

## **Discover Ohio's Water Trails A Stream of Benefits**

*Discover Ohio's Water Trail*, the state's water trail plan, adds significant value to Ohio's navigable streams. Water trails are small-boat paddling routes that combine recreation and conservation. These routes provide for small-boat launches and shore access. They may include day use and/or overnight accommodations. According to North American Water Trails, "Water trails are more than geographic phenomenon; they are alive. They are animated by the pursuits of their builders and their users. Water trails connect people with places and simultaneously enrich and protect both. By identifying and interpreting places, both natural and constructed, the water trail brings the user into contact with the whole ecology of the corridor."<sup>1</sup>

Like Ohio's land trails, water trails may be held on public land, voluntarily retained on private land or conserved through public-private partnerships. They foster recreational enjoyment, water quality protection and aesthetic enhancement of the waters and lands along the trails. Ohio's water trails are designed to maintain natural character, limit road access, and promote low-impact use. They encourage a strong sense of stewardship, protect private property rights and reduce the need for official policing and regulation.

*Discover Ohio's Water Trail* will enhance access to Ohio's navigable streams. With over 1,700 miles of navigable streams, Ohio is rich in water resources. Navigable streams wind through the state's landscape like a watered highway system. Water courses were the major transportation routes of the native peoples and the early settlers. *Discover Ohio Water Trails* features several of these historic water ways, including the Lake Erie coastline, the Ohio River and the three Historic Canoe Routes which connect our watered boundaries. In addition, the preliminary routes will include the Little Miami River, the Mohican-Kokosing-Walhonding River system and the Olentangy River. Just as these routes served many previous generations, they provide transportation and enjoyment to current Ohioans. By improving access to navigable streams, water trails will preserve and reinvigorate one of Ohio's transportation systems. In addition, they will provide an abundance of aesthetic, environmental, economic and recreational benefits to Ohioans.

The public desirability of water trails in Ohio has been identified in many planning processes. The need for increased and improved water-based access is noted in many of Ohio's planning documents including, the 2003 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), the Division of Watercraft's Strategic Plan for the Twenty-First Century and Boating on Ohio Waterways Plan (BOW Plan). The SCORP specifically identifies the need to complete the "Discover Ohio Water Trails Initiative".<sup>2</sup>

Paddlers who participated in BOW Plan focus groups (2001 & 2002) hosted by the Division of Watercraft stressed the need for more river and stream access, particularly along pristine rivers and streams, in urban areas, and in whitewater areas. Participants stated that water trails for small vessels, especially canoes and kayaks, are desired on

Ohio's rivers and streams and on Lake Erie. They stated that trails would increase opportunities for paddling, fishing, bird-watching, hiking, and camping.

A subsequent BOW Plan survey found that 35% of *all* Ohio registered boat owners are potential water trail users. Sixteen percent of survey respondents have participated in an overnight trip in a small boat where they camped on shore; another 19% have never had this experience but would like to, specifically in Ohio. With 413,276 registered boats in Ohio, this is a significant number of would-be water trail users.<sup>3</sup>

The recreation benefits of Water Trails reach anglers, canoeists, kayakers, wildlife watchers, hunters, river enthusiasts and adjacent landowners. Water Trails add value to both land-based and water-based activities along streams. A large number of Ohioans engage in these activities.

Water Trails are specifically designed for small non-motorized boaters, although use is not generally restricted to other boating recreation. In 2002, Ohio registered 56,813 canoes and kayaks, 14% of total registered boats (413,276)<sup>4</sup>. Ohio's paddlers take to the state's navigable streams to exercise, relax and enjoy the scenery. Nationally, paddling is growing at a rate of 2.8% a year and expected to grow to 169 million trips per year by 2040.<sup>5</sup>

Ohio streams are favorite haunts for the state's wildlife devotees. Water Trails enhance stream access for wildlife enthusiasts. Fishing, hunting and wildlife watching comprise some of the Ohio's leading pastimes. According to a 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2001 National Survey, 39% of the state's adult population spent some time in pursuit of wildlife recreation. With 1.4 million adults casting lines, Ohio ranked seventh both in the number of fishermen and in the number of fishing days (19,882 days). These fishermen contributed \$944.6 million to the state's economy. Streams are favorite retreats of hunters and wildlife watchers who would benefit from increased watercourse access. The survey noted that Ohio's 2001 economy benefited from 4.9 million hunters who spent \$740.4 million and from 2.9 million wildlife watchers who spent \$880 million.<sup>6</sup>

Water Trails will encourage physical activity in Ohioans. Outdoor recreation continues to grow in the U.S. However, the frequency with which Americans exercised declined slightly in 2001.<sup>7</sup> Promoting increased exercise and physical activity at all levels is the goal of many state and national health initiatives. Nationally, President Bush instituted *Healthy People 2010*.<sup>8</sup> Here in Ohio, Governor Bob Taft established *Healthy Ohioans* in 1998.<sup>9</sup> These initiatives and others like them across the country attempt to stem the tide of the deteriorating condition of human health in the U.S. Currently, Americans' inactive lifestyles cause obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Inactivity and the resultant obesity cause the premature death of over 300,000 Americans annually.<sup>10</sup> Increasingly, health experts are calling for governments to support community designs which encourage physical activity.<sup>11</sup> With Ohioans citing "observing and enjoying nature" as one of the prime motivators for outdoor recreation<sup>12</sup>, Water Trails can be part of this design renaissance.

