Raritan Headwaters Association

2024-2025 Report

Sharing Our Progress

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Dear Friends,

I want to thank you for standing with us in our mission to conserve, restore and protect our region's natural resources. Today, your support is more critical than ever.

We are living in a time of unprecedented environmental challenges. Climate change is accelerating, bringing more frequent floods, droughts, and extreme weather events that negatively impact our streams, rivers, and lakes. These events threaten not only the vitality of important ecosystems but also the health and safety of people in our communities.

At the same time, regulations protecting clean water and public lands have been rolled back along with support for the scientific research that informs effective policymaking to mitigate and adapt to these adverse impacts. This is where you come in.

Local action is our strongest defense, and the need for action has never been greater. It's up to communities like ours to meet the moment. Thanks to your generous support, we've been able to:

- Monitor the health of our watershed and drinking water supplies
- Mobilize volunteers to clean up area waterways and restore critical habitats
- Educate the next generation of environmental stewards
- Advocate for stronger protections at the state and municipal levels
- Preserve hundreds of acres of watershed lands.

But we must not let up in our efforts. The current challenges require bold, grassroots leadership—and that continues with us.

Your support empowers Raritan Headwaters to act swiftly, resourcefully, and independently in pursuit of this mission. Together, we can bring about a future where clean water, healthy ecosystems, and climate resilience are not just goals but sustainable achievements.

Thank you for your partnership in securing the future. Together, we are protecting valuable resources that are essential for everyone.

Onward,

Mara Tippett,
Executive Director

Our vision is that everyone within our reach has access to safe, clean water that is swimmable, fishable, and above all, drinkable.

Our Mission: Since 1959, Raritan Headwaters Association has focused on one thing — clean water. We engage citizens and decision makers in the protection of our watershed and beyond through science, education, advocacy, land preservation and stewardship.

RHA's Vision for 2025-2027

In early 2025, the Board of Trustees adopted a strategic plan to guide RHA over the next three years, addressing the ecological and public health challenges ahead. Our region's environmental threats include polluted stormwater runoff from residential, commercial, and agricultural areas, as well as extreme weather events that can lead to flooding or drought. The plan is a bold roadmap that outlines clear, attainable goals and impactful strategies.

With your help, RHA will intensify its efforts to improve water quality through expanded stream restoration projects and by proactively tackling emerging contaminants like PFAS and microplastics that threaten public and watershed health. The plan also reaffirms our commitment to increasing access to nature, providing inclusive outdoor experiences for people of all abilities. RHA will continue to be a strong advocate, promoting policies that prevent unsustainable development and supporting land use choices that protect ecological integrity.

