

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Buffalo Niagara WATERKEEPER® initiatives and investments
in safeguarding the waters of Western New York





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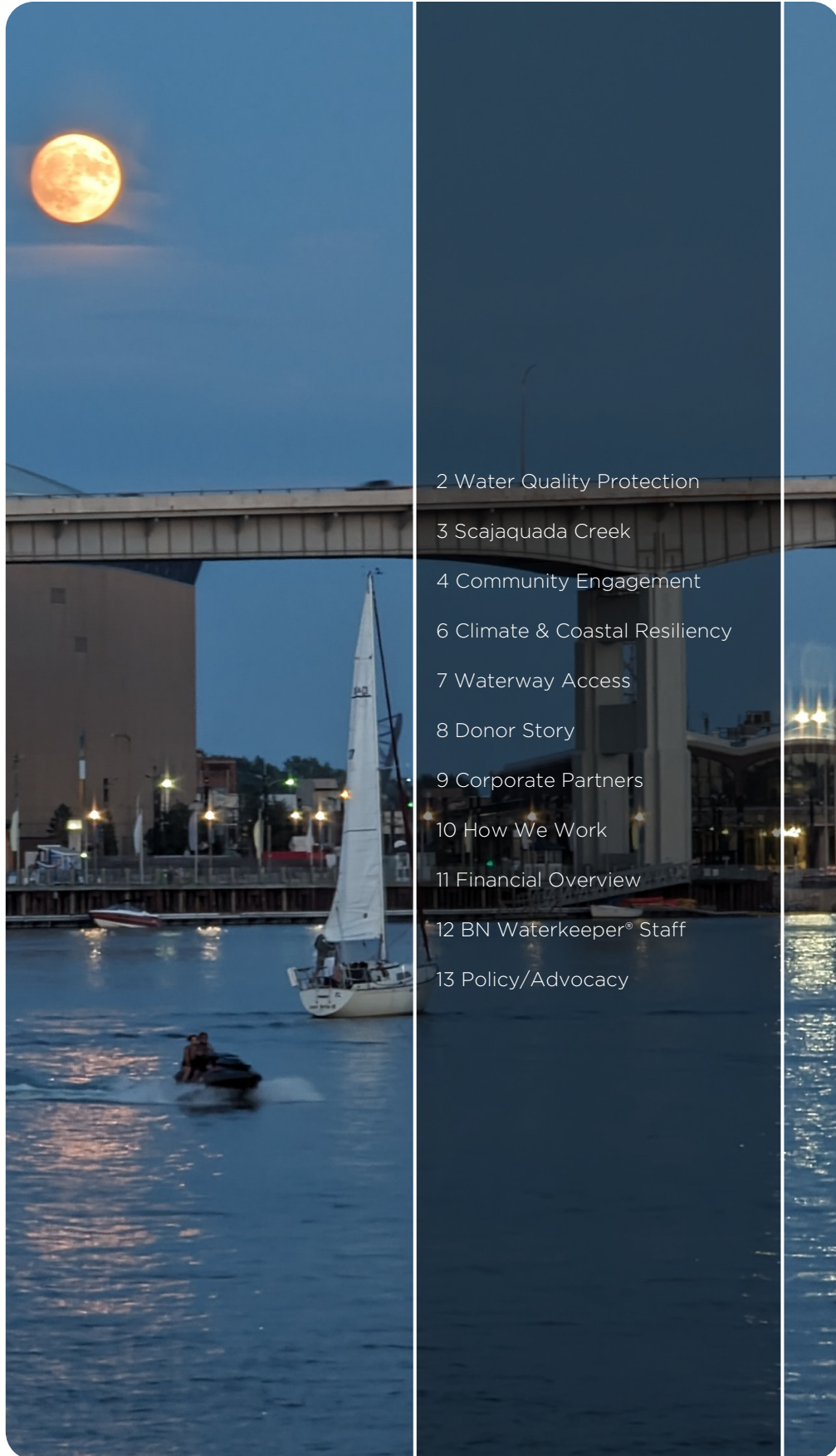
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A MESSAGE

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & BOARD CHAIR

As we embark on our 35th Anniversary Year, we must take a moment to reflect upon and celebrate the significant impact our organization, and our supporters, have had in Western New York and beyond. Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper has received national and global recognition for the positive change we have made to our waters, ecosystems, community, and regional culture. Our most recent efforts in 2023 have positioned our region and our organization well to continue to lead and protect our Great Lakes community for generations to come.

