



2014 PA RIVER OF THE YEAR
NOMINATION APPLICATION

OHIO RIVER



NOVEMBER 13, 2013
OHIO RIVER TRAIL COUNCIL
FRIENDS OF THE RIVERFRONT



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Ohio River Trail Council

"Joining communities through fitness, recreation, heritage and transportation networks"

November 13, 2013

Ms. Amy Camp
Land and Water Trails Specialist
Pennsylvania Environmental Council
2124 Penn Avenue, Second Floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Dear Amy,

On behalf of the Ohio River Trail Council and the Friends of the Riverfront, please accept this application to co-nominate the Ohio River for *2014 Pennsylvania River of the Year*.

We are honored to participate in the annual Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers program that helps raise awareness about the importance of rivers, their conservation needs, and their recreational and economic impact on our watershed communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Vincent Troia, CEO

Dr. Vincent Troia, CEO



**2014 River of the Year Nomination Form
Nominations due Thursday, November 14 by 5 p.m.**

Submission instructions:

Complete this form electronically and email it to Amy Camp at acamp@pecpa.org by Thursday, Nov. 14 at 5 p.m. Please be sure to include both this nomination form and a high quality photo of your river. If you have any questions, please contact Amy (412) 918-6563 or at acamp@pecpa.org.

Nominating Organizations: Ohio River Trail Council & Friends of the Riverfront

Is your organization a 501(c) 3 charity currently registered with the IRS? Yes

Is your organization currently registered with the PA Department of State Bureau of Charitable Organizations? Yes

Contact Name: Vincent Troia
Street Address: Ohio River Trail Council
Address Line 2: 1100 Pennsylvania Ave.
City: Monaca **State:** PA **Zip Code:** 15061
Phone: 724-774-8765 **Email:** drvtroia@ohiorivertrail.org

Contact Name: Tom Baxter
Street Address: Friends of the Riverfront
Address Line 2: 33 Terminal Way, Suite 333B
City: Pittsburgh **State:** PA **Zip Code:** 15219
Phone: 724-774-8765 **Email:** thomas@friendsoftheriverfront.org

What river or stream are you nominating for 2014 River of the Year? Ohio – PA Section

Which river basin? Upper Ohio River Basin

Based on river miles, access points, and in-stream flow, is it feasible to host to host a one-day, overnight Sojourn paddling trip on your river? Yes

Please describe your river, the river's conservation needs and successes, and any other reasons it would be a good choice for 2014 River of the Year.

The Ohio River is formed by the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers at Point State Park in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It ends 981 miles downstream in Cairo, Illinois, where it flows into the Mississippi River. At this convergence, the Ohio is actually larger than the Mississippi. The Ohio River supplies drinking water and provides recreational uses for over five million people.

Moreover, the Ohio River had great significance in American history. It received its English name from the Iroquois word, *Oyo*, meaning *The Great River*. For thousands of years, Native Americans, like the European explorers and settlers who followed them, formed numerous civilizations along its valley and used the river as a major transportation and trading route. Its waters connected many settlements. In 1669, Robert de La Salle led an expedition to the Ohio River and his French party were among the first Europeans to see the river. La Salle named the river *La Belle Rivière* or *The Beautiful River*.

In late 1753, a young George Washington, only 21 years old, visited the Native American riverside village called Logstown along the Ohio River to warn the French away from the Ohio Valley, and assert the claim of the British. The dispute erupted into violence and led to the French & Indian War.

When Thomas Jefferson became president in 1801, most of the United States population lived within 50 miles of the Atlantic Ocean. On February 28, 1803, Congress appropriated funds for the U.S. Army expedition requested by President Jefferson, commonly known as the "Corps of Discovery." Following the United States' purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France, Captain Merriweather Lewis traveled to Pittsburgh and began his journey west along the Ohio River. Thomas Jefferson stated, "The Ohio is the most beautiful river on earth. Its current gentle, waters clear, and bosom smooth and unbroken by rocks and rapids, a single instance only excepted." After European-American settlement, the river again served as a primary transportation route for pioneers during the westward expansion of the early U.S.