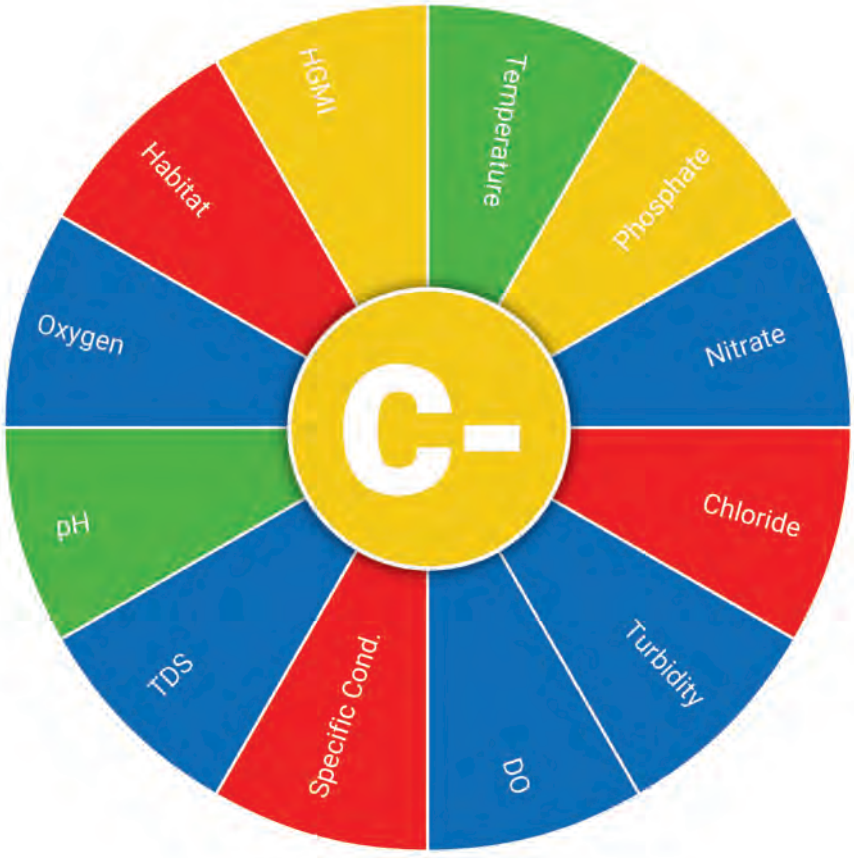
Scan to read the full strategic plan

Protecting Water Quality

RHA protects, restores, and improves water quality in the headwaters of the Raritan River to meet the highest water quality standards for aquatic and human health.

RHA serves the Upper Raritan River watershed region with the most comprehensive water testing program for surface water in New Jersey. Working in collaboration with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), RHA provides critical data included in the Integrated Water Quality Assessment Report, offering a thorough evaluation of New Jersey's surface waters, such as rivers, lakes, and streams. The NJDEP only tests water once every five years, while RHA conducts tests annually. Why is this important? Frequent testing helps identify emerging contaminants and health hazards present in our watershed communities. We track pollution sources, monitor the health of aquatic ecosystems, and provide reliable data for trend analysis and understanding the effectiveness of water quality improvements.

2024 Surface Water Report Card



Raritan Headwaters health scale

Very good A B C D F Very poor

Scan for access to the full surface water quality report and learn why we received a C- in 2024.

83 sites monitored

85 citizen scientist volunteers

Test Your Well

You cannot see, smell or taste common well water contaminants.

Eighty percent of homes in the Upper Raritan River watershed in Hunterdon, Somerset, and Morris counties get their drinking water from privately-owned wells. RHA partners with municipalities across the region each spring and fall to host community well testing events. Residents can test their well water at a reduced cost. This program makes it easy and convenient for residents to perform regular well testing. Well testing is available year-round for residents who can pick up test kits at our offices in Bedminster and Flemington.

1,238 taps and 6,416 individual tests conducted in 38 municipalities

More well owners tested for PFAS in 2024, doubling the number of PFAS tests conducted compared to 2022. This testing has proven essential, because over a three-year period, 74% of the 404 wells tested contained PFAS, with 54% exceeding EPA limits. To learn more about PFAS and access resources on testing and treatment, explore the new PFAS Toolkit on RHA's website.

Take Action - Become River Friendly!

We can all help keep our water clean by reducing the use of fertilizers and pesticides, conserving water, choosing eco-friendly products, and ensuring that waste is disposed of properly. We are all connected through the precious resource of clean water, and being part of the River-Friendly program shows you are doing your part to protect the watershed's natural resources. Learn how you can become River Friendly here: www.raritanheadwaters.org/2020/04/30/becoming-a-certified-river-friendly-resident/

RIVER FRIENDLY

RHA receives grant funding to protect the American eel

American eels face threats from degraded water quality, habitat loss, and dams that block their migration. RHA has launched the eel monitoring and education program to support conservation of this keystone species. RHA scientists deployed eel mops to monitor juvenile eel populations and installed an eel ladder to facilitate upstream migration at a major regional dam. Our educators are incorporating lessons about the American eel into school and public programs to raise awareness about this vulnerable species.

