



FINAL REPORT

NEIW PCC Job Code: 0364-004-001
Project Code: LS-2023-054
Contractor: Ausable River Association
Prepared By: Carolyn Koestner, GIS & Science Communications Fellow
Project Period: 06/06/2023 to 11/17/2023
Date Submitted: 11/17/2023
Date Approved: 11/30/2023

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

CONTACT INFORMATION

Ausable River Association
1181 Haselton Rd, PO Box 8, Wilmington, NY 12997
Tel: (518) 637-6859, Fax: n/a, Email: Carolyn@ausableriver.org

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

This project was funded by an agreement awarded by the United States Environmental Protection Agency to NEIWPC in partnership with Lake Champlain Basin Program.

Although the information in this document may have been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (under agreement LC00A00981-0), it has not undergone the Agency's publications review process and therefore, may not necessarily reflect the views of the Agency and no official endorsement should be inferred.

The viewpoints expressed here do not necessarily represent those of Lake Champlain Basin Program, NEIWPC, or the United States Environmental Protection Agency, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or causes constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ausable River is a hub for world-class trout fishing, wilderness hiking, rock climbing, skiing, and recreational paddling - drawing thousands of outdoor recreation-seeking visitors and residents each year. The high number of recreators in the area presents both a challenge and an opportunity. At the Ausable River Association (AsRA), we value engaging people in responsible recreation and inspiring them to become responsible stewards of both the Ausable and Lake Champlain basins.

Since 2019, AsRA has been offering opportunities for people to connect with the Ausable at no cost through our Guided Watershed Tours program. The goal of these tours is to educate and inspire responsible stewardship in residents and visitors alike. We aim to provide tours accessible to a spectrum of ability levels and whenever possible lend gear, such as kayaks, canoes, and binoculars, to those attending for free.

During the five years AsRA has run this program, hundreds of people of all ages have attended, and we continue to reach new audiences each year. We're delighted to see new faces and engage new people with each tour we offer.

In 2023, thanks to the continued support of the Lake Champlain Basin Program, we were able to further build upon the accomplishments of the previous years and offer 10 tours covering a variety of topics across the Ausable, Saranac, and Boquet watersheds. The 2023 Guided Watershed Tours were a success – all programs were well attended by new and engaged participants. In total, we had over 100 participants on our 2023 tours. The interpretive tours this year included: riverwalking, an aquatic plant identification paddle, a guided paddle through the Lake Everest nature trail, a mushroom walk, an AsRA river restoration projects tour, a birding walk, a fall nature walk, an old growth forest walk, a moss identification walk, and a winter tree identification walk. The tours lasted between two and four hours and were capped between 10 and 15 people.

We value the feedback and input of our participants and the public. We chose many of the topics for our tours based on public interest. Each tour is an opportunity for engagement with watershed issues, even those that might not appear to directly relate to the water. While some mushroom or bat enthusiasts might not be thinking about the relationship to the watershed ecosystem, we take these popular topics and use them to illustrate the important connection to our watershed. Additionally, each program included Leave No Trace messaging and informational materials.

Lastly, we were able to reprint 5,000 copies of our extremely popular “Waterfalls of the Ausable” brochure for distribution around the watershed.

**GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO
EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP**

2. CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary 3

2. Contents 4

3. Project Synopsis 5

4. Tasks Completed 5

5. Methodology 16

6. Quality Assurance Tasks Completed 16

7. Deliverables Completed 16

8. Conclusions 16

9. References 17

10. Appendices 18

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

3. PROJECT SYNOPSIS

This year's Guided Watershed Tour programming built upon previous years' tours and were designed with the outcomes of connecting community residents and visitors to the river and our work, and educating them on a variety of issues relevant to both the Ausable watershed and the Lake Champlain basin. The purpose and goals of the tours are to engage citizens in local outdoor recreational activities while also inspiring participants to be active stewards of the local environment. Finally, this project also included reprinting of 5,000 copies of our wildly popular "Waterfalls of the Ausable" brochure for distribution around the watershed.

Due to an extended delay in getting our executed contract, programs did not begin until August and took place through November 2023. Tours utilize seasonal climate variances and flora and fauna lifecycles to maximize learning goals. For example, our fungi identification walk was held in late August, which is historically when most of the fruiting bodies of fungi in the area appear.

Partnering organizations, like the Town of Wilmington and Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretive Center, provided in-kind support through use of their property to host tours and by offering free use of gear (canoes, kayaks, etc.). The partnering guest naturalists co-lead their tours with AsRA staff, interpreting the components of the tour that applied to their areas of expertise and relating the topic back to the watershed. Throughout each Guided Watershed Tour program, we focused on immersive learning tactics to engage with participants and maximize their learning outcomes.

