

Online river trail map launched

The Daily Journal staff report

| Posted: Friday, September 11, 2015 9:13 pm

A Kankakee River Water Trail Interactive Map website has been launched as part of an effort to get the river in Illinois and Indiana added to the National Water Trail System.

The map is the product of a cooperative effort between the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association and a group from the Kankakee area, led by firefighter and Boy Scout leader Mike Casagrande. They have been working since last year to gain the National Park Service recognition for the river water trail.

The plan includes designating leave-no-trace camping areas along the river, organizing and equipping trips, creating a portage service around the dams at Kankakee and Wilmington and emphasizing natural and cultural attractions along the way.

Creation of the river trail would encourage local outdoor recreation and attract visitors through publicity via the National Park Service water trails website, Casagrande emphasized.

It also could be an attractive local alternative to distant and costly trips for canoe and kayak adventures for scouts and others, he said, giving examples of trips to the International Boundary Waters in Minnesota and Canada and the new "Swamp Base Adventure" in Louisiana.

The Indiana paddlers have been at work to establish no-trace camping sites in cooperation with local park districts.

The new online Kankakee River map, also known as a Story Map of the river, is available online at kankakeeriverwatertrail.org.

It documents river access points, trip distances, natural features, potential hazards and various points of interest to paddlers along 133 miles of the Kankakee River, from its headwaters near South Bend to its confluence with the Des Plaines River, between Wilmington and Morris, where the Illinois River begins.

"The Kankakee River offers some of the best canoeing in this region and a variety of paddling environments," wrote Dan Plath, NWIPA president. "We eventually want to include photos and video



from spots along the entire river, so people can choose and plan the experience they want.

"We are also working to set up primitive camp sites accessible only by water, and we will map them as they are established."

To assist in trip planning, the map's home page includes a graphic display of river stages along the Kankakee, Iroquois and Yellow rivers.

There are distance charts for 16 recommended trips along the Kankakee River and for the Iroquois River beginning near Brook, Ind.

Kankakee River Days

The website was launched just ahead of "Kankakee River Days — Exploring the History and Ecology of the Everglades of the North" educational program.

The event will feature a visit from Wilderness Inquiry's Canoemobile, which utilizes six 24-foot voyager canoes. There may be as many as 1,000 local students that take part in the program, Plath noted.

The event will take place at the Kankakee River Historical Society's property at the historic Collier Lodge near Baum's Bridge in rural Porter County. Other interactive educational activities will take place on site as part of this new program.

Both the new interactive map and the River Days program will bolster the application for national water trail status, Plath wrote. The trail is already endorsed by more than 60 government agencies, interest groups, elected officials and stakeholders in Illinois and Indiana.

NWIPA hopes for final approval from the National Park Service this fall.

For further information, contact Plath at dplath@nwipa.org or 219-871-9559.