



Boone County Ohio River Initiative

Summary Report

Prepared November 2024



BCCDKY
Boone County Conservation
District, Kentucky



THE **BOONE**
CONSERVANCY



NPS-RTCA

Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

Introduction

The Boone Conservancy (TBC) and the **Boone County Conservation District (BCCDKY)** requested technical planning assistance from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance Program to provide recommendations to advance the conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities along the Ohio River in Boone County, Kentucky. The vision for the Boone County Ohio River Initiative project is to explore potential ideas to improve the natural resources and augment waterway recreation opportunities in riverfront communities and riverbank park sites.

This report is an initial summary of recommendations for community leaders to consider for enhancing the natural resources along the Boone County waterways. We recommend that the community leaders evaluate which ideas can be implemented in the short-term and which ideas should be considered for the long-term. It is our hope that these recommendations will help guide the planning process for additional conservation and close-to-home outdoor recreation enhancements.

National Park Service Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance Program

The National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA) supports locally-led conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the United States. NPS-RTCA program assists communities and public land managers in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors. This free technical planning assistance is available to communities, non-profit organizations, and tribes through an application process. NPS-RTCA staff are invited to assist communities with their outdoor recreation visions. This organization works with communities to ensure everyone has safe and equitable access to close-to-home outdoor experiences and places.

Background

Boone County is home to some of the most unique environmental and geologic features in Kentucky, including 43 miles of Ohio River frontage. Despite this, only a small percentage of the county's natural areas are available for public recreation, and there are very few points of access to the Ohio River and its many tributaries. Additionally, Boone County's rich natural and human heritage is strongly connected to the Ohio River, yet many exceptional natural areas, historic sites, river towns, and locations - such as Underground Railroad points - are difficult to access.

The Boone County Ohio River Initiative (BCORI) was formed by a collaborative group of community organizations and stakeholders in 2020 and continues to hold regular committee meetings to this day. The goals of BCORI are to:

- a.) Highlight and preserve natural and cultural resources along the Ohio River
- b.) Increase accessibility to Ohio River resources
- c.) Foster proper management of public lands
- d.) Support river town economies



BCORI consists of members representing the following organizations:

- The Boone Conservancy
- Boone County Conservation District
- Boone County Fiscal Court
- Boone County Parks
- Boone County GIS
- Boone County Public Library
- Northern Kentucky Bird Club
- Rabbit Hash Historical Society
- Petersburg community members
- Northern Kentucky Fly Fishers
- Boone County Water Rescue

A joint application for BCORI to receive a technical assistance grant from the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program was submitted by TBC and BCCDKY in February 2021 and approved for Fiscal Year 2023. A continuation of assistance was approved for Fiscal Year 2024. Initial meetings and site visits with NPS-RTCA staff were held on August 30, 2021, and June 15, 2023, to help define the scope of assistance, review the riverfront communities and parklands, and to develop a strategy for community input.

The following project goals for the Boone County Ohio River Initiative/NPS-RTCA project were identified during the initial meetings with the project partners:

- Identify and prioritize conservation opportunities along the Ohio River and its tributaries
- Explore potential water trail opportunities for the creeks and the Ohio River in Boone County
- Increase awareness of and connectivity between river towns, recreation areas, and cultural resources
- Protect the natural, cultural, and historic resources on the 43 miles of Ohio River frontage in Boone County
- Seek community input on the opportunities and challenges for Ohio River riverfront towns and riverbank park sites.

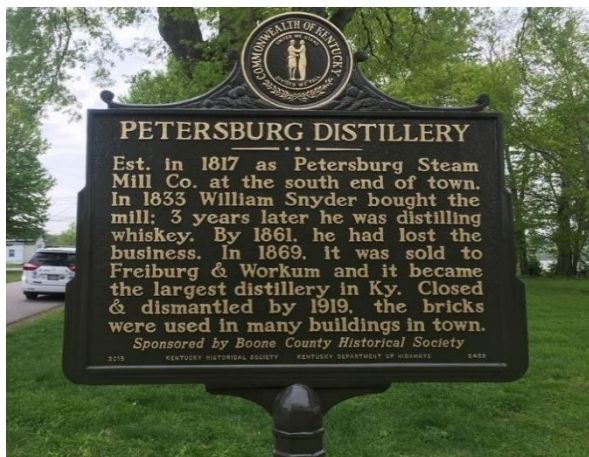


Boone County's 43 miles of Ohio River Frontage

Boone County Ohio River Historic Preservation

The Ohio River played a significant role in the development of Boone County throughout its 225-year history. In the early years of Boone County, the Ohio River was essential to travel, supplies, and communication. In Antebellum Boone County, the river played a critical role in the struggle for freedom for hundreds of enslaved who crossed the river as part of the Underground Railroad seeking their way north. River towns such as Constance, Taylorsport, Petersburg, Belleview, McVile, Rabbit Hash, Piatt's Landing, and Hamilton were communities where families and businesses thrived throughout the 19th century. Today, many of these river towns are a faded reflection of their vibrant past.