4. TASKS COMPLETED

Task 1 – Develop Watershed Tours, Print Brochures, Promote Tours

For task one, we developed the Guided Watershed Tour programs and materials. We spoke with each of the guest naturalists to establish their desired trip location, date, timeline, and goals. We then meshed those goals with relevant information about the watershed, Leave No Trace messages, and other applicable programmatic themes. These themes included invasive species, native wildlife and plants, habitat restoration, threats to the Ausable and Lake Champlain watersheds, history of our watersheds, and so forth. Once those plans and details were in place, we coordinated the logistics of staff leaders, sign-ups, materials needed, driving considerations and plans, and other operational details. We also drafted our press and outreach materials. See appendix for examples and links for 2023 tour promotional materials.

In addition to developing and promoting the tours, we placed the order for the reprinting of 5,000 copies of our extremely popular "Waterfalls of the Ausable" brochure for distribution around the watershed.

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP



Photo 1: Cover of "Waterfalls of the Ausable" brochure.

Task 2 – Spring Tours

For task 2, we held our spring Guided Watershed Tours. All tours were co-led by Carolyn Koestner, AsRA's GIS and Science Communications Fellow. Tours were offered free of charge to all attendees and gear was loaned to participants for free when applicable/possible.

Our 2023 tours kicked off with Riverwalking led by guest naturalist Helene Gibbens, Certified Nature Therapy Guide and founder of Adirondack Riverwalking. The tour took place in the West Branch Ausable River. Helene guided participants through a multi-sensory experience of the river from within it. For many in the program, this was their first-time using waders and

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

experiencing the Ausable in this way. This program had a cap of 10 people, and we had 10 people registered for the program with additional people on the waitlist. The program was well received, as one participant put it: *“It was guided with an excellent guide that provided us with meditation tips and exceptional riverwalking tips to make this experience perfect! I always felt safe and secure...plus relaxed in no time.”*



Photo 2: Riverwalking tour participants, well, riverwalking!

Our spring tour series wrapped up with an Aquatic Plant Paddling Tour. This tour was in partnership with the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program (APIPP) and was led by Brian Greene, APIPP’s Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator. The tour was also held in partnership with the Adirondack Watershed Institute as part of their annual Adirondack Water Week celebration. The program took place on Lake Placid. During the program, Brian taught participants about both native and invasive aquatic plants and what they can do to help stop the spread of invasive species. This program had a cap of 10 people, and we had 7 people registered for it. The program was well received.

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP



Photo 3: Guest naturalist Brian Greene shows participants samples of invasive species and describes what they can do to stop the spread.

Task 3 – Summer Tours

For task three, we held our summer Guided Watershed Tours. All tours were co-led by Carolyn Koestner, AsRA’s GIS and Science Communications Fellow, or another AsRA staff member. Tours were offered free of charge to all attendees and gear was loaned to participants for free when applicable/possible.

We launched our summer tours with a Nature Paddle on Lake Everest led by AsRA staff members: Carolyn Koestner, Krista Kennedy (2023 River Steward), and Matthew Ravaschiere (2023 Colgate Fellow). This tour was held in partnership with the Town of Wilmington, who allowed participants to use their canoes and kayaks at no charge and provided us with a launching location for the tour. We hold at least one of these tours each year to highlight the *Lake Everest Paddling Nature Trail* and accompanying guidebook that was developed originally in 2001 and updated and reprinted with LCBP education funds in 2018. The tour was also held in partnership with the Adirondack Watershed Institute as part of their annual Adirondack Water Week celebration. On this tour, participants learned about the ecology and history of Lake Everest, invasive species that threaten native plants and wildlife, and what they can do to help minimize the spread of invasives. This program had a cap of 12 people and we had 12 registered participants with additional people on the waitlist. The program was well received, as one participant put it: *“It was free, informative, and a lot of fun!”*

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP



Photo 4: Tour participants enjoying a beautiful & informative paddle on Lake Everest.

