

## **Bipartisan Ohio River Basin Restoration Program Act Introduced**

*Legislation would create an office to oversee multifaceted economic, environmental, and recreational opportunities for heart of the country*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 17, 2024

Contact: Michael Washburn  
Executive Director  
646-575-1787  
[michael@kwalliance.org](mailto:michael@kwalliance.org)

LOUISVILLE, KY - Today in Washington, DC, the co-chairs of the bipartisan Congressional Ohio River Basin Caucus, Reps. Morgan McGarvey (D, KY-03) and Erin Houchin (R, IN-09) introduced the [Ohio River Basin Restoration Program Act](#), an initiative that will support healthy communities, promote strong economies, and address pressing environmental and public health challenges facing the Ohio River Basin region. Twenty-five million Americans across 14 states depend on the waters of the Ohio River Basin for drinking water, recreation, and their livelihoods.

“We applaud the effort, enthusiasm, and leadership that Representatives McGarvey and Houchin have demonstrated today,” said Michael Washburn, Kentucky Waterways Alliance’s (KWA) Executive Director. “The work they have done sets us on a path leading to cleaner drinking water, stronger communities, and healthier families.”

KWA endorses the proposed *Ohio River Basin Restoration Program Act* as a comprehensive and forward-looking framework for addressing serious threats to the health and welfare of Americans residing in the 205,000 square mile Ohio River Basin. Modeled on proven programs for the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay, this legislation represents an opportunity to secure federal support and establish collaborative partnerships spanning 14 states, tribal nations, and local communities.

Kentucky is unique within the Ohio River Basin, as almost its entire land mass is contained within the Basin’s borders, more than any other in the 14-state region. Ninety seven percent of Kentucky’s 90,000 miles of rivers, lakes, and streams drain into the Basin. The Ohio River itself makes up 664 miles of Kentucky’s northern border.

“From drinking water and business to tourism and fishing, it isn’t an overstatement to say that Ohio River restoration *is Kentucky restoration*,” said Washburn.

The Ohio River Basin faces serious threats. In 2022, the Basin was subjected to 41 million pounds of toxic pollution from heavy industry, and in 2023, the Ohio River was designated as the second most endangered river in America. Despite its role as the geographical heart of the nation’s waterway system

and a critical economic driver, the Ohio River remains the largest river system in the United States without dedicated federal funding for its conservation and sustainability.

The Ohio River Restoration Program aligns closely with KWA's mission and vision by creating an office that will address, among other issues:

- **Pollution Prevention:** Ensuring clean and safe water for drinking, recreation, and tourism.
- **Community Resilience:** Creating workforce development programs, and empowering communities most affected by pollution and climate-related challenges, including flooding.
- **Core Restoration Actions:** Focused on habitat restoration, invasive species management, and farm conservation to enhance soil and water health.
- **Data-Driven Management:** Developing robust monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure the effectiveness and accountability of restoration efforts.

###

*Since 1993, Kentucky Waterways Alliance (KWA) has been the only statewide organization focused on waterways in Kentucky. KWA works with communities on local watershed issues and advocates for better policies and programs at the state and national levels. With a mission to protect, restore, and celebrate Kentucky's waterways, KWA's work is making a difference in the quality of life for all Kentuckians. Learn more here or at [www.kwalliance.org](http://www.kwalliance.org)*