

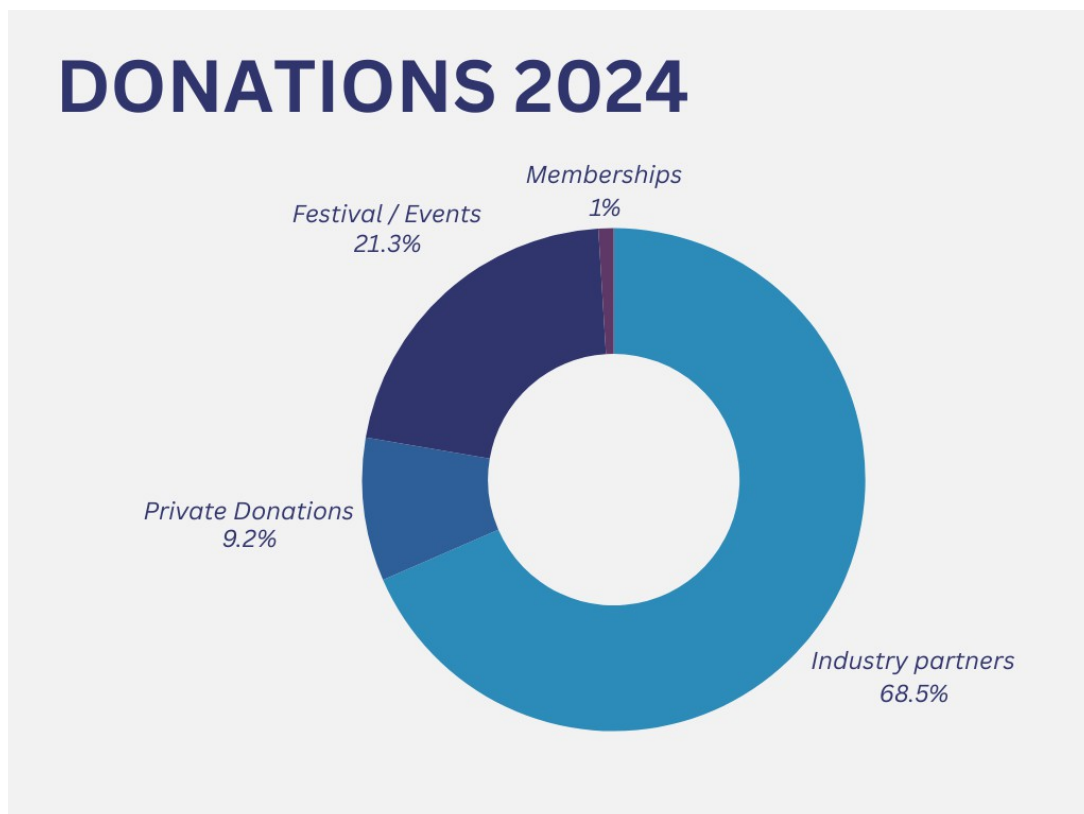
# Free Rivers Fund 2024 Annual Report



In 2024 the Free Rivers Fund focused on its main mission: To finance and support small groups, grass-root projects & individual activists that are fighting for free flowing rivers and otherwise wouldn't have access to funds and / or support.

In 2024 we've received 38 qualified applications from 23 countries on 5 continents. For 2024 we have chosen 11 projects from 11 different countries, thereof 8 brand new projects and 3 continued grants. There was no Emergency Grant during the year in 2024. A full list of the Free Rivers Fund Grantees 2024 and what they have spent their grants on is further down.

Like in 2023 the number of projects that applied for funding and met our criteria was considerably higher than we could afford to fund. This motivated us in 2024 to invest more time to find new donors in order to grow the fund and be able to support more projects in the future. In order to achieve this, 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. We managed to gain new donors in 2024 and are especially proud of how many events are now Free Rivers Fund partners and are finding creative ways to raise money to support us.



## 2024 Free Rivers Fund Grantees

**Salvemos Chilina** from **Peru** - grassroots activists trying to protect their home River **Rio Chili** from a huge hydropower development that would have horrendous effects on the ecosystem, agriculture and tourism in the whole Chilina valley. So far, they have logged legal complaints, initiated public hearings and got a lot of support and publicity for their campaign. They used their grant to buy **equipment for protests, merchandise and info material**.