Elver (young eel)

Advocacy: The Key to Lasting Change

Raritan Headwaters leads local and statewide advocacy efforts

Raritan Headwaters supports regulations and policies that protect clean water and natural habitats. We use our science-based data to inform policy-making at all levels of government. We empower citizen advocacy by providing information and tools to help the public share their positions with elected officials and decision makers in the communities where they live.

Equipping municipalities with the knowledge and tools they need

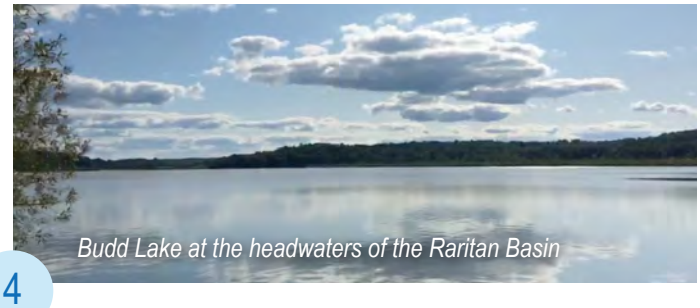
In 2024, individuals from over 40 municipalities and 5 counties attended Our Watershed Tools for Local Leaders workshops presented by experts from RHA and invited speakers from state agencies, universities, and other non-profit organizations. They received expert knowledge to help them make informed decisions that protect water resources in the Upper Raritan region.

Statewide Leadership

Executive Director Mara Tippett has been appointed as an acting member of the NJ State Water Supply Advisory Council, where she serves as the sole watershed representative. This Council advises the NJDEP on policies and planning related to the protection, allocation, and long-term management of the state's drinking water resources. Mara's appointment ensures that the voice of our watershed community is represented.

Seeking Stronger Protections for Our Rivers at the National Level

RHA is working to secure the National Wild and Scenic designation for our key waterways and has gained bipartisan congressional support to move forward with this critical step in protecting the Upper Raritan River watershed.



Budd Lake at the headwaters of the Raritan Basin

RHA is monitoring the remediation of toxic contamination at the former Hercules Kenvil Works explosives plant located at the source of the Black River and successfully challenged a proposed warehouse on the site.

First stormwater utility in the region

Raritan Township launched the first stormwater utility in our region! In New Jersey, a stormwater utility is a type of public utility created under the Clean Stormwater and Flood Reduction Act (signed into law in March 2019). It allows local and county governments, as well as certain utilities, to establish a dedicated entity responsible for managing stormwater runoff. Nobody likes new fees, but this forward-thinking, financially responsible approach guarantees that those with the greatest impervious cover contribute their fair share, creating a sustainable path toward cleaner waterways, reduced flooding, and a more resilient community.

Headwaters to Bay Initiative

RHA is partnering with Duke Farms and NY/NJ Baykeeper to bring together leaders from the 1,100 square-mile Raritan Basin. Our goal is to align restoration priorities from the headwaters region to the Raritan Bay – enhancing habitats and public access, improving water quality, and building a more resilient, connected watershed.

Education and Outreach

RHA is developing the next generation of environmental leaders

Learning about the natural world helps young people understand ecological systems and how human activities affect land and water. By encouraging a sense of responsibility, students are inspired to take active steps for conservation. RHA is dedicated to removing barriers to participation for youth from underserved communities and for those with disabilities.

The **Environmental Leaders Academy** offers high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to explore future studies and careers in the environmental field. Students learn from environmental experts and explore topics such as climate change, environmental justice, biodiversity, sustainability, resource protection, and more. Thanks to the support from Royal Bank of Canada and others, RHA provides this program at no cost to students from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. It includes a year-long experience that features a 5-day overnight summer program, a 12-month mentoring relationship, and quarterly workshops, along with ongoing support from past students navigating college applications and employment.

RHA also partners with **Greater Newark LifeCamp**, a summer program in Tewksbury for 300 children from Newark. RHA Educators spend six weeks at the camp offering nature-based programs for children who lack access to the outdoors.