For our next summer tour, we explored the Ausable's fungal communities with local mushroom expert and fungal enthusiast Susan Hopkins. This tour was held along the Owl's Head Lookout Trail in Elizabethtown. During this program, Susan identified dozens of fungal species for participants, pointing out the most likely species you'd encounter across the Ausable watershed based on the tree species present in our forests, and the important role of fungi in the forest community. Some of the fungi benefits to the watershed ecosystem she highlighted included: providing food sources to wildlife, recycling carbon, minerals, and nutrients into the ecosystem through decomposition, and as important indicators of the overall health of the watershed. This program had a cap of 12 people and we had 12 registered participants with additional people on the waitlist. The program was well received, as one participant put it: "*Susan was so knowledgeable and her love of Mycology was inspiring.*"

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP



Photo 5: Guest naturalist Susan Hopkins identifying and describing a fungi specimen to tour participants.

For our third summer tour, we held a tour of AsRA's River Restoration Projects, led by AsRA staff members: Kelley Tucker (Executive Director) and Gary Henry (Stream Restoration Manager). During this tour, participants traveled throughout the Ausable Watershed to view AsRA's past and current projects as we discussed the science behind this important work. Tour participants were especially excited to get a "behind the scenes" look at our active construction project in Upper Jay. This program had a cap of 10 people and we had 10 registered participants. The program was well received, as one participant put it: I really enjoyed "*seeing the actual sites, learning the vocabulary, and (seeing) how AsRA works.*"

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP



Photo 6: AsRA Executive Director, Kelley Tucker, describes restoration work along the West Branch of the Ausable “Dream Mile” to tour participants.

We wrapped up our summer tours with a birding walk led by Derek Rogers, extraordinary birder and Stewardship Director with the Adirondack Land Trust. The tour took place where the Ausable meets Lake Champlain, at the Ausable Marsh Wildlife Management Area. This location also allowed for a more accessible tour as the marsh has several paved, flat trails – which are suitable for mobility devices, such as a walker. Derek led participants through numerous habitat types on the property, from marshland to forest to lake front, and identified birds based on song and visual features. Late September was an especially exciting time to be at this location due to fall bird migration. This program had a cap of 12 people and we had 12 registered participants. The program was well received, as two participants put it: We really enjoyed “*getting out to see the marsh in good company*” and “*having Derek Rogers as our guide.*”

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP



Photo 7: Guest naturalist Derek Rogers identifies birds in a wetland for tour participants.

Task 4 – Fall Tours

For task 4, we held our fall Guided Watershed Tours. All tours were co-led by Carolyn Koestner, AsRA's GIS and Science Communications Fellow, or another AsRA staff member. Tours were offered free of charge to all attendees and gear was loaned to participants for free when applicable/possible.

For our first fall tour, we held a fall nature walk led by Elizabeth Lee, local outdoor guide, and Executive Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Essex County. This tour was held at and in partnership with John Brown Farm State Historic Site. Elizabeth led participants along the trails at John Brown Farm, while describing the changes on the land in the upper reaches of the watershed that contribute to the river's health in the following year. She also helped participants identify many of the plants encountered during the tour. This program had a cap of 10 people and we had six registered participants. The program was well received, as one participant put it: *I enjoyed "our guide, Elizabeth Lee, and the tour's interactive nature! I've never been on the trails at JBF, so that was fun. (I) hope to go back and explore more."*

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP



Photo 8: Guest naturalist Elizabeth Lee helps participants identify one of the plants encountered on our watershed tour of John Brown Farm in the upper part of the Ausable watershed.

For our second fall tour, we held a walk through an old growth forest led by local naturalist Dan Spada. This tour was held in the Saranac Watershed on NYS Forest Preserve near Ampersand Mountain. Dan led participants to and through one of the largest remaining tracts of old growth forest in New York State. This program had a cap of 15 people and we had 15 registered participants with additional people on the waitlist. The program was well received, as one participant put it: *I really enjoyed “our guide - Dan Spada – (he) is such an expert and has such an easy-going temperament and so willing to share his knowledge. (The tour) was excellent from start to finish. The prior communication and logistics were done perfectly - no surprises, everyone prepared. There is nothing I liked least.”*

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP



Photo 9: Guest Naturalist Dan Spada measures and describes an old growth tree to the group.

For our last fall tour, we held a moss identification walk led by local botanist Ray Curran. This tour was held at and in partnership with Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretive Center (VIC) and in partnership with the Northern Forest Atlas. Ray guided participants through the VIC's trails and helped them to identify six key moss species throughout the property. Participants learned about the kinds of conditions these species rely on, the importance of water to mosses, the different moss classifications and characteristics for the species identified, and how they fit more broadly into boreal ecosystems. This program had a cap of 11 people and we had 11 registered participants with additional people on the waitlist. The program was well received, as one participant put it: *"The naturalist was great and made learning about different species of moss interesting. The other participants were all eager to learn and were fun to be with. The trails at the VIC were a perfect choice for this tour."*

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP



Photo 10: Guest naturalist Ray Curran helping participants use moss guides to identify mosses along the VIC's trails.

