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MEDIA ADVISORY

Union Sportsmen's Alliance, Illinois American Water and Greater Peoria Economic Development Council to Cut Ribbon for New Illinois River Canoe & Kayak Trail

Pekin, Ill. (Oct. 26, 2015) – The [Union Sportsmen's Alliance](#) (USA), [Illinois American Water](#) and Greater Peoria Economic Development Council are holding a ribbon cutting ceremony on Oct. 29, at 11 a.m., to mark the completion of a new Illinois River Canoe & Kayak Trail completed by union volunteers. The project is the result of a joint effort between the USA's Work Boots on the Ground volunteer conservation program and the American Water Charitable Foundation's Building Better Communities initiative, which awarded the USA a \$25,000 grant to support three 2015 conservation projects that improve public access to water-based recreation activities in Tennessee, Illinois and West Virginia.

"Our partnership with American Water is unique and beneficial to everyone involved," said USA CEO and Executive Director Fred Myers. "By pairing the grant with Work Boots on the Ground, project funding makes a greater impact because superior work from skilled union members is performed on a volunteer basis. This allows grant funds to cover materials, equipment and other project expenses."

The project came to USA and Illinois American Water via award-winning storyteller and author Brian "Fox" Ellis through his work on Greater Peoria Economic Development Council's Water Resource Team's Tourism and Recreation committee. According to Ellis, "The Water Resource Team's vision for the Illinois River is to raise awareness that this rich wildlife corridor is like a grand Central Park for the entire Midwest to enjoy. By linking the towns along the river via a canoe trail we are creating tourist activities and recreation opportunities. This collaboration is an important step toward realizing our vision of getting people out on the water so they can connect with the inherent value of this gorgeous river."

The Illinois River Road Canoe Trail project provides 12 scenic stations for paddlers to use as launch points or rest stops, featuring flood-resistant benches and commemorative signs with attached eyelets for tethering small watercraft. The ability to stop and rest will help people tackle longer, safer voyages and make it easier for young paddlers to enjoy the river.

With funding and support from American Water Charitable Foundation and Illinois American Water, the USA organized a group of skilled union volunteers from the West Central Illinois Building and Construction Trades Council (BCTC) to complete Ellis' vision.

"Partnering with Illinois American Water, the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council and the Union Sportsmen's Alliance to complete the water trail was a great experience," said West Central Illinois BCTC Executive Director Marty Helfers. "The Carpenters Apprenticeship School built the benches, and union members from nearly every trade donated their time to install the benches and signs along our amazing river, which will showcase the union building trades' commitment to the community and put our value on display every day!"

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The project will be celebrated with a ribbon cutting on Thursday, Oct. 29, 2015 at 11 a.m. at the Pekin Park District's Riverfront Park. Parking is located behind Seico Security at 132 Court Street in Pekin. Illinois American Water will host a lunch after the ribbon cutting for volunteers and partners.

Illinois American Water President Bruce Hauk commended the collaboration, "We are blessed with the best of the best when it comes to skilled labor. Our teams are committed not only to providing excellent water service, but protecting our precious resources for everyone to enjoy. This unique project created by Brian Ellis, coupled with the partnership with the Union Sportsmen's Alliance and made possible by the invaluable sweat equity of skilled union workers ensures a wonderful resource for our community."

Leigh Ann Brown, City of Pekin Economic Development/Tourism Coordinator agreed, "The Illinois River is a huge asset to our area, as are organizations like Illinois American Water and Union Sportsmen's Alliance who give back and collaborate on behalf of our community."

The USA's mission to unite the union community through conservation to preserve North America's outdoor heritage goes hand-in-hand with American Water Charitable Foundation's ongoing commitment to being a good neighbor in the communities it serves. This sort of alignment makes the partnership successful and paves the way for more collaborative projects ahead.

"Our employees in union-represented jobs are among the most talented and skilled professionals in the nation, and we are very excited to provide support to Work Boots on the Ground projects that will enhance the outdoor experience of our customers, our employees and their families," said American Water Charitable Foundation President Darlene Williams.

About the Union Sportsmen's Alliance: *The Union Sportsmen's Alliance (USA) is a union-dedicated, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose members hunt, fish, shoot and volunteer their skills for conservation. The USA is uniting the union community through conservation to preserve North America's outdoor heritage. For more information, visit www.unionsportsmen.org or connect on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).*

About Work Boots on the Ground: *Work Boots on the Ground is the Union Sportsmen's Alliance's flagship conservation program that brings together union members willing to volunteer their time and expertise to conservation projects that improve and enhance public access, wildlife habitat and outdoor experiences for communities across America. USA's Work Boots on the Ground program works closely with federal, state and local agencies and other conservation groups to provide manpower needed to complete critical projects that may otherwise go undone.*

About the American Water Charitable Foundation: *Established in 2010 with a founding contribution from American Water, the American Water Charitable Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that provides a formal way to demonstrate the company's [ongoing commitment](#) to being a good neighbor, citizen, and contributor to the communities where American Water and its employees live, work and operate. The Foundation helps support American Water employee-identified nonprofit endeavors. More information can be found online at amwater.com/corporate-responsibility or on [Facebook](#).*

About Illinois American Water: *Illinois American Water, a wholly owned subsidiary of American Water (NYSE: AWK), is the largest investor-owned water utility in the state, providing high-quality and reliable water and/or wastewater services to approximately 1.2 million people. American Water also operates a customer service center in Alton and a quality control and research laboratory in Belleville. Founded in 1886, American Water is the largest and most geographically diverse publicly traded U.S. water and wastewater utility company. With headquarters in Voorhees, N.J., the company employs 6,800 dedicated professionals who provide regulated and market-based drinking water, wastewater and other related services to an estimated 15 million people in 47 states and Ontario, Canada. More information can be found at www.amwater.com.*