



# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

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COMMON  
GROUND  
RELIEF



# INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends and Supporters,

It is with great pleasure and gratitude that we present to you the 2022 Annual Report for Common Ground Relief. Over the past year, we have continued our unwavering commitment to responding to urgent community needs, advocating for environmental justice, and fostering habitat health in the face of the twin crises of climate change and land loss in Southeast Louisiana. Together, we have achieved remarkable milestones and made a lasting impact on the lives of countless individuals and on our future.

CGR sustained its Habitat Restoration, Environmental Education, and Community Aid programs, engaging both new and returning students, community members, and volunteers. We expanded our reach by strengthening partnerships with local organizations, government agencies, and schools. This enabled us to facilitate sustainable land and water management initiatives, educate stakeholders about coastal challenges and power structures, and provide vital resources to affected communities. CGR also transitioned to a co-leadership model and brought on a second full-time staff member.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the steadfast support of our donors, volunteers, and dedicated staff members. We extend our deepest gratitude to each and every one of you for your unwavering commitment. As we reflect on the accomplishments of the past year, we also recognize the challenges that lie ahead. Together, we will continue to build upon our successes, adapt to evolving needs, and forge ahead in our pursuit of a just, sustainable, and resilient future.

Warmly,

Charlotte Clarke and Joshua Benitez, Co-Executive Directors





# INTRODUCTION

## OUR MISSION

Common Ground Relief fosters environmental and community stewardship so that residents of Southeast Louisiana can survive and thrive, now and in the future.

## OUR VISION

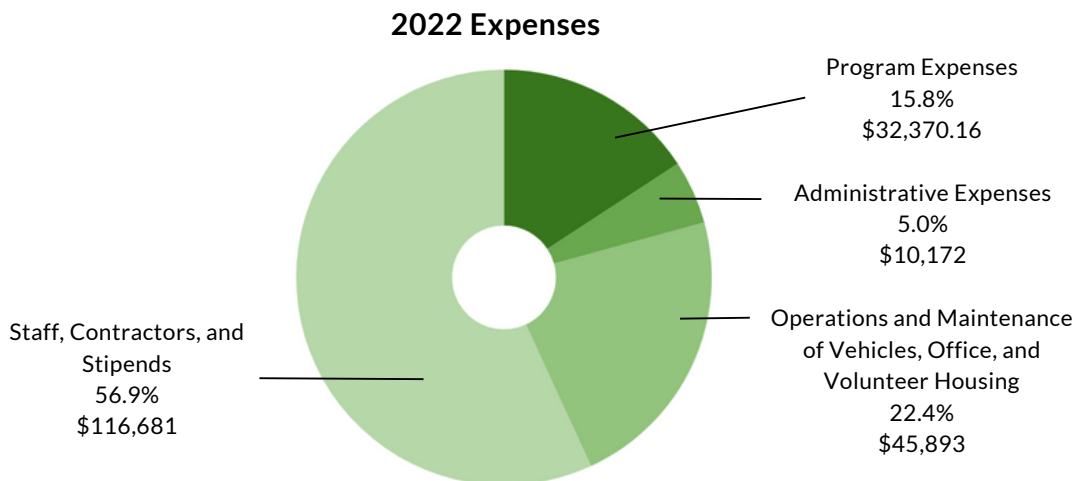
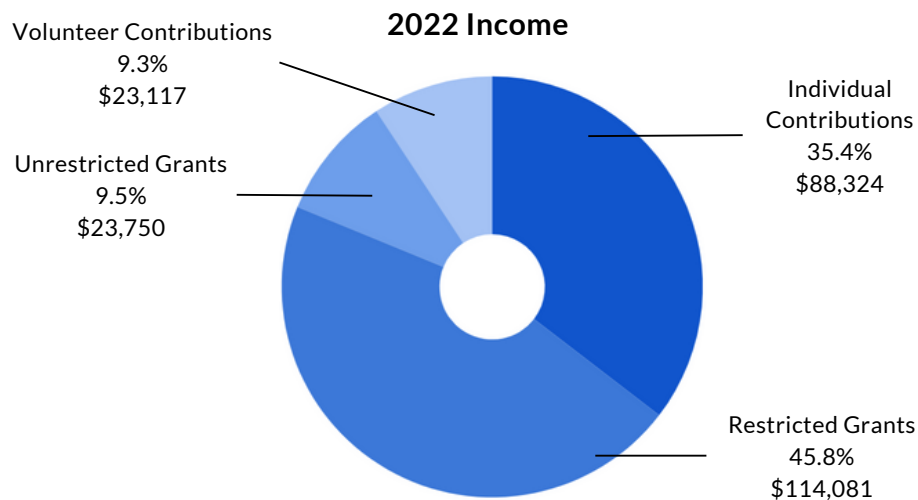
Common Ground Relief envisions a Southeast Louisiana in which residents actively engage in the ongoing process of being in reciprocal relationships with each other and their natural and constructed environments. Land is created and trees are planted faster than they are lost. All residents have their needs for food and housing met regardless of economic or natural disasters. All coastal life has the means to thrive together for generations to come.