Task 5 - Winter Tour, Quarterly and Final Reports

For task five, we held our winter guided watershed tour and completed all reports. This tour was co-led by Krista Kennedy, AsRA's 2023 River Steward. Tours were offered free of charge to all attendees and gear was loaned to participants for free when applicable/possible.

For our winter tour, which was also the last tour of 2023, we held a winter tree identification walk led by local naturalist Ed Kanze. This tour was held along the Cobble Lookout trail in Wilmington. In this program, participants meandered along the forest trail and learned how to identify trees without relying on leaf identification. Ed provided additional information on each species, such as the origins of their names, common misconceptions, and explained how each species fit into the larger ecosystem. In addition to Ed's excellent guiding, participants also enjoyed the trail and vista lookout, which many had never experienced before. This program had a cap of 12 people and we had 12 registered participants with additional people on the waitlist. The program was well received.

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP



Photo 11: Guest naturalist Ed Kanze describing how to identify a tree along the trail.

5. METHODOLOGY

N/A

6. QUALITY ASSURANCE TASKS COMPLETED

N/A

7. DELIVERABLES COMPLETED

Deliverables were completed in the form of the tours listed in the task breakdown in the previous section. In addition to these 10 individual tours that hosted 100+ people, we also delivered the reprinted “Waterfalls of the Ausable” brochures.

The greatest challenge encountered during this grant was the extended delay in getting our grant contract executed. We did not receive an executed contract until months into the approved project timeline, which condensed our timeframe to complete the planned work and programming by two months. Our programs are designed to optimize seasonality and our delayed contract meant that we were not able to offer our spring-specific programming, as by then those phenomena (like spring ephemeral wildflowers) had passed. The guest naturalists we work with are incredibly busy. Not being able to start scheduling with them until June was difficult, as by then most of their schedules had filled up.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The long-term success of our work at the Ausable River Association comes from engaging people in responsible recreation and inspiring them to become conscientious stewards of the Ausable and the Lake Champlain basins. People can't care about the river, or its watershed, without knowing it.

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

This grant allowed us to build upon the success of our most popular educational program, our Guided Watershed Tours. For the fifth year in a row, we were able to offer free outdoor education programming on a diverse array of topics led by renowned local experts in the Ausable and surrounding watersheds. Each year, with every tour, we continue to reach new audiences, showing the demand for programs like these. In 2023, the Watershed Tours program helped build connections with 100+ participants across 10 tours.

It is our great hope that their participation in these programs will strengthen their commitment to care for and steward the river, wildlife, and our own communities. Almost every participant expressed a new-found excitement for the topic area, the watershed, and for introducing their friends and family to future tours. We look forward to the opportunity of continuing the success of our Watershed Tours program in 2024.

9. REFERENCES

N/A

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

10. APPENDICES

Appended Documents:

Appendix I: Guided Watershed Tours Web Page

<https://www.ausableriver.org/events/river-tours>



GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

Appendix II: Press Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: July 5th, 2023

Contact: Madison Stroud, Ausable River Association
518-637-6859 | madison@ausableriver.org

Ausable River Association Announces Fifth Year of Free Guided Watershed Tours

WILMINGTON – The Ausable River Association (AsRA) is launching the fifth year of their guided watershed tours in the Ausable watershed and beyond. These tours are free to the public and include paddling, hiking, and interpretive programs. Gear is available for tour participants to use when possible.

"We are excited to offer our popular guided watershed tours again this year. It's an immersive opportunity for residents and visitors to better understand the Ausable and appreciate the beauty of the watershed" said Kelley Tucker, Executive Director of AsRA.

This year, ten trips will allow visitors to experience a variety of locations throughout the Ausable and its neighboring watersheds. Tours will include the return of popular programs from 2022 and some new additions based on popular requests. Birding and mushroom walks are back, along with a nature paddling trip on Lake Everest. New for 2023 are a tour of AsRA's river restoration projects and more botany programs.

