



Northwest Indiana Water Trails Inventory

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Purpose:

- To expand environmental recreational opportunities through the creation of a comprehensive inventory of Northwest Indiana's Water Trails including inventoried public access sites, feasible paddling routes, and specific resource conditions.
- To gain valuable experience extrapolating real field data into articulated environmental policy action points.



Image 1: Sign used to designate a paddler's campsite along the Kankakee River Source: Jon Micah Goeller

Study Sites:

Public access points and trail conditions were monitored along:

- Lake Michigan,
- Deep River,
- Wolf Lake,
- Lakes of La Porte,
- East Branch Little Calumet,
- Kankakee River,
- West Branch Little Calumet,
- Trail Creek



Image 2: Map of potential public access points and water trails in Northwest Indiana. (Dots indicate potential access points and blue lines indicate potential water trails). Source: Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission Blueways

Background:

- This study was undertaken to expand previous efforts aimed to increase paddler's access and familiarity with the Lake Michigan waterways and other aquatic resources.
- The completed data sets will be used to aid a variety of policy initiatives centered around improving public access to water trails.

Project Partners:

- While the ultimate goal is to make data available to the public, potential data destinations include the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association, Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Visitors Center, and the Great Lakes Sea Grant Network.

Techniques & Equipment:

- Utilized GPS tracking camera to inventory essential features and amenities of public access points along each of the potential water trails.
- Documented general water trail conditions and potential obstructions including log jams, bridges, and dangerous flows.
- Video recorded unique features and wildlife of each trail

Image 3: Festival Park (Hobart) Public Access Point along Deep River. Source: Jon Micah Goeller



Image 4: Jon Micah Goeller Geo-tagging an item of interest along a stretch the potential Deep River Water Trail Source: Eriq Sprenne

Data and Results:

- The necessary field data was transposed into separate sections describing the physical conditions of the water body and existing/potential public access sites.
- Priority status was given for water trails with conveniently located access points, visually stimulating attractions, and without substantial woody debris accumulation.
- Sections of individual water trails were designated as high priority areas for both clean up and woody debris modifications.
- Special adherence was paid to the ecological benefits of woody debris during any alteration process



Image 5: Participants in Northwest Indiana Paddling Association's Deep River event navigate around a recently modified section of woody debris. Excessive accumulation of woody debris can be detrimental to paddling efforts and can create dangerous water way conditions Source: Jon Micah Goeller

Category	Classification & Summary	Description
General Conditions:	Calm Flow	Calm flow makes for an easy paddle both up/down stream except after periods of heavy rain. Pleasant scenery is found on both sides of the river with limited human development. Isolated sections of trash exist in front of log jams that will be removed.
Trail Conditions:	Wide	20ft. across at the narrowest point and over 100 ft. across at the widest. Relatively straight paddle with isolated sections where moderate maneuverability is required. The water color remains murky until the early fall.
Canoe vs. Kayak :	Canoe + Kayak	Favorable conditions for both canoe and kayak paddlers. The calm currents provide a wonderful canoe paddle for all ages.
Portage Necessity	Wide, Deep	Deep River runs very wide and deep therefore it is not susceptible to woody debris buildup except from isolated sections from the Festival Park access point to the Riverview Park access point.
Portage Conditions:	Limited	Limited availability of sand/gravel stretches. Most of the areas around the log jams have high banks making portaging a challenge.
Aesthetic Conditions	Natural	River runs through most undeveloped shoreline with isolated houses. Limited commercial interaction. Water is dark in color, with limited visibility past the surface. Pleasant bank vegetation. Large numbers of predatory water fowl.

Table 1. Data Sheet for the Water Trail conditions along Deep River. Source: Jon Micah Goeller

Classification	Lat. / Long.	Distance from Launch Site	Passage Cleared	Description
Log Jams:	41° 32' 14", -87° 15' 16"	0.19 miles	Yes-6/18/2013	Exists after the section of faster moving water under the rail road bridge. Small jam on the right side of the river. Narrow passageway between the jam and the gravel bank (4ft.) during low water.
	41° 32' 14", -87° 15' 16"	0.43 miles	Yes-6/18/2013	Large jam spanning the width of the river. A deep water passage exists in the middle of the jam.
	41° 32' 34", -87° 15' 10"	0.65 miles	Yes-6/18/2013	Large jam spanning the width of the river. A deep water passage exists in the left portion of the jam.
	41° 32' 34", -87° 15' 10"	1.11 miles	Open	Pocketed jam reaching the left bank. Passages exist on the left side through the jam and on the right along the bank.

Table 2. Data sheet for potential Deep River Water Trail obstructions. The data is gathered from the stretch of trail from the Festival Park to River View Access Points. Source: Jon Micah Goeller

Summary:

- At the end of the research period, eight bodies of water in Northwest Indiana had completed data sets and geo-tagged photo galleries.
- By interpreting field data sets, attending relevant environmental policy meetings, and working with prominent non-for-profit/ governmental organizations I gained a new perspective and direction for both my professional and academic career.
- Northwest Indiana offers unique opportunities to paddle the same water ways used by Native Americans and the first settlers in the area.
- The data sets gathered by this research will expand the efforts to increase the scope, recognition, and access to the tremendous paddling opportunities offered by Northwest Indiana.
- In order to move forward with the project, additional data sets must be edited and completed as well as further development of the visual resources.

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