

News on the Sugar

A Publication of the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association
www.ubbersugar.org



FALL 2023

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Prairie Moraine County Park



A Note From Our Director

Hello Upper Sugar Friends,

The past year and a half have been transformative for Upper Sugar, introducing new team members, fresh challenges, and exciting opportunities. In March 2023, I had the honor of stepping into the role of Executive Director, succeeding Wade Moder, whose leadership over nine years saw significant growth for the organization. Wade has generously extended his guidance during my transition and continues to lend his expertise in his new role as Agriculture Program Manager.

You may have noticed some other new faces on our team as well. Heather Hasenstein joined us as the Communications and Membership Coordinator in August 2022, and Jasmine Wyant assumed the role of Invasive Species Program Coordinator in July 2023. I believe I speak for all of us when I say we are excited about the future of Upper Sugar and are eager to contribute to its success.

In my time here, I've had the opportunity to acquaint myself with the people and places throughout our watershed and am consistently inspired by the conservation efforts that have protected and restored land and water and expanded access to public lands. We are fortunate to be part of a strong conservation community here in Dane County, and I've had the pleasure of collaborating with many passionate and dedicated volunteers,

board members, staff, partners, and supporters. Together, we've made strides in managing invasive species, supporting agricultural practices that protect soil and water, learning together through community science programs, exploring the outdoors, and advocating for the health and resilience of Badger Mill Creek.

Our strategic plan, "A Healthy Watershed for All," guides my daily work and is a source of inspiration for envisioning the future of our organization. A central theme throughout our vision and mission is our commitment to inspiring collective action and joining with others to achieve a greater impact. We recognize the importance of equipping people with the knowledge and resources necessary for responsible stewardship, and we aspire to engage with individuals and communities in ways we have not in the past.

While Upper Sugar has undoubtedly made a positive impact throughout the watershed over the past 22 years, I also want to acknowledge the profound influence each of you has had on our journey. I am deeply grateful to all who have contributed, whether as staff members, volunteers, or supporters. Your dedication, time, talents, and support enrich our work in such a meaningful way. I look forward to contributing to this legacy during my time with Upper Sugar, and I extend an open invitation to all of you to join us to ensure a healthy watershed for all. Thank you for your continued support, and here's to a promising future for Upper Sugar!

All the Best,

Lindsay Foy
Executive Director, USRWA

Meet Our New Staff Members

This year was a year of many transitions for our organization so we thought we would take a moment and introduce you to everyone!



Lindsay Foy Executive Director

Lindsay has over 12 years of experience in the natural and cultural

resources fields and has been a part of the conservation community in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois for the past 10 years. Much of her career has been within the nonprofit sector where she has been fortunate to collaborate with and learn from knowledgeable and passionate peers and leaders.

Lindsay got her start in conservation while working with California State Parks. She was the first staff member of Upper Sugar's downstream partner, the Lower Sugar River Watershed Association, and later served on the board of directors for 7 years. Lindsay also worked with land

trusts in north central and northwest Illinois conducting land stewardship, easement and preserve monitoring, environmental education, and community outreach.



Jasmine Wyant Invasive Species Coordinator

Jasmine was born in the Midwest and earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in Wisconsin with focuses in surface mine reclamation and restoration ecology respectively. Jasmine has worked extensively in conservation and education while in positions as a natural resource contractor, with natural resource conservation nonprofits like the Prairie Enthusiasts and Goldensands RC&D Inc, and as an instructor of animal biology at UW-Madison.



Fuad Shatara Upper Sugar Intern

My name is Fuad Shatara, and I am a 4th year Ph.D. Student

in the Environmental Chemistry and Technology program at the University of Wisconsin Madison. I am originally from Orlando, Florida and spent most of my life surrounded by beautiful bodies of water that oftentimes experienced devastating environmental conditions. Seeing the impacts of climate change, overuse, and human runoff into our water systems motivated me to pursue an undergraduate degree in biochemistry and environmental sciences and graduate degree in environmental chemistry so that I could better understand how to combat declining ecosystem health in our waters.