492 campers • 29 RHA educators
31 schools • 1530 students

Environmental Leaders Academy

Fun and discovery at LifeCamp

Environmental Leaders Academy

Natural Solutions for Climate Resistance and Restoring Habitat

RHA stewards land and protects riparian corridors and stream integrity.

When natural areas, such as forests and wetlands, are functioning correctly, they support healthy habitats and clean water, protect us from floods, and even combat climate change. However, when we harm these critical resources by polluting, overbuilding, or removing native species, they stop working properly, degrading wildlife and human communitites. Maintaining a balance in nature helps everyone thrive.

Removing Dams to Restore Natural River Flow and Fish Migration

Many of New Jersey's dams, built as early as the 1700s to power mills, are now outdated and harming water quality and river ecosystems. These low-head dams hinder fish migration, degrade wetlands, and alter floodplains. Removing them restores habitats and boosts biodiversity.

Raritan Headwaters is leading dam removal efforts across the watershed region. In 2024, RHA received a $2.3 million National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) grant to remove the Rockafellows Mills dam, a multi-year project. This and other removals on the South Branch are underway to reduce flooding and improve water quality.

NOAA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the NJDEP are key partners in this effort. RHA is also collaborating with The Nature Conservancy, which is funding design and feasibility for two additional dam removal projects in the watershed.

Dam removal underway

Planting Trees to Combat Climate Change

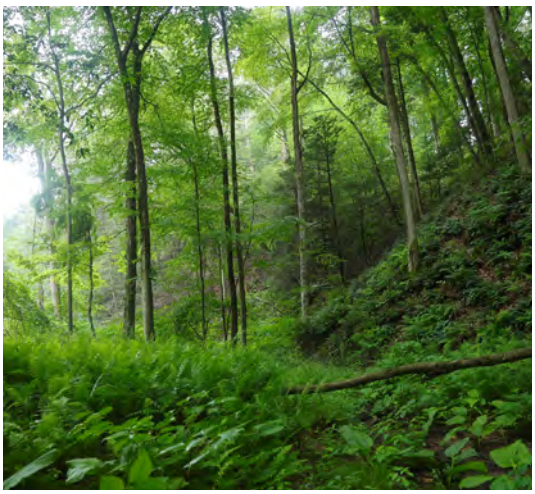
Trees, trees, and more trees! Trees are essential for absorbing and storing carbon dioxide, helping to clean the air and cool the planet. Tree roots stabilize soil, preventing erosion. They absorb rainwater, which reduces the amount of polluted stormwater runoff entering our rivers and lakes.

RHA created the Woods and Waterways tree planting program to involve communities in restoration efforts. In 2024 and 2025, RHA awarded grants to 16 new public and private landowners for riparian buffer tree planting projects at 17 different sites. Municipal partners include Hunterdon, Morris, and Somerset counties, along with the boroughs of Peapack-Gladstone, Califon, High Bridge, and Far Hills, as well as the townships of Clinton, Raritan, Roxbury, and Washington. RHA planted 2,770 trees toward the planned total of 10,000.

Volunteers planting trees

Preserving and Stewarding Land

Preserved - 11-acre Forested Parcel



In March 2025, RHA completed the preservation of the Civille property along the North Branch of the Raritan River in Mendham Township. After a two-year effort to secure open space preservation funding, RHA purchased and donated the entire parcel to the Schiff Natural Lands Trust, ensuring its perpetual management as an extension of the Schiff Nature Preserve. Once planned for a large home overlooking the river, the property now serves as a vital habitat corridor, enhancing biodiversity and protecting critical water resources. The property provides essential refuge for vulnerable species, including the Wood Turtle, Barred Owl, Bobcat, Bald Eagle, and Indiana Bat, and features nearly 550 feet of stream frontage.

RHA Supports Greenway Expansion in Readington

Cushetunk Nature Preserve

In 2025, Raritan Headwaters Association partnered with Readington Township, Hunterdon County, and the NJ Green Acres Program to preserve a key greenway parcel on Mountain Road in Lebanon, enhancing public access to the Cushetunk Nature Preserve. Once marred by a dilapidated structure and debris, the site has since been transformed through cleanup, native tree plantings, and volunteer stewardship. The preservation of this small but strategically important property strengthens protections for the South Branch of the Rockaway Creek. It brings Readington one step closer to realizing its vision of a connected greenway network. Funding from RHA's Green Acres grant played a critical role in the project's success.