Petersburg is best known for its historic distillery, which dominated the whiskey market throughout the Ohio River Valley, and its Fort Ancient Village site. Belleview is proud of its veterans who served their country faithfully for generations; just down the road, McVile was once the home of Lock and Dam 38 where you can still see the remnants of the lock house. Rabbit Hash, the Center of the Universe, is home to the Rabbit Hash General Store and their dog mayors. Finally, Boone's Landing leads to Big Bone Lick State Historic Site and the birthplace of American vertebrate paleontology. The wealth of history of Boone County's river communities adds value for visitors of the river shore and developing heritage tourism will bring opportunities for economic development and new energy into these proud and historic river towns.



The BCORI committee, guided by the technical assistance of the Boone County GIS department, compiled a list of significant cultural and natural points of interest along the river.

River Mile	Point of Interest	Description
484	Giles Conrad Park	Recreation area
492	Ohio River Conservation Corridor	Conservation area
493.5	USS Sachem ruins	Historic POI
495	Petersburg Park boat ramp	Public access
495	Historic downtown Petersburg	River Town
496.5	Aurora Ferry	Public access
500	Split Rock Conservation Area	Conservation area
500	Woolper Creek	Tributary
502	Middle Creek, Dinsmore, and Boone Cliffs Parks	Conservation area
502	Conservancy Park	Conservation Area
503	Historic downtown Belleview	River Town
504.5	Middle Creek	Tributary
506	Rabbit Hash ferry	Public Access
506	Historic Rabbit Hash	River Town
512	Lick Creek	Tributary
513.5	Gunpowder Creek	Tributary
513.5	The Knot Marine	Public Access
514.5	Landing Creek	Tributary
515	Big Bone Lick State Park	Historic POI
516.5	Boone's Landing	Public Access
516.5	Big Bone Creek	Tributary
517	Hartig Park (Gallatin County)	Recreation area

