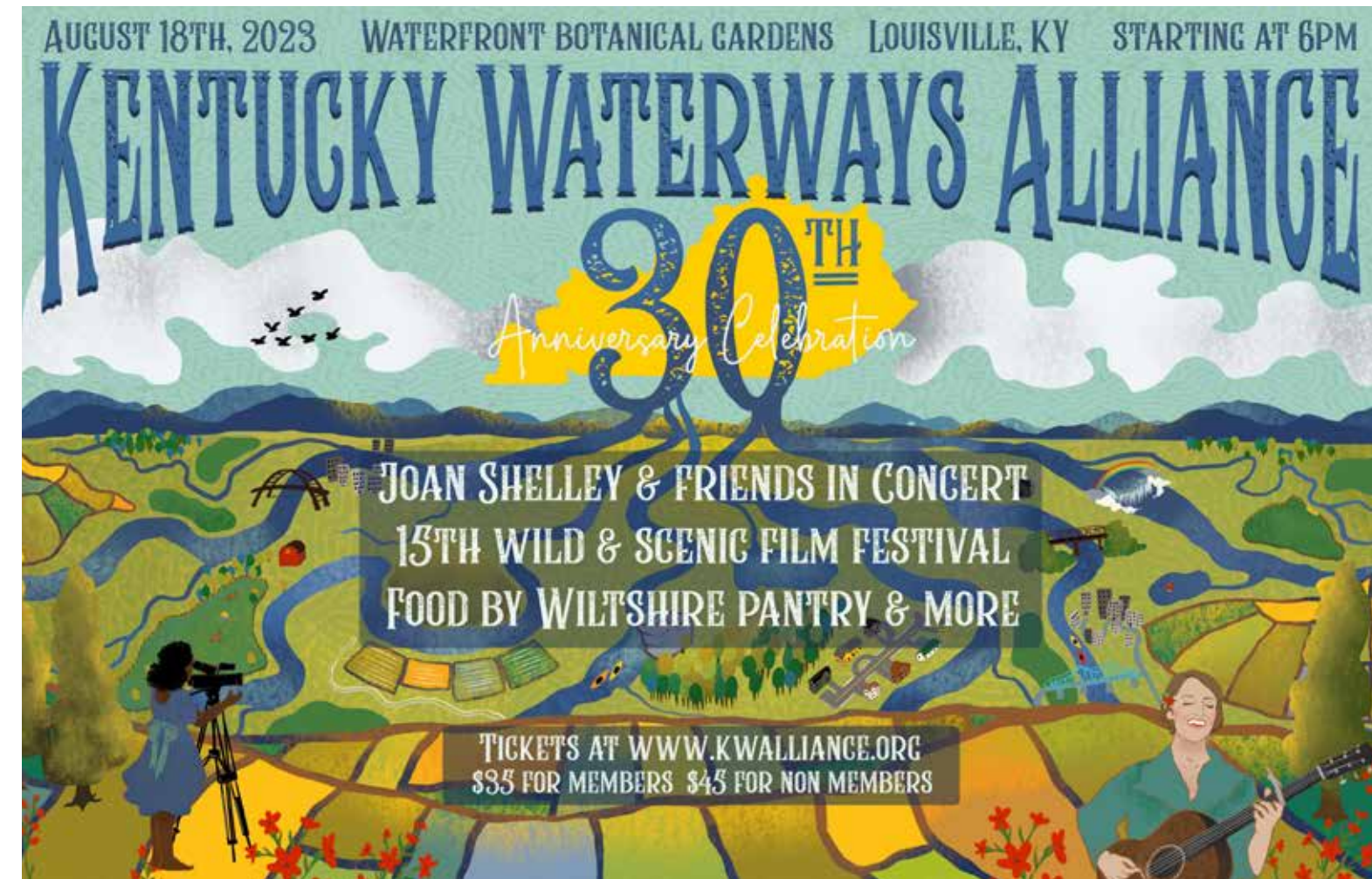
Our statewide activity feels particularly important this year. 2023 is KWA's 30th Anniversary. This publication's lead story highlights some of KWA's many accomplishments over its three-decade life. We will be celebrating our victories and steadying ourselves for the work to come this year at an anniversary celebration. On August 18th we will set up at the Waterfront Botanical Gardens in Louisville for what promises to be a great day. Louisville's own Joan Shelley will perform with friends, and after her show we will host our 15th annual Wild and Scenic Film Festival. Please see the facing page for information on this celebration.

