March 14th, 2018

The George Gund Foundation
Economic Development and Community Revitalization Program

RE: The Cuyahoga River Water Trails Network

Dear Grant Review Committee:

The American Canoe Association (ACA) established in 1880, as the current oldest and largest paddle sports organization in the United States, advocates for paddler access, education, stewardship, exploration, and competition. The ACA is writing in support of this grant application submitted on behalf of the Cuyahoga River Water Trail Partners for funding from the George Gund Foundation for the development and implementation of the Cuyahoga River Water Trail (CRWT).

The ACA is one of over 25 partners involved in the planning of the Cuyahoga River Water Trail. We envision the State of Ohio Water Trail Designation to be one of the crowning achievements toward the restoration of the Cuyahoga River, emblematic of how far Ohio has come since the dark days of burning rivers and environmental degradation. In order to complete the ongoing work of establishing the Cuyahoga River Water Trail, the Cuyahoga River Water Trail Partners needs vital funding. Securing funding will allow the citizens of Ohio and paddlers everywhere to celebrate community stewardship, river restoration and recreation opportunities through the official designation and establishment of the Cuyahoga River Water Trail in June, 2019 – marking the 50th anniversary of the last burning of the river with a new era of stewardship, recreation, and preservation. The ACA looks forward to seeing the comeback river receive widespread national recognition through the creation of the Cuyahoga River Water Trail.

Recent progress towards designation by the CRWT Partners is encouraging and collaborative. Water trail networks provide paddlers with opportunities to learn about the value of local ecology, understand connection to water resources, and enhance knowledge of boating skills, cultural heritage, and outdoor ethics. The ACA believes that having designated access points and educational materials creates a paddling experience that is more accessible to the most diverse group of paddlers. Engaging more people in their local water resources through water trail networks provides communities opportunities to collaborate, develop, and eventually implement strategies that enhance and restore the health of the local waterways and surrounding lands. In addition, the creation of a water trails network will attract new visitors to the region, and become a part of a robust outdoor recreation economy that is valued nationally at 887 billion dollars annually and supports 7.6 million jobs (Outdoor Industry Association). In Ohio alone, the outdoor recreation economy generates 215,000 direct jobs and 24.3 billion dollars in consumer spending.
Engaging the public with the Cuyahoga River will build future stewards of the Cuyahoga River and watershed. Funding the completion of the Cuyahoga River Water Trail will allow new partnership opportunities to emerge, develop, and strengthen as a variety of organizations and agencies work together to implement and plan for the future management of this superb regional asset.

The ACA appreciates your consideration of the Cuyahoga River Water Trail Partners application to receive necessary funding toward the completion of this incredible project.

Sincerely,

Brett Mayer
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ACA | Canoe - Kayak - SUP - Raft - Rescue