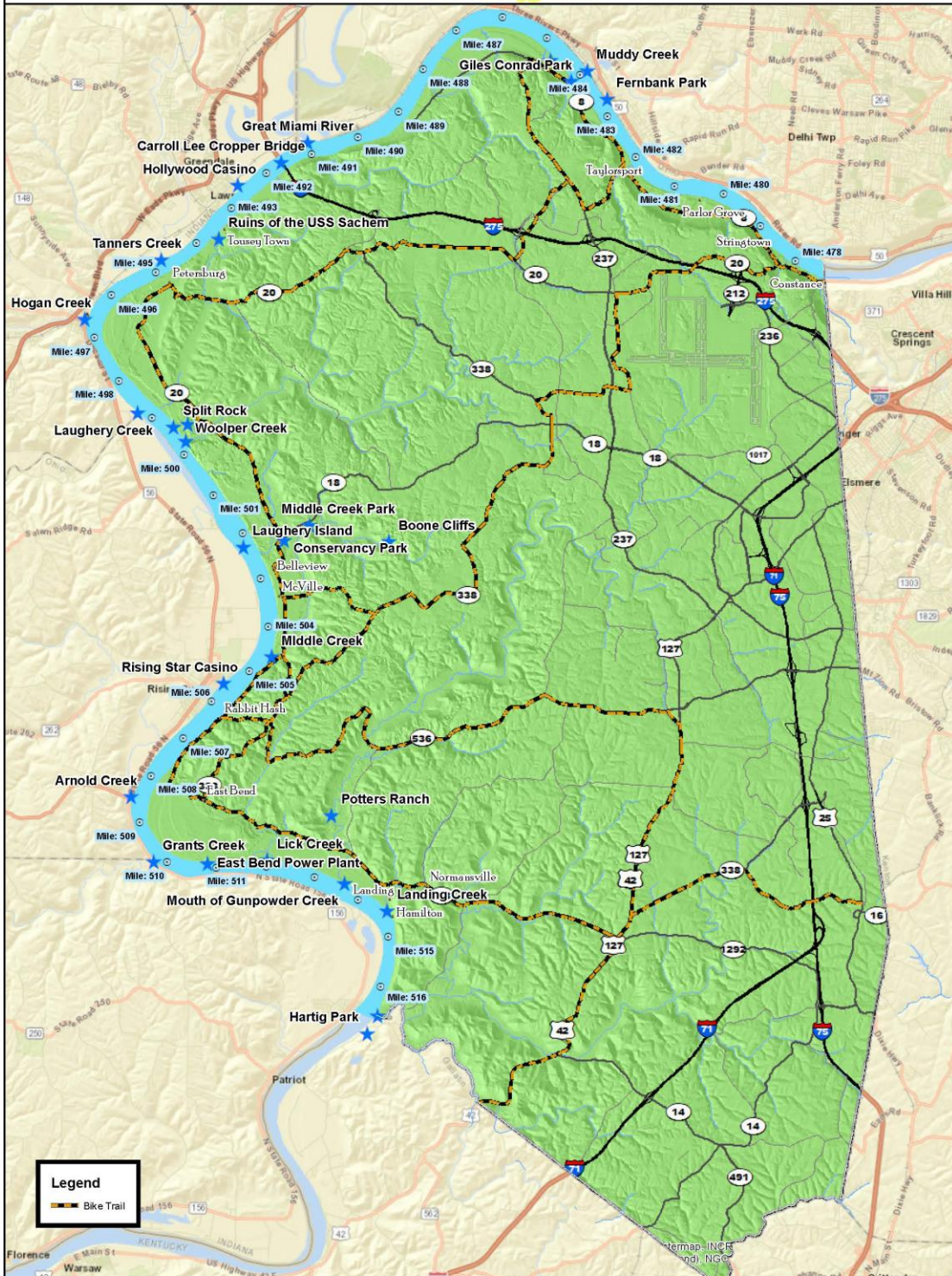
Recreational Water Trail Planning Considerations

- Boone County has 43 miles of frontage and three riverfront communities on the Ohio River.
- There are limited public parks on the river and very few public water access sites on the Ohio River.
- More public access sites will be needed in Boone County to create a viable local water trail program on all of the Ohio River frontage in Boone County.
- There are sections of the Ohio River and the existing inland creeks in Boone County that currently offer a great paddling experience with public access. BCORI has explored several one-day and overnight paddling experiences that include the Ohio River, its tributaries, and the points of interest in Boone County.
- The creeks offer safe paddling when the winds are a challenge on the large Ohio River waterway.

Water Trail Planning for Amenities	
Amenity	Desired Distance Approx. river miles
Vehicle access & parking	6 - 8
Camping	10
Bathrooms	4 - 6
Potable water	16
Trash bins	4 - 6
Picnic tables, bbq pits/fire rings	6 - 8

Boone County Ohio River Points of Interest

www.boonecountygis.com



Community Input Process

The planning process for community input was based on planning, hosting, and facilitating workshops in the river town communities. Total meeting attendance totaled over 50 people.

Initial community input workshop meeting dates:

- Petersburg Workshop September 21, 2022
- Rabbit Hash Workshop December 1, 2022
- Belleview Workshop February 1, 2023
- Boone's Landing Workshop February 2, 2023

Workshop participants were asked to brainstorm ideas related to water recreation, tourism, and natural resources under the categories of Opportunities & Challenges (see pages 7-12).



Follow up meetings were held in Petersburg and Rabbit Hash in November 2023. During follow-up meetings, initial concept plans developed by NPS-RTCA staff were presented, and participants further reviewed opportunities and challenges for their communities. In addition to feedback on concept plans, another result of these meetings was that several people from each community were identified as volunteers to become more involved in BCORI committee meetings.

