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State grant dollars awarded to water route

Chain of Lakes Water Trail receives another \$70K

BY SHERI McWHIRTER smcwhirter@record-eagle.com Mar 11, 2019



Reannin Henninger, 15, left, of Rapid City and Katherine Nation, 15, of Kalkaska prepare to launch their kayaks for a paddle on Torch Lake near Rapid City in June last year. Torch Lake is at the heart of the state-designated Chain of Lakes Water Trail.

Record-Eagle file photo/Jan-Michael Stump



ELK RAPIDS — The recently established Chain of Lakes Water Trail received another splash to the pool of money to help develop the state-designated route for paddlers.

Nonprofit Paddle Antrim received a \$70,500 grant from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for the water trail to pay for signs, creation of a paddler's guide and marketing for the route to improve the experience for paddlers while on the water. The funds is expected to provide a significant boost for the trail efforts.

Want to know more?

More information about the Chain of Lakes Water Trail, including paddling events and classes, can be found online at www.paddleantrim.com or by calling Paddle Antrim at 231-492-0171.

"We are anticipating to have the signs going into the ground and having the paddling guide going into the 2020 season," said Deana Jerdee, Paddle Antrim's executive director.

The new state grant is about double the amount of a grant already awarded in December to Paddle Antrim by Rotary Charities of Traverse City. The grants now total more than \$100,000, but Paddle Antrim continues to accept donations and seek additional funds for the water trail project.

Advertising of the state-designated water trail also will begin in 2020, Jerdee said, with a waterproof guide intended to be used on the water by visiting paddlers that will include safety recommendations and information about amenities along the route. Officials are hesitant to advertise the water trail to other communities until wayfinding signs are installed and the guide published, she said.

The Chain of Lakes Water Trail includes more than 80 miles of routes through 14 lakes and rivers in Antrim, Charlevoix, Kalkaska and Grand Traverse counties, showcasing a diversity of attractions such as small inland lakes, sunken ships, island exploration and fishing opportunities. There are a number of lakeside villages where paddlers can restock or visit amenities.

Bob Wilson, executive director of Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, said this grant award is another important sign of a growing awareness of the benefits water trails can provide. The Chain of Lakes Water Trail is a key asset for northern Lower Michigan, he said.

"It's the most significant addition to northern Michigan's trail system in the last 10 years," Wilson said. "It's because we finally recognize with a state designation the water resources as a trail resource."

There are eight water trails designated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, classifications made only late last year.

MDARD officials received 66 applications with requests that totaled \$5.1 million. Of those, the state agency awarded 16 projects that totaled \$1,245,500 with more than \$1.5 million in local match commitments.

Gary McDowell, MDARD director, said the intent is to help ignite meaningful projects in rural Michigan communities. Targeted investments and matching funds from businesses, local municipalities and others, can provide opportunities for thousands of businesses and employees across Michigan, he said.

Paddle Antrim is a nonprofit organization based in Elk Rapids that focuses on protections for water resources by using paddle sports to connect people to waterways. Goals include stewardship, education, improved trail access and promotion of waterways for outdoor recreation enthusiasts to boost the local economy.

The grant for the Chain of Lakes Water Trail was among just a few awarded to organizations or businesses in northwest Lower Michigan. Others include \$89,800 to Bee Well Meadery LLC in Bellaire for new equipment to increase hard cider production, and \$14,750 to Central Lake for a village wastewater treatment facility feasibility study.

Counties eligible for these rural development grant dollars must have no more than 60,000 residents.



[Water trail earns statewide recognition](#)

[Rotary Charities awards grants](#)