



In progress: current work at Sound **Rivers** page 3



**SUCCESS:** The year of **Sound Rivers'** work page 6



**Financial** health: a look at the numbers page 8



Riverkeeper updates page 10

The quarterly newsletter of Sound Rivers

# A look at the State of Your **Rivers and Summer 2021**

No season is more synonymous with our work for clean water than summer; this is the season you'll find my family, along with many other residents and visitors to our area, jumping into our rivers at every opportunity. I know you share my desire to know that the water we're swimming, boating and fishing in this summer is safe. That's why Sound Rivers kicks off each summer with the launch of our Swim Guide, keeping you in the



know about your water quality. You can read more

about this program on page 2, and Swim Guide results are always available at soundrivers.org/swimquide, or text "SWIM" to 33222. I hope you have a chance to get out on your rivers this summer!

Summer also brings with it the start of the Atlantic hurricane season, As we begin summer, we also have some time to reflect back on the past year. In this issue of Currents you'll find an overall picture of our audited 2020 financials, the successes and challenges facing our Riverkeepers and program staff, and a look forward, as we continue celebrating our 40th Anniversary year.

and last year was one of the busiest on record. We know that flooding, and pollution threats caused by storms, are a huge concern for our region.

Your Riverkeepers continue to work towards resilience — advocating for changes and protections at the state level, working with local communities on resiliency planning, and partnering with schools on innovative stormwater projects to reduce flooding and pollution. As always, if the Neuse, Trent, Pamlico-Tar or Pungo rivers are predicted to flood, we will be posting that information

on our Facebook page, facebook. com/soundriversnc, and our website, soundrivers.org.

Thank you, for everything you do for your water. I'm looking forward to when we can gather again in celebration of our rivers!

Sincerely,

Geather Deck

PS - Are you considering making a monthly recurring gift to Sound Rivers? As a sustaining donor, your gift every month (of any amount!) helps us plan our year. As little as \$5 per month makes a huge impact on your clean water. Many generous donors have told us this is their preferred way to give and it's easy to do at soundrivers.org/ donate!

Even more, this is a perfect time to start giving monthly, because a wonderful supporter is providing a \$1,000 challenge gift if 25 donors make a new monthly gift pledge between now and Aug. 31!

No one should ever have to swim in unsafe waters. But how can you tell if your local stream, river or lake is safe?

Swim Guide is a resource for North Carolina's water lovers informed by water sampling by local Waterkeeper organizations across the state, including Sound Rivers. From beaches to lakes to rivers, our Swim Guide is an online map that shows you which popular recreation sites in the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico are safe for water recreation or unsafe due to

E. coli bacteria levels or pollution.

Let's get real — you should care if there is poop in your water. Water contamination is largely from an overflow of human sewage facilities and runoff from industrial farming activities. This happens due to decades of lack of regulations or slack enforcement, and polluted water can lead to waterborne illnesses. That's why Swim Guide is both important, and popular — it protects both water and people. If the water exceeds the federal

safety standards, we let you know.

Currently, our program tests 46 sites each week, from the Raleigh-Durham area to Oriental.

Results from each site are shared with a "pass" or "fail" designation via text alert, various media outlets and on our Swim Guide page, at soundrivers.org/swimquide/.

There, you can find our Swim Guide map that shows all the sites: those considered unsafe for recreation are noted with a red icon. Those where it's clear to swim are marked with a green icon.

Happy swimming!

Sound Rivers' popular Swim Guide program launched Memorial Day weekend as our water-quality interns arrived at our Washington, New Bern and Raleigh offices for the summer. After an intense two weeks of training, they took on the task of coordinating and training our Swim Guide volunteers, testing water samples and relaying results via







text, email, press releases and social media videos. Our interns are responsible for relaying results weekly for 46 popular recreation sites from the Raleigh-Durham area to Oriental.

"We've had great volunteer turnout this year, and our interns are doing an excellent job of managing everyone," said Sound Rivers' Environmental Projects Coordinator Clay Barber, who is heading up this year's Swim Guide program.

Visit our Swim Guide page for more information and to check results or text "SWIM" to 33222 to get results for your favorite swimming spots texted to you every Friday.



