



Friends of the Eel River

2023 Annual Report

Advancing Eel River Dam Removal



In 2023 we made significant progress on advancing the most ecologically beneficial options for swift removal of PG&E's two dams on the Eel River. We advocated for American Rivers to list the Eel as one of **America's Most Endangered Rivers**® and used the listing to amplify press coverage of the significant recovery opportunity presented by dam removal. Along with several key partners, we continued our **Endangered Species Act litigation** against both PG&E and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. These lawsuits have proven to be effective leverage pushing both the utility and the agency to better manage the Potter Valley Project in an attempt to reduce adverse impacts to Eel River fisheries.

PG&E finally began taking dam safety at the Potter Valley Project seriously in March of 2023. Friends of the Eel River has long advocated for taking a closer look at the classified documents that **conceal serious dam safety liability (link)** at the project. When PG&E received a comprehensive engineering analysis, ordered by the State Division of Safety of Dams, they immediately **announced changes** to the way Scott Dam is managed to limit the risk of dam failure.

In the spring we facilitated a popular presentation session at the annual Salmonid Restoration Federation conference called **The Eel River: A River of Opportunities with Implications Beyond Its Basin**. The session highlighted work that conservation groups and Tribes are doing to recover the Eel River, and why research and restoration done in the Eel impacts salmonid recovery across the state of California.

We led monthly meetings of our **Free the Eel** coalition, which includes a wide variety of regional and state-wide conservation organizations, Tribes, local municipalities, and fishing industry representatives. Our new website was launched in 2022 and continued to serve as an excellent resource for sharing the latest studies on all things dam removal. Our coalition solicited over 650 comments on **PG&E's initial draft license surrender application** in the fall of 2023.

Addressing Impacts of Cannabis Cultivation

In the fall of 2023 we completed our grant program facilitated by Humboldt County with a total award of nearly **\$1.5 million**, over a period of three years, to fund sediment reductions projects in high priority watershed. Roughly half of the grant funds were awarded to individuals and road associations; the remaining awarded to the County public works department to complete previously identified priority projects. The grant program was established as part of a settlement agreement reached in **2019 over our lawsuit** challenging the County's inadequate environmental regulations for cannabis cultivation.



Protecting the Public Trust and Groundwater

Our **public trust lawsuit against Humboldt County**, filed in 2022, continued throughout 2023. We amassed evidence from highly qualified experts supporting the undesirable impacts of unregulated groundwater pumping on surface flows in the Lower Eel River. In the fall of 2023 we had a demurrer hearing in XXXX court. The County attempted to argue that our case was without merit, but (spoiler!) the judge ruled in our favor in early 2024 and our case proceeds.

Leading the Great Redwood Trail Friends Coalition

After successfully fighting off attempts of **coal industry representatives** from Utah to take over the Northwestern Pacific Rail right of way in 2022 we transitioned our "No Coal In Humboldt" coalition back into the "**Great Redwood Trail Friends**". We facilitated monthly meeting of the GRT Friends coalition, built a new website, and began addressing local trail issues.

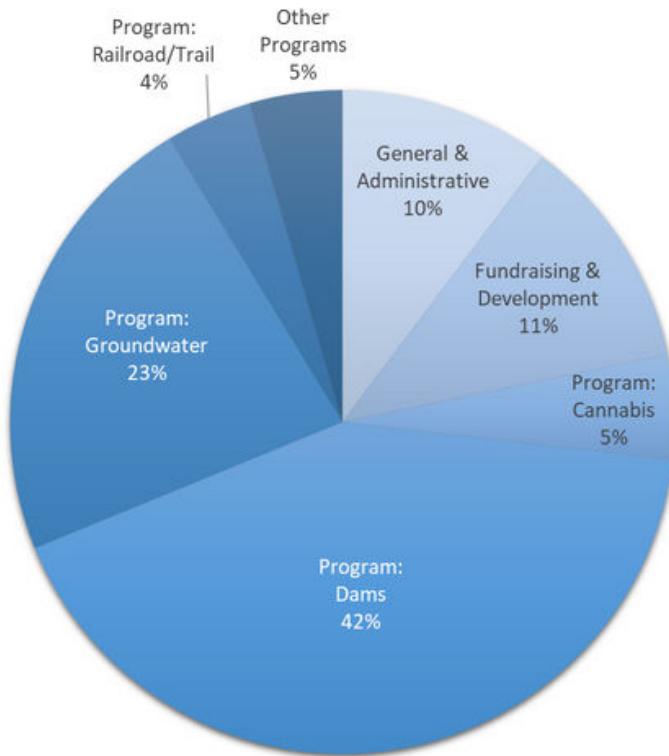
We connected with the newly formed Kinest'e coalition, made up primarily of Wailaki people as well as other Indigenous communities, who are concerned about trail impacts on cultural sites. We participated in the Great Redwood Trail Agency's Master Planning process, providing information about likely toxic sites that should be tested and remediated. And we launched a campaign to protect one of the few remaining public access points to the Van Duzen River and the future Great Redwood Trail.