Looking ahead, KWA staff and board are currently in the process of strategic planning, with an emphasis on environmental equity and justice. And in addition to our ongoing work in the state, we are working closely with local, regional, and national partners on plans to restore and celebrate the Ohio River.

Since joining the organization, I have been humbled by the loyalty and affection KWA engenders in its members, partners, and friends. KWA could not achieve these important milestones without your support. Whether you are a member, volunteer, or simply a concerned citizen who cares deeply about the health of Kentucky's waterways, your contributions are vital to our success. I would also like to recognize the hard work of KWA's staff who have worked tirelessly to advance our work. Together, we are making a difference in protecting and preserving the natural beauty and resources that make Kentucky such a special place to live.

So, yes, Kentucky is water. But the Kentucky Waterways Alliance is *you*. We are so grateful for your dedication to our shared environment. Feel free to reach out anytime and tell us how we are doing! Thank you for allowing us to support you and our community through our work.

# Save the Date



Thank you  
30th Anniversary  
Celebration  
Sponsors!



## Board of Directors

### Executive Committee:

Martin Hjalml - President  
Caitlin Johnson - Vice President  
Pamla Wood - Secretary/Treasurer

### Board Members:

Linda Cowan  
Alisha Deatrick  
Gordon Garner  
Ali Greenwell  
Kay Harker  
Travis Murphy  
Kuntesh "KC" Naik  
Layne Taylor



# KWA 30th Anniversary

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## IN THE BEGINNING

The origins of KWA are reflected in the word 'Alliance'. Eighty representatives from government, industry, community organizations and individuals from across the state, motioned to create a formal organization to work together on waterway issues. As a result, KWA was incorporated and granted non-profit status in 1993. River Network provided start-up funds with in-kind support coming from various state and local agencies.

*Prior to 1993, environmentalists were successful in protecting Lake Cumberland from the dumping of toxic dyes by a local industry. The impact of the response was huge, and it demonstrated what could be done by such a movement. As a result, a bevy of citizens held meetings around the state and many waterways were shown to be in need of protection.*

Frank Elsen, founding KWA board member



Photo - Tyler Adams-Skench Outdoors

## WATERSHED PARTNERSHIPS

As an Alliance, we have prioritized working with communities across the state on local watershed issues. During our first decade, we helped over 50 small watershed groups across the state -- from Paducah to Petersburg, Louisville to Bowling Green, Covington to London -- protect their river or stream and educate their community about the importance of clean water. KWA was instrumental in the founding of Watershed Watch of Kentucky, resulting in thousands of citizens who have been trained to take water samples and have learned about their local streams as well as about their larger watershed. In 2022, KWA's Watershed Network program was established to continue the work of previous decades with the goal of increasing collective impact to improve water quality for wildlife and people who rely on clean water.

## PROTECTION

As an Alliance we advocate for better policies and programs at the state and national levels. Over the years, KWA staff has served as watchdog over permits that discharge pollutants into Kentucky's waters by reviewing, commenting, and, in some cases challenging, bad permits. KWA staff reviewed and commented on hundreds of permit applications, helping to improve the permits and thereby protect our waterways. A citizen suit filed by KWA against the U.S. EPA set national precedent on antidegradation that helped provide better protection for over 90% of Kentucky's waterways. We successfully advocated to the Division of Water and U.S. Forest Service for the addition of new Outstanding National Resource

Waters that permanently protected over 62 miles of streams and 2,040 acres of wetlands. We fought and succeeded to keep a cold-water habitat designation for 16 Kentucky streams, which protected their use as trout streams. KWA won an 8 yearlong court battle to ensure there will be no more valley fills from coal mines under generic nationwide permits. KWA won a lawsuit requiring a more thorough assessment of the impacts of any nationwide permit before reauthorization.

