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Working to Protect, Restore, and Celebrate Kentucky's Waterways **www.KWAlliance.org**

Kentucky Waterways Alliance and the Ohio River Way Partnership Report

Introduction & Purpose

This document serves as a detailed report highlighting the partnership between Kentucky Waterways Alliance and the Ohio River Way. This information is intended to showcase the success of this ongoing partnership and provide information to be used in future public communications on the partnership, successes and challenges, and meaningful data collected.

Partnership Description

Kentucky Waterways Alliance (KWA) and the Ohio River Way (ORW) entered into a partnership agreement which focused on the use of KWA's Report A Tire Tool during the 2026 Ohio River Way Challenge. Through this partnership KWA became a sponsor for the ORW Challenge and provided use of the Report A Tire Tool as well as instructional resources for paddler use during the Challenge. In return, ORW utilized the Report A Tire Tool throughout their journey specifically reporting waste tires, large debris, and debris fields.

About KWA

Kentucky Waterways Alliance is a member-supported nonprofit organization working to protect, restore, and celebrate Kentucky's waterways. Through education, restoration projects, community engagement, and policy advocacy, KWA works to safeguard waterways that provide drinking water, recreation, and economic opportunity for Kentuckians statewide.

About ORW

The Ohio River Way is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to help people find adventure, inspire care for the land and water, and grow the economies of Ohio River communities. Through facilitating community development, tourism, recreation, and restoration in and along the river, the Ohio River Way is working to build a braided network of land, water, and cultural trails—supported by an active coalition—linking Ohio River communities and conserved wildlands.

Partnership Personnel and Roles

Kentucky Waterways Alliance
Susan Griffin Ward: Director of Community Engagement

Elijah Miller: GIS Analyst

The Ohio River Way
Molly Pope: Deputy Director
Josie Mays: 2026 Floating Lab Intern

ORW Paddle Challenge

About: The Ohio River Way Challenge is an annual canoe expedition to raise awareness for Ohio River recreation, tourism, and restoration. Held in 26- and 30-foot voyageur canoes provided by collaborators Paddle Perry and River City Paddle Sports, a volunteer crew of 30 common adventurers paddle anywhere from 15-35 miles on Ohio River each day. Along the way, the team meets with community leaders and elected officials, explores the rivertown communities, and camps in riverfront parks, HipCamp sites, islands, and other unique sites. Accompanying the canoes is the Challenge's "Floating Laboratory," a multidisciplinary research hub aboard a 55-foot houseboat lent and captained by volunteers. Undergraduate and graduate students lead participatory science initiatives–including collaborating with Kentucky Waterways Alliance to document tire pollution–and conduct independent research on ecology, environmental science, and local history.
Dates: May 10-23; Sept. 4-13

Route: Kenova, WV-Louisville, KY; Louisville, KY-Evansville, IN

Total River Miles: 289 completed; 189.5 to go

Towns stopped along the way:

Ashland, KY; Ironton, OH; Russell and Greenup, KY; Portsmouth, OH; Vanceburg, KY; Manchester, OH; Maysville, KY; Aberdeen, Ripley, and Higginsport, OH; Augusta, KY; Chilo and New Richmond, OH; Cincinnati, OH; Covington KY; Lawrenceburg, IN; Petersburg, KY; Aurora, Rising Sun, and Vevay IN; Carrollton, KY; Madison, IN; Westport and Louisville, KY. On leg 3, we'll visit West Point and Brandenburg, KY; Derby and Rome, IN; Hawesville, KY; Cannelton, Tell City, and Troy IN; Lewisport, KY; Grandview, Rockport, and Newburgh, IN.

Use of KWA's Report A Tire Tool

Purpose:

By partnering with Kentucky Waterways Alliance to utilize the tire-tracking tool during the Ohio River Way Challenge, participants gained a greater understanding of the extent of tire pollution impacting local waterways. Further, Challenge participants had the opportunity to collect real data to inform clean-up and advocacy efforts to address tire pollution, adding an additional sense of purpose to the expedition and inspiring future engagement with participatory science initiatives.

Strategies for Use:

The tire tracking tool was utilized on both the canoes and Floating Lab by participants on the Ohio River Way Challenge. The tool was primarily used to record tire pollution, however, it also

allowed for the documentation of other large debris (sunken watercraft, etc.) and field of debris (typically backwater areas with significant collections of smaller pieces of litter). During this time, a few major differences in use of the tool between the canoes and Floating Lab became apparent. The canoes often offered more accurate use of the app than the Floating Lab, as they provided a closer look at the river banks. The slower speeds while on the canoes also helped in spotting more hidden tires. One limitation from the canoes, however, is that participants are generally only able to see one side of the river. Additionally, during more choppy waters it can be difficult to pause paddling and track a tire. The Floating Lab allowed for a more holistic view of the river and tires along it, but only for major dumping grounds that are evident from a distance. From both the canoes and the Floating Lab, tire tracking was an engaging task for all participants. Paddlers and individuals on the Floating Lab would point out tires the same way they would the wildlife, though tracking them on the tool was usually done by one or two individuals.

User Reflections:

The process of tracking tires allowed for a deeper understanding of the river for all participants. Many times the tires would blend into the nature and surroundings requiring a conscious effort to fully grasp the impact tire litter has on the health of the river. It is clear that tire tracking is an important and engaging activity, so it is vital to examine the best technique for acquiring accurate data. The use of the tire tracking tool during the ORW Challenge offered a unique opportunity to do just that. Once familiar with the tool, the process of tracking a tire became very quick, however, there are a few recommendations for future use. One suggestion for improvement would be to include more pre-programmed waterways. While on the water, many participants utilized plastic phone sleeves which can make typing more difficult. Having the Ohio River or other major waterways pre-programmed as drop downs might save participants more time. Additionally, when utilizing the app offline, the coordinate map would not show specific geography, just a blank screen, making exact placement of the tire on the map difficult. Addressing this issue will allow more accurate data.

