

River Waves

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

- Ohio River Foundation (ORF) is on track to serve more than **9,000 students** through its education programs in 2025. Nearly half of the students served are from economically disadvantaged schools.
- In addition to removing thousands of invasive plant species, ORF's restoration team planted its **40,000th tree** this year as part of a multi-year, large-scale restoration project.
- We **removed our 7th river barrier**, a low-head dam on Long Lick Run in Bullitt County, KY. Long Lick Run a/k/a Long Lick Creek is a tributary of the Licking River and the Ohio River. This will reconnect 5 miles of river improving water quality, public safety, and protecting freshwater biodiversity.
- ORF introduced to 4,000 attendees at the Cincinnati Coffee Festival its **new 1,000 Acres Pollinator Habitat Project**.



Adorned in their Monarch wings are Carly Wyatt, Evan Banzhaf, Rich Cogen, and Melinda Voss. Ninety-three people bought small butterflies that populate the garden behind them.

\$20,000 Donation Match to end 2025!
Donate to help meet the match!!



DECEMBER 2025

Volume 21

*Celebrating
25 years*

*Protecting water
quality, restoring
habitat and
educating and
training the next
generation of
environmental
stewards.*

Ohio
River
FOUNDATION



Trustees

- **John Bloch** - ORF President, IFF
- **Sarah Molloy** -ORF VP, Dentsply Sirona
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- **Andrew Kolesar** - Thompson Hine
- **Alaina Pratt** - Mostly-Human
- **Brian Turner** - Messer Construction
- **Doug Hart** - Doug Hart Consulting
- **Joey Beyersdorfer** - Clear Pakaging Labs

Staff

- **Rich Cogen** - Executive Director
- **Jessica Rice** - Restoration Program Manager
- **Melinda Voss** - Education Programs Manager
- **Evan Banzhaf** - Lead Educator, Education Programs Manager
- **Bernie Moller** - Restoration Program - Projects Specialist, Senior Educator/Chief Scientist
- **Candace Caudill** - Education Program Coordinator
- **Araya Spangler** - Restoration Program Volunteer Coordinator and Educator
- **Carly Wyatt** - Communications Intern

River Explorer Educators

- **Mary Henkener**
- **Amanda Losekamp**
- **Christy Hardwick**
- **Amanda Liptakova**
- **Ryan Leonard**
- **Maria Carrelli**
- **Cassandra Ray**
- **Ella Tierney**
- **Addy Messerly**
- **Betsy Jones**
- **Cora Baldhoff**
- **David Grube**
- **Hannah Gottenbusch**

From the Executive Director

This year we continued to build on the successes of 2024, working on behalf of the millions of people who call the Ohio River Watershed home. As you can see from this newsletter, we accomplished a lot despite a challenging year where Clean Water Act protections are under assault and federal funding cuts for our partners, and all non-profits outside the conservation sector, have put pressure on private funders to make up for those cuts.

I'm so proud of our education team who responded to interest in our program that led to another participation year exceeding 9,000 students. In 2026, we will introduce a financial assistance fund for schools and expand our holding capacity to dramatically increase our mussel collection to enable us to exponentially increase the participation in our Mussels in the Classroom program in the coming years!

Our Restoration Program continues to garner interest from new partners as we plant thousands more trees, remove acres of invasive species, and work on reconnecting rivers and streams, all to increase climate change resiliency. With a 7th dam removed, we're already eyeing the next 4, as we search for funding to support this investigative phase. And, with much excitement, in 2026, we'll be launching a multi-year project at several partner properties to establish more than 1,000 acres of pollinator habitat. This project is in high demand as overall populations of monarch butterflies and bumblebees continue a downward spiral.

Lastly, our Advocacy Program was busy on many fronts with coalition building, Restoration Act legislation, responding to massive USEPA cuts and layoffs, and regulatory proposed rollbacks by the Trump administration. In 2026, we will continue to work with our other regional and national partners to defend crucial environmental regulations that safeguard public health.

