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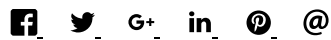
Building a 14-route water trail

BY SALLY BARBER Special to the Record-Eagle Aug 24, 2017



Josh Perrin on Torch Lake at the 2016 Paddle Antrim Festival.

Special to the Record-Eagle/Matt Drake



TRAVERSE CITY — Miles of water, classic northern landscapes and friendly small towns define the new non-motorized Chain of Lakes Water Trail.

The nonprofit water stewardship organization Paddle Antrim is leading the trail project in partnership with 15 local jurisdictions.

The 40-mile trail embodies 14 interconnected lakes and rivers of the Elk River Chain of Lakes Watershed. The Upper Chain features small lakes and the communities of Ellsworth, Central Lake and Bellaire. The larger Torch Lake, Lake Skegemog and Elk Lake characterize the Lower Chain flowing into East Grand Traverse Bay.

“The Chain of Lakes is naturally diverse,” said Paddle Antrim Executive Director Deana Jerdee. “We have good beginner and intermediate routes and challenging routes. It’s a great opportunity for paddlers of all levels to get on the water.”

The trail identifies 14 routes ranging from 3 to 30 miles. More than 70 access sites and rest stops on public lands create a paddler-friendly experience. Chain of Lakes Water Trail complies with State of Michigan Water Trail criteria and incorporates National Park Service best management practices, including a focus on public education and resource protection.

“When people connect to the water they understand the importance of stewardship,” Jerdee said.

The new water trail is also expected to spawn economic activity for host communities. Paddlers spend an average of \$126 on day trips and \$268 on overnight trips, according to Paddle Antrim.

"People are looking for that type of recreation," said Pat Savant, executive director for the Bellaire Chamber of Commerce. "We'll be up there with other places in the country with water trails."

Paddle Antrim's next step in forwarding trail development is to seek grants and donations for site improvements. Informational and interpretive signage tops the to-do list, along with restrooms, parking and universal access. The plan proposes universal access launches at sites throughout the waterway.

Milton Township Waterfront Park along Elk Lake saw the trail's first universal kayak launch installation in June. Rotary Charities donated \$30,000 for the system. A community grant and Paddle Antrim also contributed funds for the installation.

"We feel more and more it's (kayaking) an avenue for active people," said Township Supervisor Lon Bary. He added that the launch opens recreation options for those unable to enjoy the community's foot trails and ball fields.

The Paddle Antrim Festival on Sept. 15-16 provides opportunity to explore the Chain of Lakes Water Trail with short and distance paddles and merrymaking at communities along the way. Waterside towns host live music, food and beverages. Short's Brewing Company at Elk Rapids hosts the weekend's final bash.

"This is a great opportunity to highlight the different types of paddling the Chain of Lakes Trail offers and have the entire region come together to celebrate the remarkable waterways and region we live in," Jerdee said.

Go to paddleantrim.com to register for festival events and to learn more about Chain of Lakes Water Trail.

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Hearth & Vine Cafe... | Suttons Bay, MI

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