

Northeast Indiana Water Trails Retreat Notes – 10/16

Mission - *Northeast Indiana Water Trails is a regional partnership working to increase recreation opportunities on our waterways by promoting boat access, water safety and stewardship, and the development of regional water trails that will empower our citizens to become more active and unified*

Northeast Indiana Water Trails SWOT Analysis

Strengths – Internal

- Good network and diversity of partners, stakeholders, and agency involvement.
- Dedicated, knowledgeable, experienced and diverse committee
- Mission
- Great knowledge base
- Passionate volunteers
- Accomplished, passionate manager
- Focus
- Inclusive organizational culture
- Timeliness of formation
- Communication
- Breadth of outreach
- Resources/support of the MPO
- Positive bank account
- An office/equipment
- Successful first NEIWTs annual event
- Interest on social media
- Waterproof Water Trail map of the access sites in WLEB

Weaknesses – Internal

- Some key players not involved.
- Committee members wear many hats
- Lack of volunteers
- Lack of financial resources
- Lack of internal resources/staffing
- Only one very part-time employee
- Lack of official governing body
 - IDNR in more of leadership role
- Possibility of “silo” culture,
- Territorialism
- Lack of goals, objectives... focused direction
- Overlap of other initiatives or vice versa
- Marketing
- Hard to garner collaboration with other counties/organizations
- Lack of website/online Water Trail map

Opportunities - External

- Increasing awareness of river recreational need and benefits through the downtown development activities and projects.
- A lot of waterways in the region
- Willingness to generate events that, increase awareness, and draw media attention.
- Growing public interest/participation in paddle sports.
- Increasing focus on the rivers regionally
- Many actively engaged in increasing river visibility - Other counties promoting river recreation
- Extant activities and organizations as partners and/or support structure
- Zeitgeist
- Government favor
- Extant river culture
- Optimal business structure around project areas
- A lot of momentum on Riverfront development and excitement about the rivers (Fort Wayne)
- Local outfitter hosts many river related events

Threats – External

- Legal navigability status of rivers.
- Actual and/or perceived water quality
- Scarcity of a network of business, organizations, and agency personnel to provide timely, economical services.
- Many other entities who are requesting funds from the same people
- Many other entities actively engaged in increasing river visibility
- Territorialism
- Disparity among partners
- Funding
- Zoning
- Litigation
- Large log jams on Scenic River
- Lack of liveries
- Potential funders confusing the efforts of Riverfront Fort Wayne and those of the NEIWTs
- Accidents occurring on the rivers due to potential dangers such as low head dams and novice paddlers going out without instruction
- Using the rivers is a new concept in NE Indiana and funders are not fully on board yet

1 to 3 YEAR GOALS FOR NEIWT

- Develop Regional Water Trails System
 - River/boating Access along all waterways approximately 7 miles apart
 - Develop Website and Social Media Outreach
- Define and promote Best Management and Operations Practices
- NE. Indiana Water Trails as a “stand alone” non-profit organization
- Create Funding and Development Plan
- Develop Education Plan
- Engage Partners from Each Community
- Encourage, Support, Promote and Track Regional Water Trail activities
- Develop Marketing and Communications Plan

ACTION PLAN

GOAL: Develop Regional Water Trails System

Considerations – Three Watersheds, 11 Counties

- **Inventory** – Complete showing current and potential access sites
- **Funding** – available to launch!

- **Action: Develop Web Site that will include**
 - Map(s),
 - water quality info and links,
 - water quantity links (USGS),
 - access points (IDNR),
 - option for public post/comments

 - **Who:** NEIWT volunteers
 - Initial site up by Feb meeting

- **Action: Assist with River Access Development – Goal to have River/boating Access along all waterways approximately 7 miles apart**
 - **How:**
 - Identify the Gaps – Where additional access is needed
 - Reach out to IDNR Fish and Wildlife – will you build
 - Connect with local partner i.e. parks department
 - **Who:** NIRCC, Region3a will take lead
 - **When:** Report of Progress at **Feb, 2017 Meeting**

- **Action: Develop Uniform Signage – a Sign Plan USE NEIWT LOGO!!!**
 - **Considerations:**
 - Funding Sources – consider sponsorship i.e. their logo as well for cost of sign
 - Site Owner requirements
 - Types, Priorities, Locations
 - **How**
 - **1st Priority** – River miles signage at access sites and bridges
 - Work with DOT and County Highway for River identification signage
 - **Who:** NEIWT board members
 - **When:** Progress Report at **Feb, 2017 Meeting**

GOAL: NE. Indiana Water Trails as a “stand alone” non-profit organization

Discussion –

- Keeping under NIRCC – not recognized as their “core mission”, funding restrictions
- IDNR – Within mission, but lack of capacity
- Partnering with Tri-State Watershed Alliance – yes, but not under

Consensus is to Create “Stand Alone” Organization

- **Action – Reach out to Greenways Foundation for Financial Assistance**
- **Action- Explore Incorporation Process**

Discussion - Building the Board - Geographic Diversity a MUST (see The Board Building Cycle Handout attached to these notes)

Skills/People to Consider:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Lawyer | • Matt Jones |
| • CPA | • MS4 Communities |
| • Natural Resources Mgt | • Watershed Foundation |
| • Parks and Rec | • Land Trust (ACRES) |
| • Fundraising Skills | • Region3a |
| • Lakes Assoc/Lakes Region | • Users (Paddling Clubs) |

Action – Develop by-laws – Done!

GOAL: Funding - Create Funding and Development Plan

- **Action – Define Needs – Project Based of Organizational**
- **Action – Outreach to Stakeholders – How can we support each other! Share common mission**
 - Consider – Land Trusts, Parks Dept., Outfitters, SWCD, Watershed Groups, Elected Officials
- **Action – Share event calendars and invites – actively engage in their events**