## RESTORATION

As we have seen time and time again, an impaired, polluted waterway can be restored. KWA helped co-author a Watershed



Judy Peterson with Tom "Fitz" Fitzgerald, retired director of Kentucky Resources Council

*My twenty years with Kentucky Waterways Alliance were some of the most rewarding of my life. Everyone needs clean water and all too often industry is the only one at the table with regulators making a financial argument against tougher permits or new regulations. I am very proud of our impact nationally to help to protect clean water in other states.*

Judy Peterson, Executive Director, 1997-2017

Planning Guidebook, a valuable resource for watershed groups all over Kentucky and we have helped author many watershed plans through the years. Six years ago, KWA began implementing the Red River Watershed plan in Eastern Kentucky. This nationally designated Wild & Scenic River has benefited from cleanups, environmental education, and septic system repair and replacement.

KWA established and manages the Kentucky Aquatic Resources Fund (KARF), created to provide a sustainable source of funding for aquatic ecosystems in Kentucky. Outcomes from the partnerships created through this fund resulted in the removal of the Green River Dam 6 in 2017, the Barren River Dam 1 in 2022, and the upcoming removal of the Green River Dam 5. We have hosted and coordinated thousands of volunteers in river and stream cleanups across the state and removed hundreds of tons of trash from our waterways.

In 2022, KWA began working with the National Wildlife Federation and other partners on the creation of an Ohio River Restoration Plan which will be presented to Congress in late 2023. This plan, if enacted, could bring millions of federal dollars to the Ohio River Basin to protect and restore it for future generations.

# KWA 30th Anniversary

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## CELEBRATION



In 2016 the "celebration of waterways" was added to the mission of KWA during a strategic planning process. KWA believes that our waterways are worthy of celebration through participation in community events, art, music, film, photography, and writing. KWA believes when we celebrate the beauty and joy our waterways offer, it offers a chance to inspire activism and a love for nature. We protect what we love. Celebrations through the years have included hosting our Wild & Scenic Film Festival, the establishment of a KWA artist-in-residence program, Aveda Earth Month events, the Wild & Scenic Red River Festival, participation in AFLOAT,

inspired by the art and environmentalism of Harlan and Anna Hubbard, and participation in Ripple Effects, a water themed photography contest for students. This year, KWA is holding our 30th anniversary celebration, an evening of music and film, on August 18 at Waterfront Botanical Gardens on the bank of Beargrass Creek, Louisville's primary urban stream.

*I am proud of KWA's accomplishments. KWA board members led KWA through tough times and KWA staff worked resourcefully to get the work done even when we really weren't sure how we'd do it. Partner organizations stepped up to help us; we were always looking to make our alliances long-lasting and mutually beneficial. We could not have done anything without our members and supporters. So many people give to KWA and we appreciate every single one.*

Ward Wilson, Executive Director, 2017-2022



Former Executive Directors Ward Wilson & Judy Peterson inspect a dam removal

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



While much has been accomplished, much work is ahead. We know there will be continued threats to the Clean Water Act, that bad actors will put profit before our greatest natural resource, and that Black communities and communities of color will bear a disproportionate burden from polluted water and other environmental harms. We also believe that when we come together, resolved in our commitment to clean, healthy

waterways, our actions can make a difference for these and other issues that our communities face. Kentucky Waterways Alliance, its members, and partners will continue to strive to improve the quality of our waterways, for all Kentuckians and our neighbors downstream. Please join us!

# KWA Launches the Kentucky Watershed Network

By Laura Gregory

Are you concerned with the water quality in your community or in a specific stream, but don't know where to start? There are many ways to get involved in understanding and taking action to improve water quality. For instance, you could join Watershed Watch of Kentucky to sample your stream as a citizen scientist, join a local watershed or "friends of" group near you, or develop a project idea that will engage, inform, and improve water quality in your community.