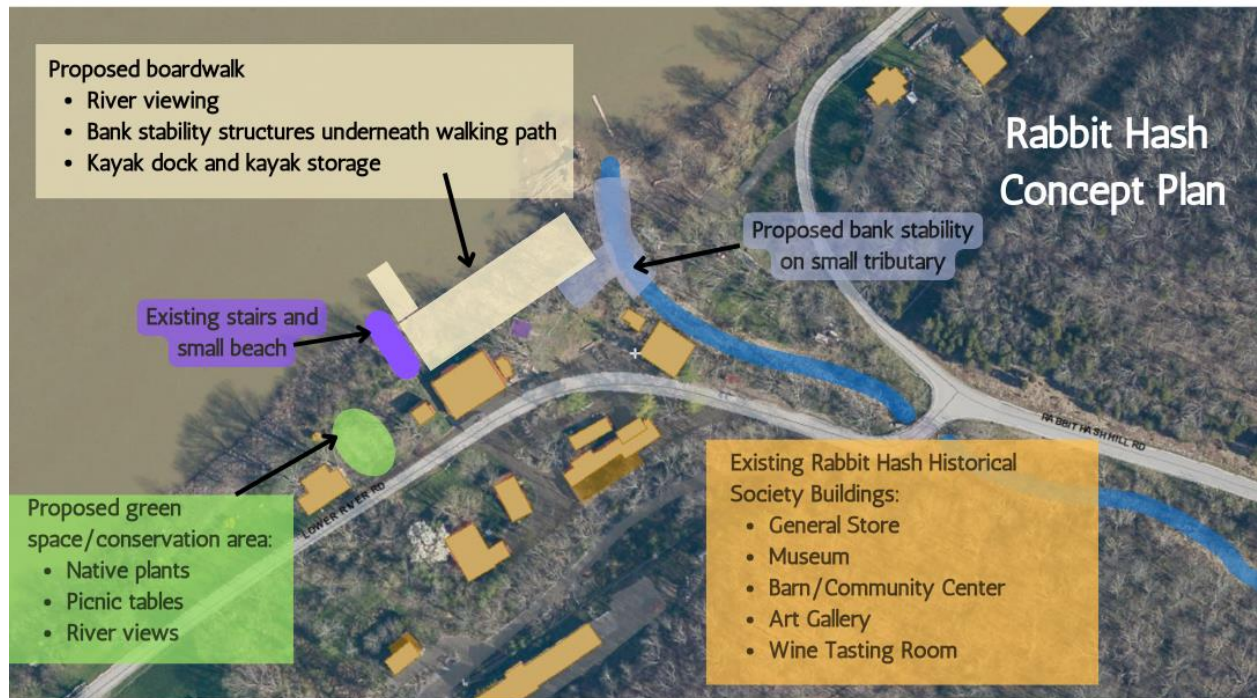
The BCORI committee also collected community input through an online survey. A total of 43 people participated in the survey between 2022-2023. The tables below highlight relevant results from the survey.

What are your recreational interests in or along the Ohio River?	
Paddling	72%
Wildlife	67%
Visiting River Towns	60%
Fishing	60%
Boating	21%
Swimming	19%
Running	2%

What are the barriers to participating in recreational activities along the Ohio River?	
Access	49%
Cleanliness/Pollution	16%
Knowledge recreational opportunities	12%
Amenities	7%
Safety and/or barge traffic	7%
Personal barriers, such as age or proximity	5%
Don't own a boat	2%