# **MEET OUR SWIM GUIDE TEAM**



#### NATHALIE URIARTE-AYALA

is Sound Rivers' Lower Neuse River intern for the summer. A rising junior at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill majoring in Environmental Science with a minor in GIS, Nathalie is excited to learn more about water quality and the variety of projects involved in its study.

Nathalie is a native eastern North Carolinian, who was born in Kinston and grew up in Pink Hill.

Nathalie is working out of our New Bern office and can be reached at nathalie@soundrivers.org.



#### **LEAH TILSON**

is a rising senior at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, where she is majoring in English with a double minor in Environmental Science and Public Policy.

Originally from Robeson County, she's a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. Leah now lives in Fayetteville, a few miles from the Cape Fear River, and enjoys hiking, painting and writing stories in her free time.

She hopes to pursue a future in environmental law, and is especially excited to learn more about riverkeeping and environmental nonprofit work in North Carolina.

Leah is working at Sound Rivers' Raleigh office and can be reached at leah@soundrivers.org.

is a rising senior at East Carolina University, majoring in environmental health with a minor in composite natural science. Will's academic interests include recreational and potable water quality, on-site wastewater and soil.

For the last two years, Will has worked as a park attendant at River Park North. A Rocky Mount native, Will grew up swimming and waterskiing on the Tar River.

Will is based at Sound Rivers' Washington office and can be reached at will@soundrivers.org.

Continued on Page 9

2

# ROGRESS

## **ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS | BIOGAS**

Sound Rivers continues to create partnerships with outside organizations/agencies for stormwater mitigation through nature-based solutions. Sound Rivers' Environmental Project Coordinator Clay Barber is currently working with four schools in the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico watersheds to construct the following stormwater control measures. Projects are funded by North Carolina's Environmental Enhancement Grants program, and local grants including from the Bosch Community Fund, Harold Bate Foundation and Craven County Community Foundation.



#### NASH COMMUNITY COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT

- Rainwater harvesting cisterns
- Rain gardens
- Improvements to a dry swale



#### WAYNE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, GOLDSBORO

- Rainwater harvesting cisterns
- Rain gardens
- Inspection of existing stormwater control measures



#### **EPIPHANY HIGH SCHOOL, NEW BERN**

• Rainwater harvesting cisterns



#### WEST CRAVEN MIDDLE SCHOOL, NEW BERN

• Stormwater control measures in the process of being determined

Sound Rivers continues to shine a spotlight on directed biogas projects located at industrial hog facilities, as biogas projects proposed in North Carolina do not fix existing waste management systems — specifically lagoons and spray fields — that harm our water, air and health.

Current projects propose installation of anaerobic digesters to capture methane from waste lagoons, construction of miles of pipeline from the operations to a central processing facility and construction of a central processing facility to "clean" the biogas before it is injected into an existing natural gas pipeline.

Sound Rivers has been working to prevent the state from passing legislation that would require one general permit for all biogas facilities, which would limit the state's authority to look at each biogas project individually and determine environmental impacts, prevent the public taking part in discussion about the projects, eliminate a significant financial incentive for facilities to install environmentally superior technology and limit legal remedies for communities impacted by these operations.

This summer, Sound Rivers will release a public service announcement about biogas, continuing to highlight why biogas projects should not

# **SWIM GUIDE**







by many volunteers. We are grateful for the team of Swim Guide volunteers who fan out over the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico watersheds every week to collect water samples at popular recreational sites from the Raleigh area to Oriental. They then deliver the samples to our water-quality interns who test each one for E. coli. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, these dedicated volunteers are working to make sure it's safe to swim in your favorite swimming spot.





Sound Rivers is celebrating 40 years of fighting for clean water! We've launched our 40 Stories for 40 Years series highlighting the many volunteers who have dedicated their time and effort to Sound Rivers' mission of protecting our waterways and the people who rely on them for everything from drinking water to recreation.

Those stories can be found on our website at soundrivers. org/40-stories-for-40-years.

Rivers' past, present and future at venues in New Bern, Raleigh and Washington. The film explores Sound Rivers' history in the work that has been done and our future, as told by the voices of the people we know. Each event will also feature a panel discussion featuring those working on and starring in the documentary. Visit our anniversary page at soundrivers.org and stay tuned for more 40th anniversary events!

