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## River Explorer program passes 30K student milestone

Contributed By: [Rich Cogen](#) | Ohio River Foundation

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Ohio River Foundation's River Explorer program closed out 2016 with another record setting performance. Fifty schools sent students on River Explorer field trips in 2016. Now, more than 30,000 students have participated in the program since its inception in 2005.

The River Explorer program provides thousands of students every year unique hands-on learning where they go down to area creeks, stream, and rivers for a high impact STEM enrichment experience. It is highly successful in engaging students to examine their surroundings and appreciate local water resources. It also provides much needed STEM enrichment that teachers are seeking for their students to better enable understanding of complex and difficult concepts.

The curriculum fulfills many of the STEM requirements teachers crave and also adheres to state education standards. With River Explorer, students are in rivers and creeks investigating and performing field research including using their hands and a variety of nets to catch aquatic creatures. The students hold what they catch and then place them in aquaria and other containers for close study. They are, effectively, junior scientists for the day.

Students in grades 6-12 (including AP) also conduct water quality tests, examining different parameters to determine water chemistry values. The data they collect throughout the day is recorded and combined to show an overall river health index. They list species of fish and types of macro invertebrates collected, water chemistry data, and perform a habitat assessment similar to that generated by field scientists.

While the collection of live specimens can be an exciting and sometimes new experience for the students, having the field grade equipment for students to use reinforces the real world application of the concepts introduced during the trip, gives students ideas about career choices, and a sense of value for the river work they perform during the trip.

It is the combination of all these activities that best enable the students to make the connection between aquatic life, water quality, and watersheds. For most students this also marks their first step



River Explorer students are junior scientists for a day as they assess river health in area waterways like Banklick Creek in Kentucky. River Explorer provides field trip experiences at multiple locations in OH, IN, and KY.

towards becoming environmental stewards.

The Greater Cincinnati program enjoys participation from schools in Southwest Ohio, Southeast Indiana, and Northern Kentucky. Field trip locations are on Banklick Creek, Little Miami River, Tanners Creek, Sharon Creek, and the East Fork of the Little Miami River. In Greater Columbus, students participate at locations on the Olentangy River and Big Walnut Creek.

Rich Cogen, Ohio River Foundation Executive Director, said, "We continue to see growing school interest in our program. There are 4 reasons for this: First, this is a testament to the unique quality of River Explorer. Second, teachers are witnessing improved scholastic performance in the classroom after their students participate in River Explorer. Third, we have an excellent staff of River Explorer educators. And fourth, the cost per student for a River Explorer experience is a great value for budget conscious teachers and schools."

River Explorer continues to experience steady annual growth. Its unique field trip activities and settings coupled with a dynamic teaching approach distinguishes the River Explorer program from other hands-on education programs.

"The popularity and success of the program is clearly on display as it continues to grow in popularity each year. Teachers and students love it!" said Allison Cone, River Explorer Coordinator.

Major funding support for River Explorer in 2016 came from Ashland, Inc., Charles Dater Foundation, The Columbus Foundation, Louis & Louise Nippert Charitable Foundation, The Sutphin Family Foundation, New Belgium Brewing Company, Louise Taft Semple Foundation, International Paper, and Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America.

Details and further program information are at [www.ohioriverfdn.org](http://www.ohioriverfdn.org). To help support this program, please visit and donate at [www.ohioriverfdn.org](http://www.ohioriverfdn.org) or call Rich Cogen, Executive Director, Ohio River Foundation at 513-460-3365.

Now in its 16th year, the non-profit Ohio River Foundation (ORF) is dedicated to protecting and improving the water quality and ecology of the Ohio River and all waters in its 11-state watershed. ORF works towards these goals through environmental education and conservation activities that serve to inspire environmental stewardship for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future citizens.

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