These accomplishments are the direct result of the support of our donors, volunteers, advocates, collaborators, and partners. For 35 years, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper has had the honor of being a trusted source of information, a convener, a problem-solver and a voice for our community in our efforts to protect our water and the ecosystems upon which all life depends. As we monitor and adjust to the challenges of the next 35 years, we are grateful to have tens of thousands of supporters and partners working together, and with your help, we are hopeful that we can expand our reach, diversify our engagement, and enhance our impact even further!

In 2023, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper made significant progress on headwaters and water quality protection, a wholistic restoration of Scajaquada Creek, cleanups, data collection, volunteer and youth engagement, advocating for policies that protect our Great Lakes Waterways, and building resiliency and access in the face of a changing climate and historic injustices.

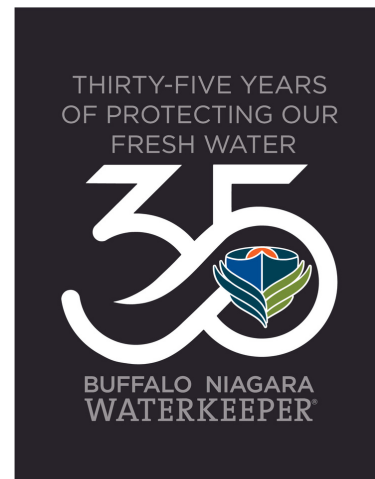
Looking forward, we are tirelessly committed to making sure our Great Lakes coasts and communities are climate resilient. We will continue to engage students and adults through hands-on events and experiential learning. We will advocate in Albany and Washington, DC to fight for effective policy and legislation for our waters. We will continue to seek out and secure millions of dollars for WNY to improve access to our waterways and restore habitats and ecosystems. And just as we have done for 35 years, we will be the eyes on the water, monitoring quality and health, cleaning up our water systems, tracking down contamination and holding polluters accountable whenever possible.

Thank you for your support over these last four decades - we're just getting started!

Sincerely,

Jill Jedlicka
Executive Director &
WATERKEEPER

Chanel McCarthy
Board Chair





WATER QUALITY PROTECTION INITIATIVE

Headwaters Protection

In 2023, BNW continued to make strong progress in securing two headwater parcels for permanent protection through the NYS DEC Water Quality Improvement Program. The parcels contain Eighteenmile Creek and a tributary to Eighteenmile Creek, a priority source water protection watershed. It is anticipated both parcels will be formally acquired in 2024.

Community Assessment towards Addressing the Health of Lake Erie's Eastern Basin

BNW was fortunate to receive funding through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to expand our decades-long water quality and ecosystem monitoring project. This allows us to enhance understanding and public awareness of Lake Erie's coastline along Western New York and nearshore environments. Data gathered through this project contributes to our understanding of local recreational waters to protect human health, inform pollution prevention, and identify potential priority areas for coastal and climate resiliency investments. Thank you to our 2023 Riverwatch program supporters: East Hill Foundation, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, funding secured by Congressman Brian Higgins in the federal budget, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, C.S. Mott Foundation and the M&T Charitable Foundation.





SCAJAQUADA CREEK INITIATIVE



2023 marked a year of progress for our Scajaquada Creek Initiative. In January, the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) presented the Preferred Scenario for reimagining the Scajaquada Corridor, a plan BNW supports for its opportunities to rehabilitate Scajaquada Creek.