In October, we'll be premiering a documentary about Sound



## **MICROPLASTICS SAMPLING**

Sound Rivers' Riverkeepers are taking part in a two-year-long, statewide study to find out exactly how much plastic is in our waterways. The research is funded by a \$188,000 Environmental Enhancement Grant to Waterkeepers Carolina, a science-based, environmental advocacy group representing 15 Waterkeeper Alliance programs in North Carolina, including Sound Rivers. Waterkeepers Carolina has partnered with University of North Carolina-Wilmington's Plastic Ocean Project and Duke Law and Policy Clinic for the project, the goal of which is to better understand the degree to which

microplastic pollution is impacting streams, wildlife and public health, and determine possible solutions to reduce microplastics pollution. Sampling for microplastic pollution in 30 urban and rural rivers and streams started in January.

Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Jill Howell, Upper Neuse Riverkeeper Matthew Starr and Lower Neuse Riverkeeper Katy Hunt are sampling for microplastics at Jack's Creek in Washington, Little Rock Creek in downtown Raleigh and Lawson Creek, a tributary of the Trent River, at Lawson Creek Park in New Bern.

# **OYSTER ROAST 2021**

Sound Rivers' signature fundraiser is back! Canceled on Nov. 13 to dine on steamed oysters under the stars, in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we're inviting Sound Rivers supporters to the Washington Civic Center and shop at our always-popular silent auction and

sample beer from local craft breweries, stroll through

dance the night away with the Adam Decker Trio. Our VIP section will be back again this year, which means early access to the oysters, a wine tasting, welcome gift and

Put Nov. 13 on your calendar now — tickets sell fast and sell out!

**NOV. 13 SAVE THE DATE!** 

#### ATLANTIC COAST PIPELINE

news of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline's cancellation in July 2020 — a pipeline that would have crossed both the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico watersheds, as well as hundreds of other waterways.

Sound Rivers was one of several groups that filed a lawsuit against the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for authorizing the pipeline without proper consideration of the impacts or public need, and launched North Carolina Pipe-

Waterkeepers across the region celebrated the line Watch, a construction-monitoring program that trained volunteers and member staff to monitor pipeline construction by air, land and water for violations of commonsense environmental protections required by state and federal permits.

Following a permit invalidated by the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals in May, the project was canceled in July, a testament to the power of people when they organize and persevere, even in the face of billion-dollar companies.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS

tion: others, access to the local waterways for all.

creasing access to the Tar-Pamlico Water Trail for all.

Over the past year, Environmental Projects Coordinator Clay Barber oversaw the completion of several projects, some of which increase stormwater mitiga-

In partnership with the City of Greenville, Sound Rivers facilitated the

makeover of Jaycee Park's constructed wetland. At West Craven High School

and New Bern High Schools, cisterns were installed to gather rainwater for a

mix of uses. Havelock High School and Beaufort County Community College

several stormwater mitigation projects at Wayne Community College.

were the recipients of constructed wetlands. Clay has also secured a grant for

In partnership with the City of Washington, Sound Rivers had new kayak

launches installed at Havens Garden and Tranters Creek in Washington, in-

# YOUR RIVERS

### KITTRELL LCID LANDFILL

The Vance County Board of Adjustment voted unanimously in February to deny a conditional-use permit for a land clearing inert debris landfill in Kittrell – a win for water-quality in the Tar-Pamlico River basin. A permit would have allowed an LCID landfill to be built on 83 rural and residential acres that include Long's Creek, a tributary to the Tar River.

Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Jill Howell testified about impact to water quality, after residents of adjacent properties reached out to Sound Rivers to help navigate the public comments hearing. Sound Rivers was instrumental in finding pro bono legal representation for the residents in later hearings.

#### LOUISBURG ASPHALT PLANT

banks of the Tar River into an asphalt and concrete plant, rock quarry and mulch yard was pulled in November 2020, after Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Jill Howell and neighbors of the 189-acre property spoke out against potential impacts to the environment, water quality, as well as the health and safety of a historically African-American residential community that has been there for generations. After the public hearing, Franklin County Commissioners delayed taking a vote on the application, and the application to rezone the property was withdrawn.

