PORTAGE WATER TRAIL PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

Location: Pemberville Opera House | 115 Main Street, Pemberville, OH 43450
Date: Thursday, May 23, 2019
Time: 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Discussion Topics

1. **Portage River Basin Council (PRBC) involvement in the Portage River Water Trail project** – Pemberville Mayor Gordon Bowman welcomed attendees to the historic opera house and provided a short introduction to the water trail project as it relates to Pemberville.

2. **ODNR Water Trail designation program** – Tom Arbour, Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) provided an overview of the state’s water trail program and detailed funding and assistance that ODNR can provide to communities seeking a Water Trail designation.

3. **Work completed towards a Portage Water Trail designation** – Kari Gerwin, TMACOG provided a brief history of the Portage River Water Trail project, discussed the work completed by the Portage River Basin Council (PRBC) and the timeline for completing the water trail designation. PRBC has a goal of official designation during summer 2020.

4. **Group Discussion** – Benefits to communities/organizations and concerns about a Portage Water Trail were discussed by attendees.
   a. The proposed new access site at Bierley Avenue presents issues with parking and ownership. This site should be removed from the water trail for now.
   b. Two additional sites were recommended by attendees – behind the Pemberville-Freedom Fire Department and upstream of William Henry Harrison Park.
   c. Lover’s Fishing Access needs structural improvements to allow for paddle access.
   d. Woody debris and logjams could create hazards in the Pemberville section of the water trail.
   e. There are already campgrounds along the river that paddlers can utilize, and there may be additional opportunities for those who wish to camp along the water trail. However, private campgrounds will not be listed in water trail materials unless they have public access.
   f. A Water Trail designation would provide opportunities for programming including educational and clean up events.
g. Past initiatives to increase access to the Portage involved alteration of the river (e.g., movement of large rocks). River alterations should not be part of the Water Trail project.

h. Some sites offer little parking, may lead to parking on the road.

i. Alcohol consumption on the river may be an issue. Alcohol is permitted in federal waters (such as the mouth of the river and Lake Erie), but operators of any vessel are not permitted to consume alcohol on waters of the state.

j. ODNR will not provide mile markers on the river, but local jurisdictions can choose to mark bridges.

k. Portaging, land ownership, and riparian rights were discussed in depth, including riverbed exposed during low water events and paddlers entering privately owned land. State law will be used to provide information to paddlers in brochures.

l. Maintenance of water trail access sites and signage would be the responsibility of the public property owner.

5. **General comments/questions** –

a. Ms. Gerwin stated that all feedback and concerns would be addressed through the remainder of the planning process and will be incorporated into the final plan. A draft plan will be available for comment by early fall.

6. Ms. Gerwin thanked attendees for coming, and the meeting was adjourned.