In the summer, we signed a feasibility study agreement with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Buffalo District to address degraded conditions in the upper Scajaquada Creek within the Town of Cheektowaga. We will build upon a decade of planning that aims to restore and enhance habitats within this portion of the creek.

In addition, BNW received funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to create a community-driven, watershed-wide Scajaquada Creek Restoration Plan. A Community Advisory Group, made up of Scajaquada Creek watershed residents and stakeholders, will ensure transparency for decisions made during the creation of the plan. The group will also see those decisions are driven by the needs and concerns of those closest to the creek. We are beyond grateful for the community partners and members working with us to restore this creek and we are looking forward to 2024.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

2023 was the year of volunteers! Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper's CleanUps Program continues to lead the way locally, basin-wide, and nationally as we engage thousands of Western New York residents to not only remove litter and debris from shorelines and communities, but to collect data using the Clean Swell app. This important data contributes towards advocacy efforts locally, nationally, and world-wide. Almost 19,000 pounds (~ 9.5 tons) of trash was collected during our annual Shoreline Sweep event. Early in 2023, BNW kicked off the Solo Sweep program, with over a hundred Western New York residents signing the pledge and carrying out over 200 solo cleanup and data collection efforts all over WNY. Solo Sweepers recorded 24,000 pieces of litter in those efforts.

BNW's re-energized Volunteer Ambassador program saw 19 trained ambassadors extend our reach across Western New York by staffing events, assisting with educational programming, and sharing our mission and work throughout the year. Our events in 2023 engaged close to 9,000 Niagara River Watershed residents. Riverwatch volunteers carried out water quality monitoring at numerous locations, acting as our eyes on the water and contributing to valuable data collection efforts across the greater Lake Erie Basin.

We celebrated our Young Environmental Leaders Program (YELP) alumni in August. YELP graduates from 2016-2023 gathered to explore Red Jacket Park and share stories about their YELP experiences and where their current paths have taken them. The YELP program continued in 2023 in partnership with Buffalo Public Schools, Niagara Falls, and Niagara Wheatfield. Since its inception in 2013, YELP has graduated over 300 students across WNY from the program.

Funding for our education programs funded in part by Bank of America.



BANK OF AMERICA





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

RestoreCorps + RAMPS: BNW's RestoreCorps program engages volunteers to complete important adaptive management activities at our restoration projects. These outreach efforts seek to ensure investments that revitalized degraded ecosystems are maintained in the critical years following construction. In 2023, adaptive management activities were carried out at six sites with over 100 acres managed.

We also hosted our inaugural Restoration and Adaptive Management Program (RAMP). This program engages students and young professionals in stewardship tasks while providing mentorship opportunities in ecological management and community engagement. The purpose of the RAMP is to support our RestoreCorps program and help foster important skillsets in young professionals hoping to enter the environmental sector. We had three great stewards this summer and hope to grow the program in future years.



