



Ohio Water Trails Information Booklet

*A “How To” Guide for Getting a
Water Trail Designated in Ohio*

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Ohio Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Watercraft
2045 Morse Road, Building A
Columbus, Ohio 43229
(614) 265-6575





Getting Started

Each water trail is unique; however, there are some common items that a trail proponent can do to develop and maintain a water trail. Following are some of the steps that are key to the development of a water trail. Keep in mind that the order may change, and additional steps may be necessary depending on the specific situation.

1. Talk to the people in your community.

One of the first things that you can do is talk to people in the community to determine if there is interest and support in developing a water trail.

2. Bring people together.

Once you have some interest from local stakeholders, it is time to bring everyone together to talk more specifically about developing a water trail. You may want to start by having a few meetings with key stakeholders; however, once you have sufficient support, it is time to have a public meeting to gather input directly from the community, potential trail users, and local/regional entities that manage public access.

There are several things you can do at the first public meeting including asking someone to give an introduction about water trails, inviting key stakeholders to talk about the specific trail that you are proposing and the characteristics of that trail, and soliciting input from the attendees at the meeting. Following are some key questions to ask:

- What are the existing access points for the water trail?
- Are there any additional access points that need to be developed?
- What are the challenges to developing a water trail along this waterway?
- Are there any safety concerns specific to this waterway?
- What significant natural, historical, and cultural characteristics and points of interest are found along this water trail?
- What community resources could be amenities to the proposed trail (campgrounds, land-based trails, parks, and local events) or vice versa?

3. Develop a water trail partnership.

Due to the various entities that may own the existing access sites and others who share your interest in developing a water trail, it may be advantageous to form a partnership. The degree of formality for the partnership is up to the members and specifics of the proposal.

4. Contact ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft about the proposed water trail.

If you are interested in developing a designated water trail, you should contact the ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft to develop project action steps and obtain technical assistance. You will need to identify a member of your partnership who will

act as the local water trail sponsor (lead entity) and serve as the local point of contact for the development of the water trail.

5. Inventory existing access and hazard points as well as natural, cultural, and historical features and points of interest.

Building on the information that you collected during the public meetings, it will be necessary for members of your local partnership to survey and document the entire length of the proposed trail. The inventory should include items such as existing access points, safety hazards, available amenities, and local points of interest. An accurate survey is important to the development of a good trail map and guide.

6. Commit to stewardship and maintenance of the water trail and access sites.

To assure the long-term success of your water trail, a commitment is necessary for the maintenance of the water trail, in particular, the access sites. Consideration also needs to be given to the need for periodic clearing of logjams and strainers that naturally develop along the water trail. The local trail partnership and sponsor should continue to provide updated information about the trail and conduct outreach regarding the trail. Ongoing stewardship can also include access site improvement and development and hazard removal projects.

7. Develop maps and signage.

One of the most important jobs of a successful water trail is to provide information about the waterway. The most useful form of information is a trail map and guide. There are many examples of successful trail maps and guides. Generally, a map and guide include access and hazard sites, trail amenities, safety information, boating regulations, and information on natural, cultural and historic points of interest trail users will see along the way. Roadside and waterway signage for the access and hazard sites should also be developed to assist trail users in identifying trail components. ODNR will provide technical assistance with water trail access sign design.



Guidelines for Designation

Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) is the state agency that officially designates water trails in Ohio. Designation brings funding for map/brochure printing and signage as well as a variety of educational, economic, and environmental benefits. Here are the specific guidelines for the local sponsor to follow in order for the trail to be designated as an official Ohio Water Trail.

- **Public Planning Process**
Designating a water trail must be a public process including public meetings that are advertised as well as press releases about the proposed trail. The purpose of the meetings and press releases is to collect and share information about the water trail (access and hazard points, amenities, etc.) and to gain public input and support.
- **Local Government Notification**
As part of the public process, it is required that water trail organizers work with local and regional government entities that are traversed by the trail. The purpose is to both notify and involve them in the development of the water trail as well as obtain resolutions and/or letters of support that will be submitted with the Application for Designation package. Local support is critical.
- **Ohio Water Trail Logo**
All designated water trails must utilize the Ohio Water Trail logo in the published map and brochure as developed by the Ohio Water Trail Program. Additionally, the ODNR Divisions of Parks and Watercraft and Wildlife logos will be required to be placed in the published map and brochure.
- **Mapping and Signage**
Maps/brochures produced in partnership with the Ohio Water Trail program must be distributed at no cost. All identified access sites should be posted with trail access signs. Other signage such as hazard portage, river mileage, etc. is encouraged. Costs for maps/brochures and signage will be reimbursed by ODNR once designation by the state has occurred.
- **Access Points**
For ease of use, it is recommended that water trails have at least one access site every ten miles. However, each waterway is unique, and consideration needs to be given to the goals of the local water trail partners and sponsor. The access sites need to accommodate boats appropriate for the water trail. Parking should be available.
- **Management/Stewardship Commitment**
The local sponsor of the water trail may be asked to sign a Water Trail Partnership Agreement with ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft under the Ohio Water

Trail Program. The agreement is for a length of five years and includes specific requirements regarding access site conditions and maintenance.

