

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024



American Canyon Community &  
**Parks Foundation**

## Our Staff

Janelle Sellick  
Executive Director

Joy Hilton  
Education Programs Director

Andrea Long  
Community Programs Director

Tammy Saunders  
Program Naturalist

Patricia Oro  
Executive Assistant

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## ABOUT THE PARKS FOUNDATION

After launching as a grassroots community-led non-profit 501(c)3 organization in 2015, the Foundation grew quickly to become the top provider of community- and school-based outdoor science education in South Napa County. Today, the Foundation serves over 3,000 youth and families yearly in watershed, conservation, and environmental programs. Our staff of five professionals includes highly qualified project managers, educators, and leaders.

These unique programs serve students and community through Napa County and the North Bay. Each year demand grows. Currently the Foundation receives two to four inquiries per month from educators throughout the Bay Area but is unable to meet the need due to lack of facilities. In 2021, the Foundation launched the Napa River Ecology Center project to meet the growing demand for education and conservation programs.

# WELCOME LETTER



Dear Friends,

Each year, I'm more amazed by our community's incredible capacity to do good. I find so much inspiration in the people and programs around me, and 2024 was no exception—it was filled with impactful moments that reminded me how much we can accomplish together. From seeing the wide-eyed wonder of students on their first visit to the Wetlands to watching enthusiastic teens clean up trash from the shorelines, it's clear that when our community connects with nature, we all benefit.

One of the highlights of my year was watching our Teen WILD leaders, Tate and Chair, take the stage at An Evening at the Ruins. They shared powerful stories about why our work matters to them. To quote Chair Miles, "Connecting with our environment is vital to connecting to ourselves, to making change, and to building a strong community." Their passion and determination were genuinely moving and made me proud of the next generation of environmental leaders.

A big thanks to the American Canyon Soroptimist for partnering with us on the Slow Stroll series! This new program invites everyone of all ages and abilities to join relaxed, social walks at the Wetlands. It's a great way to connect, enjoy nature, and learn about our local watershed.

We also made incredible progress on the Napa River Ecology Center project in 2024. This exciting initiative is now nearly shovel-ready and will serve as a hub for conservation and sustainability efforts across Napa County. I'm incredibly grateful to the City of American Canyon for their shared vision and partnership in making this dream a reality.

Looking ahead, our work supporting youth and the environment is more critical than ever. I encourage everyone in the community to get involved in a way that feels right for you. Whether volunteering your time, donating, or lending your voice to support the Foundation and the Napa River Ecology Center, every little bit helps. Please don't hesitate to reach out, stop by, or join us at one of our events. I'd love to say hello and hear your thoughts. Here's to another fantastic year of making a difference together!

Janelle Sellick  
Executive Director

# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



Watershed  
Explorers

Where Kids Meet Nature

In 2024, 400 4th graders in American Canyon schools became Watershed Explorers through a hands-on, three-part program that transformed the Wetlands Edge trailhead into an outdoor classroom. The program connected students with nature while fostering environmental stewardship.

The experience began with an in-class presentation and nature journaling activity. On the second day, students visited the wetlands, rotating through interactive stations led by partners such as Napa RCD, Napa Open Space, and the Suscol Intertribal Council. Topics included plankton, the First People, macroinvertebrates, wastewater, and wildlife conservation, providing a rich, multi-faceted exploration of the environment. Upon program completion, students demonstrated a **70% increase in their understanding of the watershed's significance.**

The program concluded with an engaging session led by the Outdoor Connection team, where students used a hands-on water table to learn about watershed dynamics, examined samples under microscopes, and recorded observations in their journals. In addition, the new Watershed Trainee program introduced 2nd and 3rd graders at Napa Junction to the local watershed through nature walks and scavenger hunts. These younger students identified birds, plants, and even mammals, building foundational knowledge about ecosystems.

Over **400 fourth-grade Watershed Explorers** spent more than **2,000 hours** exploring ecosystems, water quality, and human impacts, inspiring them to become environmental stewards of the future.

4th & 7th  
Graders Enjoyed

**3,667**

Hours  
Environmental Ed



The year 2024 was a milestone for education and environmental engagement. Two enthusiastic 7th-grade science teachers approached Parks Foundation staff with a challenge: organizing a fun, educational field day for their students.

The Parks Foundation staff kicked off the program with an in-class presentation, delving into the wetlands' long and sometimes troubled history, restoration efforts, and the current state of the environment. Students then tackled a hands-on land use activity, challenging them to balance community needs with watershed protection.

