



Friends of the Chemung River Watershed Strategic Plan 2022-2026

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Work Groups & Organizational Purpose

Strategic Planning Committee – FCRW Board of Directors

Lee Doud, President
Jim Emmick, Vice President
Don Hall, Secretary
Austin Farrell, Treasurer
Jeff DeMeritt
Monica Li
Dave Pindel
Kyle Reynolds
Emily Smith

FCRW Strategic Planning Process Advisors

Aria Camaione-Lind – Principal & CEO of Aria Strategies Consulting LLC
Randi Hewit – President of the Community Foundation of Elmira-Corning and the Finger Lakes
Wendy Walsh – Watershed Coordinator and Board Member of the Upper Susquehanna Coalition

FCRW Strategic Planning Facilitator

Emily Marino – Executive Director of FCRW

FCRW Organizational Advisors

Tanya McGee
Robert Switala
Nikole Watts
Patrick Wood

Organizational Purpose

The purpose of the Friends of the Chemung River Watershed (FCRW) is to be a resource for the community and visitors on everything related to the Chemung river, its tributaries, and the surrounding Watershed. We work to connect the public to these waterways and riverbanks, and make these areas easier and safer for our community to use and enjoy. Our focus is the Chemung River, and we provide support to the waterways and riverbanks that make up the entirety of the Chemung River Watershed. We advocate for the preservation and promotion of the Chemung River Watershed in order to meet our mission and achieve our vision.

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Context

History

For years, the Chemung River in Steuben and Chemung Counties was considered by many a dirty waterway, a flood threat, and a barrier dividing communities. But the public's attitude slowly began to change, and by 2008 residents recognized the 45-mile waterway as a natural community asset that could improve our environment, economy, and quality of life.

That change in public attitude encouraged local government to form a consortium of municipalities, nonprofit groups, and other river-related organizations to establish a regional grass-roots river-development network. In 2008, the River Trail Assessment & Comprehensive Master Plan was developed by Chemung County, the City of Elmira, and the towns of Chemung, Southport, Elmira, and Big Flats for river use, development, and protection. In order to make this plan a reality, the nonprofit organization "Friends of the Chemung River Watershed" (FCRW) was incorporated in 2009. Under the direction of the FCRW co-founder and executive director, with the board of directors, the organization used the Comprehensive Master Plan as a road map, encouraging the public to use, respect, and enjoy our waterways.

In 2020, the co-founder and original executive director retired, and the board hired a nonprofit professional with a background in fundraising and organizational management to lead the organization into the future. Under the direction of the new executive director and board of directors, the FCRW continues to be dedicated to protecting and promoting the Chemung River Watershed. Primarily focused on the 45 miles of the Chemung River, the organization also supports work on the tributaries and riverside trails, with formalized boat launches throughout the Watershed and maintenance on the surrounding trails. The FCRW works with municipal partners, local businesses, and community residents to weave the regional waterways into future development. Chemung County, the City of Elmira, and the four riverside towns agreed to help finance the initial start-up of the FCRW, and today the organization is supported by member donors, businesses, grant funders, and municipal partners throughout the Watershed.

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Current Landscape

The Friends of the Chemung River Watershed aspires to be the community's connection for everything related to the Chemung River, its tributaries, and the trails and grounds surrounding the river. The Chemung River is at the center of regional recreation for guided paddles, fishing, riverside hikes, cross-country skiing, bird watching, nature photography, and river events and programs. The clean river water makes for great outdoor recreation—drawing both locals and tourists to the area—and is the foundation for sustainable communities and healthy ecosystems. Preserving the waterways helps to protect the health of the communities, and this is at the heart the FCRW's mission. By promoting and educating the community on fun and safe recreation on and around the river system, the FCRW improves the quality of life in the Southern Tier and helps residents to embrace their role in protecting and preserving precious environmental resources.

The organization currently offers a wide variety of programs, centering around three pillars - outdoor recreation and river safety, environmental education and appreciation, and cleaner waterways and quality of life. The FCRW provides guided tours, hikes, and safe boating programs for all ages. They offer riverside education and environmental conservation programs to adults, youths, and families. They also organize volunteer cleanups, build boat launches, and add to and improve riverside trails, as they work to make rivers easier, safer, and more fun to use and enjoy. Their donor member community is made up of environmentalists, outdoor recreational enthusiasts, environmentally focused educators, and engaged citizens residing within a few miles of the 45-miles of the Chemung River. They also have a small percentage of donor members located along the tributaries in the greater 2,600 square miles of the greater Chemung River Watershed. Their work is supported through grants, business sponsorship, municipal funding support, member donations and general donations, and programming.

The Chemung River stretches from the Town of Painted Post in Steuben County New York east through the City of Corning, and the town of Corning.

