

Riverlands Outdoor Heritage Conservation Alliance

Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025



The Riverlands Alliance is a cooperative of federal, state, and local government agencies, private businesses, non-governmental conservation organizations, and others with common interests.
riverlandsalliance.com

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Bison drinking at LBL/SAM; Kentucky trails/Daniel Kahl; Little girl fishing/Stacey Hayden, USFWS; Birding on the lake/Hal Pope; Bass fishing on Lake Barkley/Hal Pope; White-tailed doe/Scott Simmons, USFWS; Wings of Winter birding festival/Barron Crawford, USFWS; Canada geese/Daniel Kahl.

Strategy photo credits:

page 1: Sugar maple/frankieleon; LBL campsite/loppear

page 2: Eagle viewing/Shannon Brockaway, USFS; Kayaking LBL/Drew Tarvin; Wild turkey harvest at a WMA/Paul Skees

page 3: Aerial shot of Ohio River confluence with Mississippi River/Mike Wilkinson, TNC

page 4: LBL sky reflection/Drew Tarvin; View from a kayak/Drew Tarvin; American mink/Chuck Porter; Largemouth bass catch/Doug Pieper

page 5: Tennessee NWR trail/Gregg Elliott; Ripples at LBL/Richard Freeman

page 6: Trail of Tears/Mike Wilkinson, TNC

page 7: Clarks River/Andrew Eller, USFWS

page 8: Clarks River kiosk/Stacey Hayden, USFWS; Youth fishing derby at Kentucky Lake/Paul Skees

page 9: Aerial view of riparian zone and farmland along the Ohio River in western KY/Mike Wilkinson, TNC

page 10: Lake Barkley marina/nex12go

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Mission

Our Riverlands Alliance mission

To collaboratively sustain regional capacity for natural resource stewardship and enjoyment to ensure a continued high quality of life for our Riverlands region.



Vision

Our vision of success

The Riverlands region of western Kentucky and Tennessee will remain a top outdoor recreation destination in America, with working lands and communities flourishing with fish, wildlife, and natural resources supported by healthy ecosystems. The region will thrive economically through an emphasis on outdoor recreation, sustainable resource use, and a high quality of life, while promoting the heritage and proud sense of place important to residents and visitors to the area.



Way of Working

To create a collective impact, we partner with stakeholders who value the unique natural, cultural, and historic resources of our region to take positive action on the ground and in our communities. In working collectively, the following practices are encouraged:

- Facilitate the sharing of information on projects and natural resource needs in the area.
- Emphasize listening and inclusion in communications and in broadening the partnership.
- Identify needs and ideas of individual Alliance members.
- Identify areas of potential collaboration.
- Co-promote planned events and activities.
- Establish shared, regional priorities.
- Support the implementation of Alliance partner projects when possible.
- Work only on those priorities without “deal breaker” or “red flag” issues that make support by one or more partners difficult.
- Seek to implement projects that reach as many groups and organizations within the region as possible.
- Aim for measurable impacts.

Why a Riverlands Alliance?



The Riverlands region of western Kentucky and Tennessee is blessed with exceptional natural and cultural resources.

Recreational opportunities and the recreation economy of the Riverlands region are valued by people and area businesses alike. Recreation is anchored by the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area—including the highly popular Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley—along with three major National Wildlife Refuges, numerous state Wildlife Management Areas and other sites, and

the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. These latter two rivers, plus the Clarks, Cumberland, and Tennessee Rivers helped to create the deep rich soils that support agriculture in the region, and they also support a flourishing shipping trade.

Trends threaten to transform the Riverlands region in coming decades.

