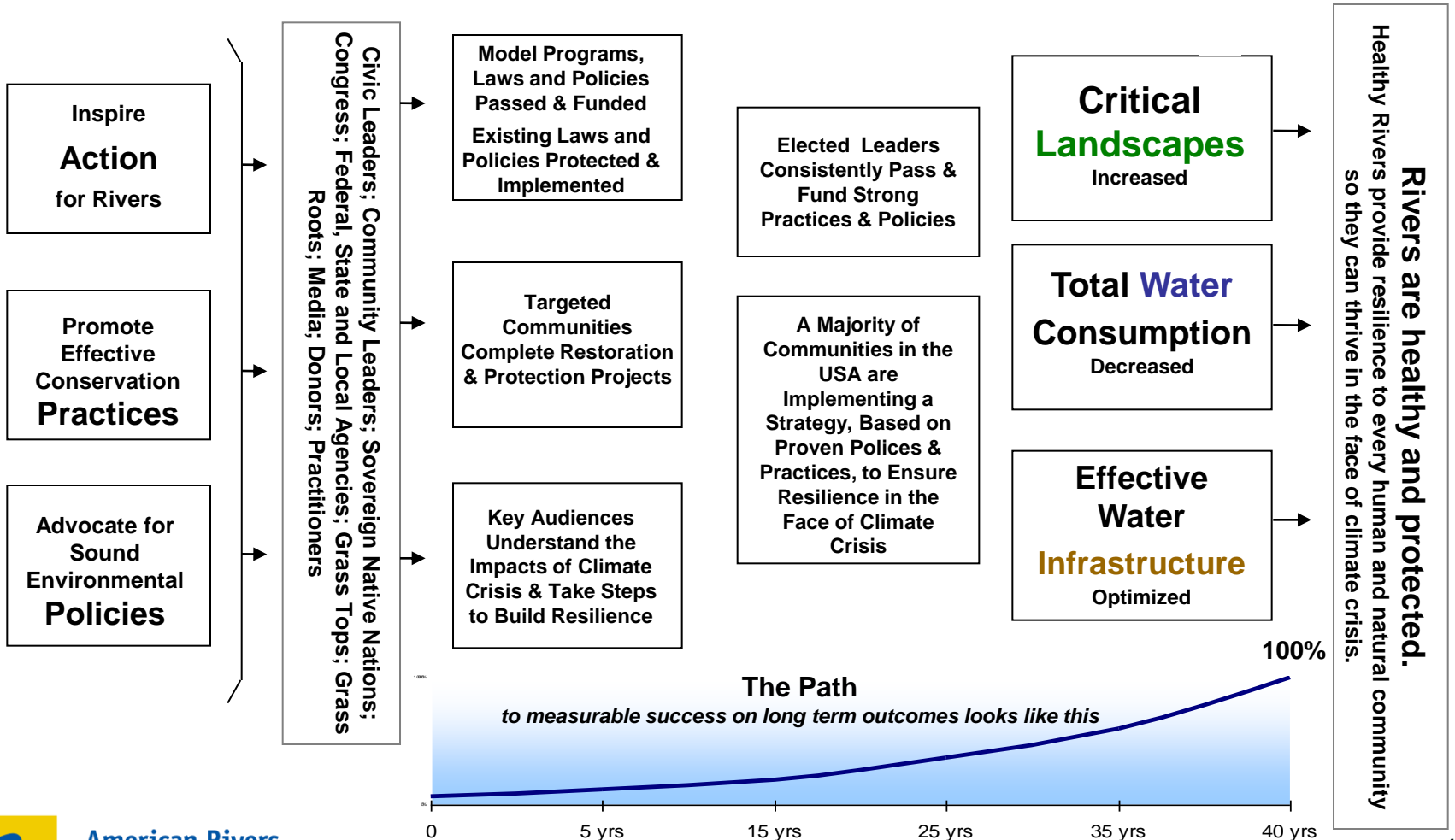




Strategic Direction: A Vision for the Future





Rivers for Life: A Vision for Healthy Rivers and Thriving Communities in an Era of Climate Change

A transformational moment in our nation's history

Water. There is nothing more fundamental to our health, our communities, and our lives. Clean, flowing rivers are the lifeblood of our country, yet today, they face unprecedented threats from climate change. Dwindling water supplies, prolonged droughts, more severe floods and waterborne diseases will threaten the health of our rivers and challenge river communities in ways we have never seen.

