



PA Water Trails Handbook: Developing your Pennsylvania Water Trail



Water trails are important to recreation and conservation in Pennsylvania, and they contribute to the health of local communities. This handbook is intended to inform groups interested in establishing a water trail on the PA Water Trail Program and steps required for state designation.

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What is a Water Trail?

Definition

Water trails are recreational and educational corridors between specific locations that can be used for both single day and multiple day trips on and along waterways. They are comprised of access points, boat launches, day use sites, and -- in some cases -- overnight camping areas. They provide safe access to and information about Pennsylvania's waterways while also providing connections to our diverse history, ecology, geology, heritage and wildlife.

Pennsylvania Water Trails provide information to users about general boating safety and also local information that's necessary for enjoying the specific water trail. Information should be provided through a combination of materials including a trail map and guide, signage, website, or other format.

Water trails are positive contributors to local communities by providing economic stimulus and also protecting resources that are important to the quality of life of Pennsylvania residents. Water trails promote an ethic of caring that makes the Commonwealth a better place. Pennsylvania Water Trails embrace the "Leave No Trace" code of outdoor ethics that promotes the responsible use & enjoyment of the outdoors.

First established by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the PA Water Trails Program is now a partnership of four entities. In 2008, PFBC and its partners – the National Park Service, PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Pennsylvania Environmental Council – signed a Statement of Purpose. The statement is included in this document, but in a few words the purpose of the program is to encourage the development and maintenance of water trails with the intent of increasing both stewardship and recreation.

The program is managed by Pennsylvania Environmental Council and funded by DCNR, with ongoing partnership from PFBC and NPS.

The guiding principles of the program, detailed throughout this document, are:

1. Partnerships
2. Stewardship
3. Volunteerism
4. Education
5. Conservation
6. Community Vitality
7. Diversity
8. Wellness and Wellbeing

The partners engaged in a strategic planning process in 2013, determining that the focus moving forward will be on helping sponsors of established trails to maintain and market the existing system. Applications for new trails will be accepted, but not actively sought out.

Water Trail Checklist & Steps in Establishing a Trail

The water trail checklist provides guidance on what activities you should undertake to implement your water trail.

Every water trail must have...

- ☐ A **local managing organization (trail sponsor)** to care about and manage the trail.
- ☐ A part in the statewide water trail system with **state designation** by the program.
- ☐ Water trail **feasibility study or plan** to determine if your waterway can be a water trail.
- ☐ **Public involvement** by the local community, including two public meetings while determining the feasibility of establishing a trail.
- ☐ A **map** providing information for using the trail. The map should be created and printed following official designation.
- ☐ **Free** information provided to users on the internet and/or printed materials.
- ☐ Active **volunteers** who will participate in the ongoing management of the trail.
- ☐ **Signage** that can direct users, interpret the resource, provide safety and orientation information.
- ☐ **Maintenance** of existing and new amenities (boat access points, signage, information provided, etc.).

Every water trail project should consider...

- ☐ The **liability exposure** assumed in promoting water recreation and an insurance plan that is appropriate to managing a water trail.
- ☐ **Designation** by the CBGN (where relevant), National Recreation Trail Program, American Canoe Association or other nationally recognized organization.
- ☐ **For-Sale** water trail map & guide.
- ☐ **Volunteer** recruitment & development program.
- ☐ Conducting **outreach educational programs**.
- ☐ **Trail amenities** & facilities including campsites, comfort stations, access points, a full range of signage, etc.
- ☐ There are a variety of additional **planning and implementation** efforts to consider:
 - Stewardship & conservation plan.
 - Interpretive Plan
 - Management Plan
 - Marketing & promotion plan.

