Getting Started With Your Water Trail

Michigan Water Trails Summit
Panel Discussion
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Panel Participants

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• Megan Olds
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Four Questions To Consider

1. Why?
   – Purpose, mission, vision, values

2. Where?
   – Place(s)

3. Who?
   – Owners, users, volunteers, champions, funders

4. How & What?
   – Governance, action plan, financing/fundraising, asset development & stewardship, marketing, etc.
WHY

• What is the purpose of your water trail?
  – What will you protect, preserve, enhance, support, build, connect, promote, steward, etc.?
• What will be different in the world because of your water trail?
• What problem(s) are you trying to solve?
• What values do you want your trail to promote?
• What will success look like?
• What does your water trail celebrate?
WHERE

• Define the place where you envision the water trail
• Where helps to define or refine Why and Who
• Identify and inventory existing assets
  – LIAA’s Access Site inventory form
  – Trail Town asset inventory form/checklist
WHO

• Leaders and Managers: Responsible for process, plan, action steps.
  – “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it’s the only thing that ever has,” – Margaret Meade

• Users: Define target audiences for trail use. Locals, out-of-town visitors, type of paddler/desired experiences, etc.

• Champions: Build relationships with people whom other people in the community trust and ask for their support.

• Supporters/Funders: Build relationships with people who believe in the vision and are willing to support it financially.

• Access Site Owners: Get written permission, resolutions of support.

• Volunteers: Need defined roles, training/ability/skill, coordination.

• Unhappy People & People Who Oppose Trail: Listen to them.

• To get started:
  – Make lists of names for each “Who” category.
  – Identify your message and desired behavior/outcome.
  – Prioritize conversations.
HOW & WHAT

• Leadership and Governance of A Water Trail
  – Government
    • Single unit of government
    • Collaboration among units of government (Interlocal Agreement, Rec Authority, etc.)
    • Department/position “ownership” within government
  – Existing non-profit organization
    • “Program of” an existing organization
  – New non-profit
HOW & WHAT

• Strategy (5 years)
• Action Plan (2 Years, Rolling)
  – Access site improvements and maintenance
  – Events, marketing and communications
  – Waterway stewardship activities
  – Financial and revenue development plan, including capital improvement, maintenance & operations
  – Designation process(es)
  – Roles, responsibilities, timeline for tasks
HOW & WHAT

• Funding
  – Public grants
  – Private foundation grants
  – Individual contributions/gifts
  – Business/corporate sponsorships
  – Earned income (events, merchandise)
Measuring & Communicating Success

• Should tie back to strategy, plan & goals
• Share stories about outcomes; connect with “Who” audiences
  – Events for users
  – Presentations to government bodies
  – Media releases
  – Volunteer party
  – Newsletter/e-news to paddlers and community members
  – VIP gathering for financial supporters
Top 10 Tips for Starting Your Water Trail

1. There is no “one size fits all” for water trail development & management
2. Work with people who are ready
3. Connect with local businesses & government
4. Map your assets on waterways & in communities
5. Be realistic about your capacity
Top 10 Tips for Starting Your Water Trail

6. Develop a strategic plan & a two-year action plan and budget
7. Grants are great for start-ups and planning
8. Don’t rely on grants for operating support
9. Be prepared & be safe
10. Monitor outcomes, celebrate successes & have fun