CLIMATE & COASTAL RESILIENCY INITIATIVE

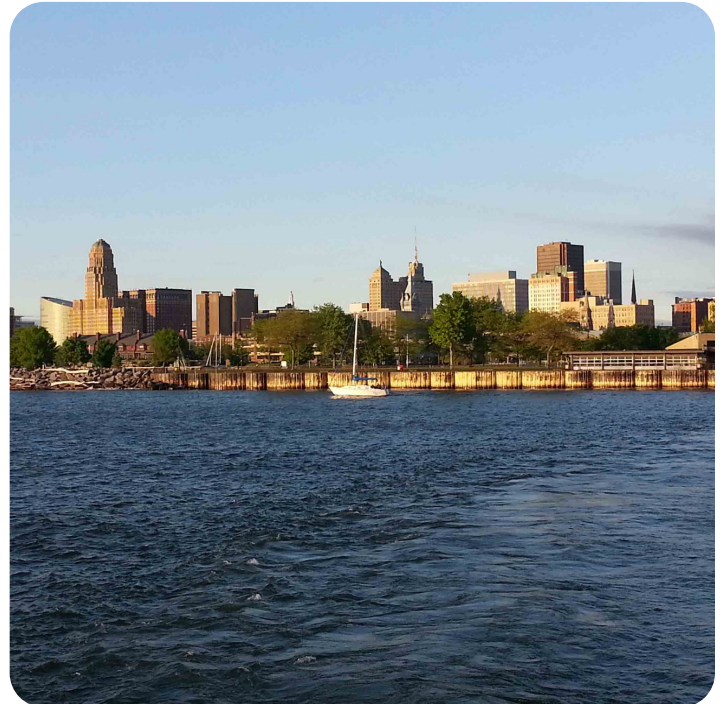
Through the Climate and Coastal Resiliency Initiative, BNW is leading efforts to build community and coastal resiliency in the face of growing impacts from climate change. We do this through systems-level planning, policy initiatives, and innovative methods to restore degraded habitats and enhance water quality. Our impact is realized through public, private and non-profit partnerships to implement nature-based solutions that restore critical ecosystem functions and benefits. In 2023, our work aimed to alleviate flooding and strengthen coastal resiliency, address water quality issues along impaired waterways, and adaptively manage completed restoration projects to ensure their longevity, while making important connections with the community.

Gill Creek Green Infrastructure + Master Plan

Gill Creek is a highly impaired tributary to the Niagara River that flows through several disadvantaged communities. The Gill Creek and Hyde Park Corridor continue to be a growing focus and investment for BNW. In 2023, we led the development of a community-driven plan for restoration along the creek corridor to identify future projects. Additionally, significant progress was made to advance a new green infrastructure project to intercept and treat stormwater runoff from two pipes and one region by the Hyde Park Golf Course that contribute nutrients and pollutants to Gill Creek in an area where Harmful Algal Blooms have occurred in the past several years. The project team advanced design and engineering and sought input from community members. Implementation of this project will begin in 2024.

City of Buffalo Coastal Resiliency Study

BNW's Coastal Resiliency Study for the City of Buffalo completed flood modeling and analysis in 2023 and began asset risk assessment and prioritization.



Part of the study included extensive community outreach. Considering present-day and anticipated flood hazards, the project team used numerical modeling to look at potential flooding under various scenarios on the City of Buffalo's Lake Erie shoreline, as well as the lower reaches of the Buffalo River and Scajaquada Creek.

While this modeling effort can serve as a basis for current and future planning, it was used to understand flood risks to public and private assets and to create a profile of current community vulnerabilities. Waterway Walking Tours were held across the study area in 2023 to engage with community members from study area neighborhoods. Each Waterway Walking Tour was well attended and provided BNW staff the opportunity to share initial findings of the study and to hear concerns related to coastal and climate resiliency. The Waterway Walking Tour series culminated in a Lake Erie boat tour on the Miss Buffalo with interactive activities and opportunities for further engagement and conversation.



WATERWAY ACCESS INITIATIVE

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper continued to make significant progress to provide and promote public access along the Buffalo River and Outer Harbor as part of our Buffalo Blueway project.

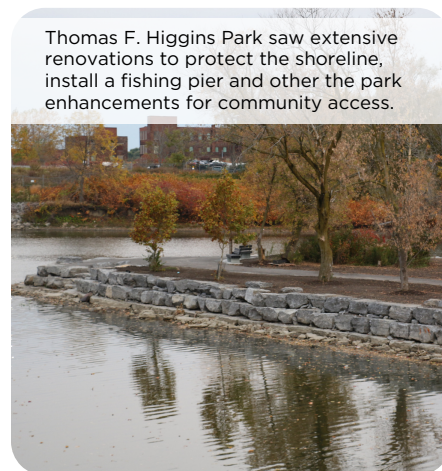
Buffalo Blueway

Construction at Thomas F. Higgins Park, located at the confluence of the Buffalo River and Cazenovia Creek, began in June 2023, and was completed in November 2023. This Erie County owned pocket park experienced significant erosion and damage due to ice scour and high-water flow events in the past, but remains a popular spot for local residents to fish and enjoy the waterway. The Buffalo Blueway project installed a new rock stabilized shoreline and debris deflection piles to eliminate future damage to the site. In addition to protecting the site, the Buffalo Blueway project installed a new fishing pier, educational signage, benches, and a paddle sport egress spot to enhance user experience.