Trends, both positive and negative, will affect the Riverlands in coming decades and could transform the region in a negative way without proactive planning. The South grew faster in population from 1990 to 2008 than the nation as a whole, with especially high increases of urban lands anticipated in western Kentucky and Tennessee over the next 40 years. This growth is projected to fuel an increasing demand for outdoor recreation, which is already booming—even more so as a result of the pandemic—and which grew approximately 5 percent annually between 2005 and 2011

during an economic recession when many sectors contracted. At the same time, non-Federal forest area is forecasted to decrease by 5 to 13 percent (1.4 to 3.7 million acres from 2010 to 2060). Moreover, some habitat types—notably early successional scrub, forests, and grasslands that are of special significance to an outdoor recreation economy that relies heavily on hunting and wildlife viewing—are extremely limited and in many places still declining. All of this is occurring at a time of stagnating budgets for conservation and natural resource stewardship at both the federal and state levels.



The Riverlands Alliance represents a coherent response to these trends and challenges.

Our aim is to be proactive, inclusive, and to provide tangible results that sustain our Riverlands outdoor heritage and natural resources. This will broadly benefit everyone, as no one is without a connection to the lands or waters of this region. We choose to be proactive to plan for the best possible future. We choose to be inclusive because by working together to maximize our shared interests, we can achieve greater results than when we work

separately. We choose to focus on tangible results to make a difference while inspiring the support and participation of partners as well as residents and visitors to the region. The new model of protecting nature for people means that in a world with increasing population, smart communities will seek win-win solutions that provide multiple benefits for multiple sectors and communities at the same time.

The challenges we face.

Our greatest challenge will be to guide growth and development in a way that enhances, rather than degrades, the region's natural assets upon which the area's outdoor and natural resource economy are based. On the other hand, long-term budget trends for federal and state lands are flat or declining precisely at the moment when the need for increased investment has never been greater. Without an increase in resources, attention, and manpower focused on maintaining and building recreational and resource-based infrastructure, as well as long-term habitat management and restoration, the Riverlands area risks:

- a degraded recreational experience
- reduced habitat, game, wildlife, and natural resources
- a corresponding decline in outdoor recreation and natural resource-based businesses

As the authors of the seminal **Nature of Americans** report suggest, "We believe a significant expansion of funding for nature- and outdoors-related programs, including wildlife conservation, will be achieved when various sectors effectively link nature, wildlife, and the outdoors to the public's self-interest in health, productivity, and quality of life—which this research suggests is already intuitive to the vast majority of Americans." As Riverlanders, we intend to make that link.



History of the Riverlands Alliance

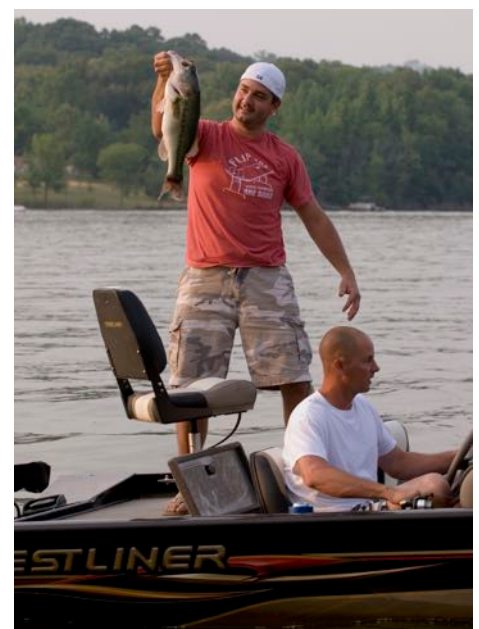
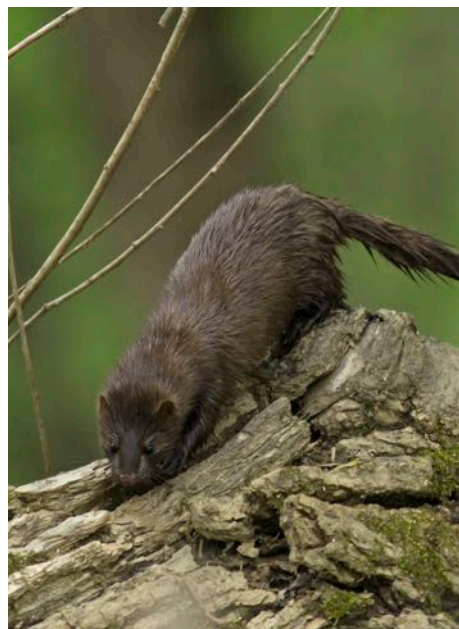
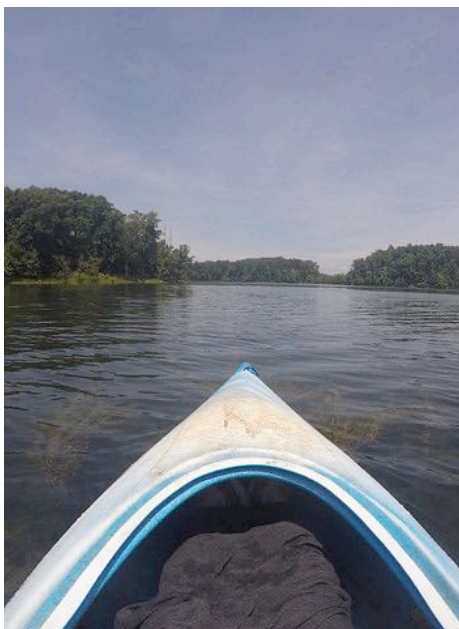
The Riverlands include areas of western Kentucky, Tennessee, and surrounding states that have in common abundant natural resources and a shared outdoor heritage. Specifically, five rivers define the area: the Clarks River flows into the Tennessee River, which lies west of the Cumberland River; these latter two flow into the Ohio River, which is itself the largest tributary to the mighty Mississippi River.