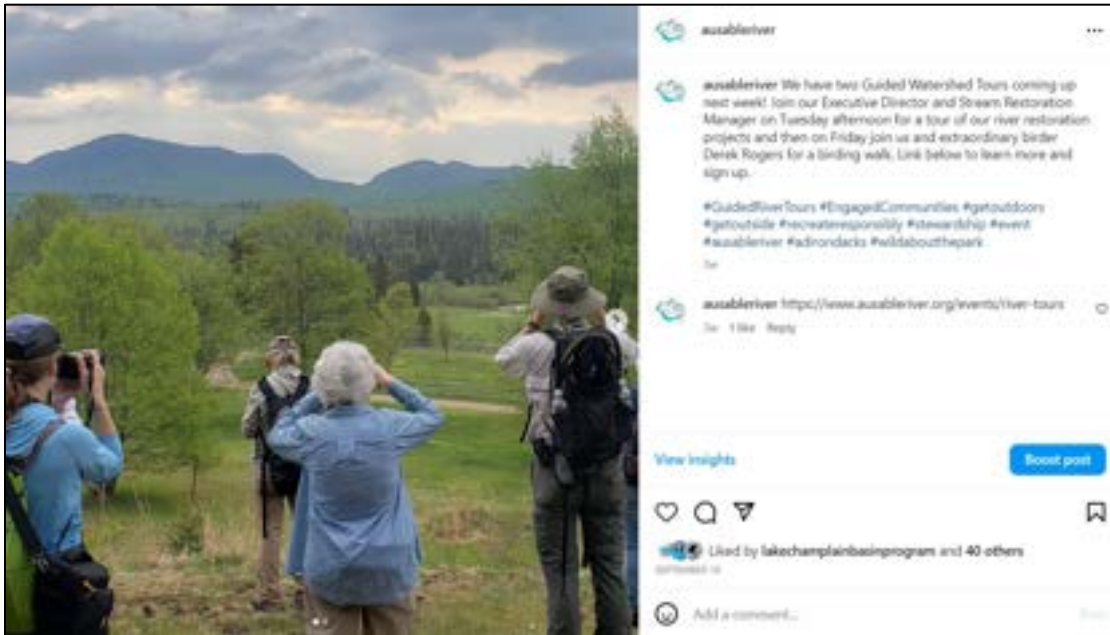
"It's been a joy to play a role in getting so many people outside and learning. I'm looking forward to assisting with this program's ten exciting tours this year" said Carolyn Koestner, GIS and Science Communications Fellow at AsRA.

AsRA's free, guided watershed tours begin in mid-July with Riverwalking and will continue through the end of 2023. Tours are free, but pre-registration is required. Learn more about AsRA's guided watershed tours program, tour dates, and registration on the Ausable River Association website, <https://www.ausableriver.org/events/river-tours>.

This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) under assistance agreement (LC00A00981-0) to NEIWPC in partnership with the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP).

GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

Appendix III: Example Social Media Posts Promoting Tours



**GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO
EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP**

Appendix IV: Example Tour Promotion in Local e-Newsletter (Jay Community News)

**JOIN ASRA FOR
A FREE
GUIDED FALL
NATURE WALK**



**AUSABLE
RIVER
Association**

Wednesday, October 4, 9:30 to
11:30 am

Join Elizabeth Lee, naturalist and outdoor guide, and ASrA staff next week for a fall walk at John Brown Farm.

We will observe changes on the land in the upper reaches of the watershed that contribute to the river's health in the following year. We'll follow an easy trail of just over a mile and look at natural and human history playing out seasonal dynamics. Click [HERE](#) to learn more and sign up.



GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

Appendix V: Example Tour Promotion in AsRA's e-Newsletter



EVENTS

AsRA Projects Tour and Birding Walk Filling Up Fast!

We have two Guided Watershed Tours coming up next week! Join our Executive Director and Stream Restoration Manager on Tuesday afternoon for a tour of our river restoration projects and then on Friday join us and extraordinary birder Derek Rogers for a birding walk.

[Learn more and sign up!](#)

**GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO
EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP**

Appendix VI: Watershed Tour Blogs

<https://www.ausableriver.org/blog/connecting-ausable>



<https://www.ausableriver.org/blog/thats-wrap>



GUIDED WATERSHED TOURS: INTERPRETIVE OUTDOOR TRIPS TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP

Appendix VII: Watershed Tours Feature in the Lake Placid News

<https://www.lakeplacidnews.com/opinion/columns/2023/09/28/ausable-water-wise-small-observations-big-connections-throughout-the-adirondack-forest/>

AUSABLE WATER WISE: Small observations, big connections throughout the Adirondack forest

COLUMNS

SEP 28, 2023

MADISON STROUD

Ausable River Association

f SHARE t TWEET



Print Now



Clockwise from top right: shagbark tree, shagbark hickory nut, black trunpets, moss-covered rocks, and ghost pipe emerging from leaf litter (Provided photos: AuRA)