

QUESTIONS FOR AMERICAN TRAILS WEBINAR:
Understanding National Water Trails: From Application to Designation
August 19, 2021

Brad asks Sarah: Great presentation Sarah, an inspiring project...when you began mapping and promoting the Great Miami River way, did you establish standards that existing access points and other amenities would need to meet in order to align with your project principles and be considered a part of the trail?

Sarah answered: We do have standards - we only promote publicly owned properties. So places that our park districts are managing or even a city or a township. We don't have any private land owner agreements. I know some rivers do a lot of that, but our standard is that really needs to be publicly managed and publicly accessible. That's the gist of it.

Bill asks: I am the Chairman of the newly created WV Flatwater Trail Commission. Please provide us with ideas for organizing a statewide water trail system. (WV)

Peter answered: The NPS NRT program cannot engage in this type of activity. I would recommend reaching out to a designated NWT to understand their process. There is also the opportunity to engage with the NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservations Assistance Program (RTCA). Upon application, they can provide technical assistance to organization such as yours to build capacity and partnerships.

Dale answered:

- I would talk to local outfitters and fellow canoeists and kayakers to see what local rivers are good candidates to be a state or national water trail.
- If you find a river or section that looks good. Then using a grass roots approach identify all public launch sites and the distances between them for your length of your trail.
- Paddle it explore it.
- Use social media to get others to paddle it – basically get some feedback on your trail idea.
- Start a dialog with fellow paddlers, public launch site owners (park directors), county and city officials. Is the interest there?
- Will this trail be day use or support overnight camping? You will need 4-to-6-mile sections for day use and have some 15 – 25 miles for camping use. The Buffalo National River has a 27-mile section as the last section. You are expected to camp on this section.
- Using information from the aforementioned steps can you answer the 7 best management practices to create a National Water Trail. There is also a “Best Practices” for river access from American Trails which helps identify what is acceptable as a launch site.

Bob asks: We have a water trail in our area and we are constantly adding access sites and camp sites and partners. At what point should I apply for designation and how do I deal with water trail growth and additions over the following years?

Alison answered: I would answer that if you are looking for national water trail designation you have to make sure that you can adequately respond to the best management practices. Those questions NPS.GOV/water trails. It is really critical you can meet the best practices before you apply. In terms of growth we do have sections that apply, you know, so it may be mile marker 1 through mile marker 25 of the river that applies for designation because that's the area that has all of the best management practices in place. And then down the road they have added another access point at mile marker 30, they can submit that information back to us for evaluation as long as you -- it has -- we have

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to have all of ownership information and approvals and letters from whoever is own the access points and any additional information to look at expanding that designation.

Peter answered: Yes. That's a good question. It is something we are trying to figure out at our office. We had some practices in place previous years, but we are kind of looking at those again. What I would recommend is don't let our process hinder you from expanding your trail network and all of that good stuff. But we should have some guidance coming within the next months or so and we will be sure to make sure everyone knows about that.

Alison added: Reach out to us if you have that kind of an issue. We will work with you on it.

Brewster asks: Does a water trail first have to be designated an official water trail by the state(s) it runs through before it can apply to be a NWT?

Peter answered: No

Alison answered: No

What are the things that you do NOT have to have in place in order to be designated a NRT compared to a NWT?

Peter answered: As Alison mentioned everything about the national recreation trail applies with the exception of best management practices, so in the water trail application, it specifically lists out described as best management practices. We do want those in place. A lot of times you hear about anticipated this, anticipated that. That's great T that you are thinking ahead but those should be in place before you go in to apply. A lot of time windshield the NRT applications a lot of times those applicants talk about the best management practices anyway. It is just not explicitly stated. So everything we discussed and all of the criteria, that should all be in place before you get started with the application.

Devony asks Sarah: Are those floating tents folks can stay in?

Sarah answered: Yes! They are owned and managed the City of Troy – find out more at <https://www.greatmiamiriverway.com/place.php?id=479>

Erica asks: For organizations who'd like to work with State/Local entities to establish a water trail, what resources does NPS offer for guidance?

Peter answered: The NPS NRT program cannot engage in this type of activity. I would recommend reaching out to a designated NWT to understand their process. There is also the opportunity to engage with the NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservations Assistance Program (RTCA). Upon application, they can provide technical assistance to organization such as yours to build capacity and partnerships.

For Peter or Alison: What resources would you recommend for dispersing information about NWT while gathering interest amongst organizations/municipalities?

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Peter answered: I would research the NPS's website on National Water Trails and American Trails' online database of NRT/NWTs. Both provide further information on the program. As Sarah stated, just getting started with talking with local government, organizations and landowners about the benefits and process would be a great start to gathering interest about a future water trail.

