

Shapiro Administration Honors Delaware River as Pennsylvania's 2025 River of the Year

DCNR celebrated the designation at Minisink Park, held alongside the 30th annual Delaware River Sojourn, highlighting the river's legacy, restoration, and impact on local communities.

The Delaware River has played a pivotal role in American history — from George Washington's famous crossing during the Revolutionary War to its role in powering the Industrial Revolution.

By DCNR

East Stroudsburg, PA — Today, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn joined the Pennsylvania Organization for Waterways and Rivers (POWR)(opens in a new tab) to celebrate the Delaware River's selection as Pennsylvania's 2025 River of the Year(opens in a new tab). The announcement was marked with a community festival at Minisink Park in Monroe County, held alongside the 30th annual Delaware River Sojourn.

The celebration welcomed both paddling participants and the general public for an afternoon of river-themed activities — including a River of the Year Paddle — live music, educational exhibits, and outdoor recreation.

“The River of the Year Festival is a powerful example of how we can bring communities together to celebrate and appreciate Pennsylvania's incredible waterways,” said DCNR Secretary Dunn. “With 28 designated water trails spanning more than 2,100 miles, our rivers are vital natural resources that connect people to nature, history, and recreation. The Delaware River, with its Wild and Scenic designation and role as a major trail corridor — a symbol of ecological restoration and regional pride.”

Once one of the most polluted rivers in the nation — so contaminated it blackened ship hulls — the Delaware River has undergone a dramatic recovery. It now boasts more National Wild and Scenic designations than any other river in the country and supplies drinking water to over 14 million people. It also holds deep historical significance, from George Washington's iconic crossing during the Revolutionary War to its role in powering the Industrial Revolution.

The Shapiro Administration remains committed to protecting Pennsylvania's natural resources — especially clean water. Administered by DCNR, Pennsylvania's Rivers Conservation Program(opens in a new tab) supports river restoration, water trail management, scenic river designations, and community engagement initiatives like River of the Year.

This is the third time the Delaware River has received the honor, following wins in 2002 and 2011. The designation is based on public voting — this year's contest garnered 8,037 total votes, with the Delaware River earning 2,962. The Youghiogheny River and Perkiomen Creek followed with 2,784 and 2,291 votes, respectively. POWR, an affiliate of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, administers the vote annually in partnership with DCNR.

“The Delaware River is more than just a waterway, it's a place where paddlers, families, and communities come together to celebrate the outdoors,” said Mark Zakutanski of the Appalachian Mountain Club and Chair of the Delaware River Sojourn Steering Committee. “The River of the Year designation adds an extra splash of excitement to this year's Delaware River Sojourn, welcoming everyone to experience the joy, beauty, and adventure that make the Delaware River a truly unforgettable place.”

The river is home to the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, one of the top 20 most-visited national park areas in the country. Additionally, many of its tributaries are currently under study for national protection under the Wild & Scenic Rivers program.

“POWR would like to extend heartfelt congratulations to everyone who rallied behind the Delaware River, we commend the overwhelming support shown for the river,” said Janet Sweeney of POWR. “The River of the Year program continues to be a powerful way to connect people to their local waterways and to celebrate the unique stories each river has to tell. This recognition not only highlights the Delaware River's breathtaking natural beauty, ecological and historical significance, but also shines a light on the passionate individuals and organizations working tirelessly to protect and enhance this vital resource. As Pennsylvania's 2025 River of the Year, the Delaware River will celebrate throughout the year with various events and gatherings.”

The Upper Delaware Preservation Coalition, which nominated the river, will receive a \$15,000 Leadership Grant from DCNR and POWR to support public events and outreach. A commemorative poster was also created to mark the honor.

In 2024, the Shapiro Administration invested a total of \$419 million in clean water infrastructure projects across the Commonwealth through the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PENNVEST) — including \$274 million(opens in a new tab) for projects in 22 counties and another \$216 million(opens in a new tab) across 21 counties. These investments reflect the Administration's ongoing commitment to ensuring all Pennsylvanians have access to clean, safe water.

Since taking office, Governor Josh Shapiro has made strategic investments(opens in a new tab) to elevate outdoor recreation as a key driver of Pennsylvania's economy and quality of life. In 2023 alone, the state's outdoor recreation industry contributed \$19 billion to the economy — a 10 percent increase from the year prior — supporting over 168,000 jobs and generating \$9 billion in wages, according(opens in a new tab) to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

As DCNR marks its 30th anniversary in 2025, so does the annual Delaware River Sojourn — a testament to Pennsylvania's enduring commitment to conservation, recreation, and community.

