



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Franklin County  
Program Title: River Of Lights  
Program Category: Parks and Recreation

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Michael Burnette  
Title: Assistant County Administrator  
Signature: 

# River of Lights

Franklin County  
Parks and Recreation



## **Program Development**

In October of 2020, the threat of COVID-19 cast a pall over our annual signature event, Ramble Weekend, now in its 19<sup>th</sup> year. This 3-day paddling festival typically draws hundreds of participants each May in which participants utilize necessary van shuttles to return to the park throughout the festival. The inability to provide socially distanced shuttles left no other option than to cancel the highly anticipated event.

The repercussions of cancelling Ramble Weekend would impact the community and leave a significant gap in our event calendar. The most adventurous and anticipated element of the 3-day paddling festival is called Blackwater Blackout (item 1,2,3) in which participants float a 2.5 mile stretch of the Blackwater River from dusk until several hours past sunset. **Recreating a similar nighttime experience, which fit within COVID-19 restrictions, became the central focus of our brainstorming sessions.**

In November of 2020, while stringing tens-of-thousands of lights for our inaugural holiday drive-through display (Land of Lights), we discussed ways to utilize them year-round. It was at this time the suggestion was made to offer a nighttime river tubing program illuminated by overhead lights in place of the Blackwater Blackout.

As our successful Family Tubing program had already been in operation for 4 years, many of the necessary supplies were already on hand. We decided to offer the program every Friday and Saturday night for the month of June, a total of 8 nights. River of Lights would be offered from

7:30 pm until 10:00 pm. This would enable participants to float the half mile stretch of river multiple times allowing them daylight to become acquainted with the river prior to the onset of night.

### **Equipment, Financing, and Logistics**

Logistics became the greatest immediate challenge. How do we pull this off? How do we run power? How do we get the lights across the river? Is it safe?

After pitching the idea to the Recreation Advisory Committee, they offered their full support for the River of Lights concept.

A site assessment was conducted where we brainstormed how the lights would be powered. We drew heavily upon the supplies we had previously purchased for Land of Lights. We were able to repurpose 1000 feet of commercial grade, aboveground electric line to extend our reach. This included three standard 15 Amp outdoor receptacle stations where we could plug extension cords into. Having these supplies already available was an immediate \$4000.00 in savings.

With a heavily wooded riparian buffer along the riverside, we fashioned trees with webbing and spring snap links, connecting the lights in a zigzag manor to a support string that held the lights (item 4). Commercial grade C9 LED string lights were able to power continuous runs of lights up to 500 feet. We were able to run 4000 feet of overhead lights plugging into outlets every 500

feet (item 5). The last 1000 feet of lights was powered by a quiet generator which we already owned and stored in a small mobile tool shed which was locked at the end of each evening. Additional Christmas lights were added at each access point, providing ambience and improving visibility (item 6,7,8). A segment containing a faster flow of water was illuminated with LED work lights providing participants additional safety.

Already having electrical supplies, tubes, and a generator, few additional purchases were necessary. Additional purchases included: 4000 feet of nylon string (\$220.00), black lights (\$191.00, *item 8.2*), 58 additional tubes (\$2039.00), wrist bands (\$22.00), LED powered work lights (\$553.00), yard signs/even banner (\$204.00, *item 8.1*), logo design (\$55.00), electric sub-panel installation (\$800.00). Expenses totaled \$4,084.00.

Ticket prices were set at an extremely affordable, all-inclusive rate of \$10.00 per ticket. Within several hours after opening registration, 1,200 tickets sold for a total of \$12,000. We were pleased to be able to cover our costs and pay for staffing with this first-time program.

### **Staffing**

Summer Family Tubing staff historically work Saturdays and Sundays 10:30 AM-5:30 PM. Each employee was consulted about working additional hours for the River of Lights event, and all four staff agreed. Managers and full-time maintenance staff were primarily responsible for the set up. Stringing 4000 feet of lights across the river 40 times was no small task. After a very steep learning curve, we made great progress. Utilizing a canoe for a floating workstation, staff

were able to unwind lights, screw in bulbs, and pass lengths of the line to individuals on ladders who would secure them to a prefixed guy rope (item 9,10,11).

Jamison Electric was contracted to wire and connect the temporary power supply. This included installation of additional circuit breakers and an outdoor service panel need to connect the temporary power supply. The county building inspector performed an inspection to ensure that wiring was done correctly.

Public Safety was contacted and briefed on the logistics of the program. It was determined that first responders were not needed onsite and had all the necessary information to act decisively. Opening night, we had 9 paid staff. Three tubing staff ensured registered participants checked in, received a wrist band and obtained a tube and life jacket. Tubing staff were also responsible for ensuring participants checked out.

