

For Immediate Release

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New Funding Announced for the Ohio Basin Access for Canoes and Kayaks Program

Mini-Grant Program Builds on Growing Popularity of Paddling

Luzerne - As paddlers take to western Pennsylvania waterways in ever-increasing numbers, a new mini-grant program announced today will provide funding to make rivers and streams in the Ohio River Basin more accessible.

The **Ohio Basin Access for Canoes and Kayaks Mini-Grant Program (OBACK)** was launched by the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers (POWR), in partnership with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) and the Richard King Mellon Foundation, to help meet growing demand for non-motorized boating opportunities. Starting in 2022, the program will provide grants of up to \$20,000 to create new or improve existing access points along the region's rivers and streams.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, sales of non-motorized watercraft such as canoes, kayaks and stand-up paddleboards skyrocketed, with a 56% increase in spending nationwide during June of 2020 alone. The rush of new users during the 2020 boating season highlighted the need for improved stream access, as established sites were

overrun by people looking for recreation close to home. According to the annual Water Trail Managers survey published in March 2021, over a third of managers rank the distance between public access sites, maintenance of existing access sites, and presence of wayfinding and signage at access sites among their top three concerns.

“The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is committed to making rivers and streams accessible to residents across the Commonwealth, regardless of whether they are angling, paddling, waterskiing, or more. This program is designed to achieve those goals by adding to our suite of funding opportunities including a similar program in the Delaware Basin as well as our Boating Facilities grants program – not to mention funding through the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources” said Scott Bollinger, PFBC’s Boating Facilities Program Coordinator.

“The Richard King Mellon Foundation has a long history of protecting lands and waters,” said Sam Reiman, director of the Richard King Mellon Foundation. “With our new Strategic Plan we are focusing on activating many of these sites, so more people can enjoy these precious natural assets. This program with the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers to increase public access to streams, rivers, and lakes exemplifies our commitment to activation, and we are pleased to join with the PA Fish and Boat Commission and others to increase public access in Western Pennsylvania.”

“This mini grant program can respond to immediate needs that arise during unforeseen circumstances,” said Janet Sweeney of POWR. “Extreme weather, crumbling infrastructure, or a global pandemic can swiftly change the type of support managers need to successfully provide recreational opportunities to the public.”

Grants will be available on a competitive basis to eligible municipalities and non-profit organizations within the Ohio River Basin. Construction projects must benefit and directly support non-motorized recreational boating. A one-to-one match is required, and grantees will be responsible for all ongoing maintenance of the selected site. The program will not award grants to private businesses.

Noteworthy Dates:

Application Opens: November 1, 2021

Application Deadline: December 15, 2021

Grant Award Recipients Announced: January 2022

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About POWR

POWR's Mission is to provide the tools, training, education and resources that empower community watershed organization leaders and volunteers to protect and restore rivers and streams, advocate for sound water resource management and policies, and facilitate stewardship and enjoyment of Pennsylvania's waterways.