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It then continues east into Chemung County New York where it winds through the Town of Big Flats, the Town of Elmira, the City of Elmira, the Town of Southport, the Town of Ashland, and the Town of Chemung. It ends by crossing the border into Bradford County Pennsylvania, and moves near to the Town of Sayre, finally connecting with the Susquehanna River in the Township of Athens.

The tributaries of the Chemung River are the Canisteo, Cohocton, Cowanesque, and Tioga. The FCRW's primary focus for their service area is Steuben and Chemung County in New York, and Tioga County in Pennsylvania. As they broaden their services to the tributaries, they look to serve the greater portion of the Chemung River Watershed.

The main counties the FCRW focus on are Chemung and Steuben County in New York. Steuben County has a population of roughly 92,948 with 21.6% under the age of 18, and 20.3% over the age of 65. Chemung County has a population of 83,045 with 21.1% under the age of 18, and 19.8% over the age of 65. Both counties are predominantly white, with 87.8% in Chemung County and 94.6% in Steuben County. The Black and Latino populations are larger in Chemung county: 6.6% and 3.6%, whereas Steuben county are 1.7% and 1.8% respectively. Chemung county has 3.7% of its population who identify as Two or More Races and 1.5% Asian alone, whereas Steuben County has 1.7% and 1.6% for those populations, respectively. Both counties are around ten percentage points lower than the national average for persons 25+ years with a bachelor's degree or higher. The median value of owner-occupied housing units is around \$125k less than the national average, with the median household income around \$10k less than the national average for both counties. Chemung county has 14.5% of its population living in poverty, and Steuben county has 12.1%, while the national average is 11.4%. Both counties are around two percentage points over the national average for people under the age of 65 living with a disability, and about four to five percentage points below the national average for people over the age of 16 in the workforce. The population per square mile in Chemung County is 206.6, and 67.3 in Steuben county, with 407.33 and 1,390.51 for land area in square miles, respectively.

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Context

The largest employer in Steuben County is Corning, Inc. (formerly Corning Glass Works), and the largest employer in Chemung County is Arnot Health.

The region is one of small towns, rolling hills, and strong family ties. Many of the people who live in the community were born there, with some companies drawing individuals from outside of the community (or the country) to relocate within the hills of the Southern Tier. A new influx of young people is beginning to arrive with the ability to work remotely and be closer to family, and there is a new focus on outdoor recreation as a means of leisure time. With the Finger Lakes of New York just north of the Chemung River Watershed, the river community has the ability to capitalize on the national recognition of the FLX Wine County and the outdoor beauty of the region. Nature is literally at your doorstep, and many of the residents tend to look to the outdoors for fun, recreation, culture, and food. Fishing is common on the river, with a large portion of fly-fishing happening on the rivers and streams in the Chemung River Watershed. The cities, towns, and municipalities that the Chemung River and its tributaries runs through have traditionally looked at the FCRW as a community development and tourism promotion partner. FCRW works with schools, children, families, and adults to educate on the benefits and risks associated with having a river in their backyard. The community has also been tragically effected by catastrophic flooding in memorable history (The Agnes Hurricane Flood of 1972), and more recently with unpredictable weather due to climate change. The FCRW works with local law enforcement and rescue personnel to educate the community on river safety and flooding risk mitigation, while continuing to repair the community's relationship with the river.

The community is at a critical juncture where the fears and pain from the worst flood in memory have begun to subside, and people are learning how to work with the river to create a respectful relationship with this wild and beautiful natural asset. The FCRW has worked hard to repair the perception of the river in the community's eyes, and many are now responsibly utilizing the river and the surrounding riverside trails on a regular basis. This strategic plan looks to build upon the work of the first twelve years of the FCRW, and move the organization from grassroots to a more professional and full-capacity environmental stewardship and recreational promotion nonprofit organization.

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Methodology

In 2021, the FCRW identified the need for an updated strategic plan. With the help of the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC), the executive director of FCRW pursued a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to support the full-time employment of the FCRW executive director to implement a successful strategic planning process. During this time, the board and the executive director also engaged in brainstorming sessions with Randi Hewit, the President of the Community Foundation of Elmira-Corning and the Finger Lakes, on board development and strategic pre-planning. Upon receiving notification of award of the grant, FCRW sought an experienced and qualified consultant to provide assistance with public engagement and data collection. The work with the consultant, Aria Camaione-Lind, was conducted at the beginning of 2022; this included community outreach and engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders including, but not limited to, community leaders, organizational and government partners, educators, outdoor recreational enthusiasts, environmental advocates, FCRW members, and residents of the Watershed. The public engagement methodology utilized by the consultant and the executive director included stakeholder mapping and interviews, small group engagements including focus groups and constituent caucuses, and a digital community survey. Under the direction of the executive director, the board of directors embarked on six strategic planning work sessions at the end of each board meeting, from January through July in 2022. These work sessions lasted for approximately one-hour and included conversations and activities about the context for this work, the purpose, vision and values organization, current and future needs of the community and environment of the Chemung River Watershed, and goals and implementation methods for the recommended strategic framework. Upon board approval, the final plan was delivered to the FCRW Advisors and the Upper Susquehanna Coalition. The following is an executive summary of the result of that work.