Thank you for your continued support of Ohio River Foundation.
From the watershed,

Rich Cogen
Executive Director



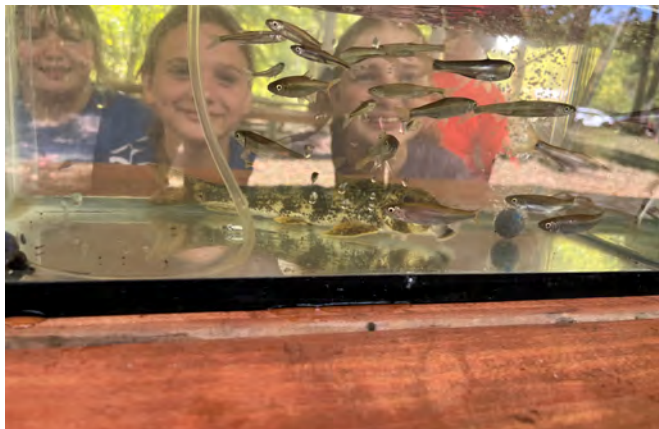
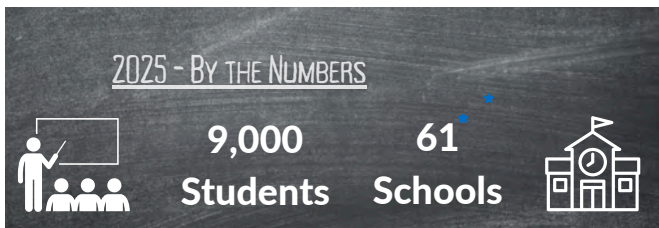


Education

For more than 20 years ORF has educated nearly 80,000 students through our hands-on, STEM, environmental education programs. **In 2025, over 9,000 students from 61 schools participated in our programs.**

Students participating in Mussels in the Classroom (MIC) learn about the endangered freshwater mussels found in their local watershed and the conservation efforts working to protect them. River Explorer is a field trip that puts students ankle-deep into local waterways, providing immersive and powerful nature experiences with real science applications. Fundraising began this year for a new Rivers to Classrooms Education Access Fund to make our programs even more accessible to economically underserved students and schools. Because of the affordability, accessibility, and excellent science content of these programs, ORF serves a growing and diverse audience of teachers and students. Nearly half of program participants are from Title 1 schools. The fund will formally launch in 2026!

Also in 2025, ORF, in partnership with the Foundation for Ohio River Education (FORE), Sanitation District No. 1 (SD1), and Thomas More University Biological Field Station (TMU) hosted a week-long, summer Ohio River Conservation Course for high school students. Students participated in hands-on opportunities designed to help them explore science careers in ecology, research, environmental engineering, water quality, and habitat monitoring.



Thank you to our education programs funders: Charles Dater Foundation, The Pfau Family Foundation, The Greater Cincinnati Foundation, Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation, 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, The Haile Foundation, and Nellie Leaman Taft Foundation.



Restoration

In 2025, the ORF restoration team planted thousands of native trees and made significant progress in controlling invasive species. **We maintain more than 200 acres of habitat** with support from hundreds of volunteers—helping strengthen forests, stream corridors, and community green spaces across southwest Ohio.

Major 2025 project sites included **Kingswood Park (Deerfield Township, OH)**, **Summit Park (Blue Ash, OH)**, **Blue Ash Golf Course**, and **Twin Creek**. We also welcomed two new sites into our restoration portfolio this year: **East Loveland Nature Preserve (Loveland, OH)** and **Miami Grove Nature Preserve (Terrace Park, OH)**.

By the Numbers


50
Acres Cleared
12,030
Trees Planted
6
Miles of
Streambank
Protected



Large-scale Habitat Restoration on 9 Miles of Twin Creek



Thanks to more than \$200,000 in support from Cargill and TC Energy, ORF advanced major riparian restoration efforts along Twin Creek—part of a multi-year project spanning nearly nine miles of riverbank. In 2025, ORF planted 12,000 live stakes along riverbanks that will bolster streambank stability, reduce sediment and runoff, and improve overall water quality. Combined with the 6,000 native trees planted in 2024 and the 15,000 trees planted in 2023, this work will cool the water, enhance habitat for fish and wildlife, and strengthen the long-term health and resilience of the Twin Creek watershed.

Thank you to our supporters!

Support for this program is provided by the L.&L. Nippert Foundation, Duke Energy Foundation, and corporate partners: Accenture, MadTree Brewing, Ameritas, Sonder Brewing, and Protiviti.

Is your company interested having a corporate volunteer day? Contact Araya Spangler at aspangler@ohioriverfdn.org.

Interested in supporting our restoration work? Learn more! ➔



Volunteers from Protiviti



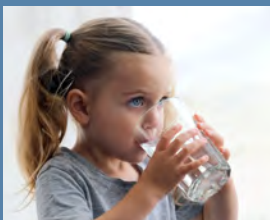
Advocacy

In 2025, 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 USEPA. 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.”

