



**2023**  
**IMPACT REPORT**

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[OhioRiverFdn.org](https://OhioRiverFdn.org)



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## From the Board Chair & Executive Director

While it is sometimes hard to believe, the Ohio River Foundation (ORF) is in its 24th year of protecting, educating, and advocating on behalf of the Ohio River Watershed. The last year saw an increasing number of individual donors, more staff, and greater program reach, resulting in greater impact.

If one were to just focus on the increases in grant funding, event revenue, service and contract revenue, and individual and corporate contributions, one would conclude that ORF is very well positioned to meet the conservation challenges the Ohio River Watershed faces. However, those challenges continue to grow, particularly with the emerging science regarding “forever chemicals,” such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS, and the risks they pose to human health and the environment. Along with the risks posed by other toxic chemicals, nutrient pollution, microplastics, and other pollution, ORF must continue to increase its activity.

ORF continues to build on its past success to change the environmental education paradigm by focusing on watershed advocacy to better draw the connections between ecosystem health and public health. We are finding results from coordinating our advocacy efforts with state and federal partners to challenge the way regulators have traditionally approached the protection of drinking water sources. While these are large challenges, ORF has the resources to face them because of supporters like you.

The impact of our work has been tremendous over the past 20+ years, but we’re just getting started and looking forward to an outstanding 2024. From all of us at Ohio River Foundation, thank you for your support.



*Bill Hayes*  
William Hayes  
Board Chairman  
Ohio River Foundation



*Rich Cogen*  
Rich Cogen  
Executive Director  
Ohio River Foundation



# Ohio River Foundation

## Our Mission

For more than 20 years, Ohio River Foundation (ORF) has worked diligently to protect and improve the water quality and ecology of the Ohio River and its watershed. Our efforts have been instrumental in providing and restoring climate change resilient habitats.

## About Us

Ohio River Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2000 by a group of citizens who were concerned about the Ohio River and saw the need for increased response to the degradation of this valuable natural resource. ORF is dedicated to protecting and improving the water quality and ecology of the Ohio River and all waters in its 14-state watershed.

## What We Do

ORF works towards these goals through environmental education and conservation activities that serve to inspire environmental stewardship and bolster climate change resiliency for native species, habitats, and communities.

ORF has grown to offer programs in education and stewardship that reach thousands of schoolchildren each year and touch the lives of thousands more citizens by protecting water quality and improving quality of life.

## Why We Do It

The Ohio River Watershed is a source of drinking water to millions of people and home to a wonderful species-diverse ecosystem. The health of the river and its tributaries affects the quality of life for everyone in the watershed. That means Ohio River Foundation's constituency is all 30 million people living in the Ohio River Watershed (approximately 10% of the U.S. population).

## Since 2000, ORF has:



Educated more than 63,000 students



Removed 5 dangerous dams



Removed 551,200 invasive plants



Planted 31,167 trees



# Programs

ORF works to protect and restore the water quality and ecology of the Ohio River Watershed through advocacy, habitat restoration, and school education and youth programs that serve to inspire environmental stewardship for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future citizens. The results of this work create climate change-resilient habitats.



## Restoration

Ohio River Foundation's restoration work bolsters climate change resiliency for native species, habitats, and communities. Our work includes invasive species removal, native plantings, and barrier removals.



## Advocacy

Ohio River Foundation is a strong voice for protecting and restoring the Ohio River and all waters in its watershed. We work at local, state, and federal levels for effective laws and regulations that will reduce pollution, restore vital natural systems like forests and wetlands, and encourage smart growth in our communities.



## Education

Through our education programs, we're not just helping improve STEM academic skills, we're also educating the next generation of environmental stewards, voters and government leaders. Thousands of students in Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky participate each year.



## Restoration

The ORF restoration team had a very active year working to plant thousands of native trees while removing harmful invasives like Callery Pear and Amur Honeysuckle. They worked across five restoration sites maintaining more than 44 acres. More than 90 volunteers logged 295 hours over the course of 10 volunteer events.