The Riverlands Alliance began organically as a small group of land managers from Tennessee and Kentucky meeting in an effort to better understand and plan for future changes that would impact the special places where they work and live. From that initial exchange of information, a commonality was evident, including a shared concern about their ability to meet public expectations for natural resource stewardship in the face of change that is inevitable. Their prominent concern was that the quality of the outdoor, rural experience cherished by local communities would become degraded or possibly lost.

These land managers believed that if they could widely share their message about future change, then the broader community would respond with interest and seek opportunities to influence that change in a positive direction.



- On July 9th, 2018 in a public meeting held at Kentucky Dam Village Conference Center with 60 people in attendance, the concept of the Riverlands Alliance was first presented in a public forum, gaining broad support.
- On November 9th, 2018, the first Riverlands Alliance workshop was held at Brandon Springs Group Center at Land Between the Lakes, engaging 40 partners. Participants established priorities, defined project selection criteria, and identified five priority projects to be achieved by the Riverlands Alliance in coming years:
 1. Development of a regional birding trail
 2. Invasive species awareness and control
 3. Improved signage and access to public lands
 4. Enhanced recreational opportunities in old growth forests and native wildflower meadows/grasslands
 5. Marketing of the region as the “Riverlands”
- On September 25th, 2019, the first annual meeting of the Riverlands Alliance took place at the Kentucky Dam Village Conference Center with 55 partners in attendance. The partners designated a “core team” representative of the Alliance membership to help move the initiative forward with minor and major decisions. Partners agreed that outreach on behalf of the Alliance will focus on promoting quality of life, quality recreation, working lands, and flourishing communities through a focus on healthy lands, grasslands, wetlands, rivers and lakes, as well as regional planning.



Goals, Objectives, and Strategies



The Riverlands Alliance has adopted 5 strategic goals:

1. Strengthen and expand the partnership.
2. Sustain momentum of the Alliance and enthusiasm of Alliance members.
3. Support natural resource stewardship.
4. Promote cultural traditions and resources.
5. Build a “Riverlander” cultural identity that unifies residents in the region.

For each goal, SMART objectives have been defined that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. Key strategies are then listed for each objective, describing the primary tasks or means for their achievement.

GOAL 1: STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND THE PARTNERSHIP

Core message: The Alliance provides a forum for partners working in different areas of the region, and on different issues, to collaborate on projects that benefit everyone. Our combined efforts add up to something more meaningful than we could achieve alone.

