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Schuylkill River Named Pennsylvania's 2014 River of the Year

Schuylkill River Greenway Association to Receive \$10,000 Leadership Grant

Once among Pennsylvania's most heavily-polluted waterways, the Schuylkill River in southeastern Pennsylvania has undergone a dramatic recovery and has been voted the 2014 Pennsylvania River of the Year.

Four other rivers were nominated finalists. They were: Kiskiminetas-Conemaugh rivers in the southwest; Ohio in the west; Brodhead Creek Watershed in the northeast; and the West Branch of the Susquehanna in the north central section of the state.

The general public was invited to vote online from Nov. 25 – Dec. 27, with a total of 5,527 votes being registered. Final tallies in voting overseen by the Pa. Organization of Watersheds and Rivers (POWR) showed the Schuylkill River receiving 43 percent; Kiski-Conemaugh Rivers, 21 percent; Ohio River, 12 percent; Brodhead Creek Watershed, 12 percent; and West Branch of the Susquehanna, 12 percent.

"The number of waterways nominated, coupled with a vote tally that increases every year, showcases both the unique diversity of Pennsylvania's rivers and the strong community allegiances that protect and enhance them," said Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Ellen Ferretti. "All five of these waterways have winning qualities that their supporters recognize and respect."

The winning applicant in the competition, Schuylkill River Greenway Association, will receive a \$10,000 Leadership Grant to help fund River of the Year activities. The association manages the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area.

"We are elated to have the Schuylkill be selected as Pennsylvania River of the Year for 2014," said Schuylkill River Greenway Association Executive Director Kurt Zwikl. "We are particularly pleased to be named because in last year's balloting we lost out by less than two hundred votes.

"We would like to thank the Schuylkill River Development Corp. and Montgomery County, who also nominated the Schuylkill and will partner with us in 2014 to bring some outstanding river programming to southeast Pennsylvania. It is a statewide honor to be chosen, and our thanks go out to all of the individuals and organizations that endorsed us and voted for the Schuylkill."

This is the second time the Schuylkill has been named River of the Year, having last received the distinction in 1999.

The organization plans to integrate the River of the Year message into its existing programs, including the Schuylkill River Sojourn; newer pedal/paddle events; and a bike tour series on the adjacent Schuylkill River Trail. Also, POWR and DCNR will work with the greenway association to create a free, commemorative poster celebrating the Schuylkill as the 2014 Pa. River of the Year.

The Schuylkill stretches 128 miles from Schuylkill County headwaters to its confluence with the Delaware River in Philadelphia. On the brink of becoming a wasteland, the river was targeted by the state in the Schuylkill River Project, beginning in 1945. The first major government-funded environmental cleanup saw millions of tons of coal culm dredged from the river.

In roughly half a century, one of the nation's most polluted bodies of water has improved to a point where it now is a popular recreational destination for paddlers, trail users and anglers. The Schuylkill is a source of drinking water for 1.5 million people, and waterfront communities along its corridor now look to the river to bolster community revitalization efforts.

"POWR would like to commend everyone for their support for the nominated rivers, especially for the strong showing of support for the Schuylkill River," said POWR Vice President Janet Sweeney. "The River of the Year program is a wonderful opportunity to showcase all of the nominated rivers and the great work being done in Pennsylvania communities on these valuable resources. We are excited about this opportunity to promote the successes and challenges facing the Schuylkill River, as well as all of Pennsylvania's waterways."

POWR administers the River of the Year program with funding from DCNR. Presented annually since 1983, the 2013 designation was awarded to the Monongahela River in southwest Pennsylvania. Each year, finalists are determined based on each waterway's conservation needs and successes, as well as celebration plans should the nominee be voted River of the Year.

Part of those plans include a River of the Year sojourn, which is just one of many paddling trips supported by DCNR and POWR each year. This water-based journey down the winning river will include canoeists, kayakers and others to raise awareness of the environmental, recreational, tourism and heritage values of rivers.

For more information, visit www.pawatersheds.org. To learn more about the River of the Year program, the nominated waterways, and past winners visit www.pariveroftheyear.org.