**Sites worked in 2023 included:** Kingswood Park (Deerfield Township), Summit Park (Blue Ash), Alms Park (Cincinnati), Blue Ash Golf Course, Twin Creek (Lewisburg and Germantown)

### By the Numbers

<b>75,600</b>
Invasives Removed
<b>44</b>
Acres Cleared
<b>15,457</b>
Trees Planted
<b>90</b>
Volunteers



## Large-scale Live Staking Habitat Restoration on Twin Creek



This year ORF received a **\$50,000 grant** from **Cargill via the Global Water Challenge (GWC) program**. The funds supported ORF's large-scale restoration initiative at Twin Creek, a tributary of the Great Miami River. ORF's restoration team installed 15,425 live stakes this spring along nearly six miles of the creek in Lewisburg and Germantown, Ohio. During the project, ORF held a community volunteer planting event at Lewisburg Community Park. Volunteers were able to plant 1,000 trees during this event!

## ORV CISMA (Ohio River Valley Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area)

Additionally, this year ORF received grants from Duke Energy Foundation and L&L Nippert Charitable Foundation to continue and expand ORV CISMA's invasive plant and tree removal work in the region. ORV CISMA is a coalition of nonprofits, agencies, and businesses working to share information and resources to control and remove invasive species in a 22-county area in the Ohio River Valley. ORF coordinates the activities of ORV CISMA.

## Thank you to our supporters!

Ohio River Foundation would also like to thank our corporate restoration partners including Accenture, MadTree Brewing, Richter & Phillips, SEIKO, and Protiviti.

**Is your company interested in volunteering with us at a corporate volunteer event? Contact Sara Brandts at [sarabrandts@ohioriverfdn.org](mailto:sarabrandts@ohioriverfdn.org).**

***Learn more about how you can support our restoration work!***





## Education

For more than 20 years ORF has educated over 68,000 students through our hands-on, STEM, environmental education programs. In 2023 over 5,000 students from 56 schools participated in our programs.

Students participating in Mussels in the Classroom (MIC) learn about the complexity of river ecosystems and the highly endangered freshwater mussels found in their local watershed. River Explorer is a field trip that puts students ankle-deep into local waterways providing immersive and powerful nature experiences with real science applications. Students use field-grade science equipment and techniques as they assess water quality and collect live specimens.

Also, in 2023 ORF invested in a Student Conservation Leaders Course offered two weeks in June. High school students participated in our intensive course about watershed ecology and conservation. Using real scientific equipment the students completed habitat, water, and biological assessments in the Little Miami River. They developed and investigated research questions, kayaked, tagged freshwater mussels, removed invasive plant species, and went electrofishing on the Ohio River. These students are now more knowledgeable, engaged, and empowered as a result of their experience in the Student Conservation Leaders Course and continue to take part in the protection and restoration of the Ohio River Watershed.



**Thank you to our major funders for helping to support our education programs:** Charles Dater Foundation, Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation, Toyota Motor Manufacturing - Kentucky, Honda Manufacturing, The Gardner Family Foundation, PNC Charitable Trusts - John A. Schroth Family Foundation, The Marge & Charles Schott Foundation, Valvoline, Inc., Harrison Family Foundation, Andrew Jergens Foundation, Sullivan Family Foundation, Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile, Jr. Foundation, and Nellie Leaman Taft Foundation.



## Advocacy

In 2023, we continued to be a voice for protecting and restoring the Ohio River and all waters in its watershed. Along with other environmental organizations, ORF signed onto several letters and petitions to Congressional committees and the U.S.E.P.A. pertaining to water quality issues, including more stringent regulation of forever chemicals (PFOA, PFAS, etc.), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project construction funding, and clarifying the definition of “waters of the U.S.”

Then, this summer, a bombshell decision from the U.S. Supreme Court in *Sackett v. EPA* that dramatically narrows the scope of the Clean Water Act undoing protections that have safeguarded our waters for more than 50 years.

The court's decision will exclude tens of millions of acres of wetlands from the Clean Water Act's oversight. At least half the nation's wetlands now have no federal protection. The ruling places in jeopardy millions of acres of wetlands—including the wetlands our communities depend on for flood mitigation, wildlife protection, recreation, and tourism—as well as water filtration and clean drinking water.