RHA Renews Land Accreditation Status

Raritan Headwaters first received land trust accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission in 2018. The Commission recognizes land trusts that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural lands and waters. Accreditation is renewed every five years through a rigorous review process that ensures adherence to best practices in land preservation and nonprofit governance. RHA was most recently reaccredited in 2024, reaffirming RHA's commitment to conservation excellence and responsible land management.

Powered by Volunteers

We don't just value our volunteers, we depend on them!
They extend our reach far beyond what staff alone could accomplish.

More than **2,400 individuals volunteered** in 2024 to support RHA's mission In addition to individual participation, RHA hosted more than twenty five corporate, school groups and garden clubs, who volunteered for stewardship projects on Fairview Farm and throughout the watershed. They planted trees, removed invasive species, and cared for our gardens.

2025 Stream Cleanup

In April, despite freezing rain, sleet, and snow, nearly 1,000 volunteers participated in Raritan Headwaters' 35th Annual Stream Cleanup. The effort spanned 70 locations across the 470-square-mile Upper Raritan River watershed, including Hunterdon, Somerset, and Morris counties. In just three hours, volunteers collected a staggering 12.2 tons of trash and recyclables.

2024 Volunteer of the Year

We're thrilled to recognize Marilynn Schneider as our 2024 Volunteer of the Year! A retired Novartis professional and lifelong New Jerseyan, Marilynn has become a cornerstone of RHA's volunteer community. From stream cleanups to tree plantings and stewardship events, her dedication is unmatched.

Marilynn's love for nature began on her childhood dairy farm and continues to shine through her tireless efforts. "I really appreciate the very necessary work that RHA does to repair and protect the environment and am happy to help," she shares.

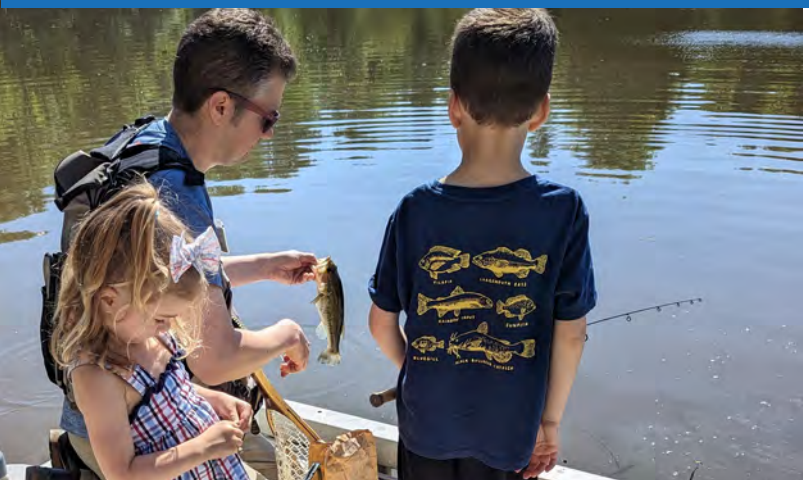
Her passion is contagious, and we're proud to celebrate her as a true champion of our mission.

Scouts in Service of Conservation

RHA maintains strong and ongoing partnerships with Boy and Girl Scout troops, offering educational programs and opportunities for meaningful service projects. In 2024, we had the great pleasure of working alongside five aspiring Eagle Scouts, helping them complete their service projects, which included building and installing kestrel nest boxes, constructing bog bridges on wet trails to improve visitor access, and creating a trail information kiosk.

70 sites • 1000 volunteers • 12 tons of trash and recyclables • 5162 plastic bottles collected

Happenings in our Watershed



Young anglers had a blast at our **Hooked on Fishing** derby sponsored by NJ Fish and Wildlife!