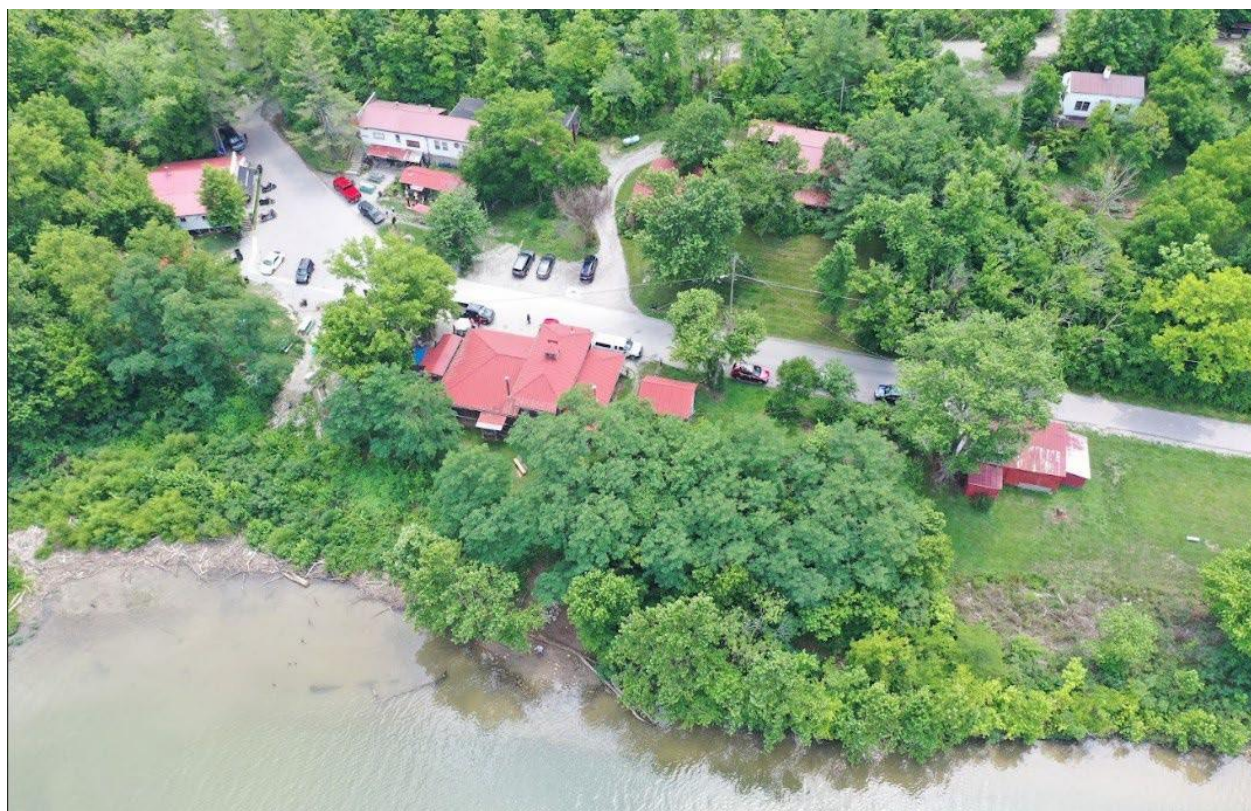
What is the importance of protecting the Ohio River?	
Ecosystem Health	93%
Recreation	74%
Water Source	67%
Historical Significance	63%
Transportation	35%
Agriculture	23%