Major Steps in Establishing a Water Trail:

- 1) Contact Pennsylvania Environmental Council to learn more about how to establish and maintain a state-designated water trail
- 2) Undergo a feasibility study, either managed by your group or with the assistance of a professional consultant (PA Environmental Council can supply guidelines)
- 3) Apply for state designation via PA Environmental Council
- 4) Secure liability insurance if not already held
- 5) Develop materials such as a map and guide, signs and webs

Benefits of Establishing a State-Designated Water Trail

- Each water trail is included on state-wide marketing materials, including on www.fishandboat.com and www.pawatertrails.org. Both sites include a GIS map of the state system. The PFBC website includes a trail listing organized by watershed with details on each trail and links to your map and guide (provided by your group).
- Ability to brand your trail as a PA Water Trail and use the standard map and guide format (template provided)
- Access to information on best practices, funding resources, etc. via PA Water Trail News (email newsletter sent at least quarterly)
- Annual water trail manager meetings that cover current issues and opportunities and allow for networking with other groups

Expectations of Water Trail Sponsors

- Upon approval as a state water trail, create map and guide in accordance with program brand. Seek staff review of draft guide before printing to ensure that boating regulations and paddling safety tips are up to date.
- Provide GIS coordinates of trail start and end points, access points, and amenities (via provided spreadsheet) so that the trail can be added to www.fishandboat.com.
- Attend annual managers' meeting in Harrisburg.
- Maintain a quality trail system years beyond designation.

See previous page (Water Trail Checklist) for additional requirements and recommendations.

PA Water Trails Partnership

Pennsylvania has a statewide program to support the development of water trails. The partners include: PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, PA Environmental Council, PA Fish & Boat Commission, National Park Service – Chesapeake Bay Gateways & Watertrails Network and National Park Service-Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program. The partners are available to assist with local water trail efforts and to advance projects at the statewide level.

For more information or assistance please contact the PA Water Trails Partners:

1. Pennsylvania Environmental Council
Amy Camp, acamp@pecpa.org, 412-481-9400
www.pecpa.org
2. PA Fish & Boat Commission
Laurel Anders, landers@pa.gov, 717-705-7849
www.fishandboat.com
3. PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources
Terry Hough, though@state.pa.us, 717-783-2712
www.dcnr.state.pa.us
4. National Park Service – Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network
Bob Campbell, bcampbell@chesapeakebay.net, 412-267-5747
www.baygateways.net
5. National Park Service – Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program
Dave Lange, david_a_lange@nps.gov, 215-597-6477
www.nps.gov/rtca

PA Water Trails Partnership

Statement of Purpose

Among
The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,
The National Park Service,
The Pennsylvania Environmental Council

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania has an abundance of natural resources that are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike with 86,000 miles of rivers and streams in one state;

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania is a major contributor to the Chesapeake Bay as home to 517 miles of the Susquehanna River, which provides the Chesapeake Bay with fifty percent of its fresh water (24 million gallons) on a typical day;

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania is a participating partner in the multistate effort to conserve and restore the Chesapeake Bay watershed and as a signatory to the Chesapeake 2000 agreement has committed to expanding public access to Bay tributaries in an environmentally sensitive manner, to increasing the number of designated water trails in the region, and to support local and community-based watershed restoration and protection projects;

WHEREAS, the Chesapeake Bay Initiative Act of 1998 (*P.L. 105-312, Sections 501-2*) calls for the National Park Service to facilitate development of a network of Chesapeake Bay gateways, water trails and other connecting routes in cooperation with other Federal agencies, state and local governments, non-profit organizations and the private sector and to establish a technical and financial assistance program to aid development of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network;

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania is a national leader in the development of water trails with an active water trails program and over twenty water trails developed or under development. Each water trail provides users with a different and unique trail experience;


WHEREAS, In order to ensure the ongoing stewardship and sustainability of our water trails, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, National Park Service-Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network, National Park Service-Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council agree to work together in a coordinated effort with local and regional organizations to achieve collaborative goals of the Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership; and


NOW, THEREFORE, we the undersigned representing the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, National Park Service – Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network, National Park Service – Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program, Pennsylvania Environmental Council intend to collaborate to provide overall planning and coordination for implementation of water trail projects in Pennsylvania. The partners will work in concert with a variety of local and regional organizations and agencies to implement projects throughout Pennsylvania and with our adjoining states. We will work with the understanding that each resource has its own character and will need to be approached with that character in mind. The goals of the Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership are to:

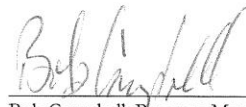
- To encourage and further the development of water trails in Pennsylvania,
- To strengthen the connections between and among existing water trails to promote a system of water trails,
- To better market and promote Pennsylvania's water trails as a recreational resource to residents and visitors alike,
- To provide technical assistance to local project managers who are implementing water trail projects,
- To promote the national recognition of Pennsylvania's water trails,
- To provide assistance to local project manager specifically with the long-term maintenance, stewardship and sustainability of water trails.
- To promote the development and management of water trails as a means to enhance citizen stewardship of local water resources

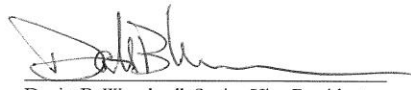
By this statement of our intention, we will work toward our goals in a spirit open to others, welcome new ideas, encourage collaborative approaches, and always be committed to the common goal of a strong system of water trails that benefit the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

This Statement of Purpose and the commitments of the parties hereunder are subject to the availability of funding. Nothing contained herein shall be construed as binding the parties to expend in any one fiscal year any sum in excess of appropriations or administrative allocations for the purpose of this statement, or to involve the parties in any contract or other obligation for the further expenditure of money in excess of such appropriations or allocations. In addition, nothing contained herein shall be interpreted as obligating the parties to provide funding, compensation or reimbursement.


 Michael D. DiBerardinis, Secretary
 PA Department of Conservation &
 Natural Resources


 Douglas J. Austen, Ph.D., Executive Director
 PA Fish & Boat Commission


 Bob Campbell, Program Manager
 Chesapeake Bay Gateways and
 Watertrails Network


 Davitt B. Woodwell, Senior Vice President
 Pennsylvania Environmental Council



Secretary DiBerardinis (PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources), Dr. Austen (PA Fish & Boat Commission), Davitt Woodwell (PA Environmental Council) and Bob Campbell (National Park Service – Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Network) sign the PA Water Trail Partnership Statement of Purpose at the 4th Annual PA Greenways & Trails Summit (2008).

Guiding Principles and Guidelines

“The water trail vision is best fulfilled when global principles, augmented by local purposes, guide trail development and use. Successful water trails have used the following ‘Principles’ as a framework for the development of their definitive trail design and management plan.”

*-North American Water Trails, Inc.**

The PA Water Trails Partnership has adopted eight principles to guide our work promoting and developing water trails in Pennsylvania. The principles are intended to promote the potential of water trail projects. Water trail projects can have a positive impact on local communities by building an ethic of stewardship, bringing new people into the community and providing recreational resources for local residents.

PA Water Trail Principles

1. Partnerships
2. Stewardship
3. Volunteerism
4. Education
5. Conservation
6. Community Vitality
7. Diversity
8. Wellness & Well-being

We have also developed guidelines for fulfilling each principle and provided project examples and resources to get more information. When considered together, the principles and guidelines should provide a “*how to*” manual for developing a water trail. Some elements may not be relevant to your specific experience, but there should be something in each principle that is important for each project. The Partners encourage you to use each of the eight principles in the development of your water trail.

* North American Water Trails, Inc. is a non-profit organization that spearheaded the national water trails movement. They can be credited with initially developing these principles. They are no longer an active organization, but their work lives on in other national organizations like the American Canoe Association and American Rivers.

#1- PARTNERSHIPS – Cooperating and Sharing

A water trail is the product of partnerships among an array of governmental and non-governmental entities. With volunteers as the key supporters and advocates of the trail, partnerships are developed among government land managing agencies, private property owners, government regulatory agencies, user groups, and local businesses. Together, these groups can create and maintain and promote a successful water trail with broad-based and long-term support.

