Little River, Big Story

The U-shaped Cuyahoga River is 100 miles long. It flows south from its headwaters near Burton, bends in Akron, heads north through Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Cleveland, and spills into Lake Erie. It was once part of a significant transportation route connecting the Great Lakes and the Ohio River. American Indians celebrated it for centuries, portaging over waterfalls on their way to the Susquehanna River and beyond. In the 1800s, engineers improved the connection. They used the Cuyahoga’s water to feed the northemmost section of the Ohio & Erie Canal. The canal system helped build the national economy. Akron and Cleveland grew from sleepy villages into booming industrial centers.

With rapid growth came extreme pollution. On June 22, 1969, waste in the Cuyahoga famously caught fire (for at least the thirteenth time). The international attention helped spark the modern environmental movement. Congress created the Environmental Protection Agency and passed the Clean Water Act, resulting in practices that are significantly less polluting.

In the decades since, many partners have collaborated to reduce the river’s pollution, improve wastewater treatment, and increase stewardship. Wildlife is returning and people are appreciating this regional resource in new ways.

The Cuyahoga is an Ohio Scenic River (upper portion 1976), a National Heritage Corridor (Ohio & Erie Canalway 1996), and an American Heritage River (1998). In becoming an Ohio Water Trail (2019), the river that burned now sparks excitement, a symbol of efforts to clean up America’s waterways.

Explore the Cuyahoga

A hub of the Cuyahoga River Trail is the diversity of opportunities around every corner. Turn. Enjoy nature, exercise, and peaceful appreciation. Differences in the paddling skills needed, seasons of flow, and equipment options contribute to this variety.

Paddling

The calm, rural waters of the Upper Cuyahoga State Scenic River above Kent are best for beginners. Intermediate paddlers might explore from Kent to Cuyahoga Falls with its frequent access points. Only the most experienced paddlers should attempt the Gorge, the only white-water rapids within 250 miles. Long paddles from Akron through Cuyahoga Valley National Park present one of the great wilderness canoe trips in the nation’s east. The industrial and shipping channels in Cleveland support over 50 species of migratory waterfowl. Huge freighters and rowing boat crews glide amid stunning views of the city. Note that there is a no-paddle zone, - Lake Rockwell - to protect Akron’s main source of drinking water.

Kayaks, canoes, stand-up paddles, sculls, and dragon boats often share the waters. Motorized boats and inflatables are not allowed in some sections. Various stretches have multi-purpose trails along the river that offer paddlers/paddle options for shuttling. Leave your bike at a downstream trailhead and use it to return to your car after your paddling.

Private boaters and other businesses operate independently to serve people recreating along the river.

For detailed information about paddling each section of the river visit cuyahogariverwatertrail.org.

Cuyahoga River Water Trail Overview Map

Map 1

Map 2

Partnerships

The Cuyahoga River Water Trail could not exist without the collaboration of many partners on both land and water. Water Trail partners include:

Managing Partners
City of Akron
Cuyahoga Valley National Park
City of Kent
Cleveland Metroparks
Cuyahoga Valley National Park
Ohio Department of Natural Resources
Portage Park District
Cuyahoga River Water Trail

Stakeholders Partners
The grassroots momentum for this regional resource in new ways.

More than a dozen stakeholder partners have been involved in the creation and implementation of the Cuyahoga River Water Trail.

Contact Us
info@cuyahogariverwatertrail.org
www.cuyahogariverwatertrail.org

© IAN ADAMS
© RICK MCMEECHAN
© RICK MCMEECHAN
© RICK MCMEECHAN
© RICK MCMEECHAN
© RICK MCMEECHAN
© RICK MCMEECHAN
Common Hazards

Floods and Swift Water
- Know the river flow before you go. Check river gauges online at link below.
- Never boat on flooded rivers. High water makes hazards such as logjams, floating logs, and submerged trees more dangerous.

Lowhead Dams and Waterfalls
- Know the location of these hazards. Portage (carry your boat) around and launch at a safe distance downstream.
- Small dams are especially dangerous. Hydraulic turbulence at the base can trap you.

Strainers
- A strainer is created by a manmade or natural obstruction that allows water to pass through, but traps boats and people.
- Avoid strainers or other obstructions, especially in swift water. These include overhanging branches, drowned trees, log jams, and flooded islands.
- Portage (carry your boat) around any section of water that seems unsafe.

Foot Entrapments
- Never stand or walk in swift water. If you fall, you can become pinned underwater.
- Always keep your feet up and pointed downstream.
- Swim to shore or calm water before standing.

Use Extra Caution in Cleveland
- Search “Cuyahoga River Safety Task Force” online for critical safety information.
- The huge frieghters in the shipping channel cannot see you. They do not leave much room on the sides when maneuvering the bends. Their side propellers create waves that can knock you over.
- Be aware of motorized recreational boats.
- Stay close to shore unless crossing, wear bright colors, and always point your boat into the wake to avoid capsizing.
- Monitor boat traffic on VHF marine radio, track freighter transit on marine traffic apps, and know your passing zones.

Plan a Safe Trip

Safety is your responsibility. Be ready for an emergency:
- Check water conditions and weather. Check water quality and levels (blue box, left) before you depart. Avoid extreme weather. If the water looks too hazardous to swim, don’t boat on it!
- Scout your course when possible. Check out access, exit, and potential hazards from the shore.
- Never boat alone and leave a “float plan” with a reliable person. Say where you are going and when you will leave and return. Contact the person once you return safely.
- Wear a life jacket at all times. By law, children under 10 must wear life jackets of an appropriate size.
- Register your boat. Canoes and kayaks must be registered with the state. Search Ohio Department of Natural Resources Watercrafts.
- Regulations vary. It is your responsibility to know and follow all regulations for specific parks, jurisdictions, and conditions.
- Load your boat evenly. Keep the weight in the boat centered for stability. Do not overload.
- Always maintain these points of contact. For example, while moving around, keep two hands and one foot foottouching the boat.
- Portage (carry your boat) around hazards.
- Be prepared to capsize and swim. Hold onto your boat unless your life is endangered. Grab the upstream side of your capsized boat.
- Know your exact location at all times. If you need help, call 911 and report where you are on the river.
- Stay hydrated. Pack plenty of drinking water and avoid overexertion. Avoid alcohol while paddling.

Avoid hypothermia. Be prepared for cold air and water by staying dry. Be aware of the symptoms of hypothermia and know how to treat it. Bring a change of clothing in a waterproof bag.

Ohio Water Trail is a network of water recreation routes that can be used as part of Lake Erie Coastal Trail. The Water Trail extends from the northern shoreline of Lake Erie to the southern boundary of Lake Ontario, following the shoreline. It includes several sections that are designated as “Ohio Water Trails.”

Ohio Water Trail Courtesies

Practice Leave No Trace Principles to enjoy and protect our natural spaces. Appropriate artifacts and natural objects that have been disturbed. Dispose of waste properly; pack it out. Visit www.LNT.org for details.

Respect the privacy and rights of landowners. Designated access sites on the water trail are public property. All others should be considered private property.

Respect wildlife. Observe from a distance. Don’t feed, feed, or approach wildlife. Control pets or leave them at home.

Clean boater information. Adopt environmental boating practices. Avoid introducing non-native species, including live bait, by following the “Clean, Drain, Dry” method. Clean all equipment by removing visible plant and animal species. Drain all water. Dry all equipment completely before moving to a new body of water.