In partnership with KEET-TV we also hosted a family-friendly community event about the rail-trail project which included a number of presentations, fun and informational booths from community organizations, and the first formal opportunity for the Kinest'e coalition members to talk with Senator McGuire's staff about their concerns. The trail is a wonderful opportunity to remediate past harms of the century-old railroad, give the next generation avenues to connect with the river, and hopefully open the door to Indigenous access to sacred sites long locked away on private property.

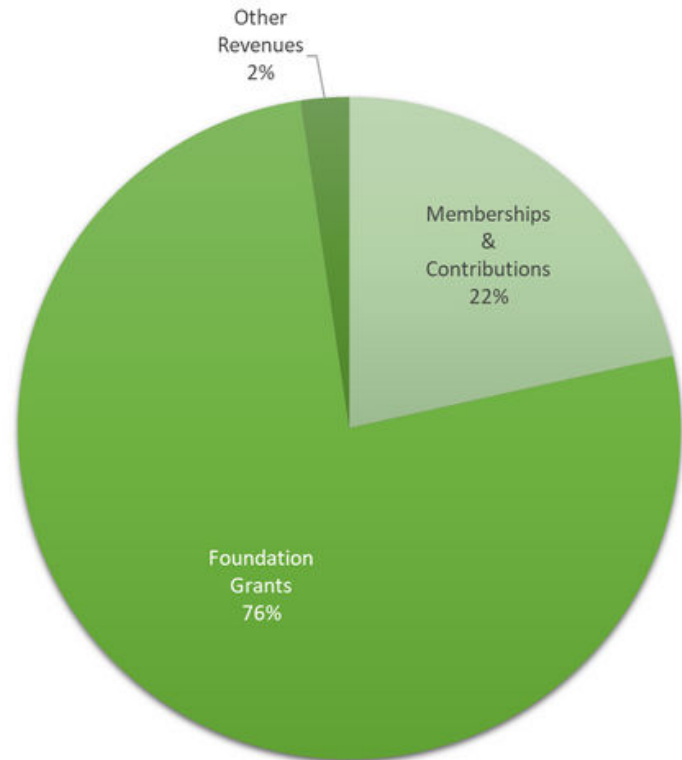
Keeping Water Where It Belongs in the River

In 2023 we launched a new program addressing water quantity and quality, primarily by engaging in the appropriative water rights application process. We issued protests on four water rights applications in the Eel, identifying some egregious misuse of water and helping to improve some well-intentioned projects. So far one protest has been resolved, resulting in a 12-acre-foot reduction of total water diverted. In this program we have also begun evaluating options for seeking designations for subterranean streams and a fully appropriated status for the Eel.

Expenses



Income



STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

REVENUE & SUPPORT

Membership & Contributions	74,714
Foundation Grants	253,900
Other Revenues	<u>7,828</u>
TOTAL REVENUE & SUPPORT	333,442

EXPENSES

General & Administrative	40,816
Fundraising & Development	45,567
Program: Cannabis	20,181
Program: Dams	167,002
Program: Groundwater	89,405
Program: Railroad/Trail	16,667
Program: Other	<u>17,959</u>
TOTAL EXPENSES	397,597

NET ASSETS Beginning of Year	588,819
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	<u>(64,155)</u>
NET ASSETS End of Year	529,198

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS

CURRENT ASSETS

Checking/Savings	417,600
Accounts Receivable	388
Other Current Assets	<u>1,534</u>
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	419,472
OTHER ASSETS	<u>119,788</u>

TOTAL ASSETS	539,260
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LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable	9,762
Other Current Liabilities	<u>300</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES	10,062

UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS	<u>529,198</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	<u>539,260</u>