ANNUAL REPORT

"Our work is far from done. We embrace an immediate future of continued and focused strategic growth wired for resilience despite anticipated changes in our social and political climate."

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Dear Outdoor Afro Family,

In a year when the ground has felt unsteady and the headlines heavy, I return to a choice I made long ago: Outdoor Afro will be an oasis - a place to breathe, reconnect, and remember what's true: we belong outside.

Sixteen years in, Outdoor Afro is fueled by tradition, hope, and gratitude. Tradition, because we stand on the shoulders of Black outdoor history that persevered in spite of barriers. Hope, because a new generation is building confidence, skill, and joy in nature. Gratitude, because none of this happens without the people who carry this movement—our volunteer leaders, staff, board, partners, and supporters.

In 2025, we did what we said we would do.

Our in-person and online participant network grew to nearly 200,000. We trained our largest cohort of volunteer leaders, leading hundreds of trips that reconnected thousands to water, land, wildlife, and one another.

Now, we're building what comes next:

This year, through Making Waves, we awarded over 3,200 scholarships to swimmers bringing our total to 6,200 swimmers since 2019. With each scholarship we are providing life-changing, life-saving water skills that can be passed on for generations.

And, recognizing that we need to exponentially expand our capacity in order to impact the lives of 48.3M Black people living in America, we launched the Outdoor Afro app. In just 5 short months, over 15,000 people downloaded the app. This new channel will enable Outdoor Afro to offer expanded access to outdoor destinations, recreation, and activities where Black people remain underrepresented and underestimated.

This is what it looks like when belonging becomes infrastructure—not just language, but leadership, technology, programs, and systems that last.

- A national network of swim schools, instructors, and pools
- Home Place—stewarded land where culture and conservation meet.
- Continued expansion of Outdoor Afro as a platform that includes our Outdoor Afro App, website, and other properties and products through which we can serve, connect, and create belonging.

This is the moment to be bold. We have delivered on our promises—and now we're asking you to invest in the future. Help us raise...

- $1M for the Making Waves National Network
- $10M to purchase and establish Home Place
- $2M to expand and fortify Outdoor Afro's App and AfroSphere

Together, we are turning an oasis into a legacy

With gratitude and hope,
Rue Mapp
Founder & CEO, Outdoor Afro

Letter from the board

I came to know Outdoor Afro through hiking. Hiking has been a passion of mine ever since I lost the physical agility required to play sports like soccer. I have enjoyed hiking in dry and wet conditions, on lush and desert terrain. From the Hudson Highlands and Sierra Nevada to the Chiricu Mountains and Parque Nacional Natural Tayrona – the peace I have made with myself and some of the most enduring discoveries of myself through the years were embodied in these natural places. What I missed while embarking on these adventures was the shared experience of reaching new highs and relating through communal purpose with others, as I had back on the pitch in my younger years.

And then I encountered Outdoor Afro – where people bonded, knowledge of the natural world became more accessible, and physical ambitions felt boundless. And it is through Outdoor Afro that I continue to build community and gain exposure to a world beyond hiking and elevation in the wilderness. It has been the gift of seeing myself through others and others seeing themselves through me.

For someone who relocates often, knowing there is an Outdoor Afro community nearly everywhere I go has been a source of comfort. The impact of this organization transcends the programs and leadership development we directly champion, by exposing our existing presence in the outdoors and expanding what is possible when we are together beyond our thinking and beyond our lifetime.

I look forward to Outdoor Afro's deepening cultivation of recreation, skill-sharing, and renewal in the natural world as we look toward stewarding land of our own in the future. Know that this land will also be your home; please join us there.

Morgan McCray
2026 Outdoor Afro Board Chair

Highlighted Impact numbers

Outdoor Afro App Downloads

13,401

3,060

Number of swimmerships

2,653

Number of participants

reached via trips this past year

Because of our work...

95

% positive mental health impact

93

% who would repeat the visit/activity

593

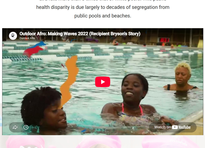
Trips completed 2025

95

% of people who would recommend us

Making Waves

Outdoor Afro created Making Waves because research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention consistently shows Black youth ages 10 to 14 drown in swimming pools at a rate more than 8 times that of white peers. This public health disparity is due largely to decades of segregation from public pools and beaches.



