

Testimony for the Ohio Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
in support of S.B. 286

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Representing the Ohio River Way

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Senator Schaffer and members of the Committee,

My name is **Frances Kern Mennone**. I am the Managing Director of Frost Brown Todd's Industry Consultants and Advisors Group. I'm an avid rower and served as the Secretary of the Board of Directors for the **United States Rowing Association**. That is the national governing body of the sport of rowing in the United States. We made watersport Olympians. As such, I have had the privilege to spend more time on Ohio waterways than most Ohioans. Professionally, I'm also a subject matter expert in public private finance and economic development. I'm here today to represent the **Ohio River Way's** support for forming an **Ohio River Commission**.

*The Ohio River Way strives to improve quality of life in the Ohio River Valley. Since 2019, the organization has built a coalition of over **120 communities** and organizations that aim to increase and improve outdoor recreation access to the Ohio River and leverage it to **strengthen the economies of river communities**. ORW is a partner with the **National Parks Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance** program in developing a nationally recognized land and water trail exploring the beauty, history, and culture of the Ohio River Valley. In partnership with elected officials, tourism bureaus, and economic development agencies, the Ohio River Way is improving quality of life for our region by connecting communities, increasing access to outdoor recreation, and enhancing economic development opportunities.*

The State of Ohio has a tremendous resource in our natural waterways. Appropriately so, this State has invested **100's of millions of dollars on Lake Erie** as part of the state's **Great Lakes Commission**. After years of investment, the northern shore of Ohio is in best shape it has been in decades, *representing nearly 30% of Ohio's travel and tourism revenue*.

But Ohio has another unique natural resource and that is our mighty Ohio River. It is now time for investment in Ohio's '**southern coast**'.

The Ohio River has a significant economic impact on the State of Ohio.

1. It is used as a **major transportation corridor** of bulk goods;
 - o steel, fertilizer, and coal.
 - o An example of which is the, massive '**super load**' components for the **Intel** plant that are being transported by way of the river. All that logistical transportation is cleaner and safer than road traffic. My colleagues from the commerce industry can share more about the invaluable impact the river has in transporting goods we use daily.

2. For recreation, the River communities have seen a marked increase in **boat registration** in the last several years. Thanks to organizations like the **Ohio River Way** who are reigniting the region's recreation economy.
3. The State of Ohio recently announced nearly \$200 million through the *Appalachian Community Grant Program* for our '**Wonderful Waterfronts**'. That investment needs protecting.
4. The River provides **fresh clean drinking water for over 5M** people. **THAT** too is an asset worth protecting. Through issues elsewhere in the country like Flint Michigan, we've seen how threats to drinking water supply can hamper economic vitality. *We need to ensure that utility resource is protected.* A disparate approach puts that at risk.

Why do we need an entity like a Commission? Much like the Great Lakes Region, the Ohio River basin has many different layers of governance that are simply not focused; We've got too many layers at the federal, state, county and local levels. The Ohio River shoreline in Ohio is broken into;

- 2 US Army Corp Districts – an issue Lake Erie doesn't deal with.
- The river represents the regional boundary of many federal agencies including; the US EPA, the US EDA, and the USDA.

Why does that matter? This makes the Ohio River fall right through the cracks as there is no federal agency specifically focused on the basin.

If Ohio wants to make the river a priority, we need to do it ourselves. The State of Ohio's business entities also divide the river with;

- 3 Jobs Ohio affiliate organizations (REDI, Ohio SW and Lake to River),
- 6 formalized state of Ohio port authorities,
- 5 local development districts
- and at least 4 Ohio river-based business associations.
- Not to mention the 14 Ohio county governments that border the river (see attached).

All those disparate layers of government hamper the growth and development of the Ohio River as an economic asset.

Meanwhile, the 'northern coast' of Ohio has a much more organized approach that has been able to *leverage resources and win business from outside our state*. An example of which is a major US EPA grant that the Great Lake Commission landed just this summer. If we want to see investments along our southern shore, we need a more organized approach. *Just imagine trying to run a business in that mix of agencies.* It is not business friendly.

The United States has renewed it's focus on onshoring manufacturing. We want Ohio to be 'development ready' for that reinvestment and an Ohio River Commission would do just that.

As a representative of the recreation focused Ohio River Way, I would like to encourage **that all benefiting industries** be included in the future Ohio River Commission.

- According to the **US Bureau of Economic Analysis**, in 2022, the value of the outdoor recreation economy accounted for **\$563.7** billion of the US GDP
- and the outdoor recreation economy generated **\$1.1 trillion** in economic output.

*When we formulate the Ohio River Commission let's do it right by including recreation **with** commerce.*

In closing, as Ohio we are **leaving money on the table with the Ohio River**. Let's formulate an Ohio River Commission and let's maximize the rivers potential as a true asset for the State.

Affects of Disparate Governance of the Ohio River for Federal Funding

Geographic Ecological Restoration Funding

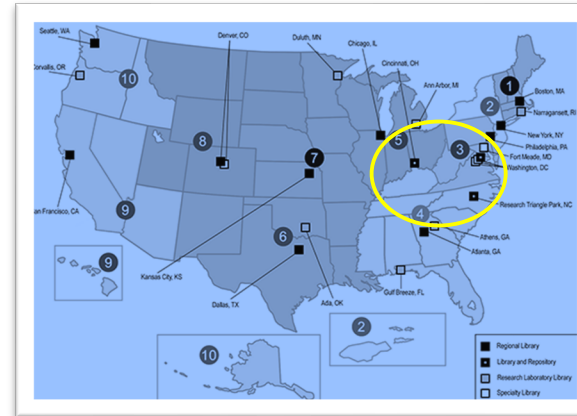


Disparate Governance of the Ohio River

US ARMY CORPS - 2



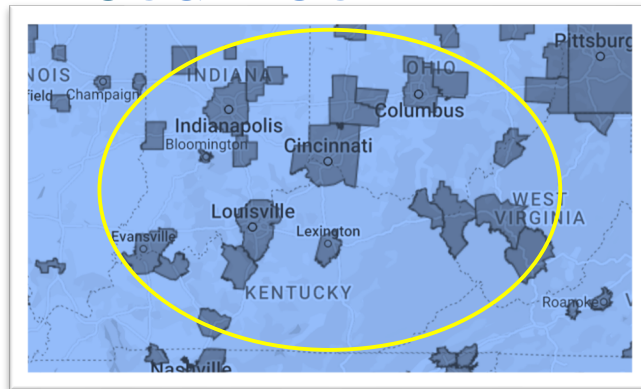
US EPA - 3



US EDA - 3



MPO's & RPO's



3 STATES
25+ COUNTIES
40+ COMMUNITIES