Partnership Guidelines

-Establish a Core Group - Form a strong core group of similarly inclined individuals and representatives of organizations who are keenly interested in establishing a water trail and will share in the workload.

-Form an Advisory Committee - Create an advisory, or steering, committee composed of the core group and the initial key partners to generate a long-term development and management plan for the trail and if appropriate, formally establish a permanent water trail organization.

-Identify Stakeholders - Identify all individuals and groups in your community that could have an interest in or be affected by the creation of the water trail. They are your stakeholders. Some stakeholders may become partners—those who will work jointly on shared goals. Others may become sponsors—those who support the trail with funds, resources, or expertise. Some may become opponents of the trail. To be successful, you must understand and address the interests and concerns of all of these stakeholders.

-Local Government Notification - As part of the public process it is highly recommended that water trail organizers work with the local governments that are traversed by the trail. The purpose is both to notify and involve them in the development of the water trail. Local support is critical. Water trails benefit local governments so it is only logical that they should be involved. Also, if the local government is not involved at the outset of the project there may be unforeseen conflicts as the trail goes into development.

-Public Planning Process - In order to designate a water trail, there must be a public process. This includes multiple public meetings that are publicly advertised. The purpose of the meetings is to collect information about the water trail (access points, amenities, etc.) and to gain support for the water trail.

-Create a Vision - Develop a vision statement that describes the desired future condition of the water trail and how the group wants to proceed. Members of the core group may have different ideas on what the trail actually should be. Reaching a consensus on a vision statement will help build a sense of ownership and commitment.

-Define the Mission - Create a mission statement that defines the role of your group in reaching your vision for the water trail. This statement can help keep the group focused and introduce and explain it to others. The mission statement should be clear and concise—ideally, no more than 25 words.

-Establish Partnerships - Use the vision and mission statements to establish partnerships with local governments, community organizations, state natural resource agencies, private property owners, and user groups such as paddlers' clubs and anglers. Partners should be willing to share in the responsibility for getting the actual work done.

-Communicate with Stakeholders - Conduct face-to-face interviews with community leaders, meet with focus groups, mail a survey to all landowners that may be affected by the proposed water trail, conduct public forums and meet one-on-one with water trail opponents. Develop a variety of ways to communicate with the different kinds of stakeholders.

Project Examples:

-Chemung Basin River Trail Partnership – www.chemungrivertrail.com

-Susquehanna River Trail Association Bylaws available at
http://www.susquehannarivertrail.org/about_srta.htm

Resources:

-Planning a Water Trail - http://www.baygateways.net/trail_planning.cfm

-Vision Creating - http://www.nps.gov/phso/rtcatoobox/dec_vision.htm

- Florida Guidelines for Paddling Trails Development
<http://myfwc.com/Boating/Paddling/Guidelines.htm>

#2- STEWARDSHIP – Leaving No Trace

Water trails promote minimum-impact practices that ensure a sustainable future for waterways and adjacent lands. Water trails embrace the Leave No Trace Code of Outdoor Ethics that promotes the responsible use and enjoyment of the outdoors. A trail user, who understands their potential impacts to water, soil, vegetation and wildlife, and their impact on other trail users, will be a better caretaker. When users learn to protect and restore areas along the trail, they may be inclined to do likewise in their own communities and backyards.

Stewardship Guidelines

-Stewardship & Conservation Plan – Generally the process can include: 1. Assess the current water trail situation, 2. Develop a future vision for the water trail, 3. Develop water trail management principles, 4. Develop a water trail stewardship and conservation action plan, 5. Determine future organizational structure for future water trail management. The plan should inventory significant viewsheds, landscapes and critical habitats and develop a plan for riparian buffer protection.

-Maintain Facilities - Clean and repair parking areas, launch ramps, campsites, fire rings, toilets, portage trails, signs, exhibits, and other facilities. Establish a regular maintenance schedule and keep records of repairs and replacements.

