



Video Transcript: CVNP Volunteer Recognized Nationally

Hi, my name is Mike Schnellinger and I'm a volunteer in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. I started out as a trail blazer, where we bike and hike along the towpath trail and along the hundred miles of trails in the park, and we provide assistance to people with directions and first aid if they need it, or if they have trouble with their bike we can help fix a bike. It's a lot of fun.

It's something I enjoy doing any how and kind of what I've always done in my spare time. And when I retired then it became something I wanted to spend more time doing. Being in an official capacity with the park enables me to do it in a more robust way.

And along the way in doing that, this river patrol started in development with the same kind of mentality, like if we have people helping on hiking trails and biking trails and even horseback trails, why wouldn't we have helpers along a river trail?

I'm a big paddler, I've been paddling the Cuyahoga for, oh geez, probably 30 years. And the program came up and I thought this is a perfect fit for me, and so I started paddling and I met Ryan Ainger who was starting up this program and it was just even more fun.

So now I get to do hiking and biking and paddling. The paddling really hit me in a sweet spot because I've been an advocate for the river my whole life. I live on the southern part of the Cuyahoga and have paddled that section, like I said, started about 30 years ago, and when my kids and I paddled we'd always pick up garbage and look to be safe, so I was happy to be part of that sort of just as a random guy picking up trash, but this river patrol program in the park came along at a perfect time because I just retired and now I can do it in a more official capacity.

We have, you know, handouts to give people with maps on them. We celebrated the 100—or I'm sorry—the 50th anniversary of the burning of the river to celebrate how much cleaner it is now and with the Akron sewer project cleaning up the sewer overflows into the river, the river in this section of the park is just so much cleaner and so much nicer. So we can encourage people to be in here, show them how to do it safely, you know, if the river's too high let them know and they might want to wait a few days till it's goes down some.

Mainly it's just the people and interaction—everybody's appreciative and everybody's out here trying to enjoy the same thing. But particularly with the river, you come out to have an enjoyable day but it's possible for things to go wrong that you don't really think about until it happens. And you're really in remote places in the river. So I really like that we get to all of those remote places and so if somebody's there we could help, and that's happened before.

But also, just if there's a log jam and we know somebody could get in trouble if they come down later in the day we can radio that in, or we can make a report after we're done and then maintenance can come down and they can clear the log jam out or at least make a sign to let somebody know that there's danger ahead. You just feel good about providing a safer environment for everybody using the park. It's just a lot of fun...and I get paid really well!