

# River Waves

## From the Executive Director

This year we continued to build on the successes of 2022, working on behalf of the millions of people who call the Ohio River watershed home.

All facets of our program work achieved results that exceeded expectations.

Our Education Programs under the leadership of our newest manager, Melinda Voss, returned to pre-COVID levels and is set to reach new heights 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. Furthermore, we have begun a sub-watershed plan program to assist communities seeking solutions to local pollution problems, with the first of two plans nearing completion.

Lastly, our Advocacy Program kicked into high gear in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's deeply disappointing and troubling decision to roll back protections for millions of acres of wetlands across the country. Coupled with our ongoing work to reduce pollution, we will continue in 2024 to work with our other regional and national partners to defend and protect wetlands.

It is with this backdrop that I look forward to sharing with you and everyone in the watershed next year our exciting multi-year plans for ORF and how everyone can invest and be a part of our success!

From the watershed,



Rich Cogen  
Executive Director  
Ohio River Foundation



DECEMBER 2023

Volume 19

*Celebrating*  
**23 years**

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



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- **Suki Christy** - River Explorer Educator
- **Julia Hessler** - River Explorer Educator
- **Amanda Losekamp** - River Explorer Educator
- **Candace Caudill** - River Explorer Educator
- **Christy Hardwick** - River Explorer Educator

## Welcome to ORF!



ORF added **four new River Explorer educators** to the team in 2023! Welcome Julia, Amanda, Candace, and Christy!



**Julia Hessler**

Julia loves to be outside. While not working she can be found in her natural habitat camping, hiking, climbing, and tossing the frisbee. Julia earned a BA in Journalism from the University of Cincinnati and recently finished her AmeriCorps service year at the Cincinnati Zoo where she taught and helped develop many other environmental programs.



**Amanda Losekamp**

Amanda has a strong passion for environmental education, service, and community. She earned a BS in Zoology from The Ohio State University and then worked for the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden's Education Department as the AmeriCorps Program Manager. Getting into the creek with students and seeing them blossom during River Explorer field trips is always a joy for Amanda.



**Candace Caudill**

Candace came aboard ORF in the Fall of 2023. She received her BS in Biology with secondary education endorsements from Campbellsville University. She spent the majority of her childhood playing in creeks and is excited to come full circle as an educator leading ORF programs as an adult. When she isn't teaching, she enjoys gardening, painting, playing board games, and spending time with her family.



**Christy Hardwick**

Christy joined the ORF team in the summer of 2023. A University of Cincinnati alumni, Christy has a decade of experience at both the Cincinnati Zoo and the Newport Aquarium. Christy is passionate about helping kids connect, explore, and get hands-on with the natural world around us. In her free time, she loves helping her husband and daughter turn their yard into a native safe haven by planting native plants and removing invasive species.



## 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.



### Donate Today!

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!



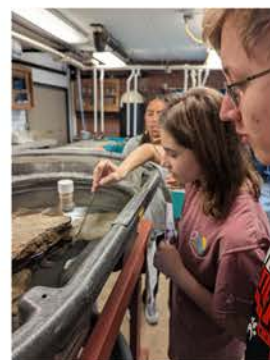


## Education

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.



## 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 37 acres. More than 125 volunteers logged 370 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**

**75,600**  
Invasives Removed

**37**  
Acres Cleared

**15,457**  
Trees Planted



### 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.

### 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!

### Thank you to our supporters!

Ohio River Foundation would also like to thank these additional 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).

**Interested in supporting our restoration work?  
Donate today!**





## 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!

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.



Cincinnati Coffee Festival continues to take steps to drastically reduce its landfill-bound waste. 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!



**Photos:** Julia May Photography

Thank you to our attendees, volunteers, vendors, sponsors, and everyone who contributed to this event for making it such a success!

**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.

**SAVE THE DATE:** The 2024 Wild & Scenic Film Festival will be on Friday, April 19 at the Woodward Theater. More event and sponsorship information at [www.ohioriverfdn.org](http://www.ohioriverfdn.org).



### ***THANK YOU to our supporters!***

Since our founding, ORF has restored thousands of acres of habitat, educated thousands of schoolchildren, and used our platform to advocate to protect and preserve our streams and rivers. But we can't do these projects alone. ORF is only as strong as the commitment of its supporters to the organization's success.

If you haven't already, please consider showing your support through a donation. You can donate via the QR code or enclosed envelope. If you want to discuss a donation of securities or a legacy gift, please visit our website to learn more or contact Rich Cogen, Executive Director at 513-460-3365. With your generous gift, you can help us continue and build on these projects into 2024 and beyond!

### **Donate Today!**