Partnership Data Collection Results

At the time of this report, 215 reports have been submitted mapping tire pollution and other dangerous debris in waterways across the Commonwealth. The reports can be viewed on KWA's Report A Tire Dashboard found here. Of these reports, 107 were submitted by paddlers and participants of the 2026 Ohio River Way Challenge. The included map showcases data collected by the Ohio River Way Challenge team and highlights several important data categories: Tires, Large Debris, and Debris Fields. Of the 107 reports submitted by ORW's team, 102 reported tire locations, 3 reported large debris such as sunken boats, and 2 reported debris fields consisting of large collections of small litter items. Due to the Ohio River's tremendous impact on Kentucky's people and wildlife, this valuable information heavily contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of tire and other debris-based pollution in major riverways across Kentucky. See the map and collaboration highlight below!

Challenges and Ongoing Collaboration

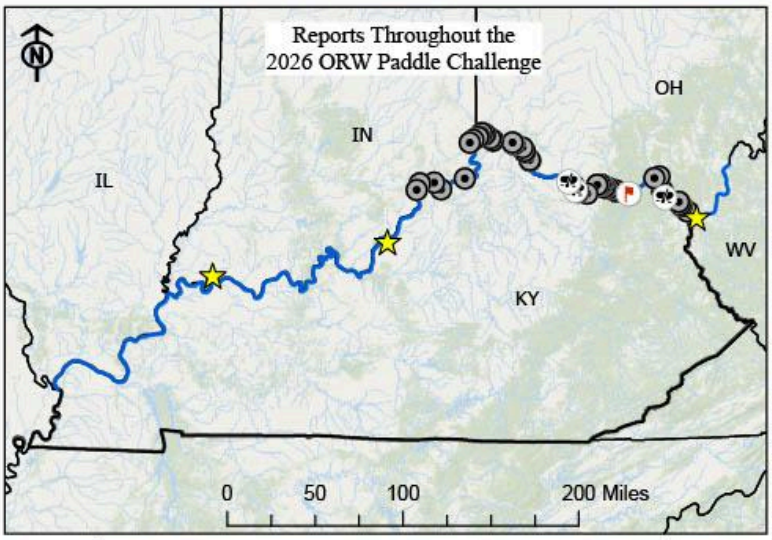
During the first two legs of the Ohio River Way Challenge, weather conditions consistently and dramatically declined. Due to high water levels, projected rain, and flooding concerns, the third and final leg of the Ohio River Way Challenge has been postponed until September, 2026. This

final stretch will cover the Ohio River between Louisville, KY and Evansville, IN. During the final stretch of this journey, the team at ORW will continue their use of KWA's Report A Tire Tool.

Initial Collaboration Mapping Announcement:

Recreation and Conservation:

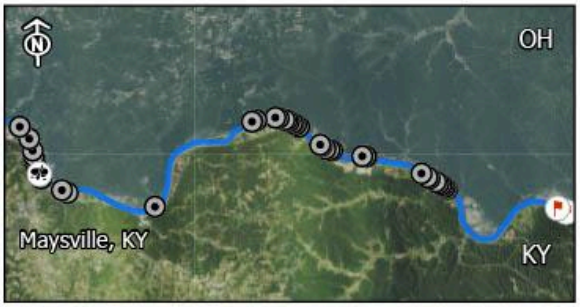
Combining Adventure and Community Engagement Towards Tire Free Waterways

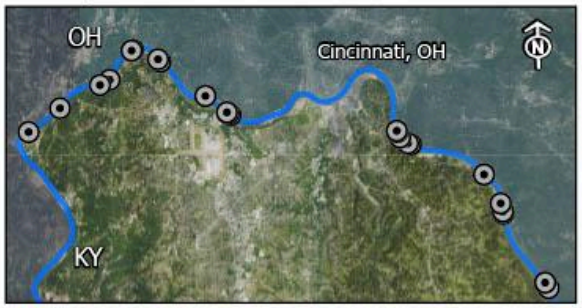


Paddle, Report, and Collaborate

Kentucky Waterways Alliance (KWA) and Ohio River Way (ORW) have partnered towards healthier waterways across Kentucky. As part of the 2026 Ohio River Way Challenge, KWA and ORW are working together to better understand tire pollution in one of the United States' largest waterways, the Ohio River. Through KWA's Report A Tire Tool paddlers joining ORW on the 2026 Challenge are identifying the locations of tires, large debris items, and debris fields as they traverse 488 miles over their 3-week journey from Huntington West Virginia, to Evansville Indiana. With two of the three legs of this adventure complete, ORW paddlers have reported more than 700 tires between Huntington, West Virginia and Louisville, KY. The final leg of the ORW Challenge will commence Friday September 4th where paddlers will continue the hunt for tires as they complete their expedition.

Report Hot Spots





See A Tire + Report A Tire

Through the Report A Tire Project, KWA and partners are mapping tires in and near waterways throughout Kentucky watersheds. Mapped tires will be used to identify where tires accumulate in waterways, help target future tire removal projects, and develop tools to track tire pollution throughout the Commonwealth. For more information on this work, visit www.kwalliance.org or scan the QR Code.

Scan Here!

Remember, whether you are hiking, fishing, paddling, boating, or simply enjoying Kentucky's amazing network of waterways, if you see a tire, report a tire!