The decisions we make now will determine what kind of country – and planet – we share and pass on to future generations. While we work to limit carbon pollution from fossil fuels, we must also transform the way we treat our rivers and freshwater resources. Our nation faces a critical decision. Will our society continue on the path we are currently on, wasting water, paving over riverside lands, and polluting the very streams that we need to nourish us? Or will we choose a smarter, greener, more sustainable path into the future? Will we waste taxpayer dollars on outdated 19th century approaches or will we spend our money on innovative 21st century solutions?

This is a pivotal moment for our nation and for the rivers and clean water that sustain it. With more than 35 years of experience on the ground and in the nation's capital, American Rivers is uniquely positioned to lead the effort to ensure rivers and communities not only survive, but thrive, in a warming world.

American Rivers has a simple yet bold vision: In 40 years, healthy rivers will provide resilience to every human and natural community so they can thrive in the face of the climate crisis.

How climate change impacts rivers and clean water

Numerous reports, including the most recent from the world's leading climate authority, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), conclude that even with the most aggressive and successful greenhouse gas reduction efforts, climate change will have profound impacts on our planet. Those impacts will hit rivers and freshwater first and worst. Rising temperatures and changing precipitation patterns will threaten both the quality and quantity of water supplies for drinking, agriculture, and municipal use. Floods will become more frequent and severe. Drought-induced wildfires will threaten communities. The risk of waterborne diseases will rise.

People and wildlife will be threatened not only by the direct impacts of climate change, but also by our responses to the problem. When drought causes water taps to run dry, panicked community leaders will reach for 19th and 20th century responses, like new dams and reservoirs, unless they are aware of 21st century solutions like water efficiency and reuse. When floodwaters kill people and destroy property, worried leaders will look to outmoded levees and dams, unless they understand that better options like floodplain restoration have been proven more effective.

At the same time that we confront the challenge of climate change and its disproportionate impact on rivers and clean water, America's water infrastructure – our drinking water, wastewater and stormwater systems, dams, and levees – is at a crisis point. Water and

wastewater systems now receive the lowest grade possible, a D-, of all infrastructure rated by the American Society of Civil Engineers. To make the situation worse, our nation's "natural infrastructure" – the streams, wetlands, forests and floodplains that provide critical clean water and flood and drought protection services – is degraded from years of abuse and mismanagement. The increased floods and droughts that come with climate change will only add to the problem.

American Rivers as a national leader: a bold vision for rivers

To achieve our long-term vision, we are confronting the freshwater issues that will make or break a community's climate resilience. Our 40-year vision is supported by short-, medium-, and long-term goals. In the first five years, we are deploying our resources to develop, identify, and promote models of policy and practice that are best suited to the volatility and uncertainty of a changing climate. In the years that follow, the focus of our efforts will shift toward achieving broad-scale application of and investment in these models – a period of "scaling up." Over the long-term, as these models reach scale, we will bring our vision of healthy, resilient rivers to communities across America.

American Rivers has a unique advantage in that we integrate our efforts at the local, state, and federal levels. We also approach our work with an eye toward replication and transferability. In addition to our federal policy work in Washington, DC we have offices in ten states around the nation involved with specific campaigns to reform state or local policy and demonstrate river conservation practices. This approach has served us well over the past several decades and is especially well-suited for dealing with climate change.

Central to our long-term vision is the need for a fundamental shift in the way our country manages water. We aim to use this transformational moment to move from old 19th and 20th century infrastructure to a 21st century approach that recognizes "green infrastructure" as the most cost-effective, reliable, and flexible way for communities to deal with the impacts of global warming and provide a wide array of valuable benefits to people and wildlife.