-Conduct Cleanup Campaigns - Organize public campaigns to clean up trash along the waterway at least twice a year, before and after the busy season.

-Monitor Water Quality - Enlist volunteers to establish and conduct an ongoing water-quality monitoring program. Alert officials about illegal dumping, floodplain encroachments, and damage to natural, archeological, and historical resources.

-Promote Species Awareness – Promote drying of equipment to prevent transferring invasive species from one waterway to another. “Clean Your Gear”

Project Examples:

-West Branch of the Susquehanna Stewardship & Conservation Plan. Contact the Northcentral PA Conservancy, www.npcweb.org.

-Clinton County Cleanscapes <http://www.clintoncountypa.com/PA%20Cleanways%20Banner.htm>.

Resources:

-Bureau of Forestry – Campsite and Aquatic Buffer Guidelines

http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/sfrmp/documents/Water_Aquatic_Buffer_Guidelines.pdf

-Protecting the Resource http://www.baygateways.net/trail_protecting.cfm

-American Canoe Association - Club Fostered Stewardship Program

<http://www.americancanoe.org/stewardship/cfs.lasso>

- Leave No Trace <http://www.lnt.org/>

- Maine Island Trail Association - Recreation Management Plan for the Public Islands on the Maine Island Trail 2004-2014. <http://www.mita.org/learn/stewardship>

#3- VOLUNTEERISM – Experiencing the Joy of Involvement

Most water trails are created, promoted, and maintained through the energy and dedication of local citizens, working individually and through organizations to support the trail. Community involvement and volunteerism are the keys to developing a sense of trail stewardship, promoting the trail within the community, encouraging respect for the trail's natural and cultural heritage and ensuring that local governments support the trail's existence. Through love of place, and of good times, volunteers bring hard work and celebration to the water trail community.

Volunteerism Guidelines

-Management & Stewardship Commitment – There must be a local group who is willing to sign a Water Trail Partnership Agreement with the PA Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC). The agreement is for a length of five years and includes specific agreements about signage, mapping, roles of the local group and the PFBC, stewardship goals, etc.

-Establish a Formal Organization – Consider establishing, after gaining sufficient community support, a permanent organization to implement the development and management plans and to carry out fundraising and personnel initiatives, including the hiring of a professional staff. Members of the advisory committee may well become officers and directors of the new organization. An alternative to establishing a formal organization would be to have one of your partners “adopt” the water trail as an ongoing project.

-Recruit Volunteers – Enlist volunteers to carry out day-to-day stewardship tasks and special development projects. Your organization cannot succeed without a solid corps of volunteers. Use their expertise so their tasks are meaningful. Recognize their contributions.

Project Examples:

-Susquehanna River Trail Association - Island Steward Program www.susquehannarivertrail.org

-Friends of the Rappahannock - Volunteer Programs www.riverfriends.org

Resources:

-RTCA Community Toolbox – Working with Volunteers
http://www.nps.gov/phso/rtcatoobox/org_volunteers.htm

#4- EDUCATION – Learning by Experience

Through comprehensive trail guides, signage, public outreach, and informative programs, water trail organizations encourage awareness of the natural, cultural, and historical attributes of the trail. Serving as outdoor classrooms, water trails teach through seeing, listening, touching – experiencing.

Education Guidelines

-Educating the Public – Building and expanding community support for the water trail is a never-ending process and should be considered an essential element of development of the trail. Provide a variety of interpretive educational programs to inform both children and adults about the waterway. An informed citizenry will value and champion the trail and become active in stewardship activities.

-Develop a Marketing & Promotion Plan – Focus efforts by developing a specific action plan for promoting your water trail. Define the audience that you want to attract and identify how to get information to them. A well thought out plan of attack will help in reaching everyone that you want to be involved in your local water trail.