A full-time maintenance staff was scheduled each night to aid with any electrical troubleshooting that may arise. They were also responsible for emptying trashcans and cleaning restrooms. Two additional part-time staff ensured smooth check-in and assisted as needed with the event as needed. This included checking wristbands and performing occasional river sweeps.

The Director and two Managers were also present on opening night to assist with parking, set-up of temporary safety lights, and determine if there were any additional staffing gaps.

## **Results**

River of Lights proved successful beyond our county's imagination (Item 12,13,14,15,16). The popularity created a situation that demanded flexibility. Original plans to sell 100 tickets per night were adapted to accommodate 150 individuals per night prompting the swift purchase of additional tubes.

Participants had positive feedback and could find no deficit in our planning efforts. There were no accidents or incidents throughout the month. We have already had hundreds of inquiries about next year as folks are eager to be placed on a registration waiting list. Several departments and local government agencies across the country have reached out to us to express interest in replicating the event. Our social media following jumped from 6,000 to more than 30,000 followers.

Franklin County Parks and Recreation hopes to build upon the success of this event and provide additional future opportunities for the public to participate in this highly sought-after experience. The disappointment of having to cancel our signature event challenged us to think outside the realm of typical programming. We were rewarded exponentially for our efforts, extending the reach of our community impact while further defining our county as a welcoming and trend setting livable community.



 **Franklin County Parks and Recreation** is with Ginny Adkins and 16 others. May 7 · 🌐

Night Tubing every Friday and Saturday for the month of June.  
A half mile, no shuttle needed float down a river illuminated with overhead string lights will be unlike anything you have ever experienced!  
This family friendly stretch of gently flowing water will have thousands of lights to help you navigate the ripples. ... [See More](#)