Preserving the Waters We Love: Badger Mill Creek

by Robert Bohanan and Lindsay Foy

Badger Mill Creek has been integral to Upper Sugar's history and the foundation of our organization. The change to Verona's wastewater treatment in the 1990s was one issue that brought together the groups that went on to form the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association. Last year, concerns resurfaced as the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) held public meetings discussing strategies to comply with statewide water quality regulations on the treated wastewater that is discharged into Badger Mill Creek. In May 2023, their Commission voted to stop the return of treated water to the creek, a decision still pending final approval by the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission and WI DNR.

Our Concerns

MMSD returns 3.6 million gallons of treated effluent to Badger Mill Creek each day, contributing up to 50% of its base flow. The wastewater and investments from various organizations and municipalities have transformed the creek into a quality trout stream, enhancing habitat quality and recreational opportunities in the watershed over the last 25 years. The potential loss of this water source raised questions about the continued health and resiliency of the stream, especially in drought conditions, and motivated action from Upper Sugar and our partners.

Advocacy

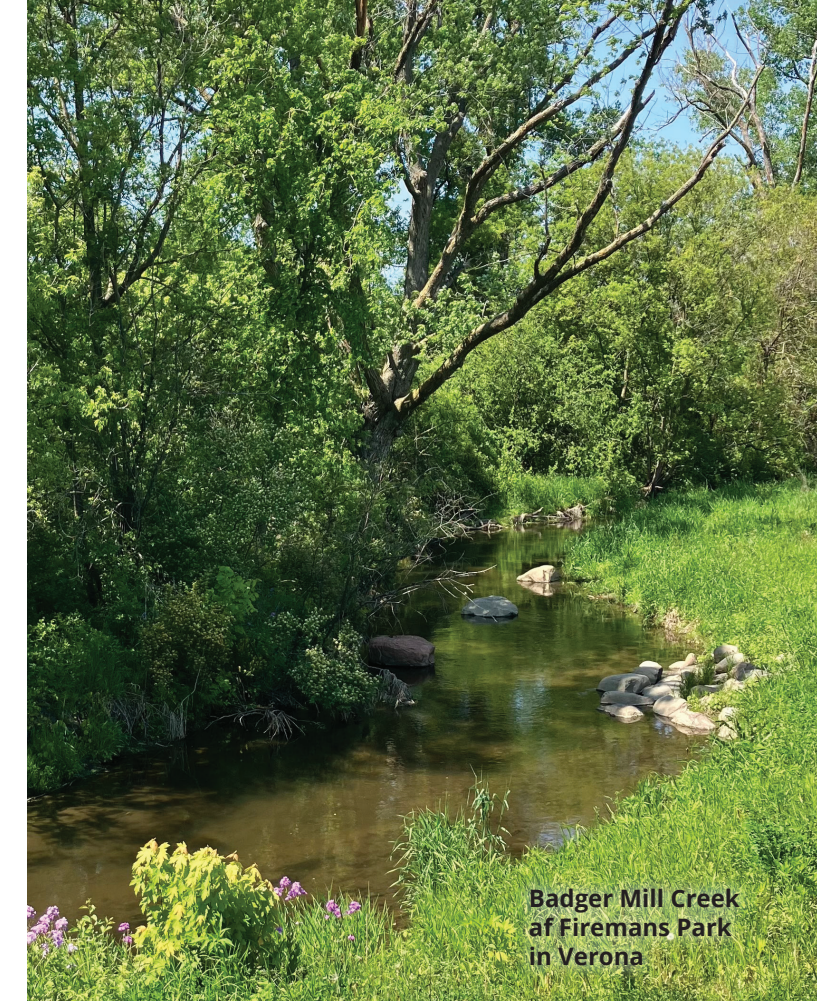
USRWA actively voiced community concerns at public meetings and hearings prior to the decision to discontinue the outflow. We engaged with MMSD, the City and Town of Verona, Trout Unlimited, the Friends of Badger Mill Creek Environmental Corridor and other stakeholders to highlight the potential harm of eliminating this wastewater discharge. Our collective voices echoed the importance of understanding and considering potential impacts under future climate and development scenarios to protect the ecological and recreational values provided by this stream and environmental corridor into the future.