Project Examples:

- Friends of the Rappahannock - Education Programs www.riverfriends.org
- Wildlands Conservancy - Education Programs www.wildlandspa.org
- PA Fish & Boat Commission Learning Center <http://www.fish.state.pa.us/edind.htm>

Resources:

- Boating Sidekicks www.boatingsidekicks.com
- Leave No Trace PEAK (Promoting Environmental Awareness in Kids) Program www.lnt.org

#5- CONSERVATION – Protecting our Natural and Cultural Heritage

Water trail activities support the conservation of the aquatic ecosystem, contiguous lands, and important cultural artifacts. Trail builders and activists are a respected constituency advocating for resource protection and participating in resource restoration. The water trail community is a watchdog in prevention of environmentally harmful acts, striving to sustain the natural integrity of the trail and preserve the quality of the trail experience.

Conservation Guidelines

-Protecting the Resource – The water trail’s success now hinges on keeping the waterway as pristine as possible or improving its condition through a variety of conservation programs ranging from cleanup campaigns to habitat restoration projects.

-Conservation and Education – At all times, the water trail organization must be vigilant about protecting—and, better yet, enhancing—the natural qualities of the waterway itself. By initiating a series of conservation projects and education programs, the organization not only protects the waterway but gains a cadre of water trail supporters.

Project Examples:

- PA Fish & Boat Commission - Conservation Programs
http://www.fish.state.pa.us/partners_programs.htm

Resources:

- Pennsylvania Land Trust Alliance www.conserveland.org
- American Rivers Blue Trails Program
http://www.americanrivers.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AR7_BlueTrails
- PA DCNR PA Rivers Conservation Program <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/rivers/riversconservation/>

#6- COMMUNITY VITALITY – Connecting People and Places

A water trail is a network of recreational and educational opportunities. Hiking trails, bikeways, greenways, museums, historic sites, parks and preserves are connected by water trails creating frontiers for exploration, discovery and enrichment. The connections build a sense of place and bind citizens in a love for their community. Water trails link families who grow together through work and play on the trail.

Community Vitality Guidelines

-Drafting a Water Trail Plan - Planning and developing a water trail requires maintaining a careful balance between protecting the resource and responding to the needs of landowners, trail users, and the community. You have established a steering committee or formal organization, talked with the stakeholders, established partnerships, recruited volunteers, and started raising funds. Now it is time to study the evidence and make some thoughtful choices about the character of the trail.

-Connecting to Land Based Recreation- Make strong connections to land-based recreation, natural and historic resources. By emphasizing land-based points of interest in water trail publications and information water trails provide another way to bring people into local communities. Connections can be strengthened through shared facilities (i.e. shared parking lots for both land and water trails) and Trail Town development.

-Interpretive Plan – An interpretive master plan emphasizes the natural, cultural and stewardship components of a water trail. Plans typically provide information about under-represented themes and they can be used to encourage greater personal involvement by telling the stories of the water trail. Plans guide future implementation of wayside exhibits and other interpretive materials.

Project Examples:

-Susquehanna Greenway Interpretive Plan – www.susquehannagreenway.org

-River Towns – Lancaster York Heritage Regions - <http://www.lyhr.org/RiverTowns.asp>

-PA Wilds <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/info/pawilds/index.aspx>

Resources:

-Chesapeake Bay Gateway Network Interpretive Planning Assistance -

<http://www.baygateways.net/assistance.cfm>.

-Case Studies of Water Trail Impacts on Rural Communities

<http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/wtimpacts.pdf>

-Northern Forest Canoe Trail –

- Trip Planner <http://www.northernforestcanoetrail.org/>
- Baseline Economic Impact Study <http://www.uvm.edu/~snrvtdc/NFCT/>
- Art and Community Landscapes http://www.nefa.org/feature_canoeTrail/index.html

#7-DIVERSITY– Providing Opportunities for all

Water trails are non-exclusive. They benefit the able-bodied and the disabled, the young and the old, the disadvantaged and the advantaged. Water trails welcome all those that want to respectfully enjoy and appreciate the trail experience. Through shared work and play, tolerance and understanding are fostered. Broad-based participation in trail activities is achieved through affirmative outreach and recruitment.