Water Trails provide significant benefit to the local rural communities through which they flow. A recent study of the impact of Water Trails on local economies indicated that, while the trails, in themselves, would not sustain local economies, their development could help local communities diversify economically and improve the local quality of life.<sup>13</sup>

Travel and tourism is one of the largest industries in Ohio. Water Trails will be a growing element of the state's recreation and tourism industry. Currently, paddlers impact local economies by spending on food, lodging and gasoline. A 1998 Ohio study showed that boaters, including canoeists and kayakers, spent an average of \$55 per trip on food and lodging alone.<sup>14</sup> This compares with a 2002 national study which showed expenditures from \$27 to \$63 per day. This national study showed an average of \$88 per day for destination paddlers who spent multiple nights on the trail. Therefore, Water Trails with camp sites increase paddling revenues and provide more income than the cost of development.<sup>15</sup>

Adjacent landowners will benefit from Water Trails. These trails will expand the recreational opportunities offered at parks and other publicly held lands along streams. By providing upstream and downstream access points, Water Trails will increase stream utilization by private landowners. Where zoning is compatible, adjacent land owners may establish commercial businesses related to Water Trails, like canoe liveries and eateries.

Water Trails will encourage stewardship on behalf of the state's streams. It is a well-demonstrated phenomenon that people value what they know and experience. Ohioans routinely value water quality as important.<sup>16</sup> However, nearly 40% of Ohio streams do not meet the minimum standard for healthy fish populations.<sup>17</sup> Citizen support is a key element in how government funds river restoration. As loss of habitat is a leading cause of loss of "fishable" streams benefits, local land-use practices are pivotal in preserving and restoring healthy streams. Experiencing Ohio's Water Trails will encourage citizens to support funding initiatives which preserve and restore streams and to promote local regulations which protect streams and enhance their aesthetics. Healthy, attractive streams can add up to three-times the property value of degraded, channelized streams<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, increased stewardship will significantly improve both Ohio's streams and local quality of life.

Ohio should complete the Discover Ohio's Water Trails system in order to provide its citizens with the abundant benefits of navigable streams.

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<sup>1</sup> North American Water Trails, <http://www.amrivers.org/feature/watertrails.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ohio Outdoor Recreation in Ohio, 2003 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

<sup>3</sup> Ohio Department of Natural Resource, Division of Watercraft, 2003.

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- <sup>4</sup> Ohio Department of Natural Resource, Division of Watercraft, 2003.
- <sup>5</sup> Loomis, John B., and Richard G. Walsh. Recreation Economic Decisions: Comparing Benefits and Costs. Second Edition. Venture Publishing; State College, Pennsylvania; 1999.
- <sup>6</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Related Recreation, State Overview, 2002.
- <sup>7</sup> Roper Starch Worldwide , Outdoor Participation Survey, Recreation Roundtable, 2001.
- <sup>8</sup> Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (*Healthy People 2010*, 2001).  
[http://fitness.gov/physical\\_activity\\_fact\\_sheet.html](http://fitness.gov/physical_activity_fact_sheet.html)
- <sup>9</sup> Healthy Ohioans Program, Ohio Department of Health. <http://www.healthyohioans.org/>
- <sup>10</sup> “President’s Report on Health and Fitness”, Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> Richard Killingsworth, MPH, “Health Promoting Community Design: A New Paradigm to Promote Healthy and Active Communities”, American Journal of Health Care Promotion, January 2003.
- <sup>12</sup> Ohio Outdoor Recreation in Ohio, 2003 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Ohio Department of Natural Resources.
- <sup>13</sup> Lindsay Johnson, MCRP, Case Studies of Water Trail Impacts on Rural Communities, University of Oregon, 2002. <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/WTImpacts.pdf>
- <sup>14</sup> Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Watercraft, 1998.
- <sup>15</sup> Lindsay Johnson, MCRP, Case Studies of Water Trail Impacts on Rural Communities, University of Oregon, 2002. <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/WTImpacts.pdf>
- <sup>16</sup> Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates, “Ohio Statewide Survey”, League of Conservation Voters Education Fund, 2000
- <sup>17</sup> OhioEPA, Division of Surface Water, “State of Aquatic Systems”, 1998.
- <sup>18</sup> Albro, et ale, “Life at the Water’s Edge”, Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan, 2000.