Wetlands are among the most productive biodiverse ecosystems in the world, comparable to rainforests and coral reefs. They are often referred to as “nature's kidneys” because of their ability to filter water. The Ohio River Watershed has already seen dramatic wetland degradation and loss. In many states in the watershed like Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia 80-90% of wetlands have already been lost. We will fight this weakening of the Clean Water Act because we just can't afford to lose any more wetlands.

So, in 2024, Ohio River Foundation will continue to fight back against the demands of polluters who seek to block the EPA from protecting the health of our communities, and we will advocate along with our regional partners to protect these integral ecosystems. Furthermore, the development of a comprehensive Ohio River watershed ecosystem restoration program, with enforceable goals, continues to be a focus of ORF and our partners. We expect a draft program will be released for public review in 2024.

We will continue to work with our local, regional, and national partners to fight a threatened petrochemical buildout along the Ohio River, hold producers of PFAS, other harmful chemicals, and microplastics accountable, and push for regulations that safeguard our environment and water. The creation of a strong watershed advocacy coalition to support this work will be a top 2024 priority.



### Learn more about our advocacy work

To continue to advocate for healthy water on behalf of the millions of people in the watershed we need the support of individual donors. Help support this crucial work!





## Cincinnati Coffee Festival 🌊

Ohio River Foundation presented the sixth annual Cincinnati Coffee Festival at Cincinnati Music Hall this past October. We had a fantastic crowd, wonderful vendors, great live musicians, and of course, all the coffee and tea you can drink.

More than 4,000 people joined nearly 50 vendors including world-class roasters, coffee shops, purveyors of fine food, and professional baristas to enjoy hundreds of free tastings of the finest coffees, teas, pastries, chocolates, and savory foods. The weekend festival included live music, latte art demos, and demonstrations by industry experts and we were able to raise more than \$100,000 for ORF!



Photo: Julia May Photography

The festival featured the always popular Latte Art Throwdown, this year featuring celebrity judges Local 12 reporter Luke Jones and New York Times best-selling author Kim Harrison.



In 2023, the Festival's composting efforts collected 2,538 lbs. (640 gallons!) of compostable materials and food waste! That converts to removing 30,000 miles of driving emissions from the atmosphere. That mileage will take you back and forth from New York to California 10 times over!

**SAVE THE DATE: The 2024 Cincinnati Coffee Festival will be October 26-27 at Cincinnati Music Hall.**

## Wild & Scenic Film Festival 🌊



The 2023 Wild & Scenic Film Festival (WSFF) was our most successful film festival yet raising more than \$17,000!

In April, Ohio River Foundation presented the Wild & Scenic Film Festival as a hybrid event. More than 100 guests enjoyed a series of short films from talented environmental filmmakers from all over the world at the Woodward Theater, with an additional audience enjoying the films online through our virtual ticket option.

