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**Contact:**

Rich Cogen

Executive Director, Ohio River Foundation

513-460-3365

rcogen@ohioriverfdn.org

**Ohio River Foundation celebrates 20 years in 2020**

CINCINNATI, OHIO (April 13, 2020) -- A refrigerator floating down the Ohio River two decades ago set plans for the Ohio River Foundation (ORF) in motion. The nonprofit dedicated to protecting and improving the water quality and ecology of the Ohio River and its watershed celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary on April 14, 2020.

When ORF co-founder and executive director Rich Cogen saw that image of our river in the local newspaper in 2000, he was concerned. After all, the Ohio River is a source of drinking water millions of people.

"Nobody was talking about the pollution in the Ohio River back then," Cogen said. "The river needed a voice; I felt compelled to help give it that voice."

At the time, Cogen was working as the environmental attorney for the city of Cincinnati, a role that limited his jurisdiction to local issues. He knew protecting the river required a broader reach, so he banded with fellow concerned citizens to form Ohio River Advocacy on April 14, 2000. The organization adopted the Ohio River Foundation (ORF) moniker in 2003 to better reflect the variety of its programs and activities, which include important education and restoration work.

On the education front, ORF has taught more than 50,000 students about water quality and ecology through its River Explorer and Mussels in the Classroom programs. The former program, which lets kids be scientists for a day as they collect data at area waterways, kicked off in Greater Cincinnati in 2005 and expanded to Columbus in 2016. Mussels in the Classroom,

a first-in-the-nation education program established in 2017, lets children learn about and care for an important but often overlooked freshwater species that is critical to water quality. ORF knows that helping young people experience and appreciate nature is critical for the future of all species, as well as for the health of natural habitats and waterways.

ORF has also restored thousands of acres of habitat in our region during its 20-year history. That includes planting more than 6,000 trees, which improves water quality by diverting runoff; removing more than 300,000 invasive plants that crowd out native ones; and reconnecting more than 200 miles of rivers by removing obsolete dams. That all adds up to more suitable habitat and better quality food for pollinators and other local wildlife, and to improved water quality.

In 2017, ORF produced the inaugural Cincinnati Coffee Festival. The event, which draws as many as 5,000 attendees each year, raises important program funds and reaches a new demographic with an underlying message of conservation and protecting water quality. (After all, without great water, you can't have great coffee!) This year's event is set for Sept. 12-13 at Cincinnati Music Hall in Over-the-Rhine.

Although ORF staff and supporters won't be able to gather to celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> birthday this month, ORF will mark the occasion by continuing to expand its conservation reach in 2020. Plans include removing thousands more invasive plants and planting native species in their place. ORF will partner with local communities to assist with this work in their parks and preserves. The nonprofit also plans to expand its River Explorer and Mussels in the Classroom education programs and is developing a new summer program for launch in 2021.

"As we embark on our next 20 years, we are emboldened by the excitement and increased support we are receiving for our trailblazing education programs," Cogen said. "And we are heartened by the support our advocacy and restoration work receives as we confront the policy and habitat resiliency challenges posed by climate change. It is a pivotal time for Ohio River Foundation's work."

### **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, conservation and advocacy activities that serve to inspire environmental stewardship for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future citizens.

In 2020, ORF celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> 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](http://www.ohioriverfdn.org).