



Protecting the Cahaba, Together

Executive Director

Position Prospectus

Location: Birmingham, AL





About Cahaba River Coalition

The Cahaba River Coalition (CRC) is a powerful new force for environmental work in Alabama, formed through the 2025 merger of two respected nonprofits: the Cahaba River Society and Cahaba Riverkeeper. Together, we unite decades of expertise, data, and community trust into one dynamic organization dedicated to preserving and protecting the integrity of the Cahaba River. The Cahaba is Alabama's longest free-flowing river and one of the most biodiverse in North America, home to more fish species than any other river of its size. Celebrated by Smithsonian Magazine as "one of the most biologically diverse places in the nation," the Cahaba sustains drinking water for hundreds of thousands, supports countless species, including many rare and endangered species, and anchors the cultural and economic vitality of central Alabama.

The challenges facing this river, from pollution and overdevelopment to agricultural runoff and the accelerating effects of climate change, demand visionary, science-based leadership and deep community engagement. CRC exists to meet these current and ongoing challenges. By combining advocacy, education, research, and stewardship, we amplify our impact while inspiring people of all ages to take ownership of the river's future. One major factor is that CRC serves as the local member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, and our Riverkeeper program holds polluters accountable, monitors water quality, and participates in national studies addressing emerging contaminants such as PFAS and microplastics, work that strengthens local protections while shaping national environmental policy.





At CRC, protecting the river also means empowering the people who depend on it. Through our CLEAN Program, thousands of students and teachers, many from under-resourced schools, gain hands-on science experiences in the natural world, participate in real time scientific discovery, enjoying safe and equitable access to outdoor learning. Our Environmental Leadership Program extends this impact, preparing high school students to become future conservation and civic leaders through mentorship, field research, presentation opportunities and college readiness opportunities.

Beyond education, CRC builds lifelong connections to the river through its Stewardship and Recreation Programs, engaging volunteers in invasive species removal, river cleanups, and community paddling events. These experiences turn passive appreciation into active stewardship, creating a broad and diverse coalition of citizens who understand now through a firsthand perspective the link between clean water, public health, biodiversity and quality of life for all.

As we embark on this new chapter, CRC is uniting the passion of two legacies into a single, future-ready organization. With renewed capacity, dedicated leadership, and strong community partnerships, the Cahaba River Coalition stands poised to deliver transformative impact to the watershed and everything and everyone that relies on it, ensuring that the Cahaba River remains a thriving, resilient, and inspiring natural treasure for generations to come.



About the Executive Director Opportunity

The formation of the Cahaba River Coalition (CRC) marks a defining moment for conservation leadership in Alabama and the Southeast. The merger of the Cahaba River Society, founded 37 years ago, and Cahaba Riverkeeper, founded 16 years ago, brings together two of the region's most respected advocates for clean water and environmental justice. CRC's creation is not the birth of something untested; it is the strategic uniting of two proven organizations, each with a track record of impact, community trust, and scientific credibility. For a visionary Executive Director, this is a rare opportunity to lead a newly strengthened organization with deep roots, an established reputation, and a clear mandate for the future.

CRC's next Executive Director will step into an organization that has already done the intentional groundwork for success. Over the past year, leadership from both organizations and a dedicated merger consulting firm (La Piana) have guided the integration process with care and foresight. The new organization is currently being led by two Co-Executive Directors from both legacy organizations strictly during the transition and has restructured its programs, clarified shared priorities, and aligned on a unified mission to pave the way for the new Executive Director. A culture consultant is now facilitating a collaborative process through which staff are actively defining the "new culture" of the merged organization, ensuring that CRC's next chapter is grounded in mutual trust, respect, and shared purpose.

The Board of Directors, composed of members from both legacy organizations, brings a powerful blend of continuity and commitment during and after this transition, offering both stability and vision. Their deep understanding of the Cahaba's conservation history and their belief in the transformative potential of this merger create a uniquely supportive environment for the incoming Executive Director. The Board is deeply engaged, eager to partner strategically, and ready to invest in the success of new leadership.

In partnership with ThinkingAhead Executive Search's Nonprofit Practice, CRC conducted an inclusive, comprehensive and transparent stakeholder engagement process to inform this national search. Through surveys and conversations with board and staff members, former board members, major funders and donors, nonprofit partners, and corporate sponsors, the organization gathered diverse perspectives on the qualities, qualifications, and early priorities essential for success. This process reflects CRC's commitment to transparency, alignment, and community ownership as it seeks its first permanent Executive Director.