Sarah answered: I was just going to say that from the very beginning of our effort to build a water trail, a long time ago, we had to reassure people that the reason we were publishing water trail maps was primarily for safety. We wanted to help direct people to get to the public properties so that we weren't encouraging trespassing. In the early days we had some people concerned that having a designation of any kind would somehow encourage private property trespassing and we said the maps are actually to help people get to the right places. So when we did share information that's kind of where we started. We were trying to help the community get people to the right place and keep them safe. So I have spent a lot of time going to city council meetings, to county commission presentations, those kind of meetings, to get the information out.

Dale answered: So what we did was actually started creating a trail just at the municipality level and getting the information out there because the -- the local Kayakers, the local Fishermen, they will find river access. And it is not going to be safe, most likely. It is not going to be ideal. They will literally tie a rope to a railing on a bridge and slide down the bank to get on the water. Once we started posting these 21 access locations and posting the distance between them and actual GPS locations, we probably did that two years before we ever applied for a trail, was just getting the information out there and getting the feedback on the paddlers.

Alison answered: I agree with Dale and Sarah that, you know, the more grass roots the effort is, the better. And starting at the local leadership and making sure they're aware of the project, supportive of the project, it is important especially if you have a naysayer or someone who has concerns about the projects, just having people more familiar with the project to respond to that at the local level better. We've had several cases of projects people were concerned about the government owning land or taking land, and just reassuring people that's not what this project is about. This is a local initiative for the local good. It is a local project for economic good and recreation opportunities to be developed and it will be managed at the local level. I think those are really important things to emphasize.

Sarah adds: I would add when you have a river it might not meet designation standards but your water trail is already there once you put a public access site on it. So helping people to understand that a water trail is a river with public access.

Greg asks Peter: Is there a geospatial file associated with National Water Trails. Curious about mapping of these on a national level. Greg Matthews - USGS.

Peter answered: We used to have that data publicly displayed, which showed the centroid of the trail and the centerline based on USGS hydro data. We don't have the capacity right now to update, but there are future plans to do so.

Helen asks: The Trinity River visual chart looks like a wonderful tool. How did you assign the threshold for "dangerous?" Who was involved in determining that?

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Dale answered: Ironically when you start establishing water levels at being safe, dangerous, you are getting into legal terms and a lot of waters push back on that. So we don't say if it is dangerous except for flood stage and all of the cities have designated what is a flood stage. So I don't have to do that. So I designate it as dangerous. The rest of them I designate as high, medium, low, and you need to determine, based on your skills, can you handle high, medium or low. That's the way that the -- that we have done that to get around saying this is safe, this is semi safe, this is not safe. So that is what we have done. Now, where do us -- the thresholds of high, medium and low, we have actually pulled together outfitters who paddle the river hundreds of days a year, expert paddler who has been paddling for years. I have been paddling the old fork and the main stem since the early 90s. So we kind of pulled those people together and said what high/medium is? What is low? And let's put those out there, and if we are always looking for feedback. If people feel as if well you have that as medium and it is really was kind of high and fast. So we are always looking for feedback. So far we have really received any -- not really received any negative feedback on the levels that were set.

Janit asks: Can a water trail be urban and suburban and rural? Is there a preference for more undeveloped shorelines? (Chesterfield, VA)

Peter answered: A national water trail can be where ever that body of water is. We have all of those types of trails existing already. There's a river trail to goes a waterway through urban centers in New York. As Sara talked about, we have got, you know, urban Suburban, maybe rural area around the, you know, the great Miami water shed. You know, we have coastal line along South Carolina out in Washington State, along that peninsula. Where ever that body of water is, if it meets the best practices, it is you will JIBL but there's no -- eligible but there's no reference for where it is.

Jonathan asks: Where can I find our official trail designation? I'm representing the Dedham Water Trail. We were given NRT designation but do we need to reapply for NWT designation?

Peter answered: I can answer the question, so that American Trails NRT data base that I showed at the beginning of the presentation that has a detailed search where you can search for our trail TLCHLT is a radio button where you can choose different types of trails. One of them is water trails there's water trails and national water trail system. The 33 that Allison described as water trail and there are others just water trails probably designated before 2012. And we had discussed that if there was a national recreation trail that wants to be recognized as a water trail, since you already have that established really the only step you would have to go through is to complete the best management practices and that would be done through a new application process.

Alison answered: Review deadline. So that basic information that you provided for NRT plus the best management practices. That's what we will evaluate the most for upgrade to the national water trail, the BMP's are the standards.

Karen asks: Our Team is working on a water trail on the Fox River in Wisconsin & Illinois. We have dozens of letters of support and resolutions. Do we need to have specific letters of permission from the property owners of each of the 80 access sites?

