Introduction to Water Trails

National Park Service
Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program
Southeast Regional Office--Atlanta
What is a water trail?

- A defined series of launch sites on a river, coastline, lake.
- Minimum requirements: Safe and legal access to the river, a means of transferring a boat and people between land/water (ramps, slides, steps, sandy shorelines, etc.), and vehicular parking.
What is it?

- Better sites: some facilities, e.g., restrooms, potable water, overnight accommodations (camping or hotels).
- Even better sites: hot showers, food and supplies nearby, safe storage for boats and gear.
What else makes a water trail?:

- Information about the trail: Maps, guides, websites and signage.
- Public ownership and acknowledgment.
- An organization to support, maintain and manage the trail to expand and improve it.
- Local, state, Federal, commercial, nonprofit—or any combination.
Basics of planning a water trail:

- Scope of the project & location.
- Jurisdictions/Partners
- Sites Inventory & Analysis
- Put it all together in a plan, maps, agreements, etc.
- Name it, claim it and make it a brand.
Basics of Planning-- by step:

- **Scope** -- Identify the river, coastline or lake of interest and define the probable start/finish points.

- **Inventory & Analysis:** identify the city, county, state, or Federal agencies that have jurisdiction on that site.

- Identify all existing public sites and try to make them work for the main framework of your water trail.
Plan the segments:

- The mileage of the segments between launch sites should allow for day trips and overnight trips.
- Evaluate your intended users, to determine distances and difficulty. Keep in mind this will be open to the general public.
- Identify locations for overnight accommodations. Tents or other facilities.
- Identify other existing and required facilities at launch sites.
Prepare the Plan:

- Identify the gaps between the public sites and evaluate best solutions.
- Work with your partner jurisdictions on minimum improvements needed at each site to meet the safe/legal/accessible criteria.
Final Steps

- Complete the legal, design and construction phases.
- Prepare the maps, guides, websites.
- Ownership and acknowledgment with maintenance and management coordination & agreements.
- Celebrate and publicize with a grand opening event.
The Benefits

- Recreation
- Conservation
- Low investment
- Revenue generators
Recreation

- Georgia has a variety of water resources--lakes, rivers and the coast.
- Each offers a different kind of opportunity for healthy outdoor activity
- In the U.S., participation increased 117% from 1995-2005.
- Water trails provide recreational opportunities for all sizes and ages--children, adults, seniors.
Conservation

- Water quality & quantity
- Wildlife
- Land use
- Canoe trails make connections between land, water, riparian edges and wildlife habitats.
Conservation

- Canoe trails create environmental stewards.
- They are a constituency that understands land use & watershed issues.
- Upstream issues = downstream problems.
- And paddle groups such as Georgia Canoeing Assoc. sponsor river clean-ups.
Economics

The economics of the trail implementation:

- Inexpensive relative to other recreation projects.
- Not as much land to buy or structures to build.
- Access facilities can be minimal and inexpensive.
- Existing public land and facilities on rivers, lakes and the coast.
Economics

Revenue generation from the canoe trail:

- Increased spending in the local area.
- Existing businesses increase profits--restaurants, outfitters, lodging.
- New businesses develop to support the trail.
- Purchases of gear & equipment increase and support business.
- Festivals and events around the trail support the local community.
- More value from local government support.
- Improve local community with higher quality of life & improved tax base.
Economic Data from the NC Study

- June-September, 2008 Study.
- North Carolina is a destination for paddlers from surrounding states. The greatest numbers of responses from outside North Carolina were from Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.
- The majority of participants in this survey (70%) believe that paddling is a viable form of economic development for North Carolina.
NC Study

- Respondents spent almost one million dollars ($947,800) last year on paddle trips outside their local area.
- Respondents spent nearly $300,000 last year on trips within their local area.
- Kayaks dominated paddlers’ choice of craft. Over half of survey participants (58%)
Three Rivers Greenway-Columbia, SC

- $400 million in private development from $7 million investment in Three Rivers Greenway in downtown Columbia.
- River Alliance, a local nonprofit, lead the efforts to create the greenway.
Blueway projects in Georgia
GA Canoe Trail Projects--Existing

- what does “existing” imply?
- **Altamaha River** -- Partnership with paddle guide and website.
- **City of Canton**—Greenway Master Plan (2000) includes blueway. Part of the Etowah River Blueway.
- **Chattahoochee National Recreation Area** -- NPS
- **Chestatee** --used by outfitters/paddlers, but no guide, public
- **Conasauga River** --- Conasauga River Alliance, the City of Dalton and Dalton Utilities.
GA Canoe Trail Projects--Existing

- **Georgia State Parks---Park Paddlers Club---22 miles in 6 state parks. [www.gastateparks.org](http://www.gastateparks.org)**
- **Oconee River** -- Oconee River Greenway Authority provides river access.
- **Ocmulgee---Middle** – 54 miles. 4 counties (Twiggs, Bleckley, Houston, Pulaski). Implementation started.
- **Rome** – City of Rome access on Coosa, Oostanala & Etowah Rivers.
- **Satilla** – no guide, but sites used.
- **St. Mary’s---River Guide -Florida water mgmt district.**
GA Canoe Trail Projects--Plans

- **Upper Chattahoochee**—about 40 miles from Sautee Creek to Clarks Bridge at Lake Lanier. Report to DNR.
- **Middle Chattahoochee**—planning underway; NPS National Rec. Area south to State Park at Chattahoochee Bend. 53 miles
- **Chattahoochee – Columbus** — city is developing river access with the new riverwalk. A small dam will be removed to allow for canoe and kayak access on the river.
GA Canoe Trail Projects--Plans

- **Chattahoochee –lower section** – several efforts south of Columbus.
- **Etowah River**— 42 miles through Lumpkin, Dawson, Forsyth and Cherokee Counties and City of Canton.
- **Ocmulgee River Blueway**-- Macon to Altamaha River. 199 miles.
- **South River Blueway & Greenway Corridor**: DeKalb and Rockdale Counties.
- **SE Coast Saltwater Paddling Trail** – GA, SC, NC, VA
National Park Service

- Technical Assistance provided to communities for conservation and recreation projects.
- Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program.
- Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta—9 southeastern states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.
- Georgia Program Assistance:
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