



Celebrating 50 Years of Ohio's Scenic Rivers!

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The recent rains and soggy snowmelt are on the move. Having fallen from the sky, these molecules of water band together and travel at varying speeds through various states of rain, snow, or ice as they make their trek to the ground's surface. Gravity drains the land, pulling all of this water into the arteries of the earth: our rivers.

Rivers Do More with A Wooded Corridor

As a critical part of the water cycle, our rivers drain about 75% of the earth's land surface, carrying water, nutrients, and materials around the world. These waterways also provide critical habitat, food, and corridors to diverse populations of wildlife including fish, aquatic insects, and birds. Just as we rely on a healthy body to function and perform, so too does a river depend on a forested buffer of trees and plants along its banks in order to function and do its essential work. Wooded river banks are the most important factor to maintaining the health of a river. They are critical to protecting its ecosystems, water quality, natural character, and life within.

River Preservation Pioneers

To our great fortune, our fellow buckeye predecessors recognized the importance of river corridor protection. In February 1968, Ohio pioneered the river preservation movement with the passage of the nation's first Scenic Rivers Act. By then the previous decades of development, damming, and diversions had negatively and visibly impacted many sections of Ohio's 60,000 miles of rivers and streams. The Scenic Rivers Act created a state program to protect Ohio's remaining high quality streams. This legislation established three categories for river classification: wild, scenic, and recreational. It specified how rivers are to be designated and classified according to certain qualities and criteria, such as healthy buffers, diverse aquatic life, and water quality. The designation process was designed as a cooperative venture initiated by the local community and ultimately dependent upon the support and protection of local governments and residents. In addition, a citizens' advisory council is required for each designated river to provide guidance and local representation. Just nine months after Ohio's Scenic River Act passed, the National Scenic River Act followed in October of the same year. Now fifty years later, 14 rivers in Ohio have been officially designated as state wild, scenic, and recreational rivers, and they collectively protect more than 6,000 acres of riparian corridor across the state. Three of these rivers have also been named national scenic and recreational rivers.

Designated Rivers

Only the segments of river that meet the criteria are designated. For exact locations refer to the Ohio Division of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Watercraft Scenic Rivers Program website (watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/scenicriversmap). In Geauga County two river systems are designated as state scenic rivers, the Upper Cuyahoga River and Chagrin River. On June 26, 1974, 25 miles of the Upper Cuyahoga River were designated as a state scenic river, followed by the Chagrin River on July 2, 1979. In November 2002 the state scenic river designation was extended for the Chagrin River and now encompasses a total of 71 miles.

Community Commitment

At the heart of the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program is local community support for the protection of a river system. In fact, more than 30,000 people participate in Ohio Scenic Rivers programming annually, including hundreds of volunteers who assist with stream quality monitoring. The Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) contributes to this data collection by organizing residents to gather and submit stream quality information on portions of the Chagrin River through their Millennium Youth Conservation (MYC) program. To help people better experience scenic rivers in other ways, the Scenic Rivers staff also provides on-the-water programming and public access sites for citizens to enjoy fishing, paddling, and hunting on riparian lands protected through the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program.

Celebrate a Scenic River!

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources invites you to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Ohio's State Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers Program! Geauga SWCD is joining in, along with the Geauga Park District and other partners, to offer a Scenic Chagrin River Celebration on Sunday, September 16th, 1:00 – 4:00 pm, at Bass Lake Preserve in Munson Township. This treasured resource and designated scenic river site is also home to Spring Brook Sanctuary, a State Nature Preserve protecting Ohio's last known indigenous population of brook trout. All are welcome to celebrate this historic milestone and "jump in" to many unique aquatic explorations and fun festivities! Stay tuned for more details. To learn more about other 50th anniversary programming in your area and across the state, visit watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/scenicrivers.



Photo Caption: Each summer the Geauga SWCD organizes volunteers to help monitor portions of the Scenic Chagrin River by sampling aquatic life and testing water quality. Contact the district for this year's stream monitoring opportunities! (Photo submitted by Colleen Sharp)



Whether the snowmelt is draining or the spring showers are raining, our rivers are always hard at work. Take time to see them in action and enjoy one of Ohio's designated scenic rivers before the year is through. Not only do they represent the state's highest quality waterways, but also offer a glimpse of the past and a promise for the future. It's time to head to the heartland and celebrate a scenic river!