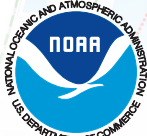