#### RIVER CLEANUPS

Among other cleanups, the Earth Day polluting the Tar.

#### MEMORIAL WATER-OUALITY FUND

**Established in memory of Sound** Rivers' supporter Gene Pate, this generous gift allows Sound Rivers to expand sampling programs to include pollutants currently too expensive to monitor, such as algal bloom toxins, PFAS (also known as forever chemicals) and microplastics.

THE PAST YEAR HAS BEEN CHALLENGING FOR ALL DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. DESPITE THOSE CHALLENGES, SOUND RIVERS' RIVER-**KEEPERS HAVE CONTINUED THE FIGHT FOR YOUR** CLEAN-WATER FUTURE. HERE ARE THE HIGH-LIGHTS OF THE SUCCESSES WE'VE HAD, WITH **MANY MORE TO COME!** 

#### **TOUR DE TAR**

Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Jill Howell and Environmental Projects Coordinator Clay Barber completed an epic kayaking adventure along the Tar River in October 2020 to highlight the beauty of the Tar-Pamlico Water Trail and the issues facing it. Many Sound Rivers' members followed their 10day trip, catching up with the adventurers

RALEIGH FLOODPLAIN RESTRICTIONS

Floodplain restrictions, as proposed by

Raleigh Stormwater Committee, were adopt-

ed by the Raleigh City Council. Upper Neuse

Riverkeeper Matthew Starr, a member of the

committee at the time, helped formulate

the plan to stop development in Raleigh's

100-year floodplain and keep structures out

of areas meant to be flooded - a key in the

fight against climate change.

#### TRENTON MILLION-GALLON SPILL

A 1-million-gallon spill of a hog waste into a tributary of the Trent River resulted in a violation and fine by DEO against the owners of D.C. Mills in Lenoir County. Lower Neuse Riverkeeper Katy Hunt provided her sampling data for background use in DEQ's investigation, as well as aerial photos of the facility, breech and other violations of waste

#### NEW BERN FISH KILL

A five-week-long fish kill on the Neuse River and an appearance to explain why it was happening during a New Bern Board of Aldermen's meeting earned Lower Neuse Riverkeeper Katy Hunt a seat at the stakeholder table for the creation of New Bern's Hazard Mitigation and Resiliency plan. Hunt is working with other stakeholders and engineers to identify the best nature-based projects to improve flood prevention and recovery. The city has applied for a grant to construct one such projects and several others have been proposed.

#### HAVELOCK WASTEWATER

Lower Neuse Riverkeeper advocated for strong enforcement of the City of Havelock's long-standing problem of sewer pills to Slocum Creek. the state finally moved to require Havelock to upgrade their waste collection system. Spills have been greatly reduced.

## A proposal to turn a sand mine on the

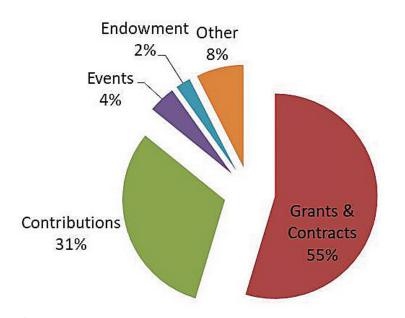
cleanup held April 25 netted half a ton of trash from the Tar River, from Town Commons to Port Terminal. A total of 30 trash bags, two super-large trash bags and two 5-gallon buckets were filled by volunteers from East Carolina University's The Coastal Society, Pirates on the Water and Water Resources Center, kayak/paddleboard rental company Knee Deep Adventures and R.A.W. Plastics. Two TV screens were some of the more interesting items found

# FISCAL YEAR 2020

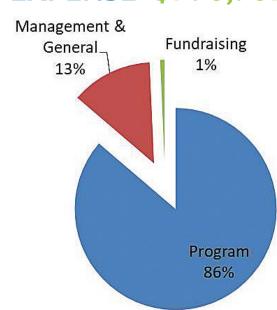
# **Sound Rivers audited financials**

Thanks to ongoing support from our clean-water community, we are able to continue Sound Rivers' strong legacy of advocacy and educational work for cleaner rivers. For 40 years, Sound Rivers has tackled the grave challenges our waterways face. We have done it together and will continue to work hard to face the next 40 years of challenges.

