

The Great American Outdoors Act is providing crucial funding – up to \$6.65 billion over five years – to fix our national parks' crumbling roads, decaying buildings, outdated water systems and many more repair needs. This bill, along with other funding sources, is ensuring our parks can continue to welcome millions of visitors each year and protect the natural and cultural resources that tell our nation's history.

Cuyahoga Valley

NATIONAL PARK

A 33,000-acre green jewel in northeastern Ohio, nestled between the gritty centers of Akron and Cleveland, Cuyahoga Valley National Park is sometimes described as an urban park. But well before the land was set aside as a National Recreation Area in 1974, locals have been fighting to preserve and rebuild the area's wildness. Today, the U-shaped Cuyahoga River—infamous for catching fire from staggering pollution in the 1960s—is vastly cleaner and healthier.

The park now protects 22 miles of the river and thousands of acres of its watershed. Wildlife has restored the space in miraculous ways. Visitors enjoy the return of nesting bald eagles and delight in the heronry—where sycamore trees bustle with the activity of dozens of great blue heron nests. Kayakers paddle on a water trail, children enjoy the scenic railroad, and people bike and stroll on the beloved Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail, 22 miles of which run through the park. The historic towpath, once a key player in our inland waterway system, is now used by 1.5 million visitors each year, including for cross-

country skiing in the winter. It's a critical asset that visitors rely on for an enjoyable and safe trail experience. But the region is located at the bottom of the watershed, so storm water runoff quickly raises the river level, and an increasing intensity of storms means more flooding. "That's the nature of having infrastructure near the river," said Community Engagement Supervisor Pamela Barnes. The constant challenge, she said, is maintaining a resource people enjoy while restoring and managing a natural resource so powerful that—left to its own devices—it would have swallowed up the towpath ages ago.



BY THE NUMBERS:



\$21.1 million

investment from the GAOA to repair projects



1.5 million

annual visitors



22 miles

of trail

PHOTOS: Cover: ©Kenneth Keifer | Shutterstock
Back Left: ©Michael G Marshall | Shutterstock
Back Right: ©Jeffrey M. Frank | Shutterstock

THE CHALLENGE: Eroded areas along the towpath are negatively impacting the park’s most important asset.

Flash floods exacerbate riverbank erosion. Excessive erosion can lead to unsafe conditions, requiring emergency repairs and closures. Closures, of course, limit visitor access to the popular towpath and the railroad—which runs parallel to the path—two of the park’s most popular amenities. As part of a larger trail network, these closures affect visitors beyond park boundaries as well. In some areas, if left unchecked, bank erosion could cut through the towpath embankment, allowing the watered section of the Ohio and Erie Canal



to drain. Bank erosion also causes increased sedimentation of the waterway and causes loss of riverside vegetation and riparian habitat, which will only worsen over time.

THE PROJECT

Through an investment that is approximately \$21.1 million, the

Visitors enjoy the return of nesting bald eagles and delight in the heronry—where sycamore trees bustle with the activity of dozens of great blue heron nests.

Great American Outdoors Act will stabilize the Cuyahoga riverbank along the Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath Trail, along the Valley Railway, and along a connector trail in the town of Peninsula, from the Towpath Trail to the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad. Stabilization will utilize natural rock rip rap and bioengineering techniques. This project also includes clearing the banks, placing rip rap, rebuilding banks, planting native vegetation to stabilize the soil, remediation of the construction site and equipment access routes, and construction of a wall along the connector trail in Peninsula to protect the trail and railroad. The eroded areas will be repaired using the sustainable guidelines of the park’s Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Riverbank Management.

THE IMPACT

A long-term repair of eroded riverbank areas will reduce annual operation and maintenance costs by reducing the amount of temporary patching and repairs

required along the edge of the trail—particularly after major rain events. Making holistic repairs through this project will be less expensive than reacting when more erosion occurs. Once repaired, the trail will no longer be subject to regular damage due to floods at these locations, reducing



unscheduled and emergency repairs. After project completion, the facilities and systems addressed by this project should not require major rehabilitation or replacement for the next 40 years. By reducing erosion of the riverbanks and providing increased riparian habitat, water quality and aquatic habitat will improve. And for the million and a half visitors who use the towpath annually, repair of the eroded riverbank areas will have direct and immediate positive impacts, including enhancing visitor safety.

The Great American Outdoors Act is successfully repairing infrastructure at hundreds of parks across the country. However, with a nearly \$22 billion backlog, much more is needed. We urge Congress to extend the Legacy Restoration Fund for an additional five years.

Preserving Our Past.



NPCA.ORG

Protecting Our Future.