Today, the river has little in common with the wild, free-flowing river of two hundred years ago, but flows slowly through a network of dammed navigational pools. The Ohio River runs through largely urbanized and industrialized landscapes, brownfields, and main river channels managed largely for commercial interests. The Ohio runs through or along the border of six states, and its drainage basin includes parts of 14 states. This inland waterway serves as an important thoroughfare for commerce. It brings producers and consumers together and connects much of America to the oceans and the rest of the global marketplace.

Despite the arrival of railroads, improved highways, and air travel, the rivers continue to serve as a major artery for transporting bulk items such as coal and grain due to the efforts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The USACE is the Nation's environmental engineer, who operates the Ohio River Locks/Dams and maintains the commercial inland navigation channels and ports. At the same time, the Corps is committed to protecting natural and cultural resources for future generations through the restoration, enhancement, and preservation of our rivers and wetlands under the Corps' Regulatory Program.

Pittsburgh is renowned for its Three Rivers, and the Port of Pittsburgh moves more than 44 million tons of cargo annually along its three major waterways – the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers – making it the second largest inland port in the U.S. With more than 200 river terminals, the Port of Pittsburgh is the origin of destination for more tons of raw materials than any other port in the world. The Three Rivers were and still are the lifeblood of southwestern Pennsylvania, having played a major part in the development of our region and country as a whole. Because of this, the Ohio River Trail Council and Friends of the Riverfront are collaborating to nominate the Ohio River for *River of the Year 2014*.

Large rivers represent the most imperiled types of ecosystems in North America, and the Ohio River is no exception. The water quality and ecology of the Ohio River has been influenced in the last one hundred years by industrial expansion, dam building, sand and gravel dredging, coal mining and steel manufacturing. Just 50 years ago, the Ohio River ran red with unregulated pollution and was quite inhospitable to aquatic life, which decimated fish populations. Smog hung over the Ohio River Valley from the stacks of steel plants, which belched smoke and stench along the river. In addition, during the mid-20th century many birds, including Bald Eagles, showed signs of succumbing to the unintended side effects of the pesticide DDT that eventually caused chronic nesting failure for countless species.

The foregoing is an example to illustrate the stark transformation from Rust Belt to Emerald Belt, from red to green, that has occurred in the last half-century. The great Ohio River, along with the Allegheny and the Monongahela Rivers, has experienced a rebirth.

The Ohio River and its tributaries represent one of the most diverse freshwater ecosystems on earth. The Ohio and its islands have been identified as one of the most important ecosystems for conservation. The Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge includes two islands in Pennsylvania – Phillis and Georgetown.

The refuge works to protect, restore, and enhance habitat for wildlife native to the river's floodplain. Current habitat conditions range from open fields and recently planted tree seedlings to remnant giants of silver maple, cottonwood, and sycamore. Many of the mature tall trees were stripped from the hillsides flanking the rivers in the 18th Century. While natural processes are regrowing much of the island forests, the refuge also plants many species of native trees and shrubs to help create a more diverse wildlife habitat

The sand and gravel deposits associated with the islands are one of the refuge's most important underwater habitats for supporting native freshwater mussels. Freshwater mussels act like little water-filtration pumps on the bottom of the river. Just by feeding, they clean the water. Freshwater mussels are among the nation's most imperiled wildlife. These legacies of the last Ice Age are protected today from dredging, but many islands show damage from past activity. The effects of navigation and high water continue to hasten island erosion. The refuge is working to stabilize riverbanks and reclaim lost shoreline.

A range of deep and shallow water habitats surrounding refuge islands support over 100 species of fish. The presence of smallmouth and largemouth bass, white bass, channel and flathead catfish, and sauger make fishing a popular sport. The record catch for Striped Bass is 35 pounds and for Blue Catfish is 104 pounds.

In 1955, a state fish survey found just 10 species of fish in the rivers of the Pittsburgh area. Today there are 55 species in the same waters. It has come so far that in 2005 it was the site of the most prestigious tournament in fishing, ESPN's Bassmaster Classic. The best professional bass fishing competitors in the world duked it out, cast for cast, over three days in a frantic scramble to take home the bountiful purse.

