

# Portage River Water Trail Advisory Group

June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018, 10 a.m. – noon

Harris Twp. Trustees Hall

321 Rice Street, Elmore, Ohio 43416

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## Notes

### Attendees –

- Sara Guiher, TMACOG
- Randy Genzman, Oak Harbor
- Becky Simpson, Ottawa SWCD
- Tory Gabriel, Ohio Sea Grant
- Darrell Opfer, Oak Harbor
- Tom Arbour, ODNR
- Christina Kuchle, ODNR
- Kari Gerwin, TMACOG
- Mike Shadoan, Oak Harbor Development Group
- Leah Binsack, Sandusky Co. Health Dpt
- Gordan Bowman, Pemberville
- Virginia Park, Oak Harbor, Ottawa County Recorder
- Ted Welsh, ODNR

### Why do attendees want to establish a Portage River Water Trail?

- Add to and expand on tourism industry. Complement to birding tourism and other outdoor and water recreation
- Increase traffic to communities along the Portage River
- Recognition of the Portage River as a valuable community resource
- Promote a regional identity based in the region's natural areas
- Offer a recreational opportunity that is economical, environmentally friendly, enhances quality of life by getting people outdoors and active, allows time with family and friends
- Emphasize the history and culture of the region – development of communities along river, Indian history, European explorers, farming
- Builds a sense of community
- Adds value to the region – people look for outdoor recreational opportunities when making decision to move or travel here.
- Creates businesses that didn't previously exist and promotes existing businesses
- Opportunities for businesses to be engaged with members of community

## Identify lead organizations and individuals

Tom Arbour provided information on management structure of a water trail

- A formal structure is needed, Key Partners need to be identified, MOUS are needed from each local government along the water trail, one organization or agency must be available as a fiscal agent, should also identify organization to take the lead on PR
- TMACOG will compile list of local officials for communities along river. Elected officials should be the first to target for outreach and will be key in getting MOUs signed.

Members brainstormed key potential partners -

- Ottawa County Fair Grounds (possible site)
- Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge (possible site at golf course, also has interesting history)
- Black Swamp Bird Observatory
- All county park districts
- Township/county/municipal officials
- Army Corps as needed
- Chambers of Commerce
- First responders and law enforcement
- County improvement corps
- County CUB
- Jet Express
- TMACOG
- County visitor bureaus
- Riverview Nursing Home (Owned by Ottawa County)
- Black Swamp Conservancy
- Materion (possible site)
- Health Departments (HSTS) and ODH
- Businesses along river – e.g. Nugent's
- Local and national outdoor outfitters
- Portage River Paddling Company
- Sea Grant
- Marinas/Yacht clubs
- State offices – ODH, ODOT, ODNR
- Portage River Basin Council

## Access Discussion

- Paddling upstream from Rt. 590 is hit or miss and depends on water levels. Downstream of 590 is typically navigable by hand-powered watercraft. The

stream gage in Woodville may be a good guide for overall stream condition. A survey of stream conditions should be conducted and incorporated into water trail materials.

- Additional access locations could include – Ottawa County Fair Grounds, new restoration site by Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge
- Distance between sites should be no more than 10 river miles. 4-5 miles is achievable by less experienced paddlers
- Safety concerns furthest downstream near mouth should be investigated. There is a lot of large motorcraft traffic and the Jet Express that should be noted on water trail materials. Another potential hazard is the lift bridge in Port Clinton. Note that role of water trail program is to provide information and signage regarding potential hazards
- Question regarding access on private property. ORC states that portaging is allowed on private property, but paddlers cannot stay overnight.

#### Short-term goals -

- Schedule outreach with elected officials – perhaps a float
- Work with partners to schedule two or three public floats. Partners could include ODNR and Wood County parks, who are already planning floats, possibly Portage River Paddling Co. Typically a small fee is charged to ensure registrants actually show up.
- October/November - host a stakeholder workshop. Stakeholder workshop would involve working out the details of the following –
  - Set target date for water trail launch – e.g. 2020
  - Management structure – lead organization
  - Access – existing access, points of interest, access gaps, barriers to access
  - Ownership/Maintenance of access points and signage
  - Mapping & GIS – lead mapping organization, map products needed (Note – ODNR, Coastal Management has offered to provide mapping assistance)
  - Community engagement in planning process
  - Safety
  - Publicity/Promotion – lead organization
- Begin public engagement after workshop throughout winter

**Next meeting of the full advisory group will be during the regularly scheduled Portage River Basin Council meeting on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2 p.m., Location TBD**

Immediately following today's meeting, ODNR and TMACOG staff visited several access sites along the Portage from Pemberville to Rt. 590 to determine feasibility and any improvement needs. Summary Below –

- Pemberville near Bridge Street – Village owns a large piece of property along the river that would be a good access location. However, the property itself is currently inaccessible and lacks parking. The Village will look into options for making the site more accessible to the public. The ODNR would likely not allocate funds to make any access improvements at this site due to its proximity to an upstream site at Harrison Park just outside of town. If the Village is able to provide access, this site would be included in the water trail publication and signed accordingly.
- Woodville at Trail Marker Park – A roughly constructed concrete ramp is available. This is not the ideal type of access, due to slope and materials used for construction, but the site could be included in the water trail publication and signed.
- Elmore at Harry Witty Memorial Park - Access from park currently includes a dirt path, which seems to be working well for launching a kayak or canoe. The river seems to run shallow during normal conditions, so portage is probably necessary at this location. This site could be included in trail publication with notes about access and the need to portage. Signs could be provided.
- Elmore at River Bend Park – The Village has placed signage directing paddlers to the launch site. Gravel or grass parking is available. The site is already being used to launch hand-powered watercraft. The launch could be improved with a low-cost ramp. This may be a good candidate for funding by ODNR.
- Rt 590 – A gravel path with limited parking is available on north side of river, along the west side of the road. Ownership is unclear from Auditor's online mapping. Appears to be partially in the ROW and partially on private property. May be able to partner with ODOT to provide materials for parking improvements. Trail to river is rather rough and may be difficult to safely carry paddlecraft to water.