Green infrastructure means planting trees and restoring wetlands to naturally filter water, rather than building a costly new water treatment plant. It means choosing water efficiency and using captured rainwater instead of building a new water supply dam. It means restoring floodplains to protect communities instead of building taller levees. Green infrastructure has three critical components:

1. **Protect healthy landscapes like forests and small streams that naturally sustain clean water supplies.**
2. **Restore degraded landscapes like floodplains and wetlands so they can better store flood waters and filter clean water.**
3. **Repair natural water systems in urban settings to capture and use water more wisely, and prevent stormwater and sewage pollution.**

One of the biggest challenges of climate change is the uncertainty and expense it is imposing on communities and businesses. Among the greatest appeals of green infrastructure is the fact that it is cost-effective and reliable – saving money and bringing a much greater degree of certainty and stability to planning processes and investment decisions. That is why many forward-looking cities are already embracing green infrastructure, including New York, Chicago, Portland,

Seattle, San Francisco, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Milwaukee, Kansas City, Toledo, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia.

Federal and state policy advocacy

American Rivers is advocating these 21st century solutions at the local, state, and federal levels. At the federal level in the coming years, our focus will be on achieving legislation that reduces carbon pollution and helps rivers and communities prepare for climate change. Another priority will be ensuring effective coordination among the various federal agencies responsible for water and climate issues, and advocating research and analysis of water management in the face of climate-related impacts. We will continue to publish *The River Budget*, our annual guide that influences the federal government's river-related expenditures.

We will also tackle key policy issues at the federal and state levels that impact the three components of our work on green infrastructure.

For example, as part of our effort to protect healthy rivers, we will work to improve the policies of the U.S. Forest Service, whose lands provide drinking water to more than 60 million Americans. And, building on our historic success with the 2009 Wild and Scenic River legislation that protected more than 1,100 miles of 86 rivers, we aim to designate nearly 100 additional rivers as Wild and Scenic by the end of the 111th Congress.

In the river restoration arena, our focus will be on several critical policy-reform efforts. For example, when the National Flood Insurance Program comes up for reauthorization, we will work to reduce incentives for homeowners to move back into harm's way following a flood. And our long history of influencing the powerful Water Resources Development Act, which funds Army Corps of Engineers projects, will continue as we advocate for investments in forward thinking flood and drought management and river restoration projects.

Finally, our efforts to repair natural water systems will benefit from our advocacy to ensure the economic stimulus successes translate into lasting policy changes. We are working to track and influence stimulus spending, helping leaders create model green infrastructure and water efficiency projects in key states. Influencing federal water programs and state laws will also be a priority, as we aim to secure requirements for the use of green infrastructure and water efficiency solutions.

Climate adaptation demonstration projects

In keeping with our 40-year vision, our climate adaptation demonstration projects will not only serve to build the resilience of local rivers and communities, they will stand as models to be replicated nationwide.

We are pioneering the use of new climate assessment techniques to prioritize and guide our river protection work, focusing initially on South Carolina, Montana, and the Pacific Northwest. Over the next several years, we will craft complementary river protection tools for entire watersheds that include both protective designations and purchase of key riverside lands.

Our river restoration work will initially focus on the removal of outdated dams, and promotion of natural flood protection measures. American Rivers has led the effort to remove more than 200 dams nationwide, restoring several thousand miles of rivers. Building on this success, our Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and West coast staff will provide technical and financial assistance to help communities remove dams to improve public safety and environmental health,

using the lens of climate change to prioritize our efforts. We will also demonstrate and promote natural flood protection solutions in strategic locations including the Upper Mississippi River basin, California's Sacramento River and Delta, and areas of Eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

We already have a strong track record working to repair natural water systems in the Great Lakes region. We will expand on our successes in the City of Toledo, Ohio and on Wisconsin's Milwaukee River, and will work to integrate green infrastructure and water efficiency measures into local codes and ordinances across the Great Lakes region and into Pennsylvania and Maryland.