Much of the Ohio River Valley is an Important Bird Area as defined by the Audubon Society. Refuge wildlife management includes treetop dwellers and focuses on nearly 200 species of birds and many are present only during migration when they stop to feed and rest. The river's fish also attract osprey, a bird most common in spring, summer, and fall. Waterfowl, including wood ducks, mallards, and Canada geese, nest along the Ohio River and refuge. Others, such as mergansers, scaups, and buffleheads, are frequent winter visitors. It is estimated that it has been more than 200 years since Bald Eagles last nested along the Ohio River and its tributaries in Allegheny & Beaver County. The United States of America's national bird and national animal, has made a comeback, and there are a growing number of nesting pairs along the Ohio River in Pennsylvania. Bird watchers can often spot Bald Eagles along the river especially during the colder months.

Despite this, one of the greatest challenges to community health is that, at times, much of the Ohio River is impaired due to high bacteria counts that affect its recreational appeal. Nonetheless, the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) calculations are being developed for the Ohio River to determine how much the inputs of bacteria must be reduced to return the river to health. To do this, the TMDL will examine the sources of bacteria. The Ohio River receives pollutant discharges from numerous stormwater outfalls, industrial point sources, combined sewers (during heavy rains), and agricultural runoff. Water quality standards for bacteria require that all waters be protected for total body contact recreation. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) delegate's authority to the states to regulate pollution under the Federal Clean Water Act, but since the bacteria is found in multijurisdictional locations that cross state boundaries; the EPA is providing coordination and support for the TMDL.

The Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO), and its member states have cooperated to improve water quality in the Ohio River Basin so that the river and its tributaries can be used for drinking water and recreational purposes and can support a healthy and diverse aquatic community. ORSANCO operates monitoring programs to check for pollutants and toxins that may interfere with specific uses of the river, conducting special studies to address emerging water quality issues. Additionally, ORSANCO sponsors an award-winning cleanup, which brings thousands of volunteers to the riverbanks to collect tons of trash and debris. The River Sweep encompasses the entire length of the river, from its origin in Pittsburgh, PA to its end in Cairo, IL, including nearly 3,000 miles of shoreline and many tributaries.

Other conservation successes on the Ohio include the creation of the Ohio River Basin Fish Habitat Partnership, a collection of government agencies and organizations that promote, fund, and prioritize the protection and restoration of the Ohio River watershed's natural resources. In addition, the Ohio River Foundation's mission is to protect and restore the water quality and ecology of the Ohio River and its tributaries for the health and enjoyment of present and future generations.

One of the most important of Ohio River Trail Council's successes was the selection of the Borough of Monaca as an Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Pilot Program recipient. Brownfields are abandoned, idled, or under-used industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination. As one of the founding members of the ORTC, Monaca is working with ORTC partner communities to target more than 250 acres of land and 34 brownfields along the 45-mile Ohio River Corridor. The ORTC's efforts in planning and community revitalization initiatives along the riverfront were complemented by the area-wide planning process, which facilitated community involvement in site-specific brownfields cleanup and reuse plans, based on environmental conditions, and evaluated which sites have potential for new or increased public access to the river through trail connections.

Additional Information

The Ohio is part of the Three Rivers Water Trail, a National Recreation Trail. In 2010, both the Three Rivers Heritage Trail and Three Rivers Water Trail were designated National Recreation Trails by the U.S. Department of the Interior. National Recreation Trails are a part of the national trail system that recognizes urban, rural, and remote multi-use trails with outstanding local and regional significance. Additionally, the Ohio River Water Trail – Pennsylvania section was approved as a state water trail on January 4, 2013. Furthermore, of Pittsburgh's Three Rivers, the Ohio is the only one that has not received *River of the Year* recognition. The Allegheny received *River of the Year 1994*, the Three Rivers received *River of the Year 2006*, and the Monongahela received *River of the Year 2013*.



Please describe your organization and why you feel that you would be a good host for River of the Year.

