A Letter from the President of RU

Rivers Unlimited (RU) is thriving and we need your support to sustain our three major activities: 1) Citizens’ Water Quality Monitoring, 2) river restoration and education, and 3) promoting Scenic Rivers in Ohio.

I am the acting President of Rivers Unlimited and University of Cincinnati Emeritus Professor of Biology. I have spent decades doing research from Alaska to South America and I bring all of that experience into the work I continue through RU locally. RU has solid programs that are making important contributions to the health of our waterways. Throughout the year, we, along with our partner programs, bring hundreds of people out to, into and onto the water. (continued next page...)

Join Us!

March 7, other dates/locations TBD
Heritage Park Live Stake Event
Sign-up at Ohio River Foundation

March 13, April 10, May 8
Citizens' Water Quality Monitoring
riversunlimited.org/wqm

April 16
Mill Creek Yacht Club Cleanup
Go to: www.themillcreekalliance

June 12, 20 (with canoes), and 26
Little Miami “Do It Yourself” Cleanups
Register: littlemiamiwatershednetwork.org
Firstly, we are beginning our 12th year of monthly sampling and analysis of nine water quality parameters from 70 sites in the lower Great Miami watershed, operating a Level 2 Lab under Ohio’s Credible Data Law. In that capacity, I am a Level 3 (highest) Chemist under the Credible Data Law. Presently, I am teaching our volunteers a course to become Level 2 Water Chemists, having trained 25 volunteers in the 5-day course over the past three years. I work to integrate the Little Miami Saturday Stream Snapshot and the Mill Creek Watershed Water Quality Program with our Great Miami Program, covering most of the streams in Hamilton County, Ohio. We worked with Butler County Stormwater District to create StreamBank, a database for all four volunteer labs in S.W. Ohio. We are housed in the University of Cincinnati Center for Field Studies in Miami Whitewater Park.

Secondly, Rivers Unlimited, in a typical year, participates in 20+ cleanups, educational canoe trips, and live stake plantings down the Great Miami, Mill Creek, and Little Miami Rivers. We, along with our partner organizations the Mill Creek Yacht Club, Little Miami Watershed Network, and Clean Sweep of the Great Miami among others, remove tons of trash, tires, shopping carts, log jams, plastic bags, and bottles from our area rivers. This year we won a grant from Ohio DNR to purchase another trailer of 8 canoes plus two additional Old Town Discovery canoes. We work with many organizations on rivers south of Dayton, OH.

Finally, Aaron Rourke has had to leave his position as President of Rivers Unlimited to continue the work begun by our founder, Mike Fremont, promoting the Scenic Rivers program as the Ohio Department of Natural Resources SW Ohio Scenic River Manager. Before taking this position and while still with RU, Aaron helped with the purchase of a Woodland Mound Village that will become an ancillary to the World Heritage Site devoted to many Woodland Moundbuilders and Fort Ancient in Central and Western Ohio around Chillicothe. Through the work of Aaron and many others, Pymatuning Creek was recently designated as a Scenic River, while Paint Creek and its tributaries Rocky Fork, Rattlesnake and North Fork stand on the verge of Scenic River designation.

We have lost contact with some of you in this period of transition, but I hope you come back as supporters of Rivers Unlimited, a truly unique water quality group, the oldest in Ohio, with a magnificent history under Mike Fremont for 40 years.

We are small, diversified, and productive and a tax-exempt non-profit. When you give to RU, know that your generosity is more than matched by the commitment and energy of our many volunteers.

Encouraging your support,

Michael C. Miller
President, Rivers Unlimited

www.riversunlimited.org
GETTING TO KNOW RU

Meet Jess

Focus: Little Miami River, Partnership with Little Miami Watershed Network

My name is Jess Evans. I have been a volunteer for Rivers Unlimited since 2009. Today I am the Treasurer for RU and assist with organizing river clean-ups with the Little Miami Watershed Network.

Each year, RU joins Little Miami Watershed Network in the June Cleanup on the Little Miami River. RU provides canoes, equipment and gear to remove tires and trash for a designated 3 mile section of the river. On average, volunteers for the June cleanup remove 2,380 pounds of trash and 87 tires out of the river per year. In 2020, due to the pandemic, RU volunteers did a land-based “Do It Yourself” cleanup along the Little Miami River, pulling 8 tires and 2,000 pounds of trash out of the river.

However, in October of 2020, Rivers Unlimited did take canoes to the October cleanup on the Little Miami River. Pfizer volunteers used RU canoes to paddle from Fairground Rd bridge to Glen Thompson Reserve on the Little Miami River with the goal to remove as many tires as possible. They removed 38 tires and collected 200 lbs of trash.

Even with the restrictions and uncertainties with the COVID-19 pandemic, Rivers Unlimited and Little Miami Watershed Network were determined to keep the rivers of Ohio in the forefront of their minds.

While 2021 is still a year of uncertainty, Rivers Unlimited and Little Miami Watershed Network are again working towards cleaning the Little Miami River. The June Cleanup will be a “Do It Yourself” event between June 12 and June 26, but we plan to offer RU canoes on Sunday, June 20 to anyone who wants to get on the river and pick up trash. Registration for this cleanup will open May 1. To register, go to www.littlemiamiwatershednetwork.org.