Creating social change

We understand that just having good ideas and facts isn't enough. If we are to create the kind of change we need, we must connect with people on a deeper level and inspire them about the kind of future that is possible. When it comes to issues surrounding climate change and environmental degradation, many people live in states of fear and apathy. Our job is to move them to places of hope and urgency by telling compelling stories and offering bold, yet achievable, solutions. Only then will we spur them to action.

American Rivers already has a unique advantage in that clean water is the public's number one environmental concern. In a March 2009 Gallup poll, the top four environmental problems respondents worry about most relate to clean water, rivers, and water supply (ranking higher than issues like climate change, air pollution, or the loss of rainforests). A January 2009 poll by Building America's Future shows that upgrading infrastructure – especially water infrastructure – enjoys strong public support. We are fortunate that people immediately recognize our issues as fundamental to their health, families, jobs, and communities. We don't have to create the concern, we simply need to tap into these values that millions of Americans share.

Our primary audience is civic leaders, because they are at the center of decisions that impact rivers and water management. For years, cities large and small turned their backs on their rivers, allowing them to become polluted, forgotten, and fenced off from community life. We are encouraging civic leaders to embrace healthy rivers as vital community assets. When a community reconnects with its river and the river becomes, once again, the "heartbeat" of the town, a strong constituency emerges to ensure that the river remains clean, healthy, and protected.

While we take every chance to inform and inspire civic leaders about green solutions to modern water management challenges, we are becoming adept at seizing the opportunities created by disasters like floods, droughts, water main breaks, and dam failures – the kinds of disasters that will only increase with climate change. When these disasters strike, leaders pay attention and are hungry for practical solutions that will prevent the problem from occurring again. We turn these disasters into valuable "teachable moments" that lead to positive actions for long-term river health and community well-being.

Partnerships

Strategic partnerships with civic leaders -- elected officials, business and opinion leaders -- along with allies in the conservation community are essential to our success, whether we are working on broad policy issues or local climate adaptation projects. We recognize the important role local governments play, and we are working closely with the U.S. Conference of Mayors (we are

the only environmental group that sits on their Water Advisory Board). We have also forged strong relationships with groups like the Association of State Dam Safety Officials, the Association of State Floodplain Managers, and the Alliance for Water Efficiency. We are teaming up with the insurance industry's Institute for Business and Home Safety to conduct message research on flood protection and advocate for forward-thinking policies. And, since 2001 we have partnered with the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration to provide over \$3.2 million in dam removal grants to communities. Whether we are working with a government agency, a land trust, a Native American tribe, or a water utility, these kinds of strategic partnerships expand our work and broaden its reach.

Recent successes

American Rivers was instrumental in raising the profile of green infrastructure and securing unprecedented funding in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (a.k.a. the economic stimulus package), the largest government public works package since the New Deal. We made sure the Act included an impressive \$6 billion for clean water, green infrastructure, and river restoration and, just as importantly, prevented harmful projects that would take us in the opposite direction. Further, our leadership ensured that the President's FY10 budget request continued the work of modernizing our water infrastructure by including a critical set-aside of more than three-quarters of a billion dollars of funding for green infrastructure and water efficiency.

We recently published a number of reports on the benefits of green infrastructure solutions, including *Natural Security: How Sustainable Water Strategies are Preparing Communities for Climate Change*. This report features in-depth research on eight communities' 21st century green infrastructure approaches that provide a wide array of benefits to people and wildlife in the face of climate change. Another report, *Hidden Reservoir: Why Water Efficiency is the Best Solution for the Southeast*, is a first of its kind study showing how water efficiency measures can save the region up to \$700 million and water supply for up to one million residents.

Conclusion

The time is now. The next several years will be critical as we fight to put our country on a path to a more sustainable future. The investments we make today are ones we will live with for decades and possibly centuries to come. American Rivers is ensuring our leaders make the right decisions for rivers, clean water, and communities and that green solutions become the first line of defense in the quest toward climate resilience. With our unique mix of bold, visionary solutions, first-rate scientific and policy expertise, diverse partnerships, and innovative communications, we are on our way toward achieving our long-term goal of healthy rivers and communities thriving in an era of climate change.