Objective 1.A. Over the next three years increase communications and engagement among Alliance members and potential Alliance members by 5% annually through regular updates and effective use of technology.

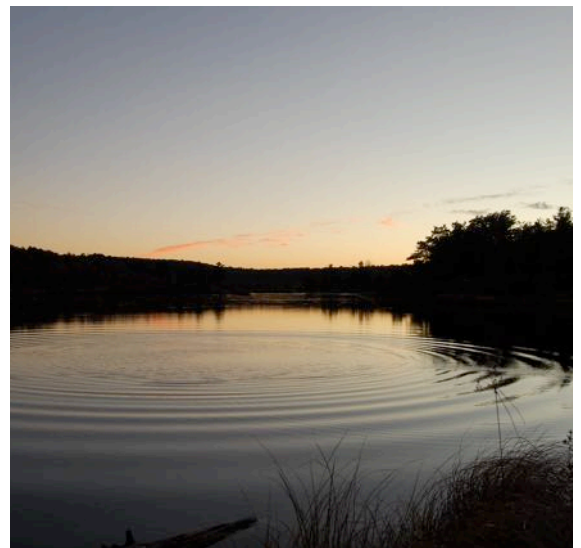
Strategy 1.A.1. Maintain the following regular Riverlands Alliance communications:

- Quarterly newsletter for the Alliance membership and public.
- Quarterly (as needed) polling of Alliance members/project committees concerning project progress, needs, and new opportunities for collaboration.
- Regular sharing of Riverlands outdoor recreation content via social media.

Strategy 1.A.2. Increase distribution of newsletter through outreach to local county offices and/or businesses. Increase open rate and click rate by 5%.

Strategy 1.A.3. Increase social media followers by 10% annually.

Strategy 1.A.4. By 2022, develop a Riverlands Communications Strategy to enhance communications



Strategy 1.A.5 Create printed promotional material to expand awareness of the Alliance.

Objective 1.B. Add at least one new Alliance member each year for the next five years by a combination of Riverlands presentations, one-on-one meetings, and sharing of Riverlands materials with outside groups that could contribute to the mission and vision of the Alliance.

Strategy 1.B.1. Increase outreach—through presentations, special events, and workshops—to inform potential new members about the Riverlands Alliance.

Objective 1.C. Raise funding to support the growth of the alliance.

Strategy 1.C.1. Work to obtain funding by applying for grant/philanthropic support annually.

Strategy 1.C.2. Continue to pursue contributions from government agencies, foundations, and corporate sources to increase Alliance capacity.



GOAL 2: SUSTAIN MOMENTUM OF THE ALLIANCE AND ENTHUSIASM OF ALLIANCE MEMBERS

Core Message: We come together as a community to actively support and participate in protecting the things we value about the region's outdoor heritage.

Objective 2.A. Engagement of alliance membership in the ongoing projects, formation of new project teams, and sharing of successes through various means.

Strategy 2.A.1. Increase awareness among Alliance members of the effectiveness of the Alliance by holding biannual working meetings of Alliance members and allies to focus on (a) success stories, (b) lessons learned, (c) building relationships, and (d) future project planning.

Strategy 2.A.3. Develop an Alliance annual report, to be published no later than June 30 each year, which captures success stories, key metrics showing Alliance progress and which institutionalizes knowledge about effective strategies and projects so that the Alliance will grow in effectiveness over time.