"Being able to get my daughter into swim lessons has been a refreshing relief! I never took lessons myself and always felt that

Volunteer Leader Stories

Volunteer Leader of the Year

Dr. Wednesday A. Jones has stepped up and showed out for her outdoor community, kept leader and participant morale high, and continues to uphold Outdoor Afro's values. "This award is a profound honor that affirms my commitment to connecting Black communities with the healing power of nature. I am deeply humbled and grateful to be recognized among so many inspiring leaders," said Wednesday when she received the news. Thank you Dr. Wednesday A. Jones for your steadfast commitment to sharing and upholding our mission.

The Big Fish

Each summer, Outdoor Afro Hosts our annual fishing trip led by Outdoor Afro volunteer leaders across the country. The Big Fish is a partnership between Outdoor Afro and the National Park Service and National Park Foundation to introduce Outdoor Afro participants in their local networks to fishing basics, and include other activities in local and national parks. Our goal is to continue to grow the number of Black people who visit National Parks to fish, and who adopt fishing as a new outdoor activity for themselves and their families.

The Big Campout

This year, we piloted the launch of The Big Campout as an extension of The Big Fish. The Big Campout is a multi-generational family, fun camping opportunity where families will get to learn some camping fundamentals while sharing time with the community.

New Ways to Lead

Introducing Outdoor Afro's NEW Virtual Brand Ambassador Program. We created the Virtual Brand Ambassador role so that we can invite nature lovers and leaders from every corner of the US—not just those from cities with large Black populations—to join us and to contribute to our mission by sharing their nature expertise and joy with those who might not be able to attend or participate in in-person events.

Participant Stories

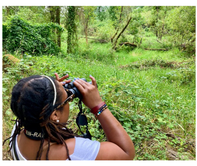
With Outdoor Afro, you don't have to go it alone

Stephanie Alcime prepared for her first birdwatching experience.... Little did she know it would widen her world.

Although she said she leans toward "quiet hobbies," Alcime was at the trailhead to meet the social group Outdoor Afro, which takes people of color outside their comfort zone and into nature.

"This is my first time with Outdoor Afro," said Alcime, who was one of seven Black participants on the leisure walk in Southeast Portland. "I joined specifically to find other people who look like me, who also like being outside."

READ THE STORY



Why do you give to Outdoor Afro?

"I love the Outdoor Afro mission! Anytime people push themselves out of their comfort zone and learn to get comfortable being uncomfortable, I get excited.

When "that's impossible," "that's not for me," and "I can't do that" turn into "I just did it," "I wonder what else I can do," or "Maybe I'll go try that other thing I've never done," I get excited.

When people discover they can use nature to challenge themselves, but also to find calm and peace, I get excited. When they realize they can use nature to build community, but also to find solitude, I get excited.

High adventure or low, solo or in a group, nature is a powerful setting. It certainly has been for me, so when others get to share in that world, I get excited."

- Anonymous Donor

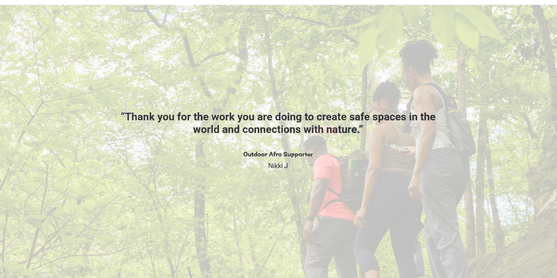
From Ripples to Waves

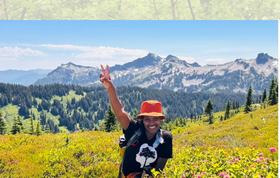
This year, you helped more than 3,200 Black children, caregivers, and adults step into the water with courage.

From first splashes to confident strokes, each swimmer is a ripple in a much bigger wave of joy, safety, and connection.

Meet the swimmers you supported below — these are just a few of the many stories shared with us this year. Each represents a family who gained safety, confidence, and connection because someone like you chose to invest in their experience.

READ THE STORY





Take a closer look

Explore the full breakdown of our growth, leadership, and vision for the future.

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