- **Safety Information**

Partners and sponsors of water trails have a responsibility to provide boating and water safety information and to warn of hazards. No waterway is completely safe. However, by providing pertinent information about the waterway and good safety tips, hazardous conditions can be addressed appropriately. For example, users may be advised to portage around a particularly hazardous area (e.g., rapids or a lowhead dam). Safety information is provided in the final published map/brochure as well as installed signage.



Resources

When there is local interest and commitment to develop a water trail, there is always a need for resources to make the project a reality. A variety of public and private resources may be helpful in completing your water trail. It is also important to know what resources you may have in your own backyard that will help you make your water trail a reality.

Public Sources – State

ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft – Offers site evaluation assistance and grants including the Cooperative Boating Facility Grant Program for boating access, the Paddling Enhancement Grant (PEG) Program for paddling specific access, and the Boating Safety Education Grant Program for boating safety education including publications.

<https://ohiodnr.gov/wps/portal/gov/odnr/buy-and-apply/apply-for-grants/grants/grant-opportunities>

ODNR Division of Wildlife – Can provide planning assistance and possibly funding for river access facilities on a case by case basis; priority is given to river systems with good game fisheries. Initial contact should be made through the district fish management supervisor. <https://ohiodnr.gov/wps/portal/gov/odnr/discover-and-learn/safety-conservation/about-ODNR/wildlife/wildlife-contacts>

Public Sources – Federal

National Park Service Rivers, Trails, Conservation Assistance (RTCA Program) – RTCA, also known as River & Trails, works with community groups and local and state governments to conserve rivers, preserve open space and develop trails and greenways.

www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/

Public Sources – Local

Local Municipalities – Key resources for water trails. Municipal leaders should be engaged in the public process of water trails development and be used for support of the trail and individual access site projects. The local municipality may be an access site landowner and may be able to play an important role in the implementation of projects and access improvement and development.

County Engineers – County bridges are possible sites for river access sites; however, each site needs to be evaluated individually for its potential.

Private Sources

Private sources vary based on the geographic location and specific project. Many groups have been successful at involving the local business community in sponsorship of various aspects of a water trail project.



Where Can I Go for More Information?

One of the key characteristics of water trails is that each one is unique. There are many examples of water trails nationally that may be of assistance to you in planning your trail. Following are some resources and examples that may help.

Other Web Resources

American Canoe Association www.americancanoe.org

American Rivers www.americanrivers.org/rivers/discover-your-river/blue-trails/

Canoeing and Paddling Guidelines <https://paddling.com/learn/category/techniques-safety/>

National Park Service

www.nps.gov/subjects/nationaltrailssystem/national-water-trails-system.htm

RTCA Community Toolbox <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/resources.htm>

Specific Water Trails

Capitol Water Trails, Ltd. (Wisconsin) www.capitolwatertrails.org

Cheat River Water Trail <https://cheatriverwatertrail.org/plan-your-trip/river-trail-map/>

Chemung Basin River Trail www.chemungriverfriends.org

Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Network www.baygateways.net

Choptank & Tuckahoe RiverGuide www.riverheritage.org/Riverguide/

Illinois Water Trails <https://paddleillinoiswatertrails.org/>

Iowa Water Trails

www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/Water-Trail-Maps-Brochures

Kentucky Blue Water Trails <https://fw.ky.gov/Education/Pages/Blue-Water-Trails.aspx>

Maine Island Trail Association www.mita.org

Maryland Public Access, Water Trails and Recreation Planning

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/boating/pages/mdwatertrails.aspx>

Michigan Water Trails <https://www.michiganwatertrails.org/>

Nebraska River Trails <https://outdoornebraska.gov/watertrails/>

North Carolina Paddle Trails <https://www.ncparks.gov/trail-use/paddling>

Nova Scotia Water Routes <https://ckns.ca/recreational-paddling>

Pennsylvania Water Trails <https://pfbc.pa.gov/WaterTrail.htm>

Schuylkill River Water Trail <https://schuylkillriver.org/schuylkill-river-watertrail/>

Susquehanna River Water Trails <https://www.susquehannagreenway.org/water-trails>

Three Rivers Water Trail <https://friendsoftheriverfront.org/three-rivers-water-trail/>

Washington Water Trails Association www.wwta.org

Wisconsin Water Trails <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/parks/watertrails>

Publications

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Johnson, Lindsay. Case Studies of Water Trail Impacts on Rural Communities. University of Oregon, 2002. www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/wtimpacts.pdf

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