Two additional Blueway project sites went through design phases: Seneca Bluffs Natural Habitat Park and the NYS DEC Harlem Road Fishing Access site. In 2024, construction at both sites will be completed to add accessible fishing access points on the Buffalo River, upgrade paddle sport launches, and install amenities to provide a better experience at both locations.

Ralph Wilson Park

BNW received \$2.5 million dollars from the Environmental Facilities Corporation to implement shoreline work at Ralph Wilson Park. The project broke ground in July and the shoreline was altered by replacing failing concrete seawalls with transitional slopes and wetlands to provide habitat and natural resilience against the changing climate. Expected work this year at the site includes the placement of large stone fill, excavation of a habitat inlet, and the installation of subaquatic, aquatic, and riparian vegetation.



Thomas F. Higgins Park saw extensive renovations to protect the shoreline, install a fishing pier and other the park enhancements for community access.



An improved kayak launch will be added to Harlem Road Fishing Access site, along with signs and benches.



Image of Ralph Wilson Park from Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy



DONOR STORY

Mary McNeill: A Steward of Waterways and Community



Born and raised in the City of Tonawanda, near the northern edge of the historic Erie Canal, Mary McNeill feels a deep-rooted connection to water. Her journey with Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper began in the late 2000s, fueled by a passion for environmental stewardship.

In those early years, Mary pedaled alongside fellow bicycling enthusiasts in tours along the waterfront. The waves of Lake Erie and the flow of the canal caused a ripple effect within her—a desire to protect these precious resources.

The shoreline became her canvas. Mary rolled up her sleeves, joining cleanup efforts to remove debris and restore the health and natural beauty of our waterways. The creation of our Volunteer Ambassador program gave even stronger purpose to her passion. Among a select group of dedicated individuals, Mary assumed the role of site captain, leading cleanups and engaging with the community.

One BNW program holds a special place in Mary's heart—school visits. Seeing students' curiosity to learn about their community's natural resources and eagerness to join her in becoming water stewards is one of her favorite ways to volunteer.

Mary's unwavering belief in BNW's mission has fueled her dedication, and she finds the organization's adaptability inspiring. "Waterkeeper didn't rest on its laurels after the Buffalo River's transformation. Instead, it set its sights on Scajaquada Creek, which has been a very neglected waterway," Mary said.

Mary's commitment to our waters transcends volunteer hours. In 2023, Mary made a significant gift to Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper from her Individual Retirement Account (IRA) through a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) (sometimes called an IRA rollover). Mary worked closely with BNW and her financial advisor to ensure her philanthropy met her and her family's future needs while maximizing the impact of one of her favorite causes. She not only received the joy of supporting a mission she was passionate about, but also received additional tax benefits by making this type of gift.

In Mary McNeill, BNW found not just a donor, but a guardian of our waterways and an inspiration for the next generation of water stewards.

"I really believe in the continued efforts and mission at Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper in improving on our biggest assets in the area."

-Mary McNeill





THANK YOU TO OUR 2023 MISSION PARTNERS



Philanthropic support from Western New York businesses is critical to our ability to advance the progress made across our region's waterways while continuing to tackle the growing threats to our environment.