Ohio River Trail Council

The Ohio River Trail Council (ORTC), a volunteer-led, non-profit organization that works to bring individuals, communities, groups, councils, businesses, recreational users, and all levels of government together to reclaim, restore, promote, protect, and preserve a continuous corridor of natural and cultural resources along the Ohio River and its tributaries. The ORTC's goal is to honor our past and build our future by providing recreation opportunities, heritage development, environmental stewardship, brownfield remediation, safe transportation networks, and economic stimulus in the region surrounding the Ohio River and its tributaries. Our mission includes the development of The Ohio River Trail (ORT), which is a pedal and paddle trail composed of two entities, the Ohio River Water Trail (ORWT) and the Ohio River Greenway Trail (ORGT). The Ohio River Water Trail Map & Guide – Pennsylvania section developed by the Ohio River Trail Council and the Friends of the Riverfront exhibits 26 access points to our riverfront. The ORTC was the recipient of the *Ohio River Watershed Environmental Award in 2012*.



Friends of the Riverfront

Friends of the Riverfront (FOR) aims to increase awareness and engagement with the Pittsburgh region's rivers and riverfronts through activities, stewardship and expansion of land and water trails. Founded in 1991, FOR works to reclaim and restore the Pittsburgh region's riverfronts for public use. FOR maintains, promotes, and improves the 24-mile Three Rivers Heritage Trail and 18 Three Rivers Water Trail river access points. FOR builds and expands these trail systems through collaboration with community partners, government officials, and a diverse volunteer base. Together, FOR and partners have transformed our rivers and riverfronts from industrial wastelands to internationally recognized examples of environmental renewal.



Both ORTC and FOR are dedicated to restoring, preserving, and advocating for our region's rivers and riverfronts. The *River of the Year* recognition will be an important step in gaining additional support for the restoration, preservation, and promotion of the Ohio River. Both organizations already host a number of events on and/or near the Ohio, as described below, and would be pleased to tie these events to the *River of the Year* recognition as well as plan and implement new activities to engage more people in river and riverfront recreational, educational, and environmental activities.

Please list some examples of the activities that you will undertake if selected for this honor.

Activities that ORTC and/or FOR will undertake if the Ohio River is selected for *River of the Year* include:

- Bass Anglers Tournament
- Dinner Fundraiser
- Guinness Book of World Records: Largest raft of canoes/kayaks
- Monaca Firefighters Ohio River Catfish Anglers Tournament
- Ohio River Watershed Celebration Committee Networker Cruise (www.orwc.org/civicrm/event/info?reset=1&id=10)
- ORSANCO Ohio River Sweep 2014 (www.orsanco.org/sweep)
- ORTC Gear & Cheer Music Festival
- ORTC Open House
- Pittsburgh Triathlon & Adventure Race
- River Network - River Rally in Pittsburgh: May 30-June 2, 2014 (www.rivernetnetwork.org/events/river-rally)

No organization can do these activities alone. What other organizations will you partner with in carrying out the 2014 River of the Year program?

ORTC and FOR will partner with the following organizations to carry out the 2014 River of the Year program:

- Allegheny County
- Audubon Society
- Beaver Area Heritage Foundation
- Beaver County
- Beaver County Conservation District
- Beaver County Historical Research and Landmarks Foundation
- Beaver County Rowing Association
- Environmental Protection Association
- Independence Conservancy
- Kayak Pittsburgh
- Leetsdale Archeological Site
- Lewis & Clark Eastern Legacy
- National Park Service RTCA
- Ohio River Basin Fish Habitat Partnership
- Ohio River Foundation
- Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge
- Ohio River Watershed Celebration Committee
- Old Economy Village
- ORSANCO
- Pashek Associates
- Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

- Pennsylvania Environmental Council
- Port of Pittsburgh
- Riverlife
- River Network
- Southwest Pa Commission
- Stromberg/Garrigan & Associates
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Western Pa Conservancy

When making your nomination, please upload a high quality photo of the river in order to be considered. This photo will be used to promote your nomination during the voting process.

