



Ohio Water Trails Information Booklet

*A “How To” Guide for Getting a
Water Trail Designated in Ohio*

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Getting Started

Each water trail is unique; however, there are some common items that a trail partner can do to develop and maintain a water trail. Following are some of the steps that are key to the development of a water trail. Keep in mind that the order may change and additional steps may be necessary depending on the specific situation.

1. **Talk to the people in your community.**

One of the first things that you can do is talk to people in the community to determine if there is interest in developing a water trail.

2. **Bring people together.**

Once you have some interest from local stakeholders it's time to bring everyone together to talk more specifically about developing a water trail. You may want to start by having a few small committee meetings with key stakeholders; however, once you have sufficient support it's time to have a public meeting to gather input directly from the community and potential trail users.

There are several things you can do at the first public meeting including asking someone to give an introduction about water trails, invite key stakeholders to talk about the specific trail that you are proposing and the characteristics of that trail, and solicit input from the attendees at the meeting. Following are some of the key questions to ask:

- What are the existing access points for the water trail?
- Are there any additional access points that need to be developed?
- What are the challenges to developing a water trail along this waterway?
- Are there any safety concerns specific to this waterway?
- What are significant natural, historical and cultural characteristics found along this water trail?
- What are the community resources that could be amenities to the proposed trail (campgrounds, land-based trails, parks, restaurants, businesses and local events) and vice versa?

3. **Development of a water trail partnership.**

Due to the various entities that may own the existing access sites and others who share your interest in developing a water trail, it may be advantageous to form a partnership. The degree of formality for the partnership is up to the members and specifics of the proposal.

4. Sign a water trail agreement with Ohio Water Trails.

If you are interested developing a designated water trail you should contact ODNR Division of Watercraft about signing a partnership agreement. You will need to identify a member of your partnership who will act as the local water trail partner (lead entity) and serve as the local point of contact for the development of the water trail.

5. Inventory of existing access points as well as natural, cultural and historical features.

Building on the information that you collected during the public meetings it will be necessary for a members of your local partnership to survey the entire length of the proposed trail. The inventory should include items such as existing access points, natural features and other amenities as well as safety hazards. An accurate survey is important to the development of a good trail map and guide.

6. Commitment for stewardship and maintenance of the water trail and access sites.

To assure the long-term success of your water trail, a commitment is necessary for the maintenance of the water trail, in particular, the access sites. Consideration also needs to be given to the need for periodic clearing of logjams and strainers that naturally develop along the water trail. The local trail partnership should continue to provide updated information about the trail and conduct outreach regarding the trail. Ongoing stewardship can also include restoration and conservation projects.

7. Develop maps and signage.

One of the most important jobs of a successful water trail is to provide information about the waterway. The most useful form of information is a trail map and guide. There are many examples of successful trail maps and guides. Generally, a map and guide includes access sites, trail amenities, safety information, boating regulations, information on natural, cultural and historical features trail users will see along the way. Road-side signage for the access sites should also be developed to assist trail users in locating the trail. ODNR will provide technical assistance with water trail access sign design.



Guidelines for Designation

Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) is the state agency that officially designates water trails in the Ohio Water Trails program. Designation brings a variety of resources including assistance with mapping, access to the statewide logo, and inclusion in the Ohio Water Trail publication. Following are the specific guidelines for local partner in order for the trail to be designated as an official Ohio Water Trail.

- **Public Planning Process**

Designating a water trail must be a public process including public meetings that are advertised. The purpose of the meetings is to collect information about the water trail (access points, amenities, etc.) and to gain support. A steering committee made up of targeted stakeholders is also recommended.

- **Local Government Notification**

As part of the public process it is highly recommended that water trail organizers work with the local governments that are traversed by the trail. The purpose is to both notify and involve them in the development of the water trail. Local support is critical.

- **Ohio Water Trail Logo**

All designated water trails must use the water trail logo as developed by the Ohio Water Trail Program and customized to the proposed water trail. The logo is a standard Ohio Water Trail image. The local partners can customize a portion of the logo, and a tag line can be included.

- **Mapping and Signage**

Any maps produced in partnership with Ohio Water Trail technical assistance must be distributed at no cost. All identified access sites should be posted with trail access signs. Other signage such as interpretive signs are encouraged and technical assistance may be available.

- **Access Points**

For ease of use, it is recommended that water trails have at least one access site every ten miles. However, each waterway is unique and consideration needs to be given to the goals of the local water trail partners. The access sites need to accommodate boats appropriate for the water trail.

- **Management/Stewardship Commitment**

A local member of the partnership must be willing to sign a Water Trail Partnership Agreement with ODNR Division of Watercraft under the Ohio Water Trail Program. The agreement is for a length of five years and includes specific requirements about signage, mapping, and roles of the local partners and ODNR.

- **Safety Information**

Managers of water trails have a responsibility to provide safety information and to warn of hazards. No waterway is completely safe. However, by providing pertinent information about the waterway and good safety tips, hazardous conditions can be addressed appropriately. For example, users may be asked to portage around a particularly hazardous area. (e.g. rapids and/or lowhead dams).



Resources

When there is local interest and commitment to develop a water trail, there's always a need for resources to make the project a reality. There are a variety of public and private resources that may be helpful in completing a water trail. It's also important to know what resources you may have in your own backyard that will help make your water trail a reality.

Public Sources – State

ODNR Division of Natural Areas & Preserves – assists in the planning of water trails on scenic rivers and reviews plans for proposed facilities along scenic river corridors. The Division may also provide funding for water trails along scenic rivers. ohiodnr.com/dnap/sr/

ODNR Division of Real Estate & Land Management – Administers the Recreational Trails Program and offers planning assistance as well as grant awards. While the grant program traditionally funds land based trails, water trails are also eligible. ohiodnr.com/grants.htm

ODNR Division of Watercraft – Offers site evaluation assistance and grants. Administers the Cooperative Boating Facility Grant Program for boating access that is open to the public and Boating Safety Education Grant Program for boating safety education including publications. ohiodnr.com/watercraft/grants/

ODNR Division of Wildlife – Can provide planning assistance and possibly funding for river access facilities on a case by case basis. Priority is given to river systems with good game fisheries. Initial contact should be made through the district fish management supervisor. ohiodnr.com/wildlife/contact/

Public Sources – Federal

National Park Service Rivers, Trails, Conservation Assistance (RTCA Program) – RTCA, also known as Rivers & Trails, works with community groups and local and state governments to conserve rivers, preserve open space, and develop trails and greenways. www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/