Diversity Guidelines

-Outreach Programming – Many water trail managers are paddling enthusiasts who have already “come to the river”. To enhance the positive long-term impacts of water trails it is important to go beyond the *usual suspects* to get as many people involved as possible. Project managers should consider developing their own programs or partnering with other organizations who can assist getting people out onto the water.

Project Examples:

- Venture Outdoors www.ventureoutdoors.org
- Wildlands Conservancy – Bike & Boat Program
http://wildlandspa.org/recreation/bikeandboat_main.html

Resources:

- The Black & Brown Faces in America’s Wild Places, by Dudley Edmondson, publisher: Adventure Publications, Inc., 144 pages, softcover.
- Universal Trail Access Program <http://www.beneficialdesigns.com/rectech/water.html>
Adaptive paddling for paddlers with disabilities

#8-WELLNESS AND WELL-BEING– Caring for Self and Others

Water trails are wholesome; fresh air and exercise bring fitness and health to trail users. While actively promoting these benefits, water trail users need reliable and accurate safety information and training to responsibly enjoy and appreciate water trails. Safe use requires a commitment to safe design and sound management. Awareness, education and safety skills training promote the wellness and well-being of all water trail users.

Wellness and Well-being Guidelines

-Gather Data - Conduct a feasibility study. Identify needs, problems, and opportunities. Determine the funds and other resources required to establish and maintain the trail. Create a development plan and budget. Your best case for your trail system will be one that articulates benefits to the community.

-Raise Funds - Develop a fundraising plan based on projects in your development plan. Focus first on obtaining contributions of money, services, products, and labor from the local community. Then, extend your fundraising efforts to a larger, regional audience and to state and federal agencies and foundations that provide grants.

-Safety Information - Managers of water trails have a responsibility to provide 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 asked to portage around a particularly hazardous area.

-Establishing Access - Over the years local boaters commonly create informal sites to get onto and off the waterway. Some of them make ideal accesses for the trail while others might be dangerous, awkwardly placed, and unevenly spaced for general public use. You probably will have to develop some new launch sites and parking areas and you may have to create some campsites.

-Producing Guide Materials - All but the most adventurous of boaters want a map of the water trail and information about sites—and hazards—they will encounter along the way. They want to know the locations of launching and parking areas, campsites, picnic areas, toilets, and other facilities. You can convey this information, safety tips, and management policies through map folders, guidebooks, signs, and orientation exhibits and websites. Properly written and designed, they can greatly enhance the water trail experience.

-Developing Trail Facilities - Facilities that are customarily built along a water trail fall into three general categories: access, day use, and camping. The size and appearance of these facilities may well be determined by the availability of funds, the setting, and the expertise of the construction crew.

Project Examples:

-Wildlands Conservancy - Walk for Wellness <http://wildlandspa.org/recreation/walk.html>

-Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership <http://www.wvwellnesstrails.org/>

Resources:

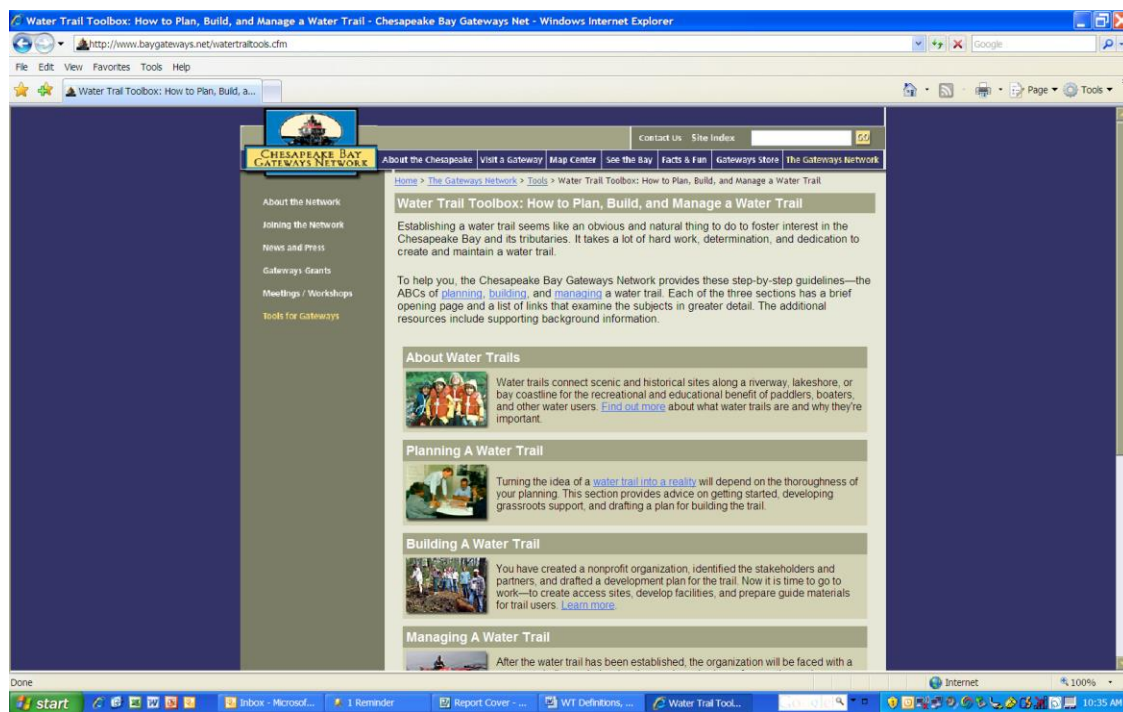
-PFBC Technical Guidance Program and Safe Paddling Tips www.fish.state.pa.us

-PANA – Keystone Active Zone & nrg Outdoors Program www.nrgoutdoors.org

- Logical, Lasting Launches http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/ht_launch_guide.html

Resources

A useful resource for water trail development is the Water Trail Toolbox that was put together by the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network (CBGN). This online toolbox provides hands on information about developing a high quality water trail. The Toolbox is available at <http://www.baygateways.net/watertrailtools.cfm>.



Another important resource that cuts across several of the principles is the Community Toolbox that was prepared by the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program. The Community Toolbox provides information on a variety of topics to assist project managers in working in their communities. The Community Toolbox is available at <http://www.nps.gov/phso/rctcatoolbox/>.

Also, the River Management Society and National Park Service have collaborated to produce [Prepare to Launch!](#), a guide on building water trail access points.

Other national organizations that have information about water trails are:

- American Canoe Association www.americancanoe.org
- American Rivers www.americanrivers.org
- American Trails www.americantrails.org
- River Management Society www.river-management.org

Water Trail Liability Considerations

The Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership has reviewed the Pennsylvania Recreational Use of Land and Water Act (RULWA) and interpret that the act, while offering liability protections to landowners, does not offer any particular protections to local water trail sponsors. We did not seek legal opinion on this, but rather have assumed a conservative interpretation of the act concerning potential liability exposure to trail sponsors.

We recommend that any groups seeking to understand the liability exposure associated with encouraging on-water recreational activities should seek independent counsel and additionally secure liability insurance that covers on-water activities. An additional potential measure is to carry a second insurance policy, either an umbrella policy or an excess liability policy, to offer another layer of protection. As previously stated, trail sponsors should seek a recommendation from independent counsel on coverage amounts.

Additionally, disclaimer language on all water trail materials (maps, signs, website, social media, etc.) is essential in keeping water trail users informed of the hazards and reducing trail sponsors' liability exposure. Trail sponsors should make every effort to warn against hazards and convey the message that on-water activities are inherently dangerous. All known hazards should be clearly marked on the water trail materials; trail users should be advised to follow recommended routes and be informed that river conditions vary depending on weather and that conditions can change rapidly based on weather events; users should be reminded that they are responsible for their own safety and follow PA boating regulations.