Rabbit Hash Concept Plan and Community Feedback

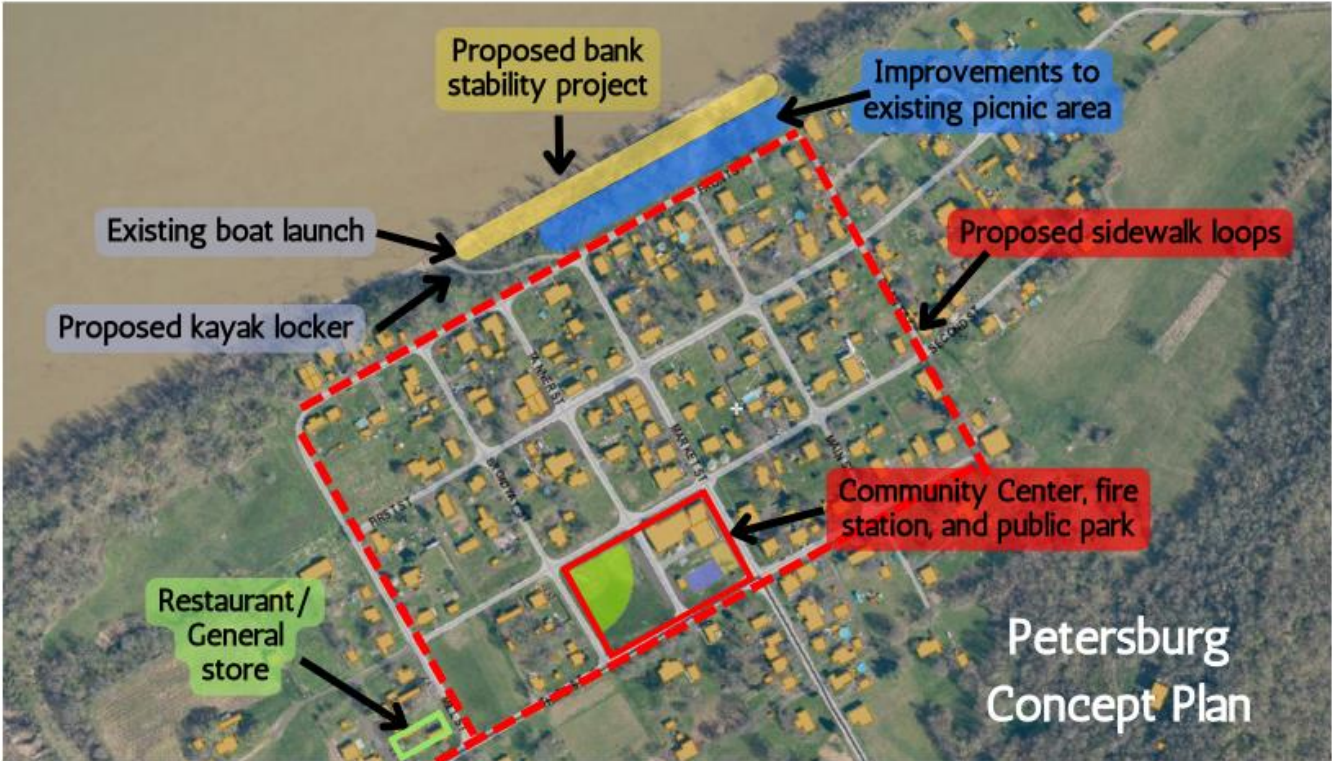


Opportunities	Challenges
Access to Rabbit Hash from the River	River and creek erosion
Boardwalk (funding)	Need more access ramps
Walking Trails	Funding
Additional public access to the River	Erosion along the river
Paddlers	Information sharing with the public
Duke Energy/East Bend access – potential partnership and river access	Insurance
Ferry landing site bike rental and parking	Landowner cooperation
Giles Conrad	Erosion from ferry
Duke Energy wetland access	Commercial river traffic
KY Fish and Wildlife	
Bellevue	
Boone County Parks Master Plan	
Creeks and Tributaries	
Local press – NKY Tribune	
River Ridge Park – rustic camping, laundry, and store facilities (upstream from Rabbit Hash)	

Aerial Images of Rabbit Hash Shoreline



Petersburg Concept Plan and Community Feedback

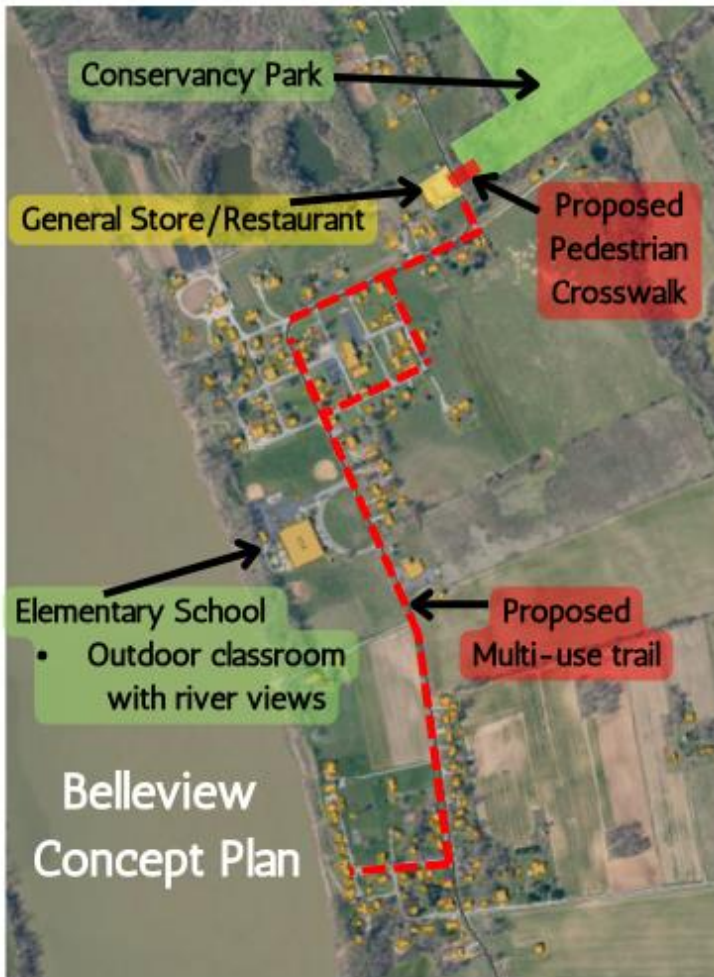


Opportunities	Challenges
Hiking	No natural gas
Fishing	Sewer
Butterfly gardens	Space – parking
Biking	Traffic flow
Kayaking	The County
Camping	Disrupt the ecosystem
Partnerships/gravel companies	Dirt bike trail
Water rescue	
History – cultural resources	
Heritage tourism	
Dirt bike trail	
Opera house	
Race track/distillery ruins	
Horse back riding	