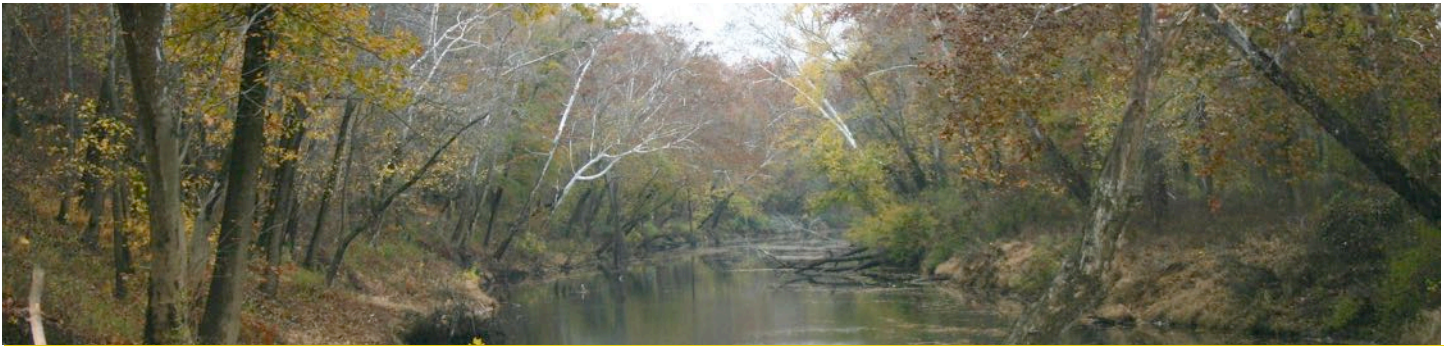
Objective 2.B. By 2025, increase by 5% community awareness and appreciation—as measured by growth in newsletter subscribers and social media followers—of the work being done by the Alliance and its members to sustain the region's outdoor heritage.

Strategy 2.B.1. By 2025, every Riverlands Alliance organizational member will be sharing and/or marketing the Riverlands Annual report via their communications channels.

Strategy 2.B.2. Issue a press release to announce completion of the Riverlands Alliance annual report each year.

Objective 2.C. Explore ways the alliance can recognize and support the participation of members in shared projects and objectives.

Strategy 2.C.1. Seek ways to align RA mission with agency or partner organizations' missions thereby expanding public awareness of the partnerships.



GOAL 3: SUPPORT THE WISE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES FOR MULTIPLE BENEFITS INCLUDING RECREATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

Core message: Riverlanders' flourishing communities, quality of life, outdoor recreation opportunities, working lands, and water quality all depend on a continued focus on healthy lands, grasslands, wetlands, rivers and lakes.

Objective 3.A. By 2025 develop a sense of pride, success, and partnership through the initiation, completion, and celebration of four "on-the-ground" projects that realize tangible benefits for the community and the resource. *pending additional paid or volunteer participation

Strategy 3.A.1. By 2022, develop at least two community task forces (strike teams) to help natural resource professionals detect, monitor, and implement management for priority invasive species in the Riverlands region.

Strategy 3.A.2. By 2022, create the first iteration of a regional birding trail, including identification of all public lands birding sites in the region and development of an online, GIS-based tool to assist people in finding them.

Strategy 3.A.3. By 2022, map locations of existing signage; by 2023, identify strategy for directional signs for the Land Between the Lakes NRA, Clarks River NWR, and Tennessee NWR.

Strategy 3.A.4. By 2024, enhance recreational opportunities for enjoying native wildflowers and old growth forest in Land Between the Lakes NRA by identifying sites and existing routes for access, creating interpretive materials, and an interactive map for all identified sites.

Objective 3.B. By 2023 create educational/interpretive resources to build community awareness of the importance of the Riverlands’ natural resources and inspire action in support of stewardship.

Strategy 3.B.1. Develop printed materials and interpretive signs/kiosks.

Objective 3.C. By 2023 increase personnel/staffing and capacity for natural resource stewardship within the Riverlands by seeking funding/grants to hire a full time coordinator and additional staff support/volunteers as identified by the Core team.



Strategy 3.C.1. Seek funding opportunities to hire a full time Alliance Coordinator to provide direct support to the Project Teams.

Strategy 3.C.2. Increase local engagement, learning, and assistance in natural resource stewardship by supporting the development of volunteer stewardship opportunities for students and residents of all ages.