Peter answered: Yes, you would. I mean, if someone has ever owned or managed by the same person, you know, that's fine. We do like to see a very well organized list of the access point, prefer location,

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access manager, owner SXSHGS if they provide a good sense. I know it is a lot but it is our due diligence to make sure that everyone is on the same page with the designation.

Alison answered: And if you have a property owner not willing to do that, we basically take them off of the map and don't want you to include that in the designation. That has happened before where we basically had some access point that is are not allowed to be used as part of the national water trail. But I agree with Peter. Ideally, yes, you would have all 80.

??? Can we have a plan for signage in place or do the actual signs need to be in place before application is submitted?

Alison answered: Your signs need to be installed before you apply. Designation is for trails that are completed, and that includes meeting all 7 BMP's, including signage in place.

Lisa asks: Is it too problematic to even begin to try to get interstate cooperation to link activities on the same river across the state border? I am interested in uniting NY and Pa to improve fragmented access to the Susquehanna

Alison answered: There are several examples of multi-state National Water Trails, including the Arkansas, Missouri, Mississippi, Mohave, Ohio, Rock and Suwanee Rivers that have been successful seeking NWT designation.

Dale answered: In my mind you need to identify all the stakeholders on both sides of the state line and see if they are willing to work together for the good of a paddling trail between the states.

Lynn asks: Has any National Water Trail designee ever had their designation revoked for failing to meet the requirements?

Peter answered: No, but it is up to the trail manager to ensure all requirements are continuously met. If at any point a water trail can no longer meet the requirements, it is up to the manager to relinquish their status, and all records of that will be recorded by the NPS.

Matt asks Sarah: Who does trail maintenance on sections that are privately owned? Any issues with land owners NOT wanting work done?

Sarah answered: So the river itself flows through lots of private lands as well as public. In Ohio, the water is in the public trust so that you can float down the river regardless of who owns either side or below you. Once you step out on the river bank or even on the land below your kayak, make sure that where you are landing is publicly owned. So we don't do any work on those private sections. I get a lot of calls about log jams, it is really up to the land owner, or if we can find a program for them to tap into. So you can float past lots of private properties but you can't get out - if that makes sense.

Dale answered: You know, there's lots of private land along the river banks here on the Trinity River. Sara is kind of right as you put it, in a public place and as long as you stay on the river, I will tell you when you come upon a gravel bar that's an island, you get very little push back on stopping on that, taking a break on that. In many parts of Texas, a gravel bar can be right adjacent to the personal

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property but if there's mixed to water. If there's no greenery on it, very few people actually protect you taking a break on a gravel bar or sand bar. Once you step up into the greenery, the grass, the forest whatever, you are really trespassing on private property. And we -- we tell people stay with our public access points we try to establish an access is point every four to six miles so it is easy to get to if somebody wants to take just a short trip.

Sarah adds: One thing I will add is that it is, at least in Ohio, it has been shown that through case law that if there's a hazard you can get out and get around it whether it is a log jam and you have the right to do that without fear of trespassing.

Maria asks: Is there a difference between a national scenic river way and a NWT?

Alison answered: A National Scenic Riverway, such as the St. Croix or Ozark Rivers, has been designated as a Unit of the National Park Service System by Congress. This is a long process requiring studies and legislative action by Congress. Depending on if and how the Scenic Riverway legislation is ultimately passed would determine who manages the Riverway (NPS, Forest Service, or partnership park unit). National Water Trails designation acknowledges the achievements of a water trail project and makes it a part of a national network of water trails, but does not provide any funding or management from the federal government.

Nancy asks Sarah: Please tell me more about the floating tents <https://www.greatmiamiriverway.com/place.php?id=479>

Nancy asks Dale: I like the idea of "park and paddle" two ways vs. one way (needing to have plans for a takeout downstream) Did you use a different symbol to show these on a map and what criteria were used to decide two way vs one way.

Dale answered: All of our trail section can be paddled downstream to the next river access location. The paddlers may have to portage but they can continue on. We designate several locations in our descriptions as a "Park & Paddle". But I think Nancy touches on a good point to use the coined term "Park & Paddle" right on the Wayfinding sign and even have a list of our P&P access locations.

Shawn asks Sarah: What are the Miami Conservancy District's main sources of revenue?

Sarah answered: That's a good question. If you are protected from flooding or high water you pay for that based on the value of your property. Recreation gets paid for by the communities who have asked us to build access or trails in their communities. And that doesn't intermix with the flood protection money. A lot of what I talked about today is a collaboration from communities all putting money in together or leveraging the federal dollars or other state grants or things like that.