

## June Green Portage Celebrating 50 Years of Ohio's Scenic Rivers

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Where can you find clean, high quality waters bordered by rich forested corridors that are inhabited by rare aquatic species and numerous game fish? Look no further than Ohio's state wild, scenic, and recreational rivers.

Ohio pioneered the river conservation movement when it passed the nation's first Scenic River Act in February 1968. The National Scenic River Act followed in October of the same year. Fifty years later, 14 rivers have been officially designated as Ohio state wild, scenic and recreational rivers. Three of these rivers have also been named national scenic and recreational rivers.

With more than 60,000 miles of rivers and streams in Ohio, this select group represents some of the state's highest quality streams. Most are home to rare or endangered species and an exceptional diversity of fish and other animals. With outstanding water quality, an abundance of aquatic life and naturally wooded corridors, it's no coincidence they are also recreational gems.

Paddle one of Ohio's wild, scenic or recreational rivers and you'll quickly notice the abundance of trees. Wooded stream banks are critical to protecting the river's water quality and natural character as well as providing habitat for fish and other wildlife. Conserving these areas, known as riparian forests, is a focal point of the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program, which currently protects more than 6,000 acres of riparian corridor across the state.

Healthy forested river banks, outstanding water quality and diverse aquatic life are all criteria for wild, scenic and recreational river designation. Equally important, is local community support for the protection of a river system since only local interest can initiate the designation process.

On June 26, 1974, the Upper Cuyahoga River earned the distinction of becoming an Ohio designated state scenic river. From the Troy-Burton Township line in Geauga County to the State Route 14 Bridge in Portage County, the scenic section of the Upper Cuyahoga flows south curving for 25 miles.

The Upper Cuyahoga is noted for breathtaking vistas and scenery, supporting rich and abundant aquatic life. This low gradient section of the Cuyahoga transitions from river channel to riverine wetland complexes with wide forested stream side buffers. At times Sandhill Cranes can be heard from Eldon Russell Park in Geauga County. The section that is designated as Scenic is easily paddled by canoeists and kayakers because of the slow moving water, providing great opportunities for birding, fishing or just a leisurely float.

Scenic Rivers staff joins local communities in conservation initiatives and on-the-water public programming. More than 30,000 people participate in Ohio Scenic Rivers programming annually, including hundreds of volunteers who assist with stream quality monitoring. A growing number of public access sites are making it easier for citizens to enjoy fishing, paddling and hunting on riparian lands protected through the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program. Existing public access points along the Upper Cuyahoga Scenic River include Geauga Park District's Eldon Russell Park, The City of Akron's access on State Route 82, the Village of Mantua's Access at Buchert Park and the Portage Park District's Red Fox

Boat Access just downstream of SR 303 on Price Road. There are also multiple commercial canoe and kayak liveries in Portage County who can rent boats and equipment, provide shuttle transportation and some who provide training. Communities along the entire 100-mile long Cuyahoga River have also joined to plan, create, manage and promote access points and safe paddling along the entire river, creating the the Cuyahoga River Water Trail.

Join the Ohio Department of Natural Resources in 2018 to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ohio's State Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Program and 50 years of river conservation success stories. To learn more about 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary programming, in your area and across the state of Ohio, visit: [watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/scenicrivers](http://watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/scenicrivers). Learn more about boater safety, river conditions and boat registration at <http://watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/>. Visit [www.portageparkdistrict.org](http://www.portageparkdistrict.org) or call 330-297-7728 for maps and information about the Portage Park District.