Strategy 3.C.3. By 2021, begin the process of recruiting for invasive species community “strike teams” that can be deployed on the ground to address problems early and cost-effectively.

Strategy 3.C.4. By the end of 2021, organize and hold at least two volunteer workdays related to on-the-ground natural resource stewardship in the Riverlands region.

Objective 3.D. By 2023, develop at least one resource focused on shared stewardship priorities within the Riverlands region.

Strategy 3.D.1. Continue the sharing of informational resources for natural resource professionals and/or the public summarizing priority stewardship needs in the Riverlands region.

Strategy 3.D.2. Develop an Alliance-backed set of priorities and recommendations concerning the importance and advantages of regional planning for the Riverlands area.

GOAL 4: PROMOTE CULTURAL TRADITIONS AND RESOURCES IN WAYS THAT SUPPORT THE ECONOMY OF THE REGION

Core message: Riverlanders are connected by rivers, family values that cherish the abundance and beauty of nature, self-reliance, and a proud sense of place. We recognize that our diverse cultural histories all contribute to the richness of our cultural and natural heritage.

Objective 4.A. Continue promoting and supporting relevant local festivals annually to increase community awareness and expand this awareness to others outside the region about the importance of Riverlands outdoor resources and heritage, along with opportunities for getting involved.

Strategy 4.A.1. Promote opportunities for current partners of Alliance members to be engaged in the outdoor heritage of the Riverlands area.

Strategy 4.A.2. Work with Partners to identify festivals and special events scheduled throughout the region and assist in marketing these festivals and events to larger audiences. Some examples include Wings of Winter, June River Jam, etc.



GOAL 5: BUILD A “RIVERLANDER” CULTURAL IDENTITY THAT UNIFIES RESIDENTS IN THE REGION

Core message: Do you love this place? Then you’re a Riverlander!

Objective 5.A. By 2025, work with a local marketing firm to develop key promotional items and materials that are unique to the Riverlands Area for use in Alliance promotions and communications.

Strategy 5.A.1. Recruit a successful regional marketing and communications firm to research and create a Riverlander brand for the Alliance pro bono.

Strategy 5.A.2. Choose and create Riverlander traditions to highlight and market across the Riverlands region. Use Riverlander branding materials and messaging for regional festivals and events.

Strategy 5.A.3. Over the next 5 years, identify and reach out to at least one event in each of the 17 Riverlands counties that could be supported with Riverlander branding.

Objective 5.B. By 2023, at least 2/3 of Riverlands Alliance partners will be consistently using the Riverlands logo, hashtags, and other branding materials in their communications, as appropriate.

Strategy 5.B.1. Encourage Riverlands Alliance partners to adopt “Riverlander” language in their communications.



GOAL 6: PROMOTE THE OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY AND BUSINESSES

Core message: A thriving Riverlands economy and many area businesses depend on high quality outdoor recreation and healthy natural resources, as well as heritage celebrations that are important to the diverse residents and visitors to the area.

Objective 6.A. Work with regional or county Chambers of Commerce and Tourism offices to develop an outreach strategy by the end of 2021.

Strategy 6.A.1. Conduct research/outreach to local businesses and banks to learn their needs for increasing outdoor recreation-based customers, businesses, and/or investments in the region.

Strategy 6.A.2. Collaborate with local and regional businesses to co-promote values of the Riverlands and the businesses.

Strategy 6.A.3. By the end of 2022, partner with at least two specific businesses to co-develop information that promotes/markets the Riverlands region.

Strategy 6.A.4. By 2024, consolidate Riverlands outdoor recreational and heritage information into one resource that is available in multiple formats and promote marketing by businesses and agencies across the region.

Objective 6.B. Collaborate with public health agencies to create materials by 2022 that highlight the health benefits of outdoor recreation along with information about amenities and access points.

Strategy 6.B.1. Partner with government agencies (local, regional, state, federal) to develop educational materials and on-the-ground projects that support the Riverlands Outdoor economy.