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Guiding Principles

FCRW Mission

The mission of the FCRW is to protect the Chemung River Watershed while promoting the responsible recreational enjoyment of its waterways and riverbanks.

FCRW Vision

The FCRW envisions a world where the natural beauty and health of the river's ecosystem is valued and maintained by students, the community, and the regional policy makers, and where the public enjoys regular outdoor recreation on the river and riverside trails supported by local infrastructure and regional business.

FCRW Values

- Community & Quality of Life: Rivers that are used frequently make it easier for businesses to attract and keep employees, and help keep people invested in these areas.
- Conservation: Rivers account for much of the world's drinking water, and feeds biodiversity and agriculture.
- Eco-Tourism: Rivers attract tourists and businesses to the region and encourage growth, sharing of services, and connections with other river communities.
- Environmental Advocacy: Rivers open the door to the exploration of nature and provide a better understanding and respect for the environment.
- Environmental Education: Rivers offer an easy and fun way to see and learn more about wildlife and nature.
- Outdoor Recreation: Rivers offer family-oriented recreation that helps improve health and wellness.
- River Safety: Rivers are wild natural resources, and must be enjoyed safely and with respect.

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Strategic Framework

The following Strategic Framework was created by the executive director and the board of boards using feedback from the Chemung River Watershed community, collected by the consultant during the public engagement exercises of this project, as outlined in the methodology.

Priority #1: Promote the safe use and importance of the Chemung River Watershed.

- Goal #1: Clarify the purpose/mission of our organization and the need we fulfill to the community and the watershed.
 - Tactic #1: Define brand and create marketing materials consistent with branding to clearly articulate who we are and what we do.
 - Tactic #2: Create marketing campaign to increase exposure; including updating newsletter software to segment audiences and create targeted communications, executing monthly email communications with members, and taking advantage of opportunities to provide consistent messaging to the community in line with our brand.
- Goals #2: Improve the ease of access to the river and riverbank trails, and continue to support watershed recreational safety.
 - Tactic #1: Support the development of the NY Southern Tier Water Trail with the help of regional tourism promotion agencies.
 - Tactic #2: Identify key locations and execute water access site upgrades, trail improvements, and other physical improvements.
 - Tactic #3: Support River safety education, resources, and local emergency rescue services.
- Goal #3: Reinforce sustainability of our organization as an environmental stewardship and promotion community nonprofit, in service to this priority.
 - Tactic #1: Grow active relationships with constituents.
 - Tactic #2: Expand sustainable fundraising practices throughout the year, including direct mailing, digital solicitations, events, grants, business sponsorships, and events.
 - Tactic #3: Research potential revenue streams for more diversified income, and develop annual budget.
 - Tactic #4: Conduct condensed strategic planning work sessions for next 5-year plan.

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Strategic Framework

Priority #2: Create meaningful education, programming, and community engagement opportunities for stakeholders focused on the Watershed.

- Goal #1: Grow organizational capacity, in a sustainable manner, to execute increased demand for programming, communications, and need for fundraising.
 - Tactic #1: Formalize key organizational policies for employee recruitment/retention & organizational management.
 - Tactic #2: Develop financial projections model to support sustainable staff growth.
 - Tactic #3: Hire additional staff member(s) to assist with and execute educational programming, volunteer coordinator, communications, and fundraising.
 - Tactic #4: Secure appropriate office/storage space for future growth.
 - Tactic #5: Expanded volunteer activities/programs, and subsequently expand the volunteer corps through targeted and proactive recruitment.
- Goals #2: Engage with school-aged children to provide learning about river ecology and environmental conservation, in line with NYS Learning Standards.
 - Tactic #1: Continue to develop relationships with schools, and other educational groups to increase annual outreach programming.
 - Tactic #2: Develop river-oriented educational programs and materials geared towards science and conservation for school aged-children, in line with NYS standards.
 - Tactic #3: Execute environmental educational programs for school-aged youths, targeting NYS curriculum guidelines for success.
- Goal #3: Engage with community through diversified programming and community engagement opportunities, geared at wide-ranging demographics.
 - Tactic #1: Develop Annual Programs Calendar targeting youth, families, and adults.
 - Tactic #2: Support and execute FCRW Annual River Programs.
 - Tactic #3: Support and execute FCRW Annual Trails/Launchsite/Riverbanks/Educational Programs.
 - Tactic #4: Grow services to better serve communities along the tributaries.