# **REVENUE\*** \$1,086,792



# **EXPENSE \$796,907**



\*Revenue represents grant income for multi-year projects that will also be expensed in future years.

# THANK YOU, SWIM GUIDE SPONSORS!

UNC Pavel Molchanov Scholars | Melinda Vann & David Silberstein | Water-Quality Fund (in memory of Gene Pate) | ECU SECU Public Fellows Internship Foundation









**SWIM GUIDE** continued from page 3

## IS IT SAFE TO SWIM?

The Swim Guide program benefits from summer data collection by Riverkeepers all across our state. "Is it Safe to Swim: Protecting Recreational Water Quality in North Carolina" is a first-of-its-kind report which compiles the results of their water monitoring efforts and includes an analysis of samples collected in each watershed. You can read the report at

waterkeeperscarolina.org/news. Since 1986, EPA has urged states to adopt E. coli standards to preserve recreational water quality in freshwaters. North Carolina is one of only a handful of states that has failed to do so. It's past time for the

state to adopt the E. coli standard

for bacteria for fresh water.

Sound Rivers, in partnership with Waterkeepers Carolina, is working to improve legislation and enforcement to protect your water quality by asking legislators for the follow-

Polluters may find it easier to pay the fine than fix the problem. Current fines for sewage and pollution breaches are often far less than the cost of a long-term fix to the

problem. Investing in infrastructure would solve some issues with water contamination, a solution Waterkeepers support.

**Remove contamination sources** from floodplains. Legislators should restrict siting and fund buyouts for industrial hog and poultry operations remaining in the 100-year floodplain. The swine farm buyout is a voluntary program that was established in the wake of Hurricane Floyd to remove swine farms from the 100-year floodplain.

**Bolster funding for farmers to** prevent contamination. Increasing state funding to help farmers reduce pollution in rivers and streams. The Agricultural Cost Share Program, the Agricultural Water Resource Assistance Program and Funding for the Community Conservation Assistance Program help farmers afford improvements such as new cattle fencing, riparian buffers and septic systems.

Help homeowners fix failing septic systems. Restoring funding to the Waste Detection and Elimination program would help homeowners fix leaking and failing septic systems.

# What can you do to help?

- Donate! You can donate to support Sound Rivers' advocacy efforts at soundrivers.org/donate.
- Adopt a Swim Guide site! Pick your favorite recreational spot from our list and make it yours for the summer. Your \$25 will support water-quality testing all summer long!
- Share! Share our Swim Guide on your social media to let your community know how to assess water safety in their area.
- Become a Clean Water Warrior! Text WKC to 844-956-1139 to get easy actions you can take from your phone to protect North Carolina's waterways.

Thank you to our generous supporters who have adopted Swim Guide sites in 2021!

**Zoe - Smithfield Commons Park** Anna and Emily - Yankee Hall Road **Knee Deep Adventures -Port Terminal** 









Albemarle-Pamlico





# Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Jill Howell

This summer, Sound Rivers will debut a new resource highlighting environmental justice issues impacting communities and their waters within the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse River basins.

During the spring 2021 semester, Eva Ramirez Flores, a UNC-Chapel Hill student worked with Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Jill Howell to build an ArcGIS Story-Map that includes interactive maps, photos, video, and narratives to tell the story of environmental justice issues past and present in the region, the organizations and individuals working to fight these injustices, and how they relate to Sound Rivers' work. Topics covered will

"Our work fighting for fishable, swimmable, drinkable waters for everyone in the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse River watersheds is inherently a fight for justice."

> Jill Howell Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper

include industrial animal facilities, sanitary sewer overflows, the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, landfills and coal ash. The StoryMap will be available in both English and Spanish.

Our work fighting for fishable, swimmable, drinkable waters for everyone in the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse River watersheds is inherently a fight for justice. Certain communities, often communities of color and low-wealth communities, bear the brunt of polluting industry and environmental harms, including to their water resources. With this StoryMap, our goal is to make this connection between our work and environmental justice.

