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The Ohio River Basin Alliance Responds to Ohio River Listed as America's 2nd Most Endangered in the Nation

Cincinnati, OH – The Ohio River has been named as the second most endangered river in the country by American Rivers, a national non-profit organization. The designation was included in American Rivers Most Endangered Rivers report on April 18. Each year, American Rivers releases this report to highlight rivers that are at a crossroads - those that face a tipping point that could significantly shape the future of the river and region.

Despite decades of improvement through policy, regulation, and partnerships with community and business leaders in the Ohio River Basin, the designation of the Ohio River as endangered comes from remaining and sustained threats to human, ecosystem and community health. These threats are in part from a lack of sufficient and sustained federal and state investment. These threats include a legacy of toxic chemical discharges, bacteria impairment, nutrient pollution, mine waste, and other serious problems. Release of the report falls on the heels of the East Palestine, Ohio, train derailment that sparked national media coverage and renewed political attention to the region and the critical role the Ohio River has in the heartland.

The Ohio River Basin Alliance (ORBA)—a voluntary collaborative of over 200 organizations that provides a forum for addressing water resource issues in the Ohio River Basin—is highlighting this designation of the Ohio River as one of the Nation’s most endangered rivers in order to raise awareness of the value of the river’s resources and raise awareness of the need for federal funding in the Ohio River watershed. The federal government invests hundreds of millions of dollars each year to restore and protect the great waters of our country such as the Great Lakes, Chesapeake Bay, and Gulf Coast, among others. ORBA’s primary goal is to have congress recognize the Ohio River Basin as threatened and deserving of sustained funding.

The Ohio River has made tremendous progress through the processes of both The Safe Drinking Water Act and The Clean Water Act. It features rich ecosystems, ample opportunities for recreation, shared culture, and investment in local economy and communities. There is more work to be done and vital federal resources are needed to sustain this work. ORBA is overseeing a process with the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO) to craft a visionary plan to restore and protect the waters of the 14 state region in the Ohio River Basin. Addressing the 10 million people in the basin, including the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, who rely on the Ohio River for drinking water. The plan will offer a “blueprint” for federal action, including designation of the Ohio River as a protected water system that receives significant, sustained federal investment. *“ORBA member organizations and members care deeply for the Ohio River Basin and are working very hard with our partners to bring critical federal resources to the region to improve the lives of millions of people that live within the basin,”* says Craig Butler, Chairperson of ORBA.

To protect the safety of drinking water for people who depend on the river for their source of drinking water, ORSANCO requires robust, sustained funding for technical upgrades to their monitoring system and increases to staff capacity. This will support long term monitoring efforts, technical expertise, and immediate disaster response. Federal investment in the restoration and protection of the Ohio River Basin will support the ecological well-being of the river, create ample recreation opportunities, safeguard public health, and improve and invest in the overall quality of life for communities throughout the watershed. Federal investment is also crucial to upgrading ORSANCO's river monitoring equipment, which is used to safeguard drinking water supplies and ensure disaster preparedness through routine monitoring. ORSANCO is an interstate pollution control agency for the Ohio River that works on behalf of eight signatory member states to improve water quality through monitoring, assessment, and public information programs that ensure the Ohio River is safe for recreation, drinking and industrial supplies. ORSANCO's programs also ensure that the river can support a healthy and diverse aquatic habitat.

The Ohio River unifies 30 million people across 14 states and includes roughly 60 Congressional Districts. As part of ORBA's restoration plan, the organization is calling on US Representatives in these districts to join the Ohio River Basin Caucus and to advocate for federal investments in the Ohio River Basin. Additionally, ORBA is urging citizens of the Ohio River Basin to share widely within their constituencies this opportunity to uplift local voices to the Ohio River Caucus to let them know they should work to secure these federal investments. "The American Rivers report is a timely reminder of how important the waters of the Ohio River Basin are to millions of people in our 14-state region. As co-chairs of the Ohio River Congressional Caucus, we understand there are urgent threats to our environment and economy that need to be addressed, and we look forward to working with our colleagues in Congress to ensure that Ohio River restoration and protection is a national priority so that we can protect our drinking water, public health, jobs, and economy," said Reps. Johnson and McGarvey.

The American Rivers designation of the Ohio River as the second most endangered river in America leverages the Ohio River Basin as a catalyst to both grow a strong regional movement of NGOs, as well as unite and galvanize the Ohio River Congressional Caucus, the body that ultimately must embrace and champion the need for federal investments and lead the implementation of a federal Ohio River restoration program. To protect the Ohio River and the millions who depend on it, ORBA along with local partners, and residents in the Ohio River Valley, with support from American Rivers, are calling on Congress. The federal government must designate the river as a protected water system and commit to significant, sustained federal funding for both the Ohio River Basin Alliance Restoration Plan and technical upgrades for the river monitoring equipment of the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission.

About The Ohio River Basin Alliance (ORBA)

ORBA was founded in 2009 to provide a unified voice for the priorities of the region - a need identified by the US Environmental Protection Agency, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and ORSANCO. ORBA's main goals, on behalf of its 500 members and over 200 organizations, are to facilitate Ohio River Basin stakeholder collaboration, inform elected officials on critical issues related to sustainable economic growth and wise management of our natural resources, and facilitate coordination and delivery of projects to address Ohio River Basin priorities. Learn more at: orsanco.org/ohio-river-basin-alliance-orba.

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