The program's highlight was an immersive field trip led by the education team, where students explored the wetlands firsthand. They learned about the area's history, including the role of the wastewater treatment plant and the impact of levee removal and restoration efforts. At Glass Beach, students searched for crabs, skipped rocks, and connected with nature through journaling and observation.

In total, **386 students, 4 teachers, and 12 chaperones participated in over 1,500 hours of hands-on environmental education**—a remarkable achievement for all involved!

# Wetlands Academy



**386**

**7th Graders**

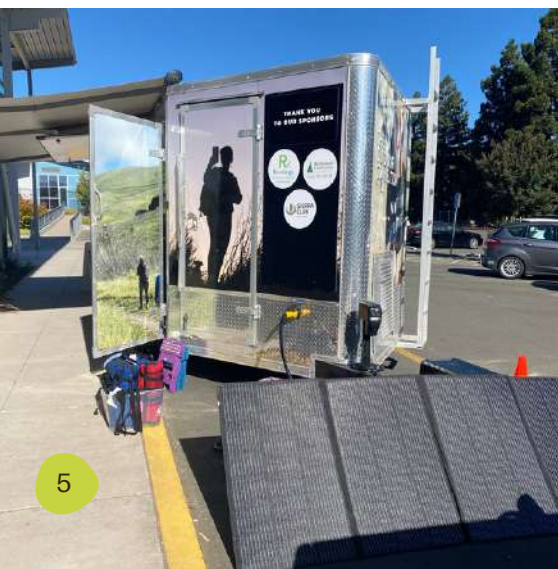


# THE OUTDOOR CONNECTION

**THE  
OUTDOOR  
CONNECTION**  
Trailside Learning Center

The Outdoor Connection had an action-packed summer! The mobile classroom hit the road, delivering hands-on science and environmental education to Napa Valley Unified School District's summer program. **Visits included four district sites and served over 64% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students.**

**Over 350 students explored the natural world, used microscopes, created nature journals, practiced sound mapping, and more. The excitement was contagious, with kids beaming and wishing the mobile classroom could stay longer!**



The Outdoor Connection had an eventful year on the trails, **servicing over 720 community members!** In January, the mobile classroom visited the Wetlands Trail to educate visitors about King Tides before they participated in the California King Tides citizen science project. During the school year, the mobile classroom stays active as part of the Watershed Explorers program for local 4th graders.

By June, the Outdoor Connection traveled to Skyline Park for a Discovery Day focused on pollinators, where Teen WILD volunteers shared fascinating insights about butterflies native to Napa County. In the fall, the Parks Foundation collaborated with the American Canyon Arts Foundation to bring engaging pumpkin science activities to the annual Pumpkin Path event.



# Teen WILD

In 2024, our teen leadership program received exciting updates! To reflect their growing impact and new opportunities, the teens voted to rebrand Teen Play Team as Teen WILD (Wilderness Inspired Leadership & Development).

Last May, we welcomed **24 Teen WILD leaders**—nine returning and 15 new—to the 2024-25 team. These teens work alongside Parks Foundation staff to bring nature programming to the community, contributing to events like Outdoor Connection Trailside Learning Center programs, **trail clean-ups**, community hikes, and more.





Teen WILD members choose from three focus areas—environmental education, conservation, and Earth Day programming—where they plan and lead impactful projects. Volunteers **removed over 50 lbs of trash** in their first wetlands clean-up! In November 2024, the environmental education committee debuted the first teen-led program, the **King Tides Discovery Walk** at Wetlands Edge, featuring education stations on King Tides and their impact on local wetlands.

Teen WILD member Alex Lee described the day, “Our stations—one along the trail to Glass Beach and the other at Glass Beach—drew an unexpectedly high number of curious passersby. The poster boards we created were a great aid in supporting the explanations given by our teen leaders. Visitors asked thoughtful questions about the King Tides and were highly engaged. Many complimented the clarity and appearance of our boards and clay models.”

The conservation and Earth Day committees will launch their projects in the spring of 2025. Applications for Teen WILD open each March—join us and make a difference!