For an accomplished nonprofit leader, this role offers the chance to shape a powerful new model for river protection, environmental education, and civic engagement. The Cahaba River Coalition is poised for momentum: a respected staff ready to move forward together, loyal supporters eager to see the merger's promise realized, and an ecosystem of partners across Alabama and beyond ready to collaborate. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to lead a newly unified organization into its next era of impact, protecting one of America's most extraordinary rivers and inspiring an unprecedented statewide movement for conservation and community resilience.



Key Responsibilities



Organizational Leadership and Strategic Vision

- Provide clear, inspiring leadership that unifies the team around CRC's mission, vision, and values.
- Lead the creation and implementation of a new strategic plan that defines CRC's priorities for impact, growth, and sustainability.
- Serve as a visible and respected ambassador for CRC, representing the organization with integrity to partners, policymakers, funders, and community stakeholders.
- Champion an inclusive, learning-oriented organizational culture that values transparency, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

Fundraising and External Relations

- Drive growth in philanthropic and grant revenue through relationship-based fundraising, donor cultivation, and strategic communication.
- Partner with the Board and Development staff to expand the organization's base of support from individuals, foundations, corporations, and government agencies.
- Serve as a persuasive spokesperson who can translate CRC's mission into compelling stories and funding opportunities.
- Strengthen CRC's visibility and reputation locally and regionally through outreach, public speaking, and partnership development across Alabama and the broader Southeast.

People and Culture Leadership

- Lead, mentor, and empower a skilled staff, fostering a workplace that values trust, respect, and shared accountability.
- Ensure the organization's evolving culture reflects its values of inclusivity, transparency, and teamwork.
- Support staff development and retention through effective communication, coaching, and clear expectations.
- Partner closely with the Riverkeeper and program leaders to align advocacy, education, and stewardship programs under a cohesive organizational vision.

Operational and Financial Management

- Oversee all aspects of financial health, including budgeting, compliance, and performance monitoring.
- Strengthen systems for internal accountability, performance evaluation, and operational efficiency.
- Ensure sound policies, clear structures, and reliable processes that support the organization's growth and sustainability.
- Ensure maintenance and timely replacement of core scientific, safety, and recreational equipment, to keep up with the growth of the organization.

Board Relations and Governance

- Report to and collaborate with the Board of Directors, providing regular updates on organizational performance and strategic progress.
- Engage and support board members in governance, philanthropy, and ambassadorial roles.
- Partner with the board to build a shared vision for CRC's long-term success, ensuring alignment between governance and operations.



Candidate Profile

The ideal candidate will bring a balance of strategic, relational, and operational strengths—someone who can lead through structure and empathy, while championing CRC’s mission with authenticity, credibility and purpose.

Essential Qualifications and Attributes:

- Minimum of five years of senior nonprofit leadership, with proven success in staff supervision, budgeting, and organizational management.
- Demonstrated strategic planning and execution experience, with measurable results in organizational growth and alignment.
- Track record of fundraising success with individuals, foundations, and grants; ability to cultivate and close major gifts.
- Skilled, people-centered leader with emotional intelligence, humility, and a commitment to building cohesive teams.
- Strong communicator who is transparent, consistent, and trusted by staff, board, and partners alike.
- Compelling public presence and ability to engage diverse audiences.
- Authentic passion for environmental stewardship, clean water, and community well-being; able to inspire others through values, not just expertise.
- Operational rigor with comfort implementing systems for accountability, HR, and compliance.

Preferred but Not Required Attributes:

- Familiarity with Alabama or the Southeast region.
- Understanding of environmental or water-related policy and advocacy.
- Experience leading through organizational change, periods of growth, or merger integration.