Research

In collaboration with local experts and volunteers, we have embarked on a comprehensive effort to assess the impacts of significantly reducing the overall flow in the stream. Upper Sugar has designed a habitat assessment that we will lead alongside volunteers through next summer. Fuad Shatara, a UW Madison graduate student intern with Upper Sugar, is working with WI Department of Natural Resources, MMSD, and others to complete a survey of existing research and monitoring data throughout the watershed as part of our State of the Watershed report planned for 2024-2025.

Restoration Opportunities

Responding to concerns over the health of the stream, MMSD made a commitment to provide funds for stream improvements and assemble a stakeholder group to prioritize projects and



Badger Mill Creek at Firemans Park in Verona

areas for protection and restoration. In September, Upper Sugar joined representatives from agencies, municipalities, and partner organizations at the first meeting of this group. We aim to mitigate, where possible, the effects of the loss of the treated wastewater and make much needed improvements in the Badger Mill Creek and the surrounding area. This holistic approach aligns with our commitment to the long-term well-being of the watershed.

Get Involved

Our collective advocacy and your continued support are playing an important role in planning and decision-making. There are ample opportunities to get involved:

- **Volunteer:** Join our dedicated team of volunteers and contribute to our ongoing research and restoration projects.
- **Educational Outreach:** Help us spread awareness about the importance of water conservation and watershed protection through community events and educational programs.
- **Stay Informed:** Keep in touch as we share future developments and engage in advocacy efforts to ensure that water quality remains a top priority.
- **Support Us:** Consider supporting USRWA through donations and sponsorships, which directly contribute to our conservation and restoration initiatives.

We invite you to be part of this ongoing journey to protect and enhance the Upper Sugar River watershed, ensuring its vibrancy for generations to come. Together, we can make a difference.

Dragonfly Monitoring

by Robert Bohanan



Blue-eyed Darner

In 2023, Upper Sugar partnered with Wisconsin Dragonfly Society to expand our community-based volunteer dragonfly monitoring program. This helped us to add previously unstudied sites and to add damselflies to our data collection. We were excited and also concerned about what the summer might show because of persistent and relatively intense conditions.

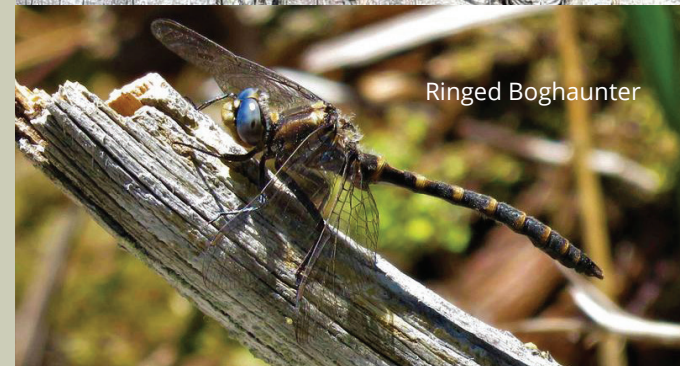
We found more species of dragonflies, but often fewer in number than previous summers. Part of the increased number of species is undoubtedly due to monitoring additional sites in 2023 and having more boots on the ground and eyes on the water.

We recorded and verified 62 species of Odonata, a scientific classification grouping that includes dragonflies and damselflies. Of these, 42 were dragonflies and 20 were damselflies. We observed several species in the Upper Sugar River Watershed for the first time including: Jade Clubtail, Fawn Darner, Ringed Boghaunter, Four-spotted Skimmer, Banded Pennant and Williamson's Emerald.

