



For Immediate Release

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CONTACT: Courtney Mahronich Vita, Director Trail Development and Government Relations, Friends of the Riverfront. Email: courtney@friendsoftheriverfront.org Phone: 412-260-6287

Area Organizations Host River Paddle Event for Elected Officials to Call Attention to the Allegheny River's Economic Promise

Organizers Point Out Potential for Reduced Funding for Lock System Could Hamper Regional Development and Recreation

Pittsburgh, PA – On Friday, August 23, three regional organizations and two state agencies – Friends of the Riverfront (Friends), the Port of Pittsburgh Commission (Port of Pitt) and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC), along with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PA Fish and Boat)– jointly hosted an on-river outing for regional elected officials aimed at raising awareness around the Allegheny River's economic and recreational impact on the region.

The on-river event, which consisted of invited attendees kayaking or riding on powered boats from Springdale borough to Harmar Township, while passing through the C.W Bill Young Lock (Lock 3), was an effort to demonstrate the potential for economic and recreational development on the river.

As the Allegheny River has had less commercial river traffic over the last few decades, the funding for needed infrastructure repairs and maintenance has also declined. Most of the region's locks, including the eight locks on the Allegheny, are well past their 50-year life span and some are approaching 100 years of service. The locks on the Allegheny River see an average of about four million tons of activity per year, far lower than those on the Ohio and Monongahela.

As a result, locks on the Allegheny River are now considered "low use" or "low volume" facilities. This status means that reductions in the hours of lock operation could occur. A reduction in lock operation could mean watercraft might have to wait a significant amount of time to move between pools on the Allegheny River.

To address this, the Save The Allegheny River initiative, or STAR, was formed. The initiative counts SPC, Port of Pitt, Friends, the Allegheny Regional Development Corporation and many other community-based organizations as members. They have been working with federal legislators who are diligently working to support initiatives that benefit the region's rivers.



The event featured several speakers, including Sen. Lindsey Williams, (38th district), Rep. Mandy Steele (33rd district), SPC Executive Director Rich Fitzgerald, Port of Pitt's Public Relations Manager Matt Pavlosky, and Friends' Executive Director Kelsey Ripper.

Aside from the above, attendees included representatives from the office of Senator Bob Casey, State Representative Lindsay Powell (21st district) as well as from the office of Congresswoman Summer Lee (12th district), the office of Congressman Chris Deluzio (17th district), as well as many of boroughs and townships from across Allegheny County.

The Springdale to Harmar route highlighted an area that Friends of the Riverfront is currently developing as a new segment of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail and Water Trail. Running more than 35 miles, mostly along Allegheny County's riverfronts, the Three Rivers Heritage Trail is estimated to have had an economic impact of \$26.5 million in 2023.

Senator Lindsey Williams said, "a decrease in staffing of the locks along the Allegheny River would be absolutely devastating to our river communities and to every Pittsburgher who boats, kayaks, takes walks with their families, or recreates in any way along Pennsylvania's River of the Year. "

The Senator added, "at a time when the economic impact of outdoor recreation is only rising, we must at minimum maintain current staffing levels. I'm happy to be a part of the Save the Allegheny River coalition and enjoyed spending time with my colleagues on the water this morning."

"Protecting the Allegheny River is one of the most important pursuits today. This river is the key to economic opportunity for our river towns in the Valley, and today was a valuable opportunity to see what is at stake, and why we must all work together to ensure that the Save the Allegheny Initiative is successful," said Representative Mandy Steele. "As Representative of the Allegheny Valley, these organizations have my full support."

"This kayak paddle event is a perfect example of our region coming together to better understand the issues that impact our rivers," said Rich Fitzgerald, Executive Director of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission.

"We had state agencies, elected officials, lawmakers' staff members, and community organizations all represented here today to not only experience kayaking firsthand through one of the locks, but to talk about the ways we can continue to work together to support initiatives that will preserve and enhance the vitality of our rivers," he added.



Mary Ann Bucci, the Executive Director of the Port of Pittsburgh, pointed out that anything that impacts the Allegheny will reduce the benefits our region derives from the entire river system.

“The Allegheny River is an integral part of the whole river system. Everyone needs to understand the system’s full benefits, which include drinking water, hydropower, and recreational boating. They’re all important to our region’s economic growth,” she said.

Bucci added, “the rivers are a transit system. Take the Allegheny away, it’s like breaking a highway apart – it isn’t going to work.”

Kelsey Ripper, executive director for Friends of the Riverfront, emphasized that access to the Allegheny River is crucial to Friends’ vision – and the region’s economic future.

“We were founded to reconnect people to the rivers after decades of being separated from them by heavy industry. We have seen communities rebuild their relationships to the rivers and as a result, enjoy greatly expanded recreational opportunities that have themselves become a crucial part of southwestern Pennsylvania’s economic story.”

She added, “we’ve made so much progress, and any impact on the Allegheny’s infrastructure risks diminishing that.”

The Allegheny River drains more than 12,000 square miles, and runs for 325 miles. In 2024, The Allegheny River was voted Pennsylvania’s River of the Year.

Friends of the Riverfront is a 501(c)3 dedicated to building and maintaining the Three Rivers Heritage Trail and Water Trail; the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission is a regional transportation and economic development organization; and the Port of Pittsburgh Commission was created to promote the commercial use and development of the inland waterway system. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) is a state department tasked with maintaining and protecting state parks, managing state forest land, providing information on the state’s ecological and geologic resources, and establishing community conservation partnerships to benefit rivers, trails, greenways, local parks and recreation, regional heritage parks, open space, and natural areas. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is an independent commission that protects, conserves, and enhances the Commonwealth’s aquatic resources and provides fishing and boating opportunities.

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CONTACT INFORMATION



Friends: see above

Port of Pitt: Matt Pavlosky, Public Relations Manager. 412-201-7335 (office); matt@portpitt.com

SPC: Caitlin O'Connor, Director of Public Relations & Communication Initiatives. 412-719-5366; coconnor@spcregion.org>