

# Free Rivers Fund

## 2023 Annual Report



In 2023 the Free Rivers Fund focused on its main mission: **To finance and support small groups, grass-root projects or individual activists fighting for free flowing rivers and who otherwise wouldn't have access to funds and / or support.**

In 2023 we've received **34 qualified applications from 26 countries on 5 continents**. We were blown away by the quantity and quality of the applications, the variety of the forms of activism, the determination, the creativity and the hard work people all over the world are putting into fighting for their rivers. **We were able to give grants to 13 projects from 13 different countries - twice as many grants as the year before and by far the most we have ever given in one year.** For the first time the number of projects that met our criteria were considerably higher than we could afford to fund. On top of that we gave out one Emergency Grant during the year.

In 2023 for the first time, we got involved more actively in projects apart from financing them and giving them advice. We took on one novice activist and helped him **build his project and campaign from the bottom** (see <sup>1</sup>). Also for the first time we **initiated and forged direct cooperations between donors and grantees**. This led to great content for the donors and more media presence and attention for the projects (see <sup>1</sup> & <sup>2</sup>). In addition we attended the **Paddle Sports Show in Strasbourg** to spread the word about the Free Rivers Fund and to hold a talk about river conservation. Full list and more info on the projects further down. Highlights include:

### Save the Austari-Jökulsá (Iceland)<sup>1</sup>

The Austari-Jökulsá is a free flowing river in north-west Iceland, known for its world-class white-water and iconic among locals and tourists alike. It is under threat to be diverted for a hydropower project and Benjamin Rowlands has taken initiative to help protect this river. The core of the Free Rivers Fund is to unbureaucratically give financial support to river conservation activists and groups on the ground - because usually they know best what to do and what they need. With Save the Austari-Jökulsá it was a bit different - their founder knew he had to do something against the proposed hydro schemes on the river he lives at, works and plays on - but he didn't know how and where even to start. We took him on nonetheless and apart from the financial support, we consulted with him, helped him come up with a strategy, start his campaign and got him in contact with the right people to help him out further. On top of it, FRF Partner *NRS Europe* offered to get involved even more and went to Iceland to produce a film about the Austari-Jökulsá and the campaign to protect it - we can't wait for its release! It's amazing to see how far the project has come in just one year and we are excited to see where this goes. You can find out more about the Austari-Jökulsá: <https://www.savetheaustarijokulsa.org/>

### Voss Naturvernlag (Raundalselva Norway)<sup>2</sup>

An awesome volunteer team in Voss (Norway) fighting for the Raundalselva and campaigning against a proposed combined hydropower/ flood prevention scheme. The Raundalselva is spectacular - it is one of the few virtually unaltered rivers in Western Norway and is one of the few protected Norwegian rivers. Apart from giving financial support, we've tried something new this year: FRF Partner *Palm Equipment* stepped up, went to Norway and produced a short documentary with and about the campaign. Watch the film and find out more about the campaign: [www.raundalselva.com/en/let-the-river-live/](http://www.raundalselva.com/en/let-the-river-live/)

## 2023 Free Rivers Fund Grantees

**Voss Naturvernlag (Raundalselva, Norway)** - a local volunteer team in Voss (Norway) campaigning against a combined hydropower/flood prevention scheme proposed for the Raundalselva River. We helped finance art & community events as well as forged a cooperation with Palm that resulted in a movie about the Raundalselva and the threats it is facing.

**Citizen Association 'Buturovic-Polje' (Bosnia and Herzegovina)** - campaigning for the Neretvica River. We financed legal fees and a lawyer helping them in their court case.

**Futaleufú Riverkeeper (Chile)** and their campaign "Por las aguas del Futaleufú" advocating for the Futaleufú to become a River National Park: The "Reserva de Caudal" would ensure this river flowing freely forever. They submitted an official proposal to the Chilean authorities. We funded a community event and film making / photography to further their case.

**Save the Austari-Jökulsá (Iceland)** – Ben Rowlands campaigning against several hydropower projects in Iceland. We helped him come up with a campaign and strategy, connected him with river activists, helped him set up a homepage, social media and a petition. We financed web hosting and travel expenses for his project. We also forged a cooperation between him and NRS – which will result in video & photo content about the river, the threats and the campaign to protect it.

**Darby McAdams (USA / Zambia)** - producing a documentary film on the Batoka Dam on the Zambezi River. We co-funded the film project.

**Dibang Resistance (India)** - locals campaigning against 17 proposed dams on the Dibang River in India, threatening the ecosystem and the indigenous people living off the river. We financed fees for legal counselling as well as an ecology expert statement.

**World and Danube (Serbia)** - campaigning against an infrastructure project that will cost 170 hectares of the Danube floodplain. We financed lawyers and expert statements for their court case.

**Protect Río Grande (Spain)** - campaigning against a massive hydropower project that will affect the water balance in their home valley. We paid for a lawyer to defend them in their court case.

**Călin Dejeu (Basca Mare & Jiu River, Romania)** - local hero fighting a multitude of hydro projects on several rivers in Romania. We financed an experts opinion statement for his petition to court.

**Save the Drin River (Albania)** - local activists fighting a court case against the Skavica dam project on the Drin River. We financed geological study they needed for their court case.

**The Grand Salmon - A Source To Sea Journey (USA)** – in 2022 these three women went on a source-to-sea journey and kayaked 1,000+ miles from the sources of Idaho's Salmon River to the Pacific Ocean. Their goal is to promote the removal of the four Lower Snake River dams and a moratorium on the Stibnite Gold Mine Project. We helped them to finance their film to tell the story of the Snake River Basin and the threats it is facing.

**Skrbuša Defence (Montenegro)** - a group of activists fighting a court case against the construction of a hydro-power plant on the Skrbuša river. They have been successfully delaying construction and are working towards the termination of the construction contracts. We paid the lawyer representing them.

**Rivières les sentinelles (France)** - Marlène Devillez is educating about the threats rivers are facing and to connect kayaking with river conservation and science. We financed production and travel costs.

Emergency Grant: **Boana El Chaltén (Argentina)** – activists fighting planned hydro-power development in Las Vueltas river, National Park of Los Glaciares. We funded an expert's statement with which they were able to halt the Environmental Impact Assessment proceedings for the project.