However, there were also several species that we routinely expect to see that were notably absent from our observations this year. These include: Carolina Saddlebags, Comet Darner, Spiny Baskettail and Smoky Shadow Dragon. Two species that occur in only one location in the watershed that we know of, Blue-eyed Darner and the Double-striped Bluet were thankfully observed again at Whalen Outdoor Laboratory Pond in Verona by the always intrepid Jessie Seiders.



Jade Clubtail



Ringed Boghaunter



Fawn Darner

Double-striped Bluet

Species Observed in the 2023 Monitoring Season

* = Initial sighting in Upper Sugar River Watershed in 2023. Previously observed in Dane Co, WI

** = In 2022 and 2023 found only at Whalen Pond Outdoor Laboratory, Whalen Rd, Verona, WI

Bold and italicized = observed at multiple locations over multiple days /weeks

Dragonflies

Autumn Meadowhawk
Banded Pennant*
Bandwinged Meadowhawk
 Belted Whiteface
Black Saddlebags
Blue Dasher
Calico Pennant
 Chalk Fronted Corporal*
 Crimson-ringed Whiteface
Common Whitetail
Dot-tailed Whiteface
Eastern Amberwing
Eastern Pondhawk
Four-spotted Skimmer*
 Frosted Whiteface
Halloween Pennant
 Red Saddlebags
Ruby/Cherry faced Meadowhawk
Saffron-winged Meadowhawk
Spot-winged Glider
Twelve-spotted Skimmer
Variiegated Meadowhawk
White-faced Meadowhawk
Widow Skimmer
Wandering Glider
 Blue-eyed Darner
Canada Darner

Common Green Darner

Fawn Darner*
Lance-tipped Darner
Shadow Darner
 American Emerald
Common Baskettail
Prince Baskettail
Racket-tailed Emerald
 Williamson's Emerald*
 Eastern Ringtail*
 Jade Clubtail*
 Midland Clubtail

Damselflies

Azure Bluet
 Double-striped Bluet**
Familiar Bluet
Marsh Bluet
Orange Bluet
Skimming Bluet
Stream Bluet
Tule Bluet
Eastern Forktail
 Fragile Forktail
Sedge Sprite
Great Spreadwing
Lyre-tipped Spreadwing
Southern Slender Spreadwing
Ebony Jewelwing
 Rubyspot Jewelwing

Invasive Species Updates

Youth Days - Fall 2023

by Jasmine Wyant

Upper Sugar participated in Fall Youth Day events for 5th, 6th, and 7th graders in Green, Iowa, and Sauk Counties. These Youth Days are a full day of outdoor education with many topics to explore including fishing, pollinator habitat, pollinators and bees, archery, wildlife sign and tracking, nature journaling, trail building and maintenance, macroinvertebrate sampling and ID, and Invasive Species impacts and prevention to name a few. The topics were very interactive with many including hands-on opportunities for the students. Upper Sugar enjoys participating in these events and getting the next generation excited about environmental conservation.

Each year counties partner with many groups to facilitate the Youth Education Days. Some of the groups that partnered this year to make the program possible are local bee keepers, county land and water conservation folks, drone experts, and many more. Thanks to all the presenters, helpers, and supporters from Iowa County, UW-Madison Division of Extension, Driftless Area Land Conservancy, Madison Audubon Society, National Wild Turkey Federation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Pheasants Forever, Upper Sugar River Watershed Association, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