# Lower Neuse Riverkeeper Katy Hunt

In the past year, Lower Neuse Riverkeeper Katy Hunt has been working on an issue with far-reaching effects: transparency – or the lack thereof when it comes to public If no notice of violation is issued, information about polluters.

At its root is a session law passed by the North Carolina General Assembly in 2014 that forbids the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality from sharing information about any investigation

stemming from a complaint against an agricultural facility unless and until a notice of violation is issued to that facility by the department. no material collected during the investigation – none of the findings. avenues of investigation or methodology — is considered public record.

"We can only find out that investigation occurred, but we can't find out what was found and how it was found," Hunt said. "The public may never know where the pollution is coming from, how it got there and how it may impact their family's health."

Hunt has also honed in on the poultry industry and the lack of information available to the public about their operations. Operators in the swine industry are required by NCDEQ to provide basic information, such as name, location,

# RIVERKEEPER UPDATES

buildings included in the operation and the number of animals a facility can hold, in order to be permitted. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture, which has oversight of the poultry industry, does not appear to require any information, instead simply stating that poultry facilities are "deemed permitted."

"We don't even know if they have records. DEQ still has the enforcement when there's a complaint against a poultry facility, but the state does not even know where these facilities are," Hunt said. "How can an agency be expected to reasonably regulate an industry that they know almost nothing about?"

Hunt says the lack of transparency must be resolved in the interest of public health — especially the

session law that prevents information from being shared by DEQ.

"That law has got to go because all it does it protect polluters," Hunt said. "It's an open door to anyone who wants to pollute our waterways

and gives them a safety net that allows them do so. All the public is left with is questions and no resolution. That lack of transparency breeds distrust."



# **Upper Neuse Riverkeeper Matthew Starr**

**HB 489** 

Upper Neuse Riverkeeper Matthew Starr serves as Sound Rivers' eyes, ears and advocate at the state capitol, especially when it comes to legislation that limits transparency and civic participation related to the health of our waterways.

**√IHB 500** 

"It's proactive; it puts funding where funding is desperately needed, like in removing floodprone structures, elevating structures, buyouts in flood plains. Reducing impact from storms and flooding is going to be really key moving forward. This is the first piece of practical legislation that North Carolina has put out, but there is considerable work that needs to be done before it's passed."

**Drawback:** Calls for levees and stream-widening on the Neuse and Lumber rivers, both long proven to be ineffective flood-mitigation efforts.

Currently, he's lobbying for changes to a few pieces of legislation, including House Bill 500 (Disaster Relief and Mitigation Act of 2021), Senate Bill 605 (North Carolina Farm Act of 2021), House Bill 489 (2021 Building Code and Develop-

following is his, and Sound Rivers', take on these bills. **✓** HB 798

The NC Healthy Soils Act is good legislation, according to Starr, as it provides incentives for farmers to implement practices to improve soil health, which is "key in our quest for clean water."

ment Regulatory Reform) and House

Bill 798 (NC Healthy Soils Act). The

X SB 605

The Farm Act of 2021 is not bad, according to Starr, but it contains one piece of bad legislation that needs to be removed: the general permitting of directed biogas projects at industrial hog facilities, which would limit NCDEO's authority to look at each biogas project individually to determine environmental impacts and prevent the public input.

increased sediment pollution

of waterways." Sediment pollution is the most common source of pollution in U.S. waters and causes approximately \$16 billion in environmental damage annually, according to the EPA.

"It's terrible. It would lead to

Sediment runoff from cleared land has long-term impacts on aquatic plants and insects, fish and other wildlife. It can also fill streams, lakes and ponds, obstruct waterways, cloq storm sewers and ditches, alter the flow of water and reduce water depth, making navigation and recreational use more difficult.

10

**Sound Rivers, Inc.** P.O. Box 1854 Washington, NC 27889

NON PROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID WASHINGTON, NC PERMIT NO. 66





It may be glossy, but this paper IS recyclable. Please recycle!

# Tell Me About It TUESDAYS

### What would you like to learn?

Tell Me About It Tuesdays is taking a summer break, but we'd love to know what topics interest as we gear up for a new season in the fall. Email your thoughts to info@soundrivers.org!

SVIM
Guide

Text "SWIM" to

33222

to sign up for text alerts
letting you know where
it's SAFE to swim!