Aerial Images of Petersburg Shoreline



Bellevue Concept Plan and Community Feedback



Conservancy Park - Bellevue



Aerial image of Bellevue

Opportunities

Chuck's Eatery
Conservancy Park (Acres of land and trails)
Culture and history (stories unique to the community to be captured)
Bicycle touring (need share the road signs)
Mountain biking (former gravel pits)
Sidewalk/trail (link housing, apartments, school, Chuck's, and Conservancy Park)
Department of Transportation crossings

Boone's Landing Community Feedback

Challenges

Riverbank erosion
River safety

Economics

Trespassing
Bicycle touring – traffic safety
Liability

Opportunities	Challenges
Jane's Saddlebag restaurant	Ryle's Road closed
Education	Safety infrastructure improvements
Events coordination – shared parking	Traffic
Camping	Trespassing
Fuel station	Few boat ramps
Additional boat ramp	Non-boaters
Paddle ramp	Parking
Air B&B	Dredge mouth of the creek
3D archery trails	Paddle and motorboat conflicts

Ohio River Conservation Corridor

The Boone Conservancy plans to acquire and preserve 368 acres along 1.25 miles of the Ohio River in Northern Kentucky. By doing so, it will establish a protected riparian corridor for native plant and animal species, linking to 3,000 acres that are already safeguarded across the river in Indiana and Ohio. This distinctive area features a large canopy forest, streams, wetlands, endangered species, and significant historical and cultural resources, including ties to the Underground Railroad, important tribal sites, and Revolutionary War-era artifacts. The rapid pace of economic growth puts this property at significant risk of development.

Project outcomes include:

- Land preservation
- Cultural resource protection and reclamation
- Habitat restoration and connectivity for wildlife
- Endangered species protection
- Riparian corridor improvement and wetlands restoration
- Nature-based climate solutions
- Access to hiking & other outdoor recreation
- Paddle boating and fishing
- Community education



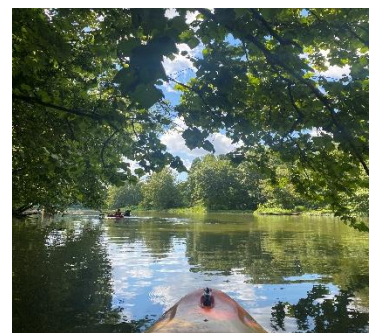
The success of this project is significant in that it will provide a unique location for Boone County community members to recreate and connect with nature, protect local historical points of interest, and serve as a connection to other environmentally sensitive areas in Indiana and Ohio.

Recreational Opportunities

BCORI committee members have worked to create unique outdoor recreation suggestions that could increase interaction and awareness for the Ohio River and its resources in Boone County. Below is a list of trip recommendations that could be promoted through local and regional tourism outlets. In addition to those listed, with proper planning, there is potential to develop future paddling and recreation opportunities in areas such as Lick Creek, Conrad Park, and Woolper Creek.

A Day in Petersburg

1. **Paddle to the Ghost Ship** – Launch kayaks from the Petersburg Park and paddle up the Ohio River to the historic U.S.S. Sachem, aka the “Ghost Ship” on Taylor Creek. Total mileage is around 3 miles and the roundtrip should take about 2.5 hours. Afterwards, enjoy a pizza or deli sandwich from Third Street Market & Café.
2. **Historic Tour** – Park at the Community Center and enjoy a self-guided tour of historic landmarks in downtown Petersburg such as the Boone County Distillery, Petersburg Cemetery, and “haunted” houses.
3. **Ohio River Conservation Corridor** – Launch a kayak from Petersburg Park and paddle up the Ohio River to the Ohio River Conservation Corridor park. Pack a lunch and enjoy a picnic or hike through the large canopy forest before returning back to town. Total paddling mileage is around 6 miles.



Paddling Gunpowder Creek and the Ohio River

1. **Explore the Tributary** – Rent a kayak from The Knot Marine and paddle up Gunpowder Creek – the largest Ohio River tributary in Boone County. Bring your fishing rod or binoculars and be prepared for wildlife sightings such as otter, herons, and turtles. When you return, grab dinner and a cold beverage from the Weather Oar Knot restaurant.
2. **Paddle to Big Bone** – Launch your kayak from The Knot Marine and paddle out to the mouth of Gunpowder Creek. Then, paddle down the Ohio River about 2 miles to the mouth of the Big South Fork and end your trip at Boone’s Landing or Hartig Park, which both offer primitive campsites. Total paddling mileage is around 4 miles.