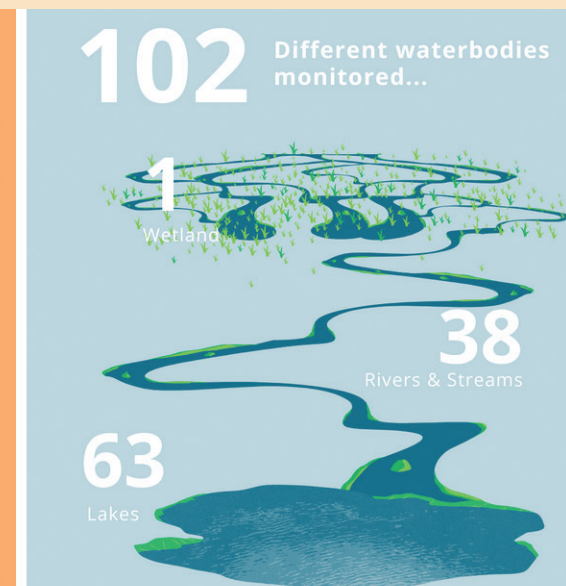
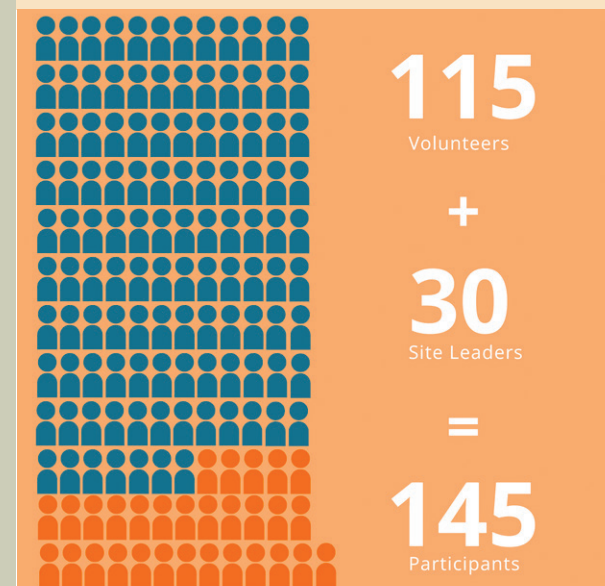


Snapshot Day 2023

On August 19th, 2023, water lovers of all ages gathered for a one-day statewide aquatic invasive species (AIS) scavenger hunt as a part of the 10th annual AIS Snapshot Day. This event is coordinated by UW Extension in partnership with River Alliance, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), and Extension Lakes. Volunteers met at different local rendezvous sites across the state to learn how to identify AIS such as Eurasian watermilfoil, purple loosestrife, and New Zealand mudsnails. They then searched for them in the field at pre-selected locations.

Initially focused on rivers and streams, Snapshot Day has expanded to include lakes and wetlands. Findings from Snapshot Day are uploaded to the statewide water quality database, SWIMS, where they can be used to track the spread of invasive species and develop management plans.

This year Upper Sugar hosted Snapshot Day at Yellowstone Lake in Lafayette County. We were able to conduct our surveys and get good information about the continued presence of purple loosestrife and the rusty crayfish, both of which have been known and tracked at this location. The good news is that no new invasive species were found in 2023! Thank you to all who joined us for Snapshot Day this year!



Rusty Crayfish found at Yellowstone Lake

Clean Boats Clean Waters Program 2023



The goals of the Clean Boats Clean Waters (CBCW) program is to increase Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) awareness, responsible behaviors, focus on containment of any AIS, and strengthen partnerships. These efforts help folks that visit our Wisconsin waters prevent the spread of invasive species.

The steps to prevent the spread of AIS are required by law, but some folks are not aware of these regulations. Part of the job of CBCW inspectors is to educate boaters, anglers, hunters, and paddlers about the prevention steps required by these laws. Those steps are:

- INSPECT - all boats, trailers, and equipment
- REMOVE - any plants or aquatic animals
- DRAIN - all water from boats, motors and equipment
- NEVER MOVE - live fish from a waterbody

This year Upper Sugar collaborated with UW-Madison to pay two CBCW boat inspectors/educators to educate and collect data on AIS at 4 boat landings in our LMPN region. 203 hours of education and boat inspection was conducted at these landings. In addition, Waterfowl Hunter CBCW outreach was conducted by Jasmine in Green County this fall.