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Strategic Framework

Priority #3: Steward the Watershed around critical environmental conservation issues.

- Goal #1: Implement water quality improvement measures in line with NYSDEC Phase III Watershed Improvement Plan.
 - Tactic #1: Support Upper Susquehanna Coalition with education and outreach for riparian buffer program to positively impact flood resiliency.
 - Tactic #2: Continue and expand Watershed Garbage Clean-up Events to help with pollution mitigation.
 - Tactic #3: Share Chemung River Watershed water quality information with public, and advocate for volunteers for water quality testing and monitoring.
- Goals #2: Increase our advocacy role in the community to increase awareness of environmental issues affecting the Watershed, with specific focus on flood resiliency.
 - Tactic #1: Become more organizationally competent on current conservation trends, and ways to integrate these into our programming and activities, with focus on engaging under-represented populations and youth in our community.
 - Tactic #2: Advocate for local, regional, and national policy decisions that will affect environmental issues impacting the Watershed.
- Goal #3: Support and collaborate with sister agencies/institutions/committees working on watershed conservation issues.
 - Tactic #1: Continue to engage with similar agencies focused on Watershed conservation and environmentally protection or education, both locally and nationally.
 - Tactic #2: Attend conferences and register for continuing education geared at collaborative stewardship of the watershed.
 - Tactic #3: Develop community engagement programming with sister agencies/institutions/committees.

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Oversight & Deadlines

An Implementation Schedule (on file with the FCRW) was created for this framework, and is a “living” detailed internal document, with key performance indicators that will be reviewed quarterly by the board of directors and executive director. This is a brief overview of the Implementation Schedule, and the “Priorities” and “Goals” are reflected on the previous page in the Strategic Framework.

Priority #1 - Goal #1

- Tactic #1: Overseen by ED, Marketing/Fundraising Committee, & Board. Deadline of 2023.
- Tactic #2: Overseen by ED. Deadline of 2023; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually or are on-going.

Priority #1 - Goal #2

- Tactic #1: Overseen by ED. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics are on-going.
- Tactic #2: Overseen by ED & Board. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics are on-going.
- Tactic #3: Overseen by Staff, ED, & Board. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually or are on-going.

Priority #1 - Goal #3

- Tactic #1: Overseen by Staff, ED, Marketing/Fundraising Committee, & Board. Deadline of 2023; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually or are on-going.
- Tactic #2: Overseen by Staff, ED, Marketing/Fundraising Committee, & Board. Deadline of 2023; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually or are on-going.
- Tactic #3: Overseen by Staff, ED, Finance Committee, & Board. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually.
- Tactic #4: Overseen by ED & Board. Deadline of 2026/2027.

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Oversight & Deadlines

Priority #2 - Goal #1

- Tactic #1: Overseen by ED, HR Committee, & Board. Deadline of 2022.
- Tactic #2: Overseen by ED & Finance Committee. Deadline of 2023.
- Tactic #3: Overseen by ED, HR Committee, & Board. Deadline of 2023.
- Tactic #4: Overseen by ED & Board. Deadline of 2023.
- Tactic #5: Overseen by Staff & ED. Deadline of 2024; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually.

Priority #2 - Goal #2

- Tactic #1: Overseen by ED. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics are on-going.
- Tactic #2: Overseen by Staff, ED, & Education Committee. Deadline of 2023; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually.
- Tactic #3: Overseen by Staff & ED. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually.

Priority #2 - Goal #3

- Tactic #1: Overseen by Staff & ED. Deadline of 2023; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually or are on-going.
- Tactic #2: Overseen by Staff & ED. Deadline of 2023; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually.
- Tactic #3: Overseen by Staff & ED. Deadline of 2023; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually.
- Tactic #4: Overseen by ED. Deadline of 2026.

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Oversight & Deadlines

Priority #3 - Goal #1

- Tactic #1: Overseen by Staff & ED. Deadline of 2024; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually.
- Tactic #2: Overseen by Staff & ED. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics repeat annually or are on-going.
- Tactic #3: Overseen by Staff & ED. Deadline of 2024.

Priority #3 - Goal #2

- Tactic #1: Overseen by ED. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics are on-going.
- Tactic #2: Overseen by ED & Board. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics are on-going.

Priority #3 - Goal #3

- Tactic #1: Overseen by ED & Board. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics are on-going.
- Tactic #2: Overseen by ED & Board. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics are on-going.
- Tactic #3: Overseen by ED. Deadline of 2026; Certain sub-tactics are on-going.