



2024 IMPACT REPORT

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



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From the Board Chair & Executive Director

While it is sometimes hard to believe, Ohio River Foundation (ORF) is in its 25th year of protecting, educating, and advocating on behalf of the Ohio River Watershed. The last year saw an increase in the number of individual donors, more staff, and greater program reach, resulting in greater impact.

While ORF is well positioned to meet the conservation challenges the Ohio River Watershed faces, those challenges continue to grow, particularly with risks associated with “forever chemicals,” such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS, and those of other toxic chemicals. We must increase our advocacy on these issues as well as nutrient pollution, microplastics, and other pollution, due to the risks they pose to human health and the environment.

ORF will continue 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.

However, with recent decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court that will have negative consequences for environmental protection, coupled with an incoming federal administration that has stated its intent to dramatically reduce USEPA’s role in protecting the nation’s waters, the next four years will be challenging for water quality protection efforts nationwide.

While the impact of our work has been tremendous over the past 20+ years, we’re just getting started and looking forward to an exciting 2025. From all of us at Ohio River Foundation, thank you for your continued support.



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
73,000 students



Removed
6 dangerous
dams



Removed
651,200 invasive
plants



Planted 31,130
trees



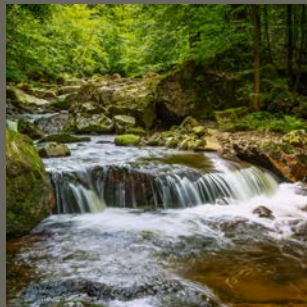
Programs

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 40 acres. More than 125 volunteers logged 320 hours over the course of 8 volunteer events.

Sites worked in 2024 included: Kingswood Park (Deerfield Township), Summit Park (Blue Ash), Loveland Nature Preserve, Highlands Park (Ft. Thomas), Johnson Hills Park (Anderson Twnp. Park District), Alms Park (Cincinnati), Blue Ash Golf Course, Twin Creek (Germantown)

By the Numbers

50,000
Invasives Removed
40
Acres Cleared
15,347
Trees Planted
125
Volunteers



Large-scale Live Staking Habitat Restoration on Twin Creek



In 2024, ORF received a **\$125,000 two-year grant** from Cargill via the **Global Water Challenge (GWC)** program. (This follows an initial grant of \$50,000 for 2023.) The funds supported ORF's continued large-scale restoration initiative on Twin Creek, a tributary of the Great Miami River. For 2024, ORF's restoration team installed more than 11,000 live stakes, 400 saplings and 5,600 walnuts along nearly nine miles of the creek north of Germantown, Ohio.

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. This year we created an interactive website that provide information to landowners with invasive species removal questions, and tracks the spread of species within the Ohio River Valley. We also held two webinars attended by 75 citizens.

Thank you to our supporters!

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

Is your company interested in volunteering with us at a corporate volunteer event? Contact us at orf@ohioriverfdn.org.

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





Education

For more than 20 years ORF has educated over 73,000 students through (MIC) our hands-on, STEM, environmental education programs. In 2024 over 9,200 students from 62 schools experienced 41,830 hours of STEM education in our River Explorer and Mussels in the Classroom programs. The MIC program grew more than 100% from 2023.

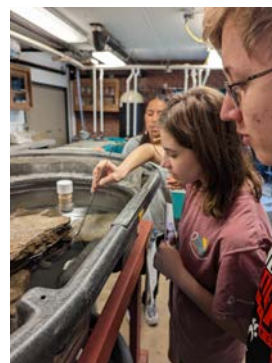
Students participating in MIC learn about the complexity of ecosystems and the highly endangered freshwater mussels found in their local watershed. River Explorer is a field trip that puts students ankle-deep into local waterways providing immersive and powerful nature experiences with real science applications.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

Also, in 2024 ORF invested in a Student Conservation Leaders Course offered for one week 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.

2024 - BY THE NUMBERS

3,040 RIVER EXPLORER STUDENTS

6,200 MIC STUDENTS



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 Edelweiss Foundation, Valvoline, Inc., Harrison Family Foundation, Andrew Jergens Foundation, Sullivan Family Foundation, Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile, Jr. Foundation, The Greater Cincinnati Foundation, The Jack Smith Charitable Trust and Luther Foundation - Fifth Third Bank, Trustee, and Louise Taft Semple Foundation.



Advocacy

In 2024, 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, another bombshell decision from the U.S. Supreme Court (after 2023's *Sackett v. EPA* that dramatically narrowed the scope of the Clean Water Act undoing protections that have safeguarded our waters for more than 50 years).

In *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo* The Supreme Court overturned the Chevron deference doctrine. This 40-year-old principle had established that courts should defer to agencies' expertise and interpretations of laws. Now court decisions will rely more on judicial expertise and knowledge. It is expected that regulatory challenges will exponentially increase.

With the change in administrations and the history of the first Trump administration we will once again join our colleagues around the country in fighting efforts to roll back environmental protection regulations. In the first Trump administration, the New York Times recorded more than 100 actions that rolled back and weakened environmental protections. Also, with expected attempts by the administration to weaken the EPA we will work with our partners to force stronger protection by state regulators.

So, in 2025, 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 2025.

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 2025 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 55 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, in 2024 featuring celebrity Cincinnati Councilman Mark Jeffreys.



