



Get to Know
at least
ONE RIVER

**“When we work together to find a
common vision, we can achieve
incredible results”**

Amy Merrill



Pictured: Amy Merrill

NCWA
Northern California Water Association



The Collaborative Steward

The rhythmic patter of hooves skimming the earth below was a sound Amy never tired of when she was young. Whether in the hot sweat-inducing summer or the bone-chill frost of winter in upstate New York, the sound was ever-present, because Amy was always riding. With 100 acres and the surrounding landscape of woods, creeks, and farm fields to explore, every grasshopper, hawk and blade of grass were familiar to the adventurous child who rode by each day.

Even so, it was the summers spent in the wilderness of Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada that locked in Amy's love of nature for life. Days at a small all-girls 'off the grid' camp were full of canoeing, portaging, swimming, and playing in the northern woods.

This camp put her so close to nature, some days it seemed as you could actually reach out and touch the moose or beaver sharing the river. As she entered college, Amy's connection with nature was as strong as ever, but she didn't realize one could make a living helping that very thing she adored.

Before landing in Northern California, Amy served as a large animal veterinarian intern, taught high school science, went to graduate school, spent time with the Forest Service and landed a job with an environmental consulting firm. She learned valuable lessons from each of these experiences and folded them into her work in years to come.

Amy's mother, Sally, always stressed the importance of listening to both sides and the benefits of understanding and supporting your community, no matter the differences in opinion. As the Interim Director of the California Program at American Rivers, one of Amy's central goals is to work with agricultural landowners to protect and improve habitat in wetlands and rivers.

"Collaboration is key. We are finding so many ways farmers can make small tweaks to their field operations which lead to dramatic gains for wildlife."

Adjusting how the land and water is used on these first few farm operations revealed that a greater benefit to people, fish and wildlife could be realized year-round. Amy worked with partners in the Central Valley Habitat Exchange to develop simple tools that can be used to help identify win-win alterations in land use and management that provide big benefits for fish and wildlife. American Rivers and others are using these tools to work with farmers and ranchers from the North State to the San Joaquin Valley.

With American Rivers, Amy is leading a group to restore stream reaches and streamside lands to provide habitat for fish and wildlife and recreational opportunities for local community members in the Central Valley. Amy's team works with farmers, ranchers, developers, state and regional parks and other land owners to find these 'sweet spots' where tweaks in land use and management provide win-wins for fish, wildlife, and people.

"When we work together with farmers, ranchers and other local interests to find a common vision, we can achieve incredible results. We can protect communities and agricultural lands from floods while providing habitat for wildlife and great recreational opportunities for people. We can have clean, cold rivers and see populations of fish increase while providing respite from the heat along shade-covered banks. This is what a sustainable landscape looks like that we Californians can all care for and be proud of."

It may seem like a long time ago that the young girl was riding her horse around the back country of upstate New York, but the love for nature is as present as ever. Amy is still new with American Rivers, but much like the impression those early years in the wilderness and farmland left on her, she hopes to leave a lasting and positive effect on the rivers, farms, and wildlands of California.