Day Hiking in Belleview

1. **Spend the day at beautiful Conservancy Park.** This park includes a 1 mile birding trail, fishing in the pond, and a shelter for picnics. For an all-day adventure, consider hiking the connector path that leads to Middle Creek Park and Dinsmore Woods, or take a short drive to the trailhead at Boone Cliffs State Nature Preserve. If you need to fuel up after your hike, stop by Chuck's Store for a sandwich or a snack.



Rabbit Hash

1. **Connect with the River** – Launch your kayak from the small beach behind the museum and take a leisurely paddle up and down the shoreline. Watch the Aurora ferry float back and forth, the barges go by, or try to spot eagles and herons flying overhead. And of course, you can't leave Rabbit Hash without a bottle of pop from the general store or a visit with the dog mayor.



A Weekend at Boone's Landing

1. **A Day on the Water** – When you launch your motor boat or kayak from the boat ramp at Boone's Landing, you have access to several miles of water trails, including Big South Fork, Big Bone Creek, and the Ohio River. Watch for local wildlife or imagine what life was like for people who traveled to this area for the past 10,000 years.
2. **A Day on the Land** – While camping at Boone's Landing, take a short drive to visit Big Bone Lick State Historic Park and learn why this place is both called the Birthplace of Modern Paleontology and a stop on the Lewis and Clark National Park trail. When you get back, enjoy dinner at Jane's Saddlebag restaurant. To add to this trip, take a quick 20-minute paddle to Hartig Park and hike to the top for an excellent view of the Ohio River.



General Recommendations

- a. BCORI should continue to work with community members and stakeholders to identify projects that will conserve the natural resources, preserve the uniqueness of small river towns, and provide outdoor recreational opportunities for the region.
- b. Boone County Fiscal Court should prioritize the cultural, environmental, and historic aspects of the Ohio River and its surrounding communities and tributaries through park enhancements and by supporting grassroots efforts to implement new projects
- c. Projects that improve the accessibility of boat ramps, hiking trails, docks, as well as the walkability of river towns should be investigated
- d. BCORI should work with river towns to seek funding opportunities to pursue concept plans and other professional services in order to implement projects such as streambank stability and river access
- e. With the increased national attention on Ohio River conservation and recreation efforts through projects such as the Kentucky Ohio River Regional Recreation Association (KORRRA), the Ohio River Restoration Plan, the Ohio River Way, and others, Boone County should not miss the opportunity to participate in this significant initiative.
- f. Increased education and outreach through signage, events, and web-based media about recreational opportunities, the presence of historically significant landmarks, and the health of the Ohio River should be a collaborative effort between stakeholders.
- g. Opportunities to create new access points to the river, whether public or private, should be supported
- h. Consider the positive and negative impacts of increased traffic and visitors to residents of river communities
- i. Key points generated from community input should be investigated:
 - Rabbit Hash
 - Stabilize streambank
 - Create access and amenities for kayakers
 - Increase river views and expand picnic areas for visitors (example: boardwalk)
 - Support and encourage the Rabbit Hash Historical Society with project planning
 - Investigate opportunities for additional parking, transportation, and visitor amenities such as collaborating with the local campground and ferry
 - Belleview
 - Increase walkability from housing units to store and points of interest
 - Look for ways to provide river access
 - Follow through with improvements to Conservancy Park and create access to downtown Belleview
 - Foster a deeper connection to the Ohio River for students at the elementary school
 - Petersburg
 - Work with the County to make the best use of the Community Center
 - Stabilize streambank and increase native plant diversity at Petersburg Park
 - Increase signage to highlight the historic points of interest
 - Encourage community identify by supporting local festivals and events

- Boone's Landing
 - Maintain infrastructure for multiple water sports activities, including fishing, motor boating, and kayaking
 - Maintain and promote campground amenities for visitors
 - Create programs to educate the public about natural resources, historical landmarks including Big Bone State Historic Park, and water sports safety
 - Encourage day and overnight excursions by collaborating with Hartig Park, the Knot Marine, and other river-adjacent amenities in the region

The Boone County Ohio River Initiative believes that the adoption and implementation of these recommendations by the Boone County Fiscal Court, river town community leaders, and collaborative stakeholders will ultimately contribute to the health, wellness, and success of Boone County residents. BCORI will continue to meet regularly and work diligently with partners and stakeholders to continually review and update our goals and priorities.

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