Additionally, Rivers Unlimited will be at the October cleanup on the Little Miami River in 2021. The date has not been determined yet, but Pfizer always comes through with a “boatload” of volunteers to help remove tires from the river.

Join us on the Little Miami River in June. Let’s make a difference for all Southwestern Ohio communities.

RESTORATION

Live Stake Harvesting/Planting

Focus: Multi-watershed

Partners: The Ohio River Foundation and Hamilton County Soil & Water Conservation District

Eroded sections along the Little Miami, Great Miami, Mill Creek and O’Bannon Creek have been identified as places where restoration efforts would be beneficial. These efforts entail harvesting cuttings of small tree branches and then planting 10,000 to 15,000 of these “live stakes”. Once the live stakes take root and become established, they will help reduce further streambank erosion. With the reduction of sediment from the eroded soil, water quality will improve and wildlife habitat will increase.

To harvest the live stakes, small branches, approximately 2’ long and ½” to 1” diameter, will be cut from mature, dormant trees already growing near our waterways. The live stakes will be kept dormant until the weather and stream conditions at the restoration sites are appropriate for planting.

Live stakes are planted in areas where riparian tree saplings would help stabilize the stream banks. Sites for planting vary from loose soil to gravel and rock. Planting techniques range from simply pushing the live stake in the ground, to pounding an iron stake in the rocky ground to create a pilot hole. The live stakes need to be installed in the riverbank where the in-ground end of the cutting will remain moist until they establish roots.

Health and safety for our volunteers is a priority. The weather and river conditions along with the guidelines for safe social interaction can dictate the extent of certain activities or the need to change event dates.

Dates/locations on front page. Preregister at ohioriverfdn.org
Queen of the Stream
(aka, Carp of the Mill Creek)
by: Andy Sutthoff

There are many descriptors of the Mill Creek, but rarely will one hear “fishery” among these. In fact, when I mention in conversation that I spend any time near the Mill Creek, I often receive incredulous looks, which question my mental stability or, at best, my judgment. Many people cannot fathom that the small, urban stream flowing through Cincinnati and Hamilton and Butler Counties has any catchable fish, let alone large catchable fish. The Mill Creek has had a long history of suffering from industrial pollution, physical degradation and sewage contamination, but things are changing.

Through aggressive advocacy, stronger regulation and habitat restoration, the resilient Mill Creek is making a comeback. This is certainly evident by the number of different game fish now found in its waters. Largemouth bass, panfish, channel catfish, suckerfish and the occasional hybrid striped bass now call the Mill Creek home. But perhaps the crown jewel of the Mill Creek is the common carp, a fish with its own unsavory history in this country that’s undergoing an image rehabilitation much like the creek where it resides.

In his seminal work, The Compleat Angler, the English writer, Izaak Walton, wrote that “the carp is the queen of the rivers, a stately, a good, and a very subtle fish…” Unfortunately, many American anglers do not share Walton’s esteemed opinion of the common carp. Anglers accuse carp of being a “trash” fish, destroying habitats and game fish nests with their notorious feeding habit of rooting through bottom sediment for food. The result, as it goes, is that entire fisheries suffer.

Perspective, though, has a way of changing one’s views. In the last seven or eight years, fly fishermen have discovered the common carp to be a challenge on the fly. Big, powerful, selective and willing to eat artificial flies, carp bring all the positive attributes of a respected game fish. They are also readily available in most waterways and can tolerate a wide range of environmental conditions. The common carp’s adaptability has helped it assimilate into the Mill Creek’s ecology.

Fly fishing for carp is primarily a sight fishing endeavor- a major reason anglers find it challenging. Few things in angling are more exciting, and potentially maddening, than presenting a fly to a large carp. It requires stealth, casting accuracy, fly manipulation and, at times, a bit of luck. But when everything comes together, and a carp takes the fly, the ensuing battle is unlike anything many freshwater anglers will experience: bulldog-like headshakes, powerful, line stripping runs, and pure, unmitigated strength. Should you ever find yourself in this fortunate circumstance, you’ll be a carp fan for life- whether or not you actually land the fish.

Many people have conjured images of fly fishing as a gentlemanly sport, catching beautiful trout on idyllic rivers surrounded by some of the most beautiful places in nature. Fly fishing for carp on the Mill Creek, by contrast, is much less idyllic and not so gentlemanly, but it does offer the thrill and challenge of stalking large, smart fish in tight quarters.

For this reason, most fly casting performed on the Mill Creek is short and targeted to minimize snagging and scaring fish. A “long” cast may be 30 feet, if the terrain behind you permits it.

One has to recognize active feeding behavior to successfully catch carp from the Mill Creek. As I mentioned before, fly fishing for carp is a sight fishing experience, which means most of your opportunities will come from shallow water. Look for feeding fish to be rooting around in the bottom sediment for aquatic worms and insects or searching rock piles for wayward crayfish. The most catchable fish will have their heads down and their tails up, methodically working through the sediment, often leaving a mud trail in their wake. Carp that are not actively feeding or appear to be sunning themselves are low percentage fish. It’s best to move on and find more promising targets...

... Want to hear more about my experiences and methods for landing carp on the fly in the Mill Creek? Stay tuned for the Spring Issue of the newsletter.

www.riversunlimited.org