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PRESS RELEASE

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Ausable River Association Receives \$2 million For Stream Restoration & Community Flood Resilience

A request from the Ausable River Association (AsRA) for \$2 million was included in the 2023 Federal Omnibus Bill, signed into law last week by President Biden. AsRA's request was shepherded through the appropriations process, through subcommittee review and approval, by Congresswoman Elise Stefanik. These funds will help build flood resilience, protect water quality, and restore stream health in the Town of Jay. They will advance critical river restoration projects detailed in the East Branch Ausable River Restoration Plan and expand the Plan, which currently includes the Town of Jay, to include the upstream half of the East Branch in the Town of Keene.



This funding request and Congresswoman Stefanik's backing were a direct response to the ice jam and flood that devastated parts of the hamlet of Au Sable Forks February 18, 2022. That same day, 10 miles upstream in the hamlet of Upper Jay – where ice jams normally develop first – an AsRA-coordinated stream restoration project completed in 2021 successfully broke up large slabs of ice, storing them on newly rebuilt streambanks. But downstream in Au Sable Forks, where similar projects lack full funding, the ice built up, forming dams that shifted thousands of gallons per minute of rushing icy water through homes, properties, and town infrastructure.

“These projects led by the Ausable River Association make a real difference for our communities,” said Town of Jay Supervisor Matt Stanley. “They avert ice jamming and flooding and are examples of how humans and towns can cohabitate with each other, and how river restoration really works.” Stanley reached out to Congresswoman Stefanik's office and to AsRA that day last February to ask if funding could be identified to move more AsRA-coordinated projects in the Town forward to construction.

New York State Senator Dan Stec wrote in support of the request, noting “Planning and implementing these projects will increase stability and confidence for businesses and residents alike. Where infrastructure cannot be adjusted, stream restoration projects promote stability and sustainability that incentivize economic growth.”

Town of Keene Supervisor Joe Pete Wilson said “The Town of Keene is grateful for this support. The Ausable 1181 Haselton Road ♦ PO Box 8 ♦ Wilmington, NY 12997 ♦ (518) 637-6859 ♦ www.ausableriver.org



River and its tributaries are essential to our town's well-being. But we also know their devastating power firsthand. This funding will enable us to make significant progress planning coordinated restoration projects along the Ausable River. These projects are essential for flood resilience and for habitat protection and it's a real success to have projects that are good for the environment and for the communities along the river."

Since 2010, AsRA's staff – working with local towns, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other public and private partners – has designed and constructed several significant stream restoration projects on the East and West Branch Ausable Rivers. These projects have demonstrated time and again that natural stream restoration techniques alleviate ice jams, absorb flood waters, increase flood resilience, and improve the

health and visual appeal of the river corridor. From 2018 to 2019, with funds directed by the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery (GOSR), AsRA's staff and a team of experts developed the comprehensive East Branch Restoration Plan for 12 miles of the river in the Town of Jay. GOSR and the Town of Jay funded the successful restoration in Upper Jay.

"What began as a fringe idea in 2010, when we completed our first demonstration stream restoration on the West Branch, has over time been embraced by residents, town leaders, permit agencies, anglers, emergency personnel, and by our elected representatives at the state and federal level," said Kelley Tucker, Executive Director of AsRA. "Having this level of interest and engaged support from the Congresswoman is a game changer."

AsRA's request for funds described shovel-ready projects in Upper Jay and Au Sable Forks, as well the need to complete technical designs for additional projects included in the East Branch Restoration Plan in Jay and to pursue a full geomorphic assessment of the upper East Branch Ausable River in the Town of Keene to plan future projects there. The \$2 million will be paired with other federal, state, and private funds received and pending to move these river restoration projects forward as quickly as possible.

"AsRA's approach to stream restoration rebuilds the self-sustaining capacity of the river," Tucker said. "We work on damaged sections of the river. While rivers can heal themselves, they need significant amounts of time and space to do so. Where human infrastructure cannot be moved to allow the river to heal, we can intervene. Using only native stone, trees, and biodegradable fabric we repair the channel and banks with careful planning and mathematical precision. The result, over time, is a beautiful flowing channel of oxygenating riffles and deep pools with thick buffers of native trees and plants. It's good for the river, for water quality, for biodiversity, and it's the foundation for healthy, vibrant Adirondack communities. It doesn't stop flooding, but in places where human infrastructure must exist in proximity to a river, it reduces unpredictability and allows human communities to flourish alongside natural ones."

Photo caption: Wrapping up a successful stream restoration project on the West Branch Ausable River in 2019.
Photo credit: Ausable River Association.