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Ohio River Foundation waiving fees for Mussels in the Classroom program

CINCINNATI, OHIO (June 16, 2020) – Ohio River Foundation (ORF) is waiving all fees for its Mussels in the Classroom program for fall 2020.

Established in 2017, Mussels in the Classroom (MIC) is the first program of its kind in the country. It takes live freshwater mussels, an often overlooked species that's critical to ecosystems, to schools in Greater Cincinnati, Columbus, Lexington, Georgetown and Frankfort.

"Our education programs help students learn important Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) content that relates to state standards while also inspiring them to become the next generation of environmental stewards," said Rich Cogen, Ohio River Foundation's executive director. "Anticipating that many schools will be unable to take field trips this fall, we want to make sure students still have opportunities for hands-on environmental learning."

Even if classroom setups are different when students return to school, ORF can adapt the MIC program to meet teachers' needs. To accommodate schools with visitor restrictions, ORF educators can set up equipment when class is not in session, and they can conduct the presentation they'd normally lead in the classroom via videoconferencing or a pre-recorded video. Because the mussels remain in the classroom for two weeks, all students can observe them, even if they aren't all in the classroom on the same day. Students have the opportunity to care for the mussels and participate in provided activities or come up with their own creative projects.

Why mussels? The animals serve as our rivers' natural filters, straining the water and eating everything from dead leaves to algae. But pollution, habitat destruction and overfishing are taking a toll: Nearly half of the 127 mussel species once found in the Ohio River Basin are now considered extinct, endangered

or species of concern. Students participating in the MIC program will gain a better understanding of these animals and the threats they face.

MIC is open to grades K-12, and applications are accepted on a rolling basis [via the program's web page](#). The program is offered the entire school year, September through May. Interested teachers are encouraged to register now, as space is limited.

In addition to MIC, ORF offers its perennially popular River Explorer program in Greater Cincinnati and Columbus. The inquiry-based field trips let students be junior scientists for a day as they learn about the ecology and importance of the Ohio River and its watershed at area creeks, streams and rivers. Open to grades four through 12, River Explorer includes three hands-on stations: 1) Catching, examining and identifying fish; 2) Collecting and identifying macroinvertebrates; and 3) River chemistry (grades six through 12) or water use and the water cycle (grades four and five). All but the youngest students also take part in habitat assessments as part of their day, and ORF educators touch on issues such as water pollution and environmental stewardship with all students.

The River Explorer program is offered in September, October, April and May. Greater Cincinnati field trips take place at Nisbet Park and Lake Isabella Park in Loveland; Sycamore Park in Batavia; Sharon Woods Park in Sharonville; Pioneer Park in Covington; and Guilford Covered Bridge Park in Guilford, Indiana. Columbus programs are at Highbanks Park and Friendship Park. Registration for fall River Explorer field trips is open through Aug. 15 [via the program's web page](#).

Support for the MIC and River Explorer and programs is provided by the Charles Dater Foundation, Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation, Duke Energy Foundation, Ashland, Inc., Valvoline, PNC Charitable Trusts and Honda Manufacturing.

About Ohio River Foundation

Ohio River Foundation (ORF) is dedicated to protecting and improving the water quality and ecology of the Ohio River and all waters in its 11-state watershed. ORF works towards these goals through environmental education and conservation activities that serve to inspire environmental stewardship for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future citizens.

In 2020, ORF celebrates its 20th anniversary of Ohio River watershed work. During its history, the nonprofit has reached 50,000 students with its freshwater education programs; restored and reconnected more than 200 miles of rivers; removed four dams; planted 6,000 trees; and removed more than 300,000 invasive plants.

For more information, visit www.ohioriverfdn.org.