The community came together on Fairview Farm to attend **Shedfest**, a music festival for all ages.

To support the **American Kestrel** population, in 2024, RHA installed 10 new nest boxes in the watershed, bringing the total to 50. Forty-four chicks successfully fledged!

ELA students kayaking at a local lake. Our **kayaks** make every camper's experience unforgettable!

Birdathon engaged both young and experienced birders who helped us raise funds for science and education programs.

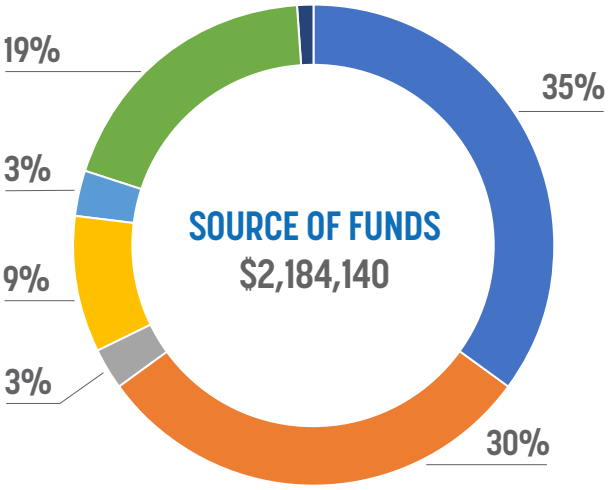
RHA Educators ready to lead another magical **Lantern Walk** on Fairview Farm.

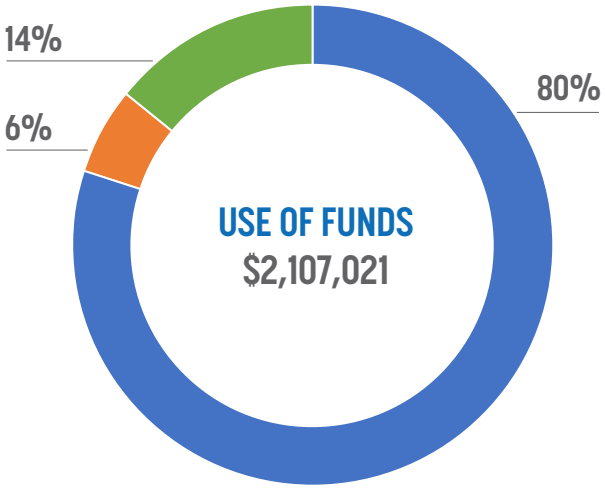
To Our Donors and Partners

Thank you for supporting RHA's mission. You play a vital role in protecting our natural resources, ensuring that future generations can enjoy and benefit from healthy, thriving watersheds. As we face today's challenges, your support will help promote environmentally friendly practices and policies, engage our communities in collective action, and safeguard our land and water. You play a vital role in accelerating the transition to a sustainable future and protecting our planet for future generations.

Fiscal Year January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024

Raritan Headwaters Association is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) conservation organization that operates on the calendar year, January 1 and ends on December 31. Our accounts are audited on an annual basis by the accounting firm of James M. Wood, CPA. Presented are two graphs depicting the Functional Expenses and Support Revenue of the Association for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2024.





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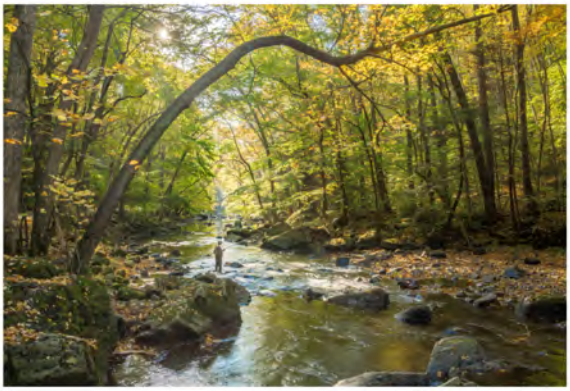