## OUR VALUES

We prize effectiveness, interdependence, equity, and accountability in our work, and we strive to operate in a way that honors these values.

# FINANCIAL REPORT

Common Ground Relief had a net income of \$44,155 in the 2022 fiscal year. CGR's income sources were similar to 2021, with grants and individual contributions comprising the majority of the organization's income. CGR's expenses were also generally on-track with 2021 expenses, though there was an increase in expenditures on salary due to the hiring of a second full-time staff member.







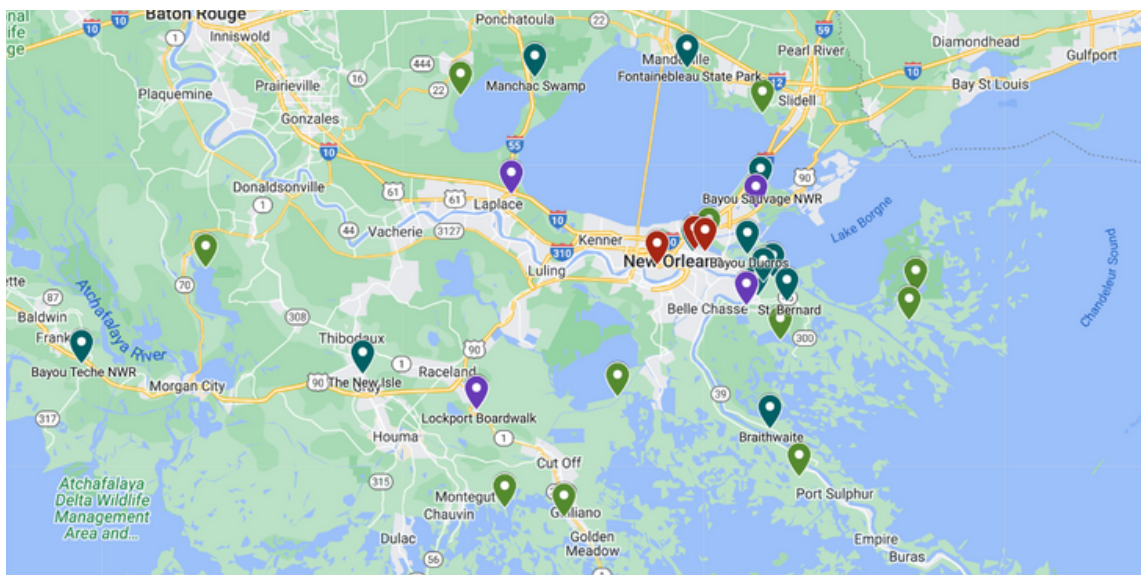
# PROGRAMS REPORT

## HABITAT RESTORATION

Habitat restoration was Common Ground Relief's main programmatic focus in 2022, as it has been for many years. We planted 4,439 native trees, 19,886 plugs of marsh grass, and 2,550 Louisiana irises this year.

Plantings utilized the older and more diverse trees available in CGR's nursery as a result of pandemic-related supply chain changes. Though it was logistically challenging to move larger trees to remote sites, projects are expected to have similar or improved outcomes in tree survival and habitat benefit due to the biodiversity and competitive advantage of larger seedlings.

This work restored an estimated 19 miles of shoreline and 11 acres of bottomland hardwood forest in Southeast Louisiana's vulnerable coastal wetlands, forests, and residential areas. The below project map and details are available at [tinyurl.com/CGRwork2022](https://tinyurl.com/CGRwork2022).