**50lbs**  
Waste  
Removed

# NATURE & COMMUNITY

**300**  
Hours of  
Connection

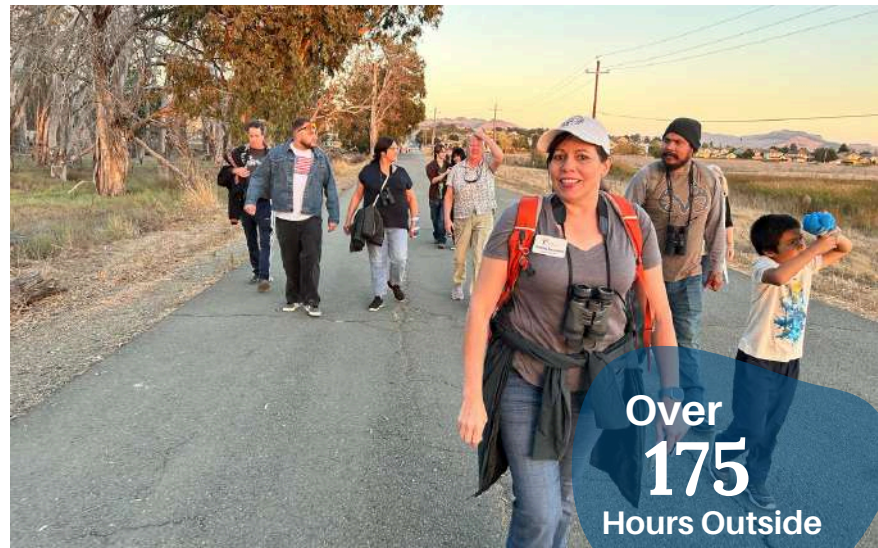


## Wetlands Coffee Mornings

Combining the **beauty of the wetlands**, opportunities for **physical activity** and **socialization**, the Wetlands Coffee Morning series continues to be a favorite way to **connect community with nature**. This year's series was made possible by Starbucks American Canyon and Brian Farmer Insurance. Coffee Morning expanded to include community trail clean-ups and nature walks in 2024.

## Community Hikes

In 2024, the Parks Foundation **expanded trail exploration** opportunities by welcoming staff naturalist Tammy Saunders and partnering with the American Canyon Soroptimist. Trail events offered both **environmental education & social connection for the community**. Events included monthly Slow Strolls, a beginning birding walk, a fall Full Moon Walk, and the first **wetlands community bike ride** with the Napa Bike Coalition and more.



**Over**  
**175**  
Hours Outside

**200**  
Attendees



## Earth Day

The American Canyon wetlands provided a beautiful backdrop for the Earth Day celebration, sponsored by Marin Clean Energy, Recology, and Best Earth Goods. Over **200 community members** gathered for demos, environmental education, docent-led walks, and tours of the water reclamation facility. Over **12 eco-conscious partners** joined the Parks Foundation to bring this inspiring event to life.

## 100 Hours Outside

The 100 Hours Outside Challenge returned for its third year, encouraging residents to spend time outside for better **physical and mental health**. Over 45 days, participants tracked their outdoor activities, aiming for 100 hours. **24 finishers** logged over **3,110 hours outside**, with one participant winning a California State Park pass.



Over  
**3,000**  
Hours Outside

**670**  
Runners &  
Walkers



## 14th Annual Reindeer Run

The Reindeer Run returned to Wetlands Edge Trail in December, drawing a record **670 participants!** Runners and walkers of all ages donned festive attire and enjoyed refreshments, visits with Santa, photos with the Reindeer Run mascot, face painting at the teen-led "sparkle station," and food from Riley's Food Truck. Proceeds support the Parks Foundation's mission to connect community and nature.

## Wine & Wild

In March 2024, the Parks Foundation hosted its first member-exclusive Wine & Wild event at Wetlands Edge Trail. The gathering featured wine, light bites, and a **meet-and-greet with owl ambassadors** from All About Owls. Due to its success, the Foundation plans to launch a public Wine & Wild series in 2025.



