



# Building Community Water Trails 2006 River Rally Workshop 7B



# Agenda

- Water trails 101 from ACA.
- History and successes of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail.
- Partnering with NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance.



# Workshop Goals

- How to develop a fun, safe and sustainable water trail.
- How to build a coalition of partners to support your trail.



# ACA 411

- 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 four ways:
  - Assist with the development of new trails.
  - Provide resources for the maintenance of existing trails.
  - Connect paddlers to trails around U.S. & Canada.
  - Celebrate the successes of water trails nationwide.



# 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

- Inventory available resources.
  - Waterways (history, culture, character).
  - Access points and facilities.
  - Hazards.
  - Funding.



# Developing a Water Trail

- 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?
  - 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.



# Tips for IDing Target Users

- Analyze hazards.
- Paddle the trail yourself in different boats.
- Ask people of different skill levels to paddle the trail and provide you with feedback.



# 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:
  - Safe.
  - Well-suited to the landscape and the waterway.
  - Designed for paddlers.
  - Environmentally friendly.
  - Reduce conflicts with other users.
  - Cost-effective & durable.
  - Offer accessibility features whenever possible.



# LOGICAL LASTING LAUNCHES

DESIGN GUIDANCE FOR CANOE AND KAYAK LAUNCHES

National Park Service  
Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program  
Spring 2004

## 2) Canoe launch, Camp For All, Burton, Texas

Situated on an 8-acre lake, this launch provides access for children with disabilities. The 20' x 16' wooden structure attaches to a concrete surface on the shoreline via an aluminum gangway approximately 12' long. Two 3.5' tapered ramps allow canoes to slide up onto the launch, easing transition to the water for those in wheelchairs. A railing around the perimeter of the launch, made of double 2' x 4' wooden pieces, helps keep wheelchairs from sliding off the launch and also provides an anchoring device for boats.



Photos courtesy of Roger Lewis  
Lower Colorado River Authority

Photos 3C, 3D: ADA accessible wooden floating launch has two tapered ramps that allow canoes to slide up onto the deck





# Rest Stops

- Places to stop and stretch are vital on a water trail.
  - Give users a break from paddling.
  - Serve as destination points.
  - Direct paddlers away from sensitive areas or private lands.



# Campsites

- Is camping appropriate for your trail?
- If so, sites should be chosen carefully.
  - Use existing parks and private campgrounds whenever possible.
  - Direct use to sustainable / manageable areas, and away from sensitive areas.



# 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.



# Map and Guide Tips

- Tell your story - river history & trail history.
- Map the trail in as much detail as practical.
- Describe available facilities & services:
  - Access points, campsites, portages.
  - Motels, restaurants, private campgrounds (increase buy-in from local businesses!).



# Map and Guide Tips

- Provide safety information.
- Describe hazards & hazard avoidance.
- Explain low-impact use ethics and urge users to follow them.
- Invite users to join your efforts to protect the trail.



# Map and Guide Tips

- Work with a good cartographer and graphic artist.
- Use waterproof paper.
- Use pictures of the kinds of people that should use your trail!



# Be Creative!

- There are many ways to build a good water trail.
- Good watershed protection strategies are often good water trail development strategies.
- Learn from others, then use the strategy that works best for your trail/community.



# Resources

- American Canoe Association:
  - WT Database: [www.americancanoe.org/recreation/watertrails.lasso](http://www.americancanoe.org/recreation/watertrails.lasso)
  - CFS Grant program: [www.americancanoe.org/stewardship/cfs.lasso](http://www.americancanoe.org/stewardship/cfs.lasso)
- RTCA resources:
  - [www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/ht\\_publications.html](http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/ht_publications.html)
- A few remnants of NAWT (North American Water Trails, Inc.) on the web.
  - [www.bayaccess.org/nawt.html](http://www.bayaccess.org/nawt.html)
- Maryland DNR Water Trails page: [www.dnr.state.md.us/outdoors/boating.html](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/outdoors/boating.html)
- Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Comm. Water Trails page:
  - [www.fish.state.pa.us/Fish/watertrails/trailindex.htm](http://www.fish.state.pa.us/Fish/watertrails/trailindex.htm)
- Washington Water Trails Ass'n FAQ page: [www.wwta.org/about\\_us/faq.asp#1](http://www.wwta.org/about_us/faq.asp#1)
- OpenLands Project of NE Illinois: [www.openlands.org/watertrails.asp?pgid=171](http://www.openlands.org/watertrails.asp?pgid=171)
- Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network WT resources: [www.baygateways.net/tools.cfm](http://www.baygateways.net/tools.cfm)
- Schuylkill River Heritage Area: [www.schuylkillriver.org/](http://www.schuylkillriver.org/)
- Capitol Water Trails of WI: [www.capitolwatertrails.org/](http://www.capitolwatertrails.org/)
- Michigan Heritage Water Trails -- [www.wmich.edu/glcms/watertrails/](http://www.wmich.edu/glcms/watertrails/)



# Contact Info

**Paul Sanford**

Director of Stewardship and Public Policy; Legal Counsel

**American Canoe Association**

**7432 Alban Station Blvd. Suite B-232**

**Springfield, VA 22150**

**(703) 451-0141 x20**

**[psanford@americancanoe.org](mailto:psanford@americancanoe.org)**

**[www.americancanoe.org](http://www.americancanoe.org)**