



# River Stewardship in the Ausable Watershed



## COLGATE UNIVERSITY'S 2019 UPSTATE INSTITUTE SUMMER FIELD SCHOOL

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The Ausable River Association (AsRA) helps communities protect our streams and lakes. We envision a community of watershed residents and visitors enjoying the Ausable River, its lakes and tributaries, and protecting its clean waters, healthy free-flowing streams, and the diverse habitats that sustain its native plants and wildlife. This engaged community supports and works in partnership with AsRA to inspire future generations to cherish and protect our watershed. At the Ausable River Association (AsRA), our focus is on building partnerships and implementing projects that support vibrant local communities while simultaneously protecting the Ausable River, its tributaries and watershed lakes. We spend the summer working on a variety of field projects, including a river steward program that provides education and outreach to the public on invasive species spread prevention, our porta-john program that addresses human waste issues in the high peaks and supports Leave No Trace ethics, and we protect communities and infrastructure through AsRA's stream restoration, dam removal, and culvert replacement projects.

## Project Description

How can we encourage residents and visitors of the Adirondack Park to be better stewards of the land and waters? The Ausable River watershed boasts wild landscapes and abundant recreational opportunities. For residents and visitors, the watershed is a destination for world-class trout fishing, hiking, skiing, climbing, and paddling, but several threats face the watershed, including road salt contamination, eroding streambanks, invasive species, and warming water temperatures. The Ausable River Association (AsRA) has worked on protecting the river and connecting communities since 1998. AsRA addresses these threats through our work and through promoting stewardship of this resource.

We are interested in hosting a Colgate student in summer 2019 to help us in achieving our mission to help communities protect our streams and lakes. A student would assist us in promoting stewardship through three program areas: River Stewardship, Clean Water, and Biodiverse Habitats. Work will involve assisting our River Steward with riparian plant surveys, monitoring our past planting sites, and co-organizing a paddling river clean up and volunteer community tree planting events. In the Clean Water program, the student will assist with production of multi-media outreach materials as part of the *Hold the Salt Campaign* with our partner organization, AdkAction. Other Clean Water tasks include assisting with stream and lake water quality sampling missions throughout the summer season. In the Biodiverse Habitats program, a Colgate student would assist with biological monitoring of fish and other aquatic species at our restoration and stream connectivity project sites, as well as hiking around the watershed to collect water samples to look for eDNA of different trout species. In addition to working on these various projects, both in the field and in the office, the student would produce two blog posts for our website and an informational brochure encouraging stewardship by watershed visitors.

## Benefits to AsRA's mission

Public stewardship is the key to maintaining the health of the Ausable River watershed long-term. As an organization, AsRA helps the community learn about and constructively respond to the needs of the river and its watershed resources. We share the data and information we gather, and help the community effectively address new challenges and emerging threats. But these threats will reemerge if the residents and visitors don't take an active role in stewardship of the watershed. Engaging our community – people who live, work, and play in the watershed – through membership, by passing on valuable information to children and adults, encouraging volunteer participation on the river or by adding informed citizen voices in a town meeting, is an essential goal if we are to achieve AsRA's mission.

This project will have numerous direct and tangible benefits to the health of the river, while also building the less tangible benefit of long-term community driven stewardship. By assisting with stewardship and research projects across all of AsRA's programs, the Upstate Institute Summer Field School student will enable us to achieve our mission and to find better ways of incorporating volunteer teams in our future work. In 2018 we released a brochure called *Caring for the River*. This brochure is all about land and water stewardship, and was geared specifically towards summer and year-round residents of the Ausable watershed. We are hoping to expand our outreach efforts to visitors of the watershed, and believe that involving a Colgate student in a variety of projects that we do, both with volunteers and just with science staff, will enable them find ways of encouraging visitors to participate in stewardship activities.

## Logistics

We anticipate a full time student working on this project during the summer months. The project would be based out of the Ausable River Association office in Wilmington, NY and would require a driver's license and car to travel throughout the 512 square mile watershed. The student would be directly supervised by Dr. Brendan Wiltse, Science and Stewardship Director, and would work closely with Nicole Pionteck, AsRA River Steward, and Carrienne Pershyn, our Science and Operations Associate. We would provide office space, but many of the

projects will take place in or near the river. Work may involve moderate to strenuous hiking, wading, and tree planting. We would provide daily oversight, weekly progress meetings, and ensure the student has direct access to partner networks.

### **Training and skills**

This project requires computer research skills, and ability to work outside for long periods in variable weather conditions. The student should be comfortable talking to partners and members of the public, and traveling in remote areas in northern NY. The project would be relevant for students interested in conservation, land stewardship, and biological or limnological research. Plant identification skills, paddling experience, and other field sampling skills are also desirable.

From this experience, the student would have the opportunity to experience working in a professional workplace and in a variety of public outreach situations. They would have the opportunity to plan events, conduct field work and analyze data, apply communications skills, and learn about and understand implications of climate change on aquatic wildlife and lake and stream ecology. We'd like the student to engage in discussions with volunteers and visitors and provide us with information to help guide future programmatic efforts.