In 2024, the Festival's composting efforts collected 3,045 lbs. (768 gallons!) of compostable materials and food waste! That converts to removing 2,000 miles of driving emissions from the atmosphere.

SAVE THE DATE: The 2025 Cincinnati Coffee Festival will be October 25-26 at Cincinnati Music Hall.

Wild & Scenic Film Festival 🌊



The 2024 Wild & Scenic Film Festival (WSFF) was our most successful film festival yet raising more than \$20,000!

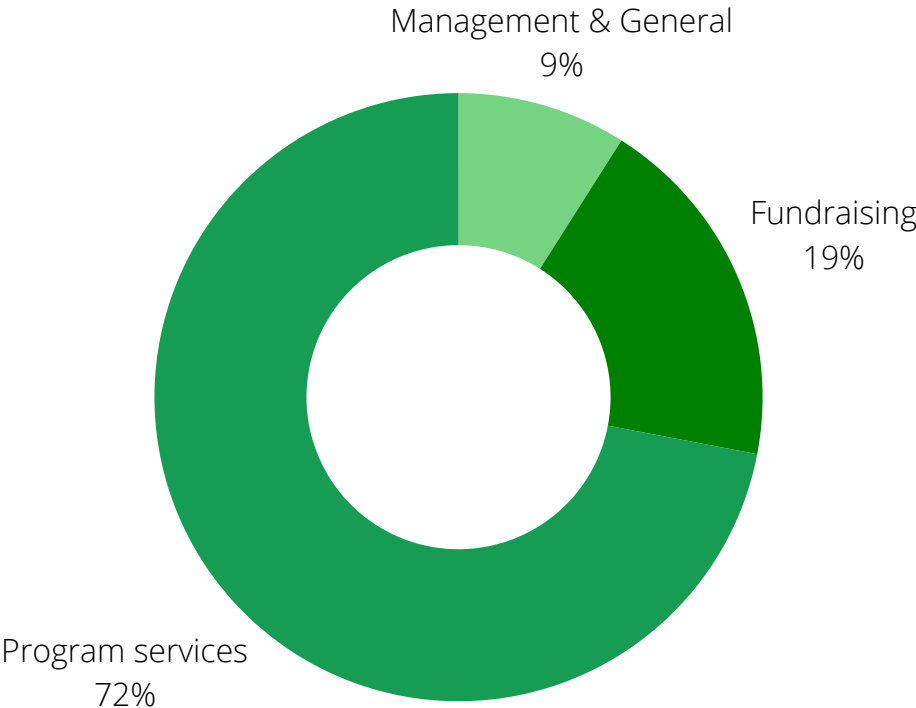
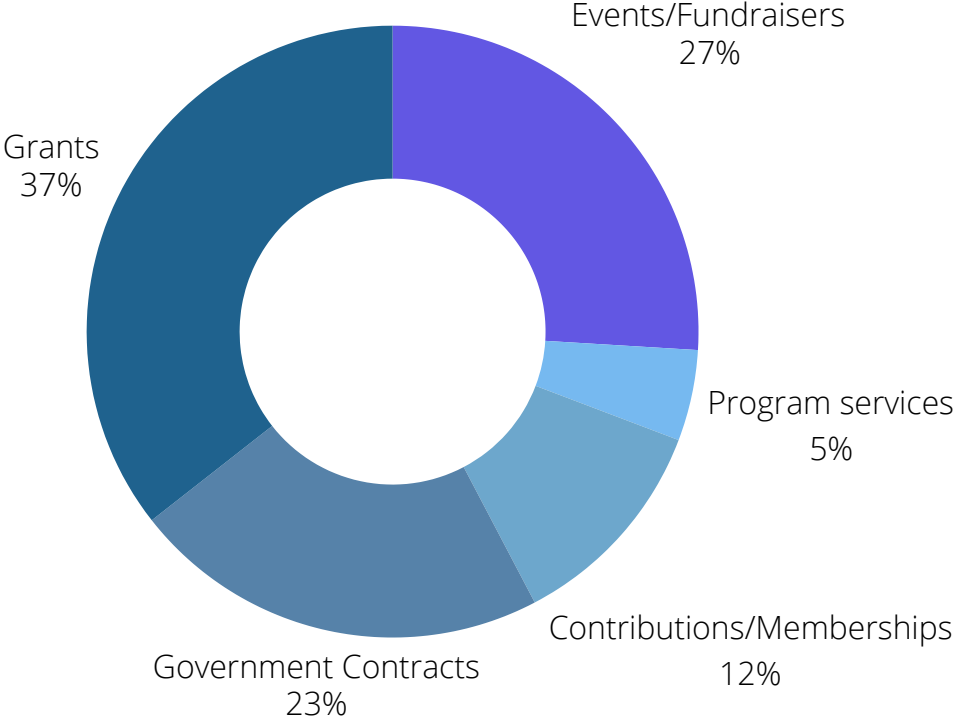
In April, Ohio River Foundation presented the Wild & Scenic Film Festival. 150 guests enjoyed a series of short films from talented environmental filmmakers from all over the world at the Woodward Theater.

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



YE Net Assets = \$296,769



Thank You to our Major Donors & Sponsors!



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Donate Today!





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



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Ohio River Foundation!