 **Get More Likes, Comments and Shares**  
When you boost this post, you'll show it to more people.

**9,038,948** People Reached      **1,658,144** Engagements      [Boost Post](#)

👍❤️😂 6.4K      10K Comments 90,308 Shares

Item 0: Initial Facebook post reached over 9,000,000

## Performance for Your Post

**9,038,948** People Reached

**523,757** Reactions, Comments & Shares

**169,402** Like      **5,019** On Post      **164,383** On Shares

**50,939** Love      **1,441** On Post      **49,498** On Shares

**1,035** 😂 Haha      **6** On Post      **1,029** On Shares

**15,643** 😲 Wow      **171** On Post      **15,472** On Shares

**153** 😞 Sad      **2** On Post      **151** On Shares

**25** 😡 Angry      **1** On Post      **24** On Shares

**194,060** Comments      **20,135** On Post      **173,925** On Shares

**93,400** Shares      **90,308** On Post      **3,092** On Shares

**1,134,387** Post Clicks

**37,904** Photo Views      **253,073** Link Clicks      **843,410** Other Clicks

### NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

**798** Hide Post      **357** Hide All Posts

**0** Report as Spam      **0** Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts.



Item 8.1: yard signs



Item 8.2: Banner under blacklights





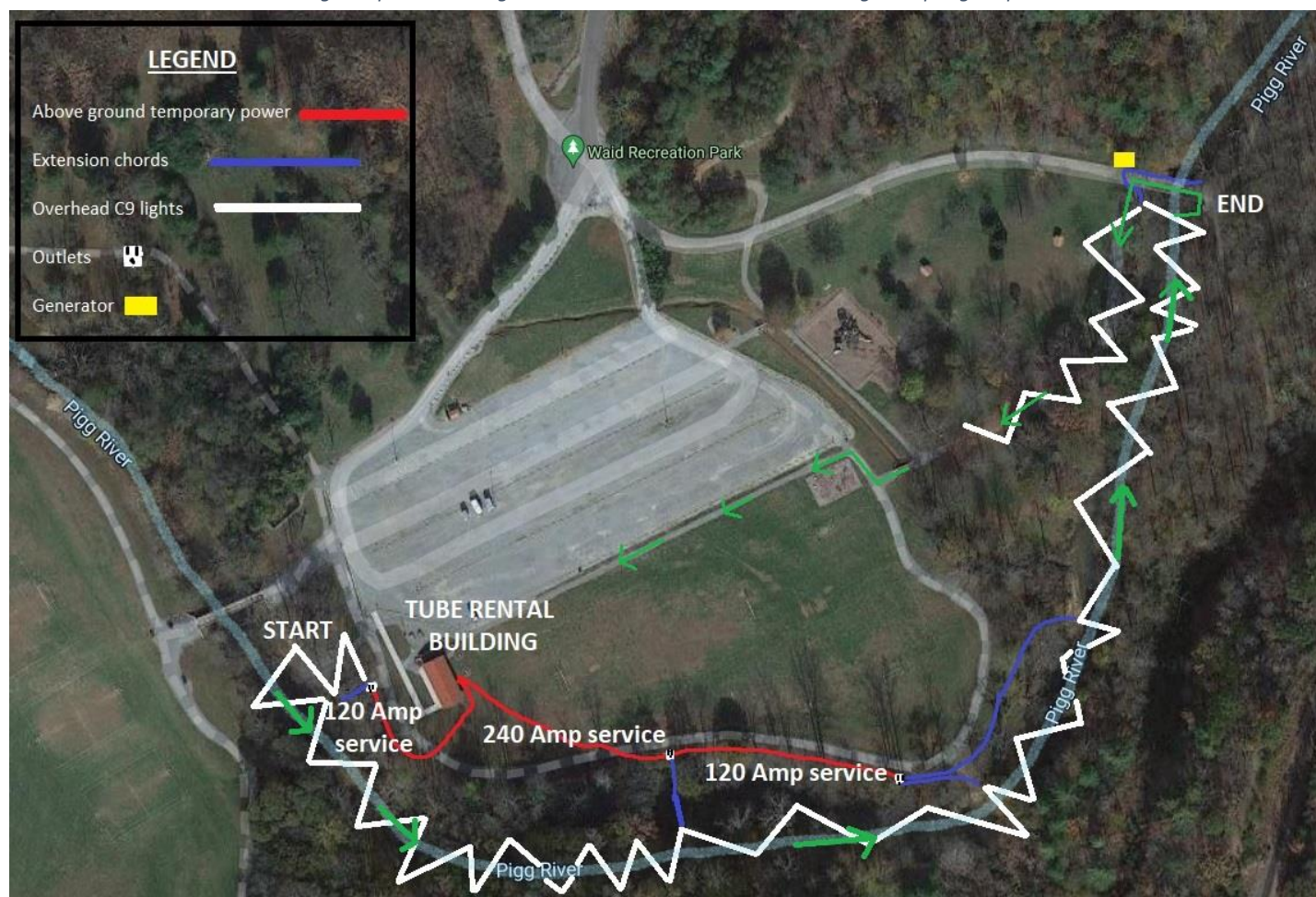
*Item 1,2,3, Blackwater Blackout - Part of Ramble Weekend*







Item 4: Lights zip tied to string and connected to tree with red webbing and spring snaps.



Item 5: River of Lights Electric layout.