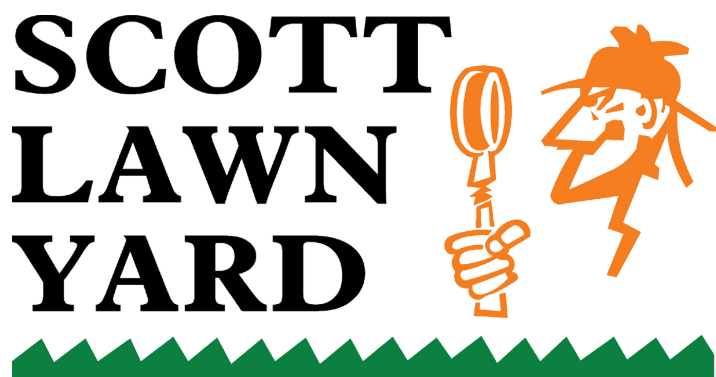
By investing in Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, our Partners and Sponsors are an integral piece of the essential and enduring impact on the revitalization of our region's waterfront.

We are grateful for our Mission Partners investment in our work and for supporting us throughout 2023.



**RICH FAMILY
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HOW WE WORK

OVERVIEW

Local Philanthropy
Donations & Giving

1



Individuals
Foundations
Corporations

10-1 Historical
Leverage of Generosity

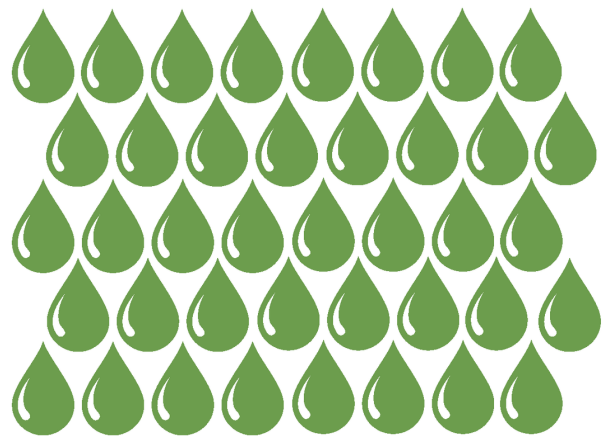
10X



This 10-1 leverage of generosity allows BNW to annually deliver over 60 programs and projects across the Niagara River Watershed.

4-1 Economic Investment
Back into the Community

4X*



Our most successful restoration initiative, the Buffalo River, has drawn another 4-fold in economic investment into our WNY community.

*** 4x ADDITIONAL ECONOMIC IMPACT**
*Economic Impacts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative: 2018





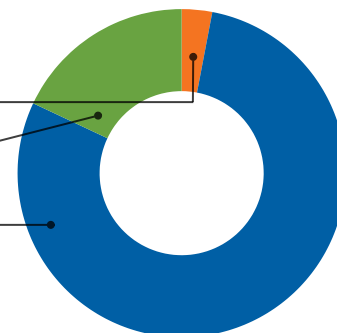
2022 FINANCIAL SUMMARY



OPERATING EXPENSES

2022 Totals

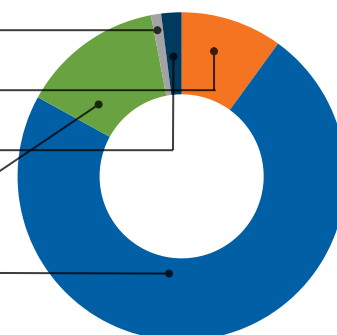
Fundraising Expenses	\$158,342	3%
Management & General Expenses	\$787,358	18%
Program Services Expenses	\$3,596,542	79%
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$4,542,242	100%



SUPPORT & REVENUE

2022 Totals

Program Sales	\$29,699	1%
Contributions - Individuals & Foundations	\$431,287	10%
Contributions - Corporate Entities	\$109,292	2%
Government Grants	\$595,466	14%
Other Grants	\$3,188,222	73%
TOTAL REVENUE	\$4,353,966	100%



Buffalo Niagara WATERKEEPER® is a 501(c)(3) and the figures that appear in the financial summary shown are taken from our 2022 audited financial statements. Once 2023 audited statements are received, this page will be changed in the digital version.

For additional tax and financial information, please contact Kelly Mayer, Deputy Executive Director of Finance & Operations 716-852-7483 (Ext. 18) or email kmayer@bnwaterkeeper.org.



