



Water Trails 101

Southeast Water Trails Forum
October 29, 2009



The ACA

- Nonprofit membership organization – 50,000 canoeists, kayakers and rafters.
- Three focus areas:
 - Providing paddlesports education;
 - Promoting responsible stewardship of the paddling environment; and
 - Supporting organizations and events that provide paddlesport recreation opportunities.



ACA's Water Trails Program

- Goal -- To support water trails in three ways:
 - Assist with the development of new trails.
 - Provide resources for the maintenance of existing trails.
 - Connect paddlers to trails around U.S. & Canada.



Why Water Trails?

- Water trails serve paddlers by answering important questions:
 - Where should I go paddling?
 - What will I find when I get there?
 - Water conditions, skills and equipment needed.
 - Access facilities, services, wildlife viewing, *etc.*
 - What do I need to do to be safe?
 - Where can I go to get more information?



What A Water Trail Can Do For You

- Help you protect and restore your river.
 - Reconnect people with your river.
 - Grow your corps of volunteers.
 - Monitoring and maintenance.
 - Advocacy on behalf of a healthy river.
 - Build a “constituency” for a healthy, enjoyable river.



What A Water Trail Can Do For You

- Help you manage for safety & sustainability.
 - Direct use to areas that are less vulnerable / easier to maintain.
 - Direct use to minimize user exposure to hazards.
 - Dangerous water conditions (WW, rocks, surf, tides, dams, water intakes).
 - Size/speed conflicts between boats.
 - Security zones around government facilities.
- SAFETY helps you protect the river!



What is a Water Trail?

“...A recreational waterway on lake, river or ocean between specific points, containing access points and day use and/or camping sites for the boating public. . . . An important ingredient . . . is an ethic of low-impact use and personal stewardship of the lands and waters being used.”

David R. Getchell, Sr.

Modern Water Trails Guide, 1998



ACA Water Trail Criteria

- Contiguous / semi-contiguous waterway or series of waterways open to recreational use by paddlers;
- At least one public access point;
- Covered by a publicly available map, guide, sign or website of reasonable quality and detail;
- Map, guide, sign or website communicates low-impact ethics to trail users; and
- Trail supported and/or managed by one or more organizations.



Developing a Water Trail

- One strategy for approaching your trail project – there are other strategies.
- Based on the approach used by some trail developers I have worked with.
- Additional suggestions that may help you make your trail better.



Do an Inventory

- Step 1 - Inventory available resources.
 - Waterways (history, culture, character).
 - Access points and facilities.
 - Hazards.
 - Funding for WT implementation.



Develop a “Personality”

- From this, sketch out your water trail’s personality.
 - What kind of experience will your trail provide?
 - Purely recreational?
 - Historic or cultural? Wildlife viewing?
 - Adventure and adrenaline?
 - Type of experience determined both for you and by you (within available funding limitations).
 - No two water trails are alike!



ID Target Users

- Who will be interested in this experience?
 - Individuals, families, scout groups?
 - History buffs, nature lovers, bird watchers?
 - Adventurers, adrenaline junkies?
- What are their boating skill levels?
 - Safety important in the development process.
 - Safety = good experience → friend of the trail.
 - No accidents = less pressure to restrict use (e.g., Illinois Dam Safety Regulations).



Tips for Identifying Target Users

- Analyze the hazards that exist on your trail.
- Paddle the trail yourself in different types of boats.
- Ask people of different skill levels to paddle the trail and provide you with feedback on their experience.



Infrastructure needs

- Determine infrastructure needs of target users.
 - Launches, rest stops, campsites, portage routes, restroom facilities.
- Develop infrastructure to serve two purposes:
 - To enhance safety and enjoyment for trail users.
 - To help you manage the trail in a sustainable way.



Launches

- **The best launches are:**
 - Durable, cost-effective and environmentally friendly.
 - Well-suited to the landscape and the waterway.
 - Designed to enhance safety and reduce conflicts with other boaters.
 - Offer accessibility features whenever possible.
- **NPS RTCA Launch Guide:**
 - www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/ht_launch_guide.html



Rest Stops & Campsites

- Rest stops are vital features of a trail.
 - A place to stop and stretch (particularly novices).
 - Serve as destination points.
 - Direct users away from sensitive areas or private lands.
- Camping
 - Is camping appropriate for your trail?
 - If so, choose sites carefully to manage impacts.



Maps and Guides

- Key marketing tool for your trail
- Well-designed maps and guides:
 - Tell users what to expect.
 - Enable them to self-select a trail that:
 - Provides the experience they want...
 - At their particular skill level...
 - Without hazards they wish to avoid.



Map and Guide Tips

- Tell your story – both the river’s history and the trail’s history.
- Map the trail in as much detail as practical.
- Describe available facilities & services:
 - Access points, campsites, portages.
 - Motels, restaurants, private campgrounds
 - Some users may prefer developed facilities.
 - Listing increases buy-in from local businesses.



Map and Guide Tips

- Content
 - List required safety equipment and skills.
 - Describe trail hazards & hazard avoidance.
 - Include LNT ethics and urge users to follow them.
 - Use pictures of appropriate trail users.
 - Invite users to join your efforts to protect the trail.
- Materials
 - Work with a good cartographer and graphic artist.
 - Print your map on waterproof paper.



ACA & Water Trails

- Club-Fostered Stewardship Grants
 - Small grants available for partner NGOs
 - Volunteer-driven stewardship
- ACA Water Trails Database
 - 400 water trails from U.S. & Canada
 - www.americancanoe.org/recreation/watertrails.lasso



Resources

- American Canoe Association:
 - WT Database: http://www.americancanoe.org/site/c.lvIZIkNZJuE/b.4343521/k.939D/ACA_Water_Trails.htm
 - CFS Grant program: www.americancanoe.org/stewardship/cfs
- American Rivers has a Blue Trails program. www.americanrivers.org
- RTCA resources:
 - www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/ht_publications.html
- A few remnants of NAWT (North American Water Trails) on the web.
 - www.bayaccess.org/nawt.html
- Maryland DNR Water Trails page: www.dnr.state.md.us/outdoors/boating.html
- Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Comm. Water Trails page:
 - www.fish.state.pa.us/Fish/watertrails/trailindex.htm
- Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network WT resources: www.baygateways.net/tools.cfm
- Washington Water Trails Ass'n FAQ page: www.wwta.org/about_us/faq.asp#1
- Northern Forest Canoe Trail: www.northernforestcanoetrail.org
- Scuykill River Heritage Area: www.schuykillriver.org/
- Bartram Canoe Trails in Alabama: <http://www.outdooralabama.com/outdoor-adventures/bartram.cfm>



Contact Info

Paul Sanford

Director of Stewardship and Public Policy;
General Counsel

American Canoe Association

1340 Central Park Blvd. Suite 210

Fredericksburg, VA 22401

(540) 907-4460 x106

psanford@americancanoe.org

www.americancanoe.org