Over  
**50**  
Members  
Participated

# FINANCES AT A GLANCE

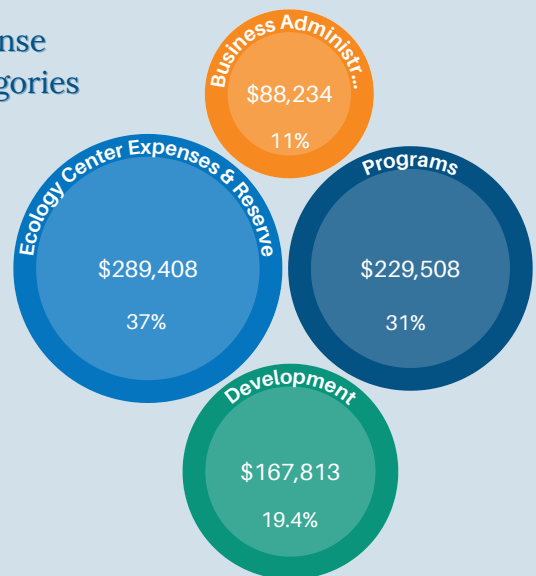
2024 was a notable year for finances as we saw a 36% increase in support of the Ecology Center Project and a doubling of our grant revenue. In April 2024, Congressman Mike Thompson presented an \$800,000 check for the Ecology Center while the City of American Canyon committed to \$1,000,000 in support. These funding successes paved the way for a second round of federal funding, expected to be awarded in 2025.

The Foundation relies on community and business partners to keep expenses low. Ecology Center and direct program services account for nearly 70% of expenses, with overhead kept to a minimum. These sustainable financial practices ensure that the Foundation will serve youth and protect the environment for generations to come.

## Revenue Categories



## Expense Categories



# EVENING AT THE RUINS

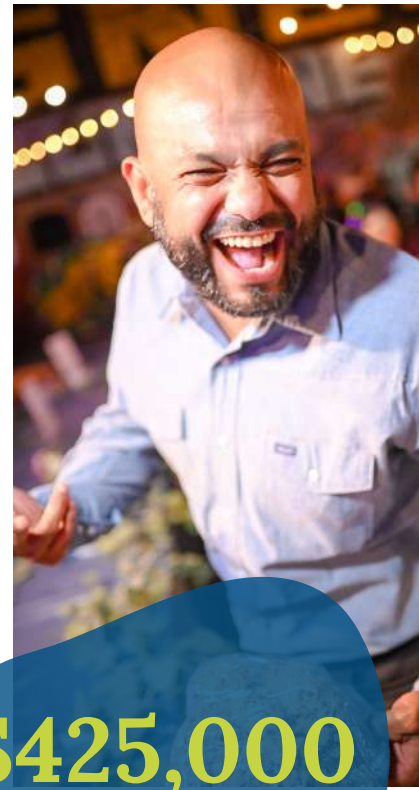
## A Record Breaking Year

The 8th annual Evening at the Ruins was another remarkable year with enthusiastic bidders, exciting entertainment, and an inspiring cause. Thanks to the generosity of our Sponsors, donors, and bidders we raised \$425,000 to support the development of the Napa River Ecology Center. Highlights of the Evening included check presentations from the City of American Canyon and Congressman Mike Thompson, and Teen WILD leaders sharing personal feelings about the importance of the Ecology Center and Teen WILD program to them.

## Thank you

Special thanks to our Sponsors, especially Terry McGrath, McGrath Properties, the Jaeger Family, and JamCan for their ongoing support of An Evening at the Ruins, the Parks Foundation, and our community.

Volunteer shout out - over 60 volunteers come together to make An Evening at the Ruins successful and fun. Special thanks to every volunteer that donates their time and energy.



**\$425,000**

**Raised**



# OUR FUTURE HOME

## The Napa River Ecology Center

The Napa River Ecology Center is a visionary project to repurpose the City's former Corporation Yard into a community education and conservation center focused on the Napa River Wetlands. It is also the future home of the Parks Foundation which will support expanded youth and environmental programs for Napa County and the North Bay region.

2024 was a pivotal year for the project. Planning highlights included securing our Design Permit from the City of American Canyon and approval of our long-term lease by City Council. Seed funding from the City of American Canyon and state and federal agencies allowed us to move forward with project design and permitting. Special thanks to Congressman Mike Thompson for securing \$800,000 in funding through Community Grants. With major funding and approvals in place, the project is nearly shovel ready and construction is expected to begin in early 2026. Special thanks to the City of American Canyon for their partnership and shared vision for the Napa River Ecology Center. We invite you to follow along and get involved! For more information, please visit [www.napariverecologycenter.org](http://www.napariverecologycenter.org).



Environmental Education



Community Gathering



Accessible Facilities



# CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

## DONOR HIGHLIGHT – SCOTT THOMASON



The Parks Foundation is honored to recognize Scott Thomason, a dedicated former board member, volunteer, and passionate advocate for the Parks Foundation. His unwavering commitment to our mission has not only shaped the future of our programs but has also inspired countless others to get involved. Scott’s generosity knows no bounds.