**Nicoleta Nour**, an individual activist from **Slovenia**, campaigning for the protection of the **Sava River** and in particular against the Mokrice Hydro Power Plant: one of nineteen hydropower dams projected along the Sava, not counting the development plans on almost all tributaries. The decision about the Mokrice HPP is crucial as it will determine the future of all other planned developments. Her campaign heavily aims at and includes the local communities that will be affected by the hydro power development. She used her grant to facilitate several **meetings, events, and community actions; as well as for legal advice, print materials and a social media campaign**.

The **Aetomilitsa Residents Initiative** from **Greece** is fighting against dozens of small hydropower plants (SHPs) currently planned in the **Sarantaporos River** - a tributary to the Vjosa River network. The area is a NATURA 2000 site and the Vjosa is Europe's first River National Park - and yet its tributaries and wider river network are still under threat. They used their grant to **finance their legal battle, court and lawyer's fees**.

The local initiative **Hijos del Rio** is working on protecting the rivers of the Napo region of **Ecuador** and opposing the proposed "La Merced de Jondachi" hydro power project. In 2024 these activists co-hosted a community watershed conference with local authorities and the Ministry of Environment about the conservation of the Rio Jondachi. They also run a free kayaking school for local indigenous youth, introducing them to whitewater kayaking and river conservation. They have used their grant to pay for **transportation and food at their several events, as well as merchandise and the design of informative material**.

**RiverLov** - a grassroots initiative made up of local activists, ecologists and lawyers in **Montenegro** that came together to spark civic engagement and build strategies to protect the last remaining free flowing rivers in the Balkans. Their main objective at the moment is to stop the Komarnica Dam project. They used their grant to pay for **videography & photography** to fuel their social media campaign.

Individual activist **Dejan Furtula**, working alongside Citizen Association Eko Centar Visegrad towards the protection of the **Rzav River in Bosnia and Herzegovina**. The Rzav area is planned to become a nature park, but nonetheless investors have proposed at least 3 small Hydro Power Plants for the Rzav River. The situation around the hydropower developments has been volatile in the last year: Dejan did not realise his initial plans and **did not retrieve his grant yet**. We gave him an extension to do so in 2025.

**Spasimo Ričinu** is a small group of volunteers fighting for the **Rječina River in Croatia**. The upper part of this river is listed as NATURA 2000 area and yet there is a new dam project planned: the Kukuljani Hydro Power Project is supposed to be build only 2,5 km from the source and would affect the whole river. These volunteers are doing community work, informing the public, working on river revitalization and initiated research projects. They used their grant to **commission and realise a mosaic trout mural for the protection of the river** right in the town center of Rijeka and with that managed to stir up a lot of attention and media coverage.

The **Amazonian Rivers Initiative** opposing the Chepete-Bala HPP proposal in the **Beni River Basin (Bolivia)**, organised by Rios to Rivers. The proposed mega dam would flood 781 km<sup>2</sup> of Amazon rainforest, forcibly relocate ~6,000 Indigenous people and put the food security, rights, lives & cultures of the Beni River Basin's people in great peril. The Amazonian Rivers Initiative seeks to empower the Indigenous communities to exercise their constitutional right to manage their territories. The grant was used to cover **travel expenses** for Beni's indigenous Youths to attend kayaking, leadership & advocacy training programs and meet with other indigenous river defenders.

We continued the support of **Varig vern av Raundalselva** - a local volunteer team in Voss (**Norway**) campaigning against a combined hydropower / flood prevention scheme proposed for the Raundalselva River. In 2024 they used their grant to **organise and host an informative community event on the proposed hydro scheme** with great turnout where they presented a newly published study on the topic to the audience and hosted a debate with experts and local politicians.

We also continued to support **The Grand Salmon**: 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 (USA)** to the Pacific Ocean. Their goal is to promote the removal of the four Lower Snake River dams and to halt the Stibnite Gold Mine Project. We helped them fund their journey in 2022, the film production in 2023 and supported them with **post-production and their film tour** in 2024.

We continued the support of is **Iván Morales** from Veracruz, **Mexico**. For years now he has been fighting for his home river, the **Antigua River** Basin that is threatened by multiple massive hydropower projects. We supported him already in 2022 when he went on a trip down the river to photograph and map the threatened ecosystems and the river's importance to the communities. He was planning to take his pictures on a **tour to the affected communities to inform them about planned dams, the threats they are facing and to foster a broad basis for the resistance against the hydropower developments**. He had to postpone the tour and is not finished with this project yet. He has not retrieved his grant yet, but will receive it as soon as he needs it.