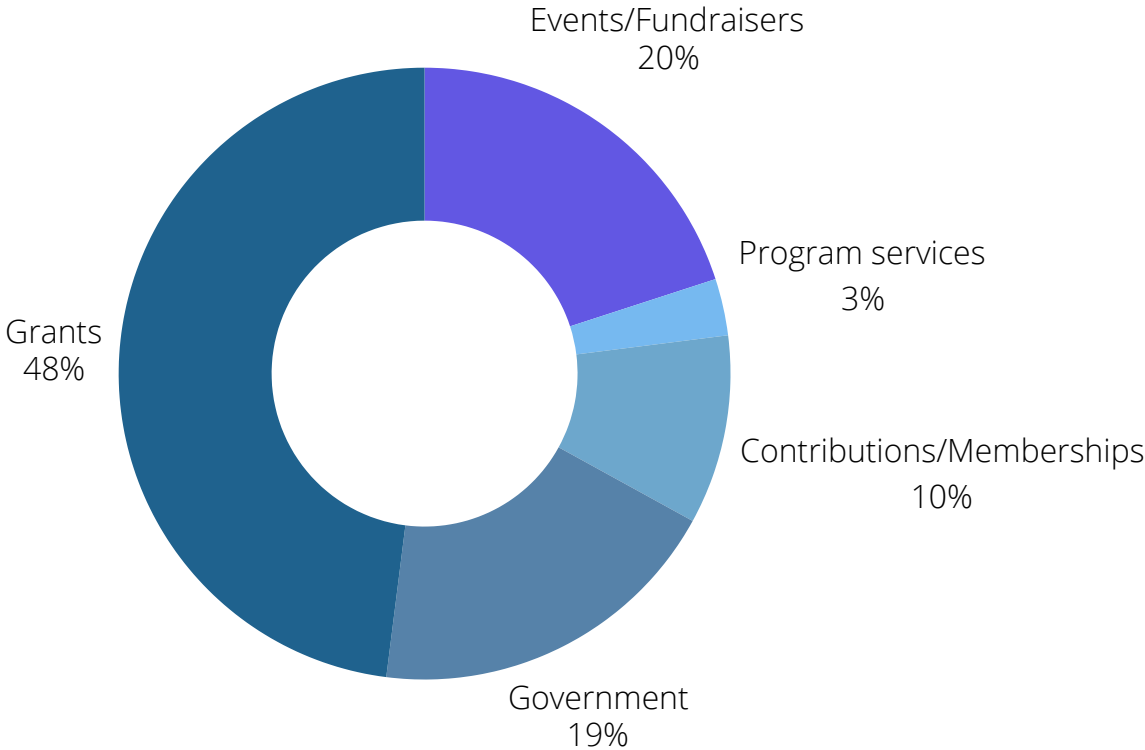
ORF is honored to be able to bring this program to the Cincinnati region to promote environmental activism and a love for nature through film. These films feature breathtaking locations, precious ecosystems, and inspiring people who are making a difference and stepping up for the environment every day—it's an opportunity for people to appreciate the nature all around them.

This festival allows our team to raise important funds for our program work and bring community awareness to the connection we share with the planet and our role as stewards to keep it healthy for future generations.

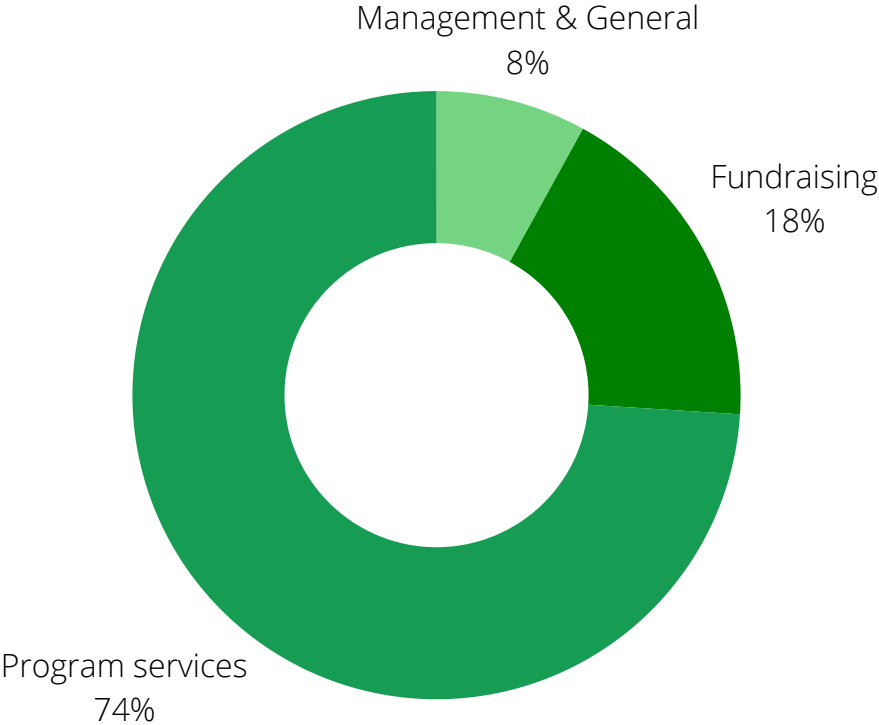




# Financials



**Revenue Total = \$730,085**



**Expense Total = \$468,927**



# Thank You to our Major Donors & Sponsors!



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## Donate Today!





Ohio River Foundation  
P.O. Box 42460  
Cincinnati, OH 45242



*Celebrating Another Great Year at*  
**Ohio River Foundation!**