Cahaba River Coalition Board of Directors

**Craig Neely, President**

*Vice President and Treasurer,
Coca-Cola Bottling Company United*

Kate Smith, Vice President

Development Director, Ronald McDonald House

Andy Buck, Secretary

Senior Vice President and Senior Counsel, Protective Life Corporation

Robert Webb, Treasurer

Tax Attorney and CPA, Robert A. Webb Associates, CPA, LLC

Allison Manley

Community Volunteer

Ashley Smith

Heart Surgery Coordinator, UAB

Courtney Pittman

President, Davis Architects

Henry Campbell

Director of Advanced Analytics, Spire

Jared Smith

*Senior Manager of Operational Excellence,
Milo's Tea*

Jeff Roseman

Retired Epidemiology Professor, UAB

Jim McClintock

Department of Biology, UAB

Joshua Snable

Attorney, Snable Law

Kenya Goodson

*Climate and Sustainability Organizer, Hometown Action /
Hometown Organizing Project*

Leigh Anne Bishop

Community Volunteer

Taylor Stewart

*Communications Specialist, UAB Department of Clinical
and Diagnostic Sciences*

Cahaba River Coalition Staff

Deborah Barker

Interim Co-Executive Director

David Butler

Interim Co-Executive Director & Riverkeeper

Anne Chamberlain

Operations Manager

Emma Wilson

Communications Manager

Kelly Samples

Administrative Director

La'Tanya Scott

CLEAN Manager

Matt Brennan

Development Director

Nicole Tran

Programs Coordinator

Paige Goldschmidt

Membership and Fundraising Manager

Reed Butler

Community Engagement Coordinator

Wil Rainer

Recreation and Stewardship Manager

Zach Fitzgibbon

Volunteer Coordinator



About the Birmingham Community

Nestled at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, Birmingham, Alabama blends Southern warmth with modern energy, a place where historic charm, natural beauty, and civic pride come together in a uniquely welcoming way. Once known for its industrial roots, Birmingham has evolved into a hub for education, healthcare, philanthropy, and outdoor living, offering residents the amenities of a metropolitan area with the friendliness of a close-knit community. It's a place where people genuinely say hello to strangers, neighbors become friends, and newcomers quickly feel they belong.

Birmingham offers a vibrant quality of life at a manageable pace. The city is home to world-class medical institutions such as UAB (University of Alabama at Birmingham) and a growing tech and innovation ecosystem, balanced by an affordable cost of living and welcoming neighborhoods. Families are drawn to its strong sense of community, high-performing schools in suburbs like Homewood, Vestavia Hills, and Mountain Brook, and an abundance of parks, greenways, and family-friendly festivals. Outdoor enthusiasts enjoy trails, lakes, and rivers, including the nearby Cahaba River itself, making weekend paddling, hiking, and cycling part of everyday life.

For those seeking culture and connection, Birmingham's arts and culinary scenes rival those of much larger cities. The Alabama Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Museum of Art, and a variety of local theaters and live-music venues create a thriving creative landscape. The city also hosts acclaimed film and music festivals, including the nationally recognized Sidewalk Film Festival, regional jazz and folk festivals, and outdoor concerts that bring the community together. Meanwhile, the city's celebrated restaurant scene (home to multiple James Beard Award-winning chefs) makes it a destination for food lovers.

Whether you're an empty nester looking for community and natural beauty, a young professional seeking an affordable, dynamic city, or a family eager to raise children in a place that values both progress and place, Birmingham offers a rare balance of opportunity, authenticity, and belonging. Its residents are known for their kindness, generosity, and pride of place, qualities that make newcomers quickly feel at home. Conveniently located in central Alabama, Birmingham is within a few hours' drive of Atlanta, Nashville, and the Gulf Coast, yet remains distinctively itself: a city that continues to evolve while staying deeply rooted in the people and landscapes that define it.



Location

The organization and position are headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama, with a hybrid/in-office schedule. Remote arrangements for this position will not be considered.

Compensation

This role offers a salary range of \$120,000–\$150,000. The actual salary offered will depend on a variety of factors, including relevant professional experience, depth of senior leadership, and demonstrated qualifications aligned with the position.

Relocation assistance for uniquely qualified candidates will be considered.

Recruitment Process

The Cahaba River Coalition has retained ThinkingAhead Executive Search's Nonprofit Division. If you are qualified and interested, **please apply on the link provided**.

To ensure full consideration, please submit your application by January 12th, 2026. Review of applications will continue until the position is filled.

For further information or questions, please contact:

Kay Linder

Partner, Nonprofit Division
klinder@thinkingahead.com

Heather Campbell

Partner, Nonprofit Division
hcampbell@thinkingahead.com