# PROGRAMS REPORT

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

CGR engaged hundreds of students and volunteers, providing experiential learning opportunities to students both in and out of the classroom. CGR worked with over 400 students from over 20 high schools and universities and local green job training programs in environmental stewardship projects in our nursery and at project sites throughout Southeast Louisiana.

CGR staff completed the Mississippi River Delta Institute, a professional development program for educators to improve skills in engaging students in STEM through experiential, inquiry-based investigations. CGR presented to educators, students, and community members at the St. Bernard Bird Festival, Restore America's Estuaries' Coastal & Estuarine Summit, and the Students Shoulder-to-Shoulder Ethical Leadership Summit.

## COMMUNITY AID

CGR remains committed to responding to Southeast Louisiana community needs in the wake of natural and economic disasters.

Community needs for fresh and accessible groceries continued: though COVID-related stresses waned, rapid inflation created new hardships and most of the Ninth Ward remained under food apartheid, without a grocery store within a mile. CGR distributed groceries weekly on Saturdays, serving an average of 50 families each week. The CGR Free Store prioritizes fresh produce and patron choice, and diverts food waste through partnership with New Orleans Food Rescue.

In April, an EF3 tornado tore through Arabi, less than 2 miles from CGR. CGR mobilized volunteers with HandsOn and Rebuilding Together to clear debris from 20 blocks and gut 7 houses. Mike Campbell, Rosa Booth, and other community members raised over \$4,000 in funds that CGR disbursed to 10 impacted families.





Common Ground Relief continued working with LA Green Corps and Tierra Resources to support hands-on learning for green job trainees, hosting workshops at our nursery and planting 900 trees at 2 sites.



Saturday food distributions made healthy groceries accessible to neighbors in the Lower Ninth Ward and beyond, plus we added additional community resources such as fresh herbs in a planter box, glass recycling supported by the Lower Ninth Ward CSED and Glass Half Full, and a Little Free Library supported by One Book One New Orleans.







# HIGHLIGHTS



Over 500 volunteers -- high schoolers through retirees -- planted 4,439 native trees, 19,886 plugs of marsh grass, and 2,550 Louisiana irises at 28 sites in Southeast Louisiana.

CGR joined Louisiana Iris Conservation Initiative and other orgs to plant 400 seedlings at Fontainebleau State Park in just a few hours!

CGR was proud to work with the Meraux Foundation, St. Bernard Wetlands Foundation, and other partners to plant over 1,200 trees along shorelines of historic natural bayous within the Central Wetlands Unit. The Mississippi River Gulf Outlet closed in 2010, so the 70,000 acres of wetlands it degraded are now amenable to native freshwater-friendly plants again. This opportunity led to the formation of the Central Wetlands Reforestation Collective, which will be active in 2023 and beyond.



NOLA Ready teamed up with CGR to care for trees and landscape in our native plant nursery in the Lower Ninth Ward. Recognizing the connection between environmental stewardship and disaster vulnerability, we can spend the storm off-season building relationships with each other and with our natural environment in order to forge a more resilient future.





Common Ground Relief would like to thank our network of funders, partners, volunteers, and neighbors for making this work possible.

## FUNDERS

- Commission for Environmental Cooperation
- Cox Community Foundation
- Coypu Foundation
- Ella West Freeman Foundation
- Harrah's New Orleans Casino
- Guacamole Fund
- J Foundation
- Jewish Community Foundation
- Jewish Endowment Foundation
- Louisiana for a Green New Deal
- NFWF Five Star and FedEx
- New Orleans Town Gardeners
- Tierra Foundation and Kosmos Energy
- Winky Foundation

## PARTNERS + COLLABORATORS

- Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge
- Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge
- Big Branch National Wildlife Refuge
- Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana
- Comite Resources
- Farming New Orleans
- Fontainebleau State Park
- Global Works
- Grand Bayou Indian Village
- GNO Interfaith Climate Coalition
- GNO Caring Collective
- HandsOn
- Healthy Gulf
- Isle de Jean Charles band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe
- LA Dept. of Agriculture and Forestry
- LA Green Corps
- LA Iris Conservation Initiative
- LA SPCA
- L9W Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development
- Meraux Foundation
- NCSY Missions
- NO Food Rescue
- NOLA Ready
- Rebuilding Together NO
- Southeast Louisiana Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- St. Bernard State Park
- St. Bernard Wetlands Foundation
- Students Shoulder-to-Shoulder