*Item 6: Repurposing Christmas lights.*



*Item 7: Ambient light - General public observes from the take-out.*

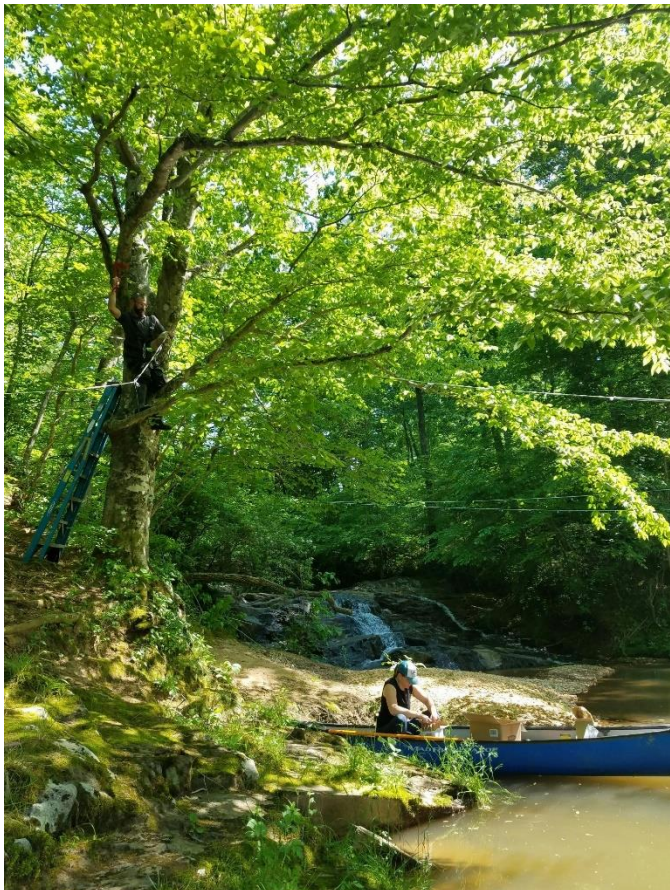


*Item 8: Christmas lights near the put-in and tube rentals building.*

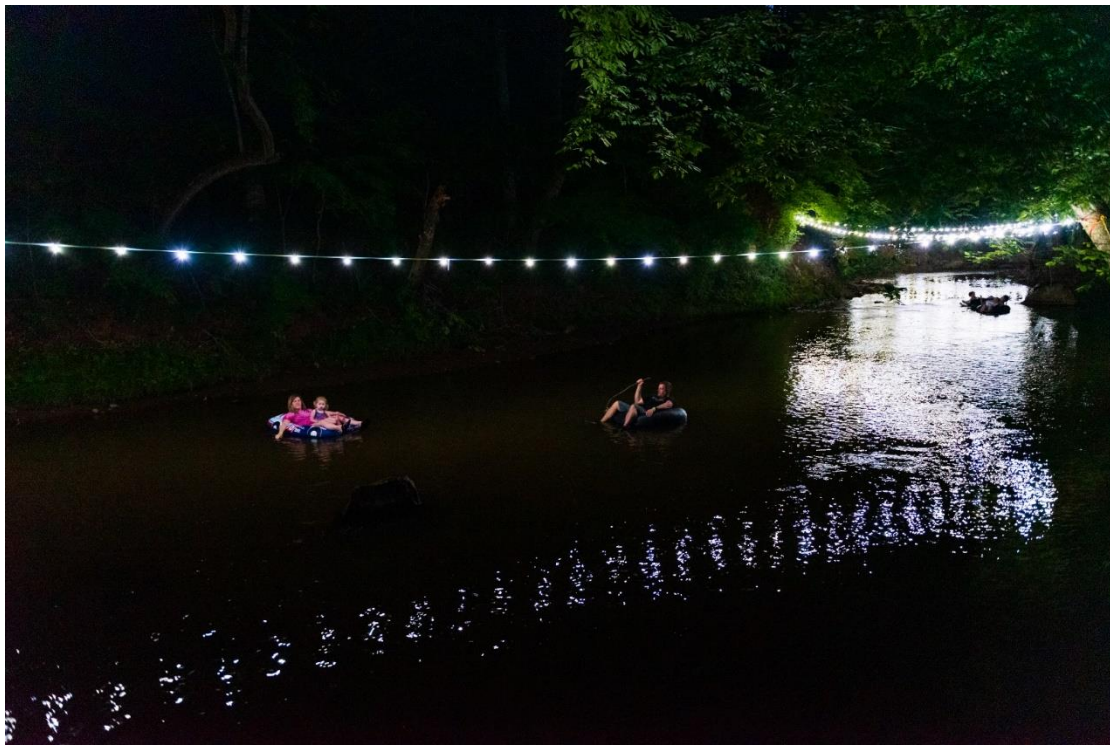




*Item 9,10,11: Hanging lights from our water-based work station.*







*Item 12,13,14,15,16: River of Lights.*





## Executive Summary – River of Lights

**Problem:** Franklin County Parks and Recreation had to cancel their signature event due to COVID-19 restrictions. Ramble Weekend, a 3-day paddling festival in its 19<sup>th</sup> year, has annual attendance of 1000 participants who use van shuttles throughout the event.

**Solution:** To allow for social distancing and eliminate the need for shuttles, River of Lights was birthed from the most anticipated portion of Ramble Weekend, a nighttime paddling activity. By creatively repurposing holiday supplies participants were able to tube a half mile section of river at night illuminated by overhead string lights.

**Costs:** Already possessing many of the needed supplies which included: electrical equipment, tubes, and holiday lights, we were able to keep our purchases to a minimum spending just over \$4,000 on additional items.

**Revenue:** Due to the abstract nature of this original idea, we wanted to ensure participation. We kept ticket sales affordable, only charging \$10.00 per registration. 1,200 tickets sold within hours, filling all eight nights and covering all costs with a gross revenue of \$12,000.00.

**Impact:** The event was well received and quickly spread across the country with the aid of social media. 1,200 tickets sold within hours of opening registration, creating a demand that we were able to only partially satisfy. Currently over 9 million individuals have seen the activity. We have had to answer thousands of messages and phone calls. The combination of accessibility and affordability at a time when folks are eager to engage in outdoor activities helped aid in the program's success. We look forward to expanding registration in years to come and we are excited to serve our community and visitors through creative outdoor experiences.



### **Brief Overview – River of Lights**

Due to COVID-19 health restrictions, Franklin County Parks and Recreation had to cancel its signature 3-day paddling festival. The inability to shuttle hundreds of participants safely between river access points led us to reimagine a new socially distanced river event.

River of Lights, a nighttime tubing event on the Pigg River, combines the use of natural resources with repurposing seasonal Christmas supplies. Four thousand feet of overhead string lights illuminate the river in this adventurous, no-shuttle-needed, family-friendly activity. Waid Recreation Park provides the perfection location with its shallow water and easily accessible amenities.

River of Lights has attracted interest cross-country, with registrants from 15 states including Washington State, Maine, Texas, and Florida. The program reached over nine million views on Facebook (Item 0) and sold-out all 1,200 tickets within hours of opening registration.

While we welcome all benefits of tourism, we are most grateful to be able to serve our community with low cost, world-class recreation opportunities, which make our residents proud to call Franklin County home.