To help support these and other water quality-related community endeavors, KWA is pleased to announce the creation of the Kentucky Watershed Network (KWN), a statewide alliance of watershed groups and stakeholders that work together and support each other with the goal of increasing collective positive impact on Kentucky through education, outreach, and action. The Network will build local capacity by both helping concerned citizens form watershed groups and supporting existing watershed groups in watershed planning and project implementation. Undergirding all of this work will be a focus on equity and justice - KWA will ensure that community voices are heard, especially those most impacted by systemic environmental injustices, and that any resources and investments prioritize those areas that need it the most in partnership with those communities.



Through the Network, KWA will offer several opportunities for local groups on all seven river basins in Kentucky. We are forming a Kentucky Watershed Network stakeholder group and developing a Community Education & Action for Clean Water Playbook. Network participants will gain access to many opportunities to learn and network during weekly office hours, monthly virtual or in-person happy hours, quarterly workshops and trainings, and an annual Kentucky Water Conference/Celebration, among other activities. Perhaps most importantly, we are developing a seed grant program for watershed groups which will build capacity and jumpstart groups on a path toward watershed planning and restoration.

We want to meet you where you are and help empower you in your clean water journey. Please contact [laura@kwalliance.org](mailto:laura@kwalliance.org) to get started or to learn more about the Kentucky Watershed Network.



# KWA Documentary to Focus on Tire Dumping

By Laura Gregory



Every year KWA and its partners remove nearly 60 tires from the same section of the Red River in the remote Clifty Wilderness. How is that possible? How do these tires get there? How do we remove them?

Taking these questions as a starting point, and thanks to funding from Kentucky River Authority and Friends of Red River (FORR), KWA is working with FORR & Wilkinson Visual to create a 5-minute mini-documentary to shine light on the illegal dumping issues on our rivers. The documentary will explore yearly tire removal on the annual Upper Red River cleanup. In addition to explaining the process of tire removal from this remote part of

the Commonwealth, the film will also offer some solutions to this nagging environmental problem.

The film will focus on our friend Russ Miller, "the River Cowboy." Russ has organized and hosted an Upper Red River cleanup since 1996 - you may remember him from a feature in our Summer 2020 newsletter. This section of Red River is quite remote and inaccessible, as it is a 6-mile section of Kentucky's only nationally protected Wild & Scenic River, making this a particularly challenging clean-up. We will document the incredible effort Russ and his crew have put forth in cleaning the Red River over the years, reflections, and solutions on the issue. While the video will focus on the dumping issues and solutions, we will highlight the history of the Red River, the Save Our Red River efforts, as well as the outstanding remarkable values of the Red River as it flows through the Clifty Wilderness.



The video was shot at the 27th annual Red River cleanup this spring, and we plan to submit the film to several film festivals in 2024.

# Cleaning Up and Celebrating our Waterways

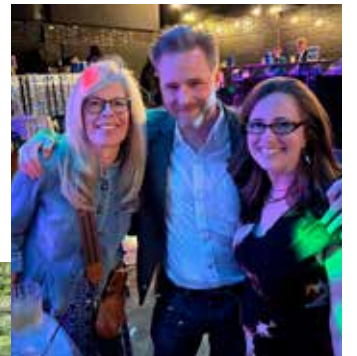
By Susan Griffin Ward



Kentucky Waterways Alliance believes in coming together as a community to celebrate our waterways. This year our April Earth Month events included cleanups on Harrods Creek and Beargrass Creek. Our partners at Aveda hosted Catwalk for Water with Omagi Salon & Spa and The Springs Salon & Spa, and special events by Z Salon and Allure Salon & Spa, also supported our mission.

Our Watershed Network Program kicked off virtual happy hours with organizations across the state, and we hosted the second annual Rock Skipping competition fundraiser with West Sixth Farm in Frankfort.

