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## Ohio River Trail Council

“Joining communities through fitness, recreation, heritage and transportation networks”

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Ohio River Water Trail

**Monaca, Pa** — To celebrate National Trails Day, Saturday, June 6, 2015 U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and the National Park Service Director Jonathan B. Jarvis designated 10 local and state trails as National Recreation Trails, adding more than 150 miles to the National Trails System.

“By designating these exceptional trails as part of the National Trails System, we recognize the efforts of local communities to provide outdoor recreational opportunities that can be enjoyed by everyone,” said Jewell. “Our world class network of national trails provides easily accessible places to get exercise and connect with nature in both urban and rural areas while also boosting tourism and supporting economic opportunities in local communities across the country.”

One of the outstanding National Recreation Trails for 2015 is the Ohio River Water Trail (ORWT), which navigates the counties of Allegheny, Beaver, Columbiana, and Hancock in the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. The ORWT is 69-mile blue trail that supports an enhanced river recreation experience on 46-miles of the Ohio River, three miles of the Beaver River, four miles of Raccoon Creek, and 16-miles of Little Beaver Creek. Multiple partners manage the 14 access points connecting 48 riverfront communities. The Ohio River Trail Council (56-miles) and the Friends of the Riverfront (13-miles) administer the ORWT.

The National Recreation Trail (NRT) designation recognizes existing trails that link communities to recreational opportunities on public lands and in local parks across the nation. Each of the new national recreation trails will receive a certificate of designation, a letter of congratulations from Secretary Jewell, and a set of trail markers. In addition, the ORWT is eligible for an array of benefits, including promotion, networking, training, technical assistance with stewardship and sustainability projects, and access to essential funding.

“Even though the Ohio River ecosystem was adversely affected by deforestation, industrial expansion, coal mining, and steel manufacturing, the water quality and ecology of the great Ohio River has consistently improved over the past 43 years due to the passage of the 1972 Clean Water Act. As a 1973 graduate of Monaca High School, I have personally witnessed the waterway’s rebirth. Perhaps the most broadly visible testament to the Ohio River’s partial return to its natural state is the rise of the bald eagle population, which depends on a diet of 70-90% fish,” stated Dr. Vincent Troia, CEO of the Ohio River Trail Council. “The Ohio River’s designation as a National Recreation Trail will inspire and encourage a strong sense of stewardship for the waterway and its associated landscape that will further protect, restore, and enhance the aquatic environment and the habitat for wildlife native to the river’s floodplain.”

The National Trail System Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-543) authorized the creation of a National Trail System comprised of National Recreation Trails, National Scenic Trails and National Historic Trails. An act of Congress may only designate National Scenic Trails and National Historic Trails. However, the Secretary of Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture may approve National Recreation Trails (NRT’s) in order to recognize exemplary trails of local and regional significance in response to an application from the trail’s managing agency or organization.

The National Park Service (NPS) jointly administers the NRT's program in conjunction with a number of federal and not-for-profit partners, notably American Trails, which hosts the NRT [website](#). The NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) carries out the natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation mission of the NPS by supporting community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects. The RTCA network of planning professionals delivers the RTCA Program nationwide, helping communities to help themselves achieve locally defined goals. The ORTC received four assistance grants from 2010 to 2014. Peggy Pings, an Outdoor Recreation Planner located at the NPS Field Office in Morgantown, WV provided invaluable technical assistance in conceptual planning, organizational development, and capacity building. The ORTC submitted the application nominating the ORWT as a NRT on November 1, 2014. Support from the tri-state region was widespread and backed by 32 letters of endorsement.

The ORWT project originated in 2010 to develop a dedicated safe route for boats that provides a destination for canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and other recreation. These routes establish recreational corridors between specific locations and can include boat launches, day-use sites, and in some cases overnight camping. The ORWT project's goal is to connect Pittsburgh, Pa to its neighboring communities while building a sense of place and offering an enormous opportunity for recreation for the 1.6 million residents living along the ORWT. To accomplish this task, the ORTC forged several partnerships to promote river utilization and community pride.

Dr. Vincent Troia, President of the Ohio River Trail Council, served as chairperson. John O. Buerkle, Jr, President of Pashek Associates worked as the principal consultant. Other steering committee advisors included members from the Ohio River Trail Council, Beaver County Planning Commission, Beaver County Recreation & Tourism Department, Beaver County Historical Research and Landmarks Foundation, Beaver County Rowing Association, Beaver County YMCA, Friends of the Riverfront, Independence Conservancy, National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish & Wildlife Service's Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge, and the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission.

The evidence to support the development of trails is compelling, especially given the minimal state, county or local investment compared to other endeavors with similar objectives. The Ohio River Trail Council procured financial sponsorship from a \$20,000 Port of Pittsburgh Commission grant, a \$9900 National Park Service Challenge Cost Share Program grant, and approximately \$20,000 of in-kind and volunteer services.

On January 4, 2012, the ORWT received the Pennsylvania designation as an official state water trail by the Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership (PWTP). The members of the partnership include the PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, PA Environmental Council, PA Fish & Boat Commission, National Park Service – Chesapeake Bay Gateways & Watertrails Network, and the National Park Service-Rivers – Trails & Conservation Assistance Program. The PWTP provides technical assistance materials to the ORTC in the form of printed publications, online resources, and various workshops and events. The water trail is listed on the PA Fish & Boat Commission website — [www.fishandboat.com/watertrails/trailindex.htm](http://www.fishandboat.com/watertrails/trailindex.htm). The Ohio River Water Trail Map & Guide which includes the identification of access and hazard sites, trail amenities, safety information, boating regulations, and information on natural, cultural and historic points of interest is available in print and online from the ORTC website — [www.water.ohiorivertrail.org](http://www.water.ohiorivertrail.org).

The Ohio River Trail is a multi-use trail project spearheaded by the Ohio River Trail Council, a multifaceted, non-profit volunteer-led public benefit corporation. The Ohio River Trail Council, founded in 2009, is composed of a dedicated and visionary leadership, which embraces a team strategy to implement our initiatives, encourage collaboration, and provide a forum for recreational users, local citizens, municipal managers and council members to share knowledge with the intention to guarantee a bright future for our rivers, forests, and towns.

The Ohio River Trail Council would like to thank the Ohio River Water Trail development team for their outstanding contributions. The time and energy this assignment demanded to make the project a great success is sincerely appreciated. The inclusion of the Ohio River Water Trail in the National Recreation Trail and the Pennsylvania Water Trail Systems expands the possibilities for bicycling, birding, butterflying, canoeing, deer spotting, fishing, hiking, kayaking, and enjoying the spring wildflowers or the peak autumn colors. Moreover, this designation will assist our partner communities to meet our shared goal of increased ecotourism and economic stimulus as well as improved utilization and stewardship of the Ohio River Valley's natural and recreational resources.

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