BNW Executives & Directors:

Jill Jedlicka, Executive Director & WATERKEEPER

Kerrie Gallo, Deputy Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives

Kelly Mayer, Deputy Executive Director of Finance & Operations

James Bender, Development Director

Jen Fee, Communications & Marketing Director

Joy Knowlton, Director of Finance & Operations

Emily Root, Director of Ecological Programs

Sandy Smith, Director of Community Engagement

Margaux Valenti, Esq., Legal Director



BUFFALO NIAGARA WATERKEEPER® STAFF

BNW Staff:

Brittni Anderson - Volunteer Coordinator

Jeanne Beiter - Senior Program Manager

Robert Coady - Senior Project Coordinator

Elizabeth Cute, Senior Program Manager

Emily Dyett - Project Manager

Holly Kistner - Project Manager

Bonnie Majda - Administrative Assistant

Charles Oddo - Project Manager & Senior Designer

Juliann Parker - Administrative Manager

Dani Priebe - Development Manager

Katherine Winkler - Senior Program Manager

Adam Zaremski - Marketing Manager



POLICY/ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS



New York is a Great Lakes State

Throughout 2023, BNW bolstered our “New York is a Great Lakes State” campaign to the forefront of local and state level policy making decisions. Waterkeeper remained steadfast in our presence and leadership in 25 coalitions and groups. Within these forums, Waterkeeper advocated for increases in funding for the state’s Environmental Protection Fund, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, and fully funding the Clean Water Infrastructure Act for critical water infrastructure upgrades.

BNW continues to meet with lawmakers in Albany to represent Western New York’s Great Lakes watersheds and communities. Alongside our water colleagues, we helped set priorities for shared clean water goals, participated in conversations about producer responsibilities, attended lobby days dedicated to clean water priorities, and advocated for PFAS elimination. We asked elected leaders to increase drinking water protections, enhance wastewater discharge requirements, and join us in meaningfully reducing plastic production and waste.

These successes combine to arm NY’s Great Lakes communities with robust tools and resources to protect our waterways and communities.

Wetlands

Waterkeeper maintained work with the Save NYS Wetland Coalition and through this partnership we shepherded the passage of new wetlands laws. In 2023, we worked with partners and agencies to ensure new regulations are as protective as possible for the Great Lakes and our direct feedback sought language changes to comprehensively protect as many wetlands in the Great Lakes basin as feasible.

Municipal Engagement

Last year we worked with 14 local villages and towns directly on partnership and project opportunities. We guided these communities through source water protection planning and assisted with procuring project design and implementation funding.

We leveraged modeling results associated with the Buffalo Coastal Resiliency Study to engage with municipal leaders, community-based organizations, and coastal landowners. The study results served as a springboard to catalyze community interest in an expanded coastal resiliency study, extending along the shoreline to the Pennsylvania border.

PFAS and Drinking Water

BNW expanded efforts to sample for PFAS in surface water and continued monitoring efforts related to PFAS contamination in Cayuga Creek attributed to the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station. Ongoing participation in two statewide PFAS contamination coalitions allowed us to follow the status and efforts of a water quality committee for pending drinking water regulations. BNW has continued to advocate for PFAS discharge reduction in New York along with advanced monitoring technologies that could assist utilities in treating harmful PFAS before entering our drinking sources.

The Citizen Scientist data collected through outreach programs like Riverwatch and Spring Sweep is used in our conversations with policymakers, showing elected officials PFAS contamination in their district. Officials in Albany are told about pollution impacts in Western New York and advised on policies to protect citizens against these harms. In addition, the State of New York Attorney General relied on data collected by BNW volunteers to file a plastic pollution lawsuit against Pepsi.





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Restore



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ECOSYSTEMS
& WATER**

Connect



**PEOPLE &
WILDLIFE
TO WATER**

Inspire



**GROWTH &
ENGAGEMENT**

**WE CAN'T DO THIS WORK
WITHOUT YOUR SUPPORT.**

**OUR WATER.
OUR FUTURE.**