In May, we partnered with local organizations in Eastern Kentucky to host the annual Mother's Day cleanup of the Upper Red River, the 6th Wild & Scenic Red River Fest in Clay City, and the Make-a-Splash Environmental Education program with Powell County 5th graders. We also hosted an evening at the Filson Historical Society with Rinker Buck, who shared stories from his New York Times bestselling book, *Life on the Mississippi*.



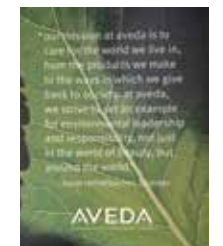
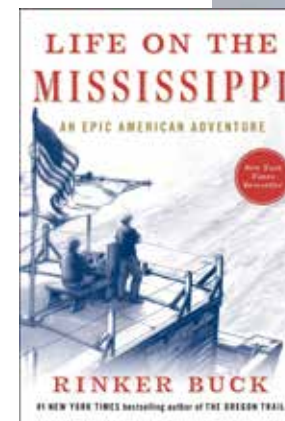
KWA staff at Catwalk for Water



Beargrass Creek Earth Day Sweep



Rock skipping champions



# Beargrass Creek Alliance Ramping Back Up

by Mark Long, Beargrass Creek Alliance Chairman



*Mark Long is working to reinvigorate the Beargrass Creek Alliance. KWA is proud to be partnering with BCA as it re-establishes itself as a vital community and watershed asset in Jefferson County. We asked Mark to provide this update on the status of the BCA and the exciting future both organizations foresee for Beargrass Creek.*

Under the guidance of a brilliant new board, which convened for the first time in March, the BCA is working on several projects to further our mission of revitalizing the Beargrass Creek watershed into a world-class ecological, educational, recreational and economic asset that boosts the health, wealth and happiness of all Louisvillians.

BCA reintroduced itself publicly on Earth Day, April 22, at a Beargrass cleanup spearheaded by KWA and new District 9 Councilman Andrew Owen, along with District 8 Councilman Ben Reno-Weber, the Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Brightside, and MSD. Nearly 70 people showed up on an unexpectedly gorgeous Saturday morning and collected 133 bags of trash—mostly single-use plastics—as well as various hunks of metal and several tires. BCA looks forward to helping organize more big cleanups like this, as well as targeted events to identify hotspots and gather data to help head off the flow of refuse into the creek.

Next up: a new website that will eventually serve as a hub of information for all things Beargrass, including current water conditions, maps illustrating all manner of data about the watershed, an events calendar, a library of the past decades' plans and studies, a link for donations, and news on public and private projects to restore and develop the waterway and its environs.

Chief among these projects currently is the ~\$140 million Army Corps of Engineers Three Forks of Beargrass Creek Ecosystem Restoration project, approved by Congress in December. Encompassing 12 separate sites covering more than 600 acres along the creek's three forks, the project still requires a local, non-federal partner and a 35% local match. The good news: much of that total price tag is made up of real estate. And who owns the biggest chunk of that? Louisville Metro!

The BCA and KWA have been advocating behind the scenes for this project, which could serve as the catalyst for a broader renaissance throughout the watershed. Stay tuned with KWA and the BCA's social-media feeds, emails and websites for further announcements, including a series of talks on the ecology, history and current developments along Beargrass.



Mark Long receives the Beargrass Creek Conservation Award on behalf of the Alliance

# Staff Profile: Meet Meg Kelly



Meg joined the KWA team as Business Manager in March 2023. Her experience is in nonprofit theatre and dance management, supporting the work of artists including Liz Lerman, Woodshed Collective, and the TEAM and managing productions across the U.S., off-Broadway, and the West End. Meg grew up in Arizona, where she thought a lot about the lack of water in the desert, and she has since made her home near rivers, including the Potomac, Hudson, and Ohio. She holds a BFA in Stage Management from the University of Arizona, and an MFA in Theatre Management and Producing from Columbia University in New York. Meg spends as much time as possible baking and making jam, traveling to new places, hiking in U.S. National Parks, and jogging around Louisville.