However, with changes in the White House and congressional leadership has come a tsunami of proposed regulatory and legislative changes to environmental protection. The individual property rights advocates and well-funded corporate interests interested in maximizing profit potential are leading congress and the Trump Administration in proposed rollbacks of many bedrock environmental laws and regulations that have been in place for decades. Unfortunately, the political climate of the 1970s that passed laws and regulations for the benefit of the common good has been replaced with an emphasis on personal gain and corporate profit.

In 2026, 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. Legislation has been introduced in Congress to authorize the Ohio River Restoration Program Act to be administered by the U.S.E.P.A. While we support the initiative, in a climate of budget cuts and pressure to reduce federal spending its passage is far from certain.

Finally, we will continue to work with our local, regional, and national partners to hold producers of PFAS, other harmful chemicals, and microplastics accountable, and push for regulations that safeguard our environment and water. For too long the Ohio River - a source of drinking water for 5 million people - has been the dumping ground for millions of gallons of chemicals. It's time for a reduction in this toxic load. In 2026, ORF will increase our public advocacy to raise the public awareness about the threat posed by chemical pollution to the environment and public health. The solution to pollution can no longer be dilution. The burden for water treatment and risk to health and well-being should not be borne by the public and communities. It's time for producers of pollution to bear a greater share of the burden, costs, and reduce their pollution of the Ohio River.



Donate Today!

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



Cincinnati Coffee Festival



Ohio River Foundation presented the eighth annual Cincinnati Coffee Festival at Cincinnati Music Hall this past October. More than 4,000 people joined over 60 vendors including world-class roasters, coffee shops, and professional baristas to enjoy hundreds of free tastings of the finest coffees, teas, pastries, chocolates, and savory foods.

The festival also featured the always popular Latte Art Throwdown, this year featuring celebrity judge Kelly Rippin from WLW-Channel 5.

SAVE THE DATE: The 2026 Cincinnati Coffee Festival will be October 24-25, 2026.



Wild & Scenic Film Festival



The 2025 Wild & Scenic Film Festival at Memorial Hall was our most successful film festival yet. More than 150 guests enjoyed a series of short films from environmental filmmakers from all over the world.

These films feature breathtaking locations, precious ecosystems, and inspiring people who are making a difference by stepping up for the environment every day.



SAVE THE DATE: The 2026 Wild & Scenic Film Festival will be June 13, 2026.



25th Anniversary Celebration



On April 23 at MadTree Brewing's Parks & Rec in Summit Park, Blue Ash 150 guests came together to celebrate 25 years of Ohio River Foundation. The event highlighted the Foundation's achievements in water quality protection, habitat restoration, and high impact STEM education.

Awards were presented to MadTree Brewing, Michael Miller, and Mike Fremont for their contributions to habitat restoration, environmental education, and river advocacy. The evening featured a keynote by Rhiannon Hoeweler, VP of Experience and Impact at MadTree.



Thank you to our 2025 Events Lead sponsors! Thomas Anthony Sullivan Foundation, Dan & Jill Freshley, First Financial Bank, Towne Properties, World Centric, Snowville Creamery, Prysmian, Michaelson Home, Accenture, Oatly, First Financial Bank, Alpine Valley Pure Service, Thompson Hine, and Protiviti.



\$20,000 MATCH for year-end 2025. Donate to help us get started with a bang in 2026!



Starting in 2026, we are embarking on 2 ambitious and audacious multi-year projects: (1) build out of our education program capacity to boost our program reach to 30,000 students per year, and (2) a multi-site public-private habitat restoration project that will transform more than 1,000 acres in the Ohio River Valley into a crucial pollinator flyway for millions of butterflies, bees, and other critical pollinators.



Your gift can make all this a reality.

Consider a transformational gift. If you are 70-1/2 or older consider a Qualified Charitable Contribution. If you are 73 or older consider a donation to qualify as your Required Minimum Distribution from your IRS, 401(k), or 403(b).

Also, consider donating stock and other securities via transfer to Ohio River Foundation without incurring capital gains and receive the full value of the security as your tax-deductible charitable donation. A win for you and a win for ORF! Contact Rich Cogen, ORF Executive Director at rcogen@ohioriverfdn.org or 513-460-3365 to start the process. Let us put your donation to work today!

**Donate
Today!**



You can donate via the QR code or enclosed envelope.
With your generous gift, you can help us continue and build on
these projects into 2026 and beyond!



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



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

SAVE THE DATES

Wild & Scenic Film Festival
June 13, 2026
Memorial Hall
Cincinnati, OH

Anniversary Dinner: A Watershed Moment - The Butterfly Effect
September 2026

Cincinnati Coffee Festival
October 24-25, 2026
Music Hall Ballroom
Cincinnati, OH