Explore the Cuyahoga

A hallmark of the Cuyahoga River Water Trail is the diversity of opportunities around every 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 a series of Low bridges, the northernmost 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 1974), a National Heritage Corridor (Ohio & Erie Canalway 1996), and an American Heritage River (1996). In becoming an Ohio Water Trail (2019), the river that burned now sparks excitement, a symbol of efforts to clean up America’s waterways.

The U-shaped Cuyahoga 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 splits into Lake Erie. It was once a part of a significant transportation route connecting the Great Lakes and the Ohio River. American Indians cared for it centuries, portaging over the water barrier to the Tuscarawas River and beyond. In the 1800s, engineers improved the connection. They used the Cuyahoga’s water to feed the numerous mills and the Ohio & Erie Canal. The canal system helped build the national economy. Akron and Cleveland grew from sleepy villages into booming industrial centers.

The Cuyahoga River Water Trail is the diversity of options contributing to this variety. The river now operates independently to serve people recreating along the river. Private liveries and other businesses offer guided paddles from Akron through Cuyahoga Falls. More than a dozen stakeholder partners have been essential in the creation and implementation of the Cuyahoga River Water Trail.

Stakeholders

Cuyahoga River Water Trail

- Friends of the Gorge
- Cuyahoga Valley National Park
- Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District
- Portage Park District
- Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce
- City of Akron
- City of Cleveland
- Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District
- City of Beachwood
- State Nature Preserve

Contact Us

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Little River, Big Story

The Cuyahoga River is one of the oldest of America’s watersheds. It has been home to American Indians for thousands of years. Ohioans used the Cuyahoga’s water to feed their mills and the Ohio & Erie Canal. The canal system helped build the national economy. Akron and Cleveland grew from sleepy villages into booming industrial centers.

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Common Hazards

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

Stripers
- A stripper is created by a mammal or natural obstruction that allows water to pass through, but traps boats and people.
- Avoid streamers 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.

Use Extra Caution in Cleveland
- Search “Cuyahoga River Safety Task Force” online for critical safety information.
- The hump hikers is the shipping channel cannot see you. They do not leave much room on the water 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 a VHF marine radio, track freighter traffic 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 in it!
Scout your course when possible. Check out access, exigent, and potential hazards from the shore.
Never boat alone and learn 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.

Avoid hypothermia. Be prepared for cold air and water by dressing properly. Be aware of the symptoms of hypothermia and knowledge of hypothermia symptoms. Bring a change of clothing in a waterproof bag.

Ohio Water Trails
A network of water trails throughout the state of Ohio helps boaters connect with nature and enjoy the unique features of Ohio’s waterways. The Ohio Water Trails program, administered by the Division of Natural Resources, is a collaborative effort of the State of Ohio, local, county, and municipal governments to create a network of trails with designated launch points and access points.

Ohio Water Trails offers assistance to communities, local government agencies, and non-profit organizations, to stay safe and enjoy the Ohio Water Trails. For more information about the Ohio Water Trails, visit watertrails.ohiodnr.gov.

Water Trail Courtesy
Practice Leave No Trace Principles to enjoy and respect the privacy and rights of landowners.
- Do not camp overnight in natural areas.
- Respect wildlife. Observe from a distance. Don’t feed, follow, 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. Dry all water. Dry all equipment completely before moving to a new body of water.

“**The Cuyahoga River Water Trail** offers boaters access to the headwaters and challenging white-water rapids in the State of Ohio. The Ohio Water Trails offers assistance to communities, local government agencies, and non-profit organizations, to stay safe and enjoy the Ohio Water Trails. For more information about the Ohio Water Trails, visit watertrails.ohiodnr.gov.