Through his time, leadership, and philanthropy, he has given generously to support conservation efforts, education, and community programs. His dedication has played a vital role in launching the Napa River Ecology Center ensuring that future generations can enjoy and protect the wetlands.

According to Scott:

“I am a long-time environmental and conservation advocate, a retired educator and a strong supporter of the Parks Foundation (past Board president) and the Napa River Ecology Center. I can’t think of a more worthwhile group or project, and it is my privilege and honor to help fund the Ecology Center and the Parks Foundation’s many important programs, especially the Watershed Explorers. The staff and board represent the best American Canyon has to offer in so many ways.”

Thank you, Scott, for your incredible generosity and unwavering dedication!

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

In 2024, the Parks Foundation welcomed seven adult volunteers to the new Community Engagement Committee (CEC). CEC members serve as ambassadors at community events, support staff at trail activities, and meet quarterly to review volunteer opportunities and provide input on membership events.

The friendly faces of the CEC can be seen supporting the Parks Foundation at coffee mornings, community hikes, trail clean-ups, and more. New members are actively being recruited. If you would like to learn more about CEC volunteer opportunities, email Andrea Long at [andrea@acparks.org](mailto:andrea@acparks.org).



### 2024 CEC MEMBERS

Claudia Rameriz  
Hugh Marquez  
Michelle Marquez  
Charles Plummer III

Harold Collins  
Karina Montanez  
Darlene Barga

# CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

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American Canyon Environmental Services  
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Napa County Regional Parks and Open Space District

Napa County Resource Conservation District  
Napa Wildlife Rescue  
Napa-Solano Audubon Society  
Recology American Canyon  
Sierra Club - Napa Group  
Soroptimist of American Canyon  
Suscol Intertribal Council

## 2024 REINDEER RUN COMMITTEE

Danielle Schofield  
Scott Thomason  
Elaine Boloyan  
Tai Gaskins



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Mark & Cheryl Joseph  
Kenneth Leary  
Fran Lemos  
Anthony & Crystal Mallare

Nance Matson & Sande Sutter  
Elizabeth Moulds  
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David & Patricia Oro  
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Mike & Janelle Sellick  
Paul & Dana Shigley  
Alan Tran & Saeko Sugo





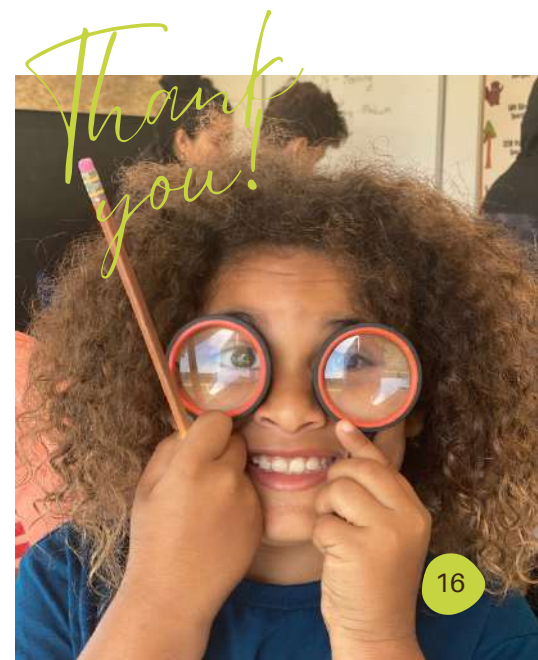
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Zita Latona



# FUNDING PARTNERS

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the grantors and sponsors whose generous support has been instrumental to Parks Foundation's success. Your unwavering dedication to our mission has enabled us to create meaningful and lasting change within our community. Thanks to your trust and investment in our vision, we've been able to deliver impactful school and community programs that make a real difference.

Your ongoing partnership not only sustains our efforts but also motivates us to aim higher and achieve more as we continue pursuing our goals. We are profoundly thankful for your belief in our work and the brighter future we are building together.

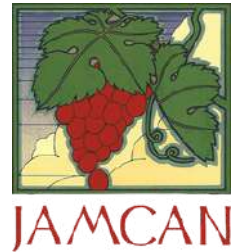
## Grant Funders



## The Outdoor Connection Sponsors



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Hugh & Michelle Marquez



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Mayor Leon and Eva Garcia