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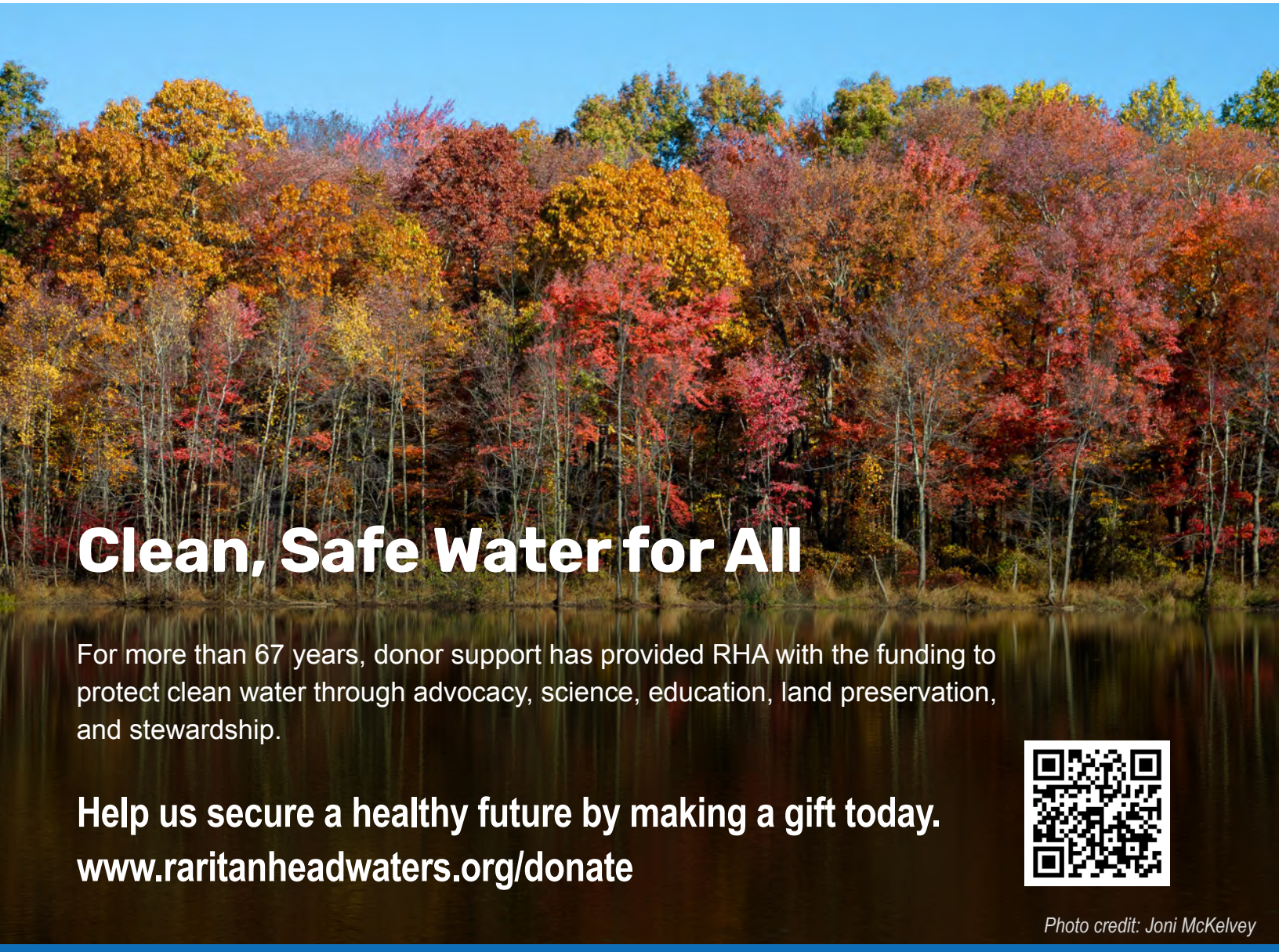

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