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1st Kankakee River Paddlers Camp now open

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LAPORTE | The Northwest Indiana Paddling Association (NWIPA) in partnership with the LaPorte Co. Parks Department, the Kankakee River Basin Commission (KBRC), LaPorte Co. Surveyor's Office, and the LaPorte County Drainage Board, would like to announce that Kankakee River Paddler's Overnight Camp #1 is now open for public use. The campsite is located on the Kankakee River 1.5 miles downstream of the Yellow River DNR Public Access Site on the north bank of the river (Lat. 041° 15' 59.71", Long. 086°51' 8.54"). The new campsite is intended to be the first of several free overnight campsites planned along the bi-state 133 mile long Kankakee River Water Trail spanning from the headwaters rising near South Bend, IN to where the Kankakee joins the Des Plaines River in Will Co. Illinois. Campsite is designed as a primitive paddler's

overnight campsite accessible only by the river. The campsite is

located on levee surrounded by forests, wooded wetlands, and an ancient oxbow of the river which is under lease by the LaPorte Co.

Parks Department. On May 22nd, members of the LaPorte Co. Parks Department, the KBRC, the LaPorte Co. Surveyor's Office, and NWIPA completed the first phase of the project which will allow paddlers river access to the site for camping. NWIPA is responsible for maintaining the property and asks that fellow paddlers exercise a "leave no trace" philosophy when using the campsite.

NWIPA President, Dan Plath said "we are pleased to help make a multi-day paddling trip on the Kankakee possible. NWIPA is delighted by the outstanding partnership that has bloomed between our organization and the Kankakee River Basin Commission, the LaPorte County Drainage Board, the LaPorte Co. Parks Department, and the LaPorte County Surveyor's Office. We also are very appreciative of the efforts by Indiana District 20 Representative Tom Dermody, for his efforts downstate to help secure much needed maintenance funding that helps keep the river open for recreational use. We have begun talks with other interested organizations further downstream to establish three or four additional overnight paddling camps. Our goal is to establish bi-state water trail with National Water Trail recognition.

We are especially thankful for the hard work of NWIPA and LaPorte Co.

Parks Board Member, Ron Knickrehm and Ken Purze, the Vice-Chair of the KRBC and the Laporte County Drainage Board, who helped champion this outstanding project."

According to LaPorte Co. Parks Dept. Superintendent Tim Morgan, "the campsite is as close as you get to remote wilderness in LaPorte County. Henry David Thoreau penned...We need the tonic of wildness – to wade sometimes in where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. At the time that we are earnest to

explore and learn all things, we require that all things mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough nature.”

KBRC Executive Director Jody Melton says of the project, “The Kankakee River is being discovered for the recreational potential it has.

French paddlers explored the interior of North America through the Kankakee River. It is exciting to see our generation discover what the early explorers utilized. While the river is certainly not the same as it was back then, it still provides great opportunities and the first campsite is encouraging as we progress toward even more uses.”

The Kankakee River Water Trail has seen its use by paddlers exponentially grow since being dedicated in 2010. Also, with the popularity of the documentary, “Everglades of the North: the Story of the Grand Kankakee Marsh”, paddlers from both near and far are attracted to the water trail to see the majesty of the river for themselves, according to Plath. The goal of the project was to have the campsite open by Memorial Day.

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