PEOPLE Program's 3rd Year With Upper Sugar

by Heather Hasenstein

The PEOPLE Program (Precollege Enrichment Opportunity Program for Learning Excellence) was a success again this year! Upper Sugar provided two full days of hands on experiences in environment related careers for these students who will be attending college in the near future.

The students started with an ecological scavenger hunt to learn about the ecology of Belleville Community Park and the Upper Sugar River, which was their "classroom" for the two days. This was followed by presentations from our staff and board members sharing their paths to an environmental career. Students then had the opportunity to paddle on Lake Bellevue to get a closer look at the natural world both on and in the water. A big thank you to Sugar River Outfitters for supplying the canoes and kayaks, and for providing a short safety course for the students. For many students this was the first time they had ever had the opportunity to kayak or canoe, and they thoroughly enjoyed it!

To get even more familiar with the water's residents they also had the opportunity to wade in the river to monitor for macroinvertebrates. Macroinvertebrates are the tiny critters in our waters that are visible with the naked eye or a magnifying glass. Students

found creatures such as dragonfly and damselfly larvae, mayfly larvae, native snails, and fast moving scuds. They even came across a vertebrate in their search - a beautiful young painted turtle! They had a great time observing it and then carefully releasing it back to its home in the river.

The second day was hosted by one of our Farmers for the Upper Sugar River (FUSR), Single Oak Farm. There the students got to tour the many aspects of farming and learn how it can impact the watershed. They learned about beef production, horse boarding, and market farming. They also got to sample raspberries for the market stand fresh off the cane. One of the students had such a good time that he wanted to move in! A huge thank you to Jeff, Marsha, and Savannah of Single Oak Farm for sharing their expertise and their love of farming with the students!

The two days wrapped up with the students creating an environmental assessment video that showcased the things they learned about their environment the past two days. The videos were insightful and shared the appreciation that the students had gained for the outdoors. We here at Upper Sugar are looking forward to hosting the PEOPLE students again next year!



Macroinvertebrate monitoring



Painted turtle



Beef production at Single Oak Farm

What's Happening on the Farms?

by Wade Moder

Farmers for the Upper Sugar River (FUSR) continues to make incredible progress in the Ag community here in the Upper Sugar River Watershed. Starting with just five original farmers in 2016, the group continues to recruit new farmers each year, provide educational field days, and offers the forum for farmers to learn from other farmers. FUSR remains one of the largest farmer-led groups in the state, and one of only a few that are partnered with a conservation non-profit organization like Upper Sugar.

FARMERS FOR THE UPPER SUGAR RIVER STATS



66 farmers
in our
group



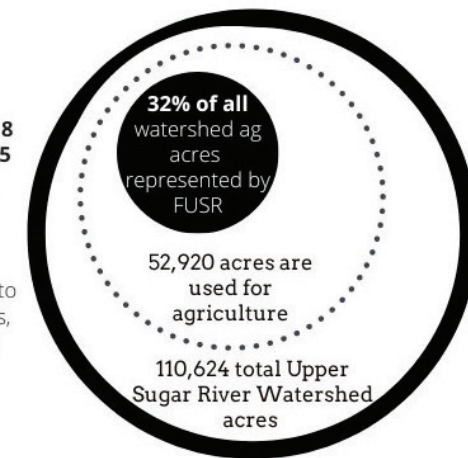
50 farms
represented by
members
(17,088 acres)



They own 2,218
steers & 5,475
milk cows



Since 2016, FUSR has raised \$230,000 to fund cost-share programs for members, host field days, and increase education



Farmers at an FUSR meeting



Farmers at a Field Day

WAV Community Science

by Heather Hasenstein



WAV volunteer training at Falk Wells Wildlife area near Paoli.

Water Action Volunteers (WAV) is a state wide water quality monitoring group that Upper Sugar helps coordinate. The volunteers in the Upper Sugar Watershed monitor the water for health indicators such as water temperature, turbidity (the amount of suspended solids in the water), dissolved oxygen content, flow rate, and the presence or absence of macroinvertebrates. This year we had 12 volunteers monitoring 15 different sites along the Upper Sugar River or its tributaries. The data that is collected is entered in to the DNR's Surface Water Integrated Management System (SWIMS) where the data can be accessed

by anyone needing data for research or policy making decisions.

