

French Creek Named Pennsylvania 'River Of The Year'

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By Brian Ferry

From its quiet headwaters in western Chautauqua County, French Creek has made its way to Pennsylvania's River of the Year 2022.

It is the third tributary of the Allegheny River - itself the 1994 and 2017 River of the Year - to be so named in the last eight years.

Conewango Creek was named the Pennsylvania River of the Year in 2015.

The Clarion River - just south and east of Warren County - was named River of the Year in 2019 after previously winning the award for 1983-84 and 1996.

"The eight counties served by Penn Soil RC&D have been home to five of the last eight winning waterways of the Pennsylvania River of the Year Contest," Penn Soil Executive Director Wes Ramsey said.

The Shenango River in western Crawford County, a tributary of the Beaver River, was the 2021 River of the Year.

The awards "keep highlighting the value of our high-quality water found in our streams, creeks, and rivers of northwestern Pennsylvania," Ramsey said. "It also shows that citizens of our region are aware of the value of clean water and the recreational and economic benefits it provides to the region."

Penn Soil helped campaign for French Creek as River of the Year, Ramsey said.

French Creek's headwaters are in French Creek, Chautauqua County, just 10 miles from Columbus Township. The creek previously won River of the Year honors in 2003.

"We are delighted to have French Creek selected as Pennsylvania River of the Year," French Creek Valley Conservancy Executive Director Brenda Costa said. "Many thanks to DCNR and POWR for this program and this honor. French Creek has incredible biodiversity, flowing through beautiful natural landscapes, and it provides many wonderful recreational opportunities. It is a common thread that joins so many small communities in northwest Pennsylvania with a sense of pride and passion, and we are grateful to the thousands of people who voted for French Creek. People often share stories with me about their experiences and family memories surrounding French Creek, and I look forward to having more people discover our community treasure."

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) announced the River of the Year designation on Tuesday.

"Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn and Janet Sweeney of the Pennsylvania Organization for Waterways and Rivers (POWR) today jointly announced that French Creek in northwestern Pennsylvania had been selected as the state's 2022 River of the Year," according to the release.

"The River of the Year highlights Pennsylvania's amazing waterways annually and we are excited to recognize French Creek as the 2022 winner," Dunn said. "Our waterways are a great way to connect to nature for recreation and relaxation. They also provide a great opportunity to learn about the regions through which they flow. I am hopeful that more people will consider experiencing French Creek and its beauty as a result of this prestigious honor."

"French Creek is one of the most biologically diverse waterways of its size in the United States, meandering 117 miles from its headwaters in southern New York through four Pennsylvania counties to the Allegheny River," according to the release. "The creek is home to 27 species of freshwater mussels, more than 80 species of fish, and numerous waterfowl and songbird species, including bald eagles and four Audubon-designated Important Bird Areas (IBAs). French Creek is also home to the Eastern Hellbender, the largest species of salamander in North America, which was recently named the official amphibian of Pennsylvania."

"The French Creek Valley Conservancy (FCVC) will receive a \$10,000 Leadership Grant to help fund a slate of year-long 2022 River of the Year activities," according to the release. "DCNR and POWR will work with FCVC to create a free, commemorative poster celebrating the French Creek River as the 2022 Pennsylvania River of the Year."

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