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## Water trail earns statewide recognition

Chain of Lakes gets inaugural state designation

BY SHERI MCWHIRTER [smcwhirter@record-eagle.com](mailto:smcwhirter@record-eagle.com) Dec 25, 2018



Record-Eagle file photo/Tessa Lighty Torch Lake is part of the Chain of Lakes, now among the state's initial eight designated routes in its new water trails program. The Chain of Lakes Water Trail stretches more than 80 miles through Charlevoix, Antrim, Kalkaska and Grand Traverse counties.

Record-Eagle/Tessa Lighty



BELLAIRE — State officials named the locally developed Chain of Lakes Water Trail among its inaugural eight designated water routes in a new recreation and preservation program.

"We are very excited to receive this designation from the state of Michigan. It's a great honor," said Deana Jerdee, executive director of the Bellaire-based nonprofit Paddle Antrim. "It recognizes we have the fundamentals to be a quality water trail."

Paddle Antrim served as the lead organization in the effort to develop the Chain of Lakes Water Trail, which stretches through Charlevoix, Antrim, Kalkaska and Grand Traverse counties. It's an extensive route of more than 80 miles through 14 lakes and rivers, with 81 access sites for users.

Jerdee said the special state designation announced Thursday will not only encourage outdoor recreation along the trail, but is expected to have a positive economic impact.

"It will have a huge impact on the community. Paddling is a growing industry, and people want to go where they know what to expect," Jerdee said. "The communities along the trail can help promote the water trail now."

Communities along the route include Ellsworth, Central Lake, Bellaire, Alden and Elk Rapids.

A water trail is a designated route on a navigable waterway such as a lake, river, canal or bay that is managed to support outdoor recreation. Water trails feature well-developed access points and many are near significant historical or environmental sites, as well as restaurants, hotels and campgrounds.

Ron Olson, parks and recreation chief for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, said water trails are experiencing an increasing trend as interest in paddle sports and other water-based recreation continues to grow. The water trail designations recognize model public water trails that set the standard for the future of the state's program, he said.

Paul Yauk, DNR state trails coordinator, said Michigan is poised to create a statewide water trails program that complements the state's broader trails system.

"We fully expect that offering — and expanding — water trail opportunities in Michigan will encourage more outdoor recreation and healthier lifestyles, and also serve as regional destinations that will give a boost to local economies," Yauk said.

Requirements for the special state water trail designation included: quality trail experience; clear information for users; broad community support; and, water trail plan in place to address safety, stewardship, historic and cultural resources, education opportunities, funding, signs, management

and development, marketing and promotion. Both the DNR and the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes made the designated water trail selections.

Chain of Lakes was the only water trail in northern Michigan to receive the state designation.

The other seven state-designated water trails include: 11 miles in Monroe County along the Central River Raisin Water Trail; 104 miles in Livingston, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties along the Huron River Water Trail; 10 miles in St. Clair County along the Island Loop Route; 72 miles in Genesee and Lapeer counties along the Flint River Trail; 87 miles in Clinton, Eaton, Ingham and Ionia counties along the Middle Grand River Water Trail; 88 miles in Genesee, Oakland, Saginaw and Shiawassee counties along the Shiawassee River Trail; and, 91 miles in Eaton, Ingham and Jackson counties along the Upper Grand River Water Trail.

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**Sheri McWhirter**

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