This was especially useful data to Upper Sugar this year with the changes to Badger Mill Creek that are being made (see pg 3 of this newsletter). The past data collected by our WAV volunteers will help us monitor the impact of those changes on Badger Mill Creek, and on the watershed as a whole. Without volunteers like you collecting this data we would not be able to speak up for our watershed's health as we have been able to do. If you are interested in becoming a WAV volunteer please email Heather at heather@uppersugar.org.



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Make A Difference at Upper Sugar

by Robert Bohanan

Have you ever wanted to create a positive impact but didn't know where to start? We invite you to consider joining the Board of Directors for the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association.

Upper Sugar is on the lookout to fill a recent vacancy and expand our board. We're particularly interested in individuals with a background in:

- Diversity, equity, access, and inclusion
- Fundraising (corporate, foundations, and individual)
- Event planning
- Partnership development
- Communications
- Conservation
- Stewardship
- Water resources

Your expertise will help support vital programs throughout our watershed, including restoration, invasive species management, education and outreach (for both youth and adults), citizen science/community science, and agriculture.

Responsibilities include:

- Monthly 1-2 hour evening meetings
- Support the work of one of our committees

- Participate in Upper Sugar events 1-2 times a year
- Assist in developing program and funding partnerships
- Actively recruit new members to Upper Sugar

Still on the fence? I, too, was once in your shoes. Now I am happy to say that the rewards far outweigh the demands. I thought I didn't have the time or the knowledge about board membership. But my passion for the environment, conservation, education, grassroots community organization, and protecting our resources drove me to take the leap. My journey with Upper Sugar has led to ecological research, community science/citizen science projects, chairing a communications committee, serving as Vice President, and now as President. It's given me the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in my neighborhood and communities throughout the watershed. Join us and be part of something bigger!

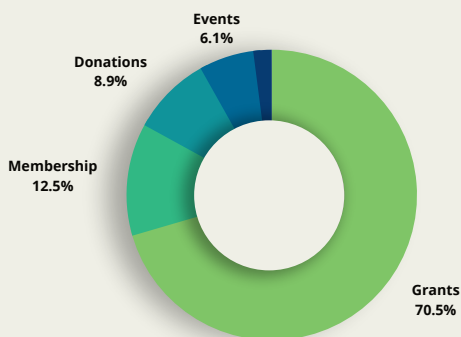
Learn more about Upper Sugar and how you can make a difference at:

<https://uppersugar.starchapter.com/images/USR-WA-Board-Member-Application.pdf>

#BoardOfDirectors #Environment #Community #MakeADifference

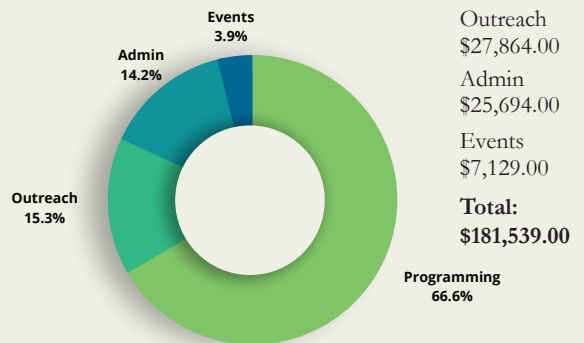
Our Financials

Income



| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Grants | \$128,890.00 |
| Membership | \$22,875.00 |
| Donations | \$16,219.00 |
| Events | \$11,167.00 |
| Investment/ Interest | \$3,739.00 |
| Total: | \$182,890.00 |

Expenses



| | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| Programming | \$120,852.00 |
| Outreach | \$27,864.00 |
| Admin | \$25,694.00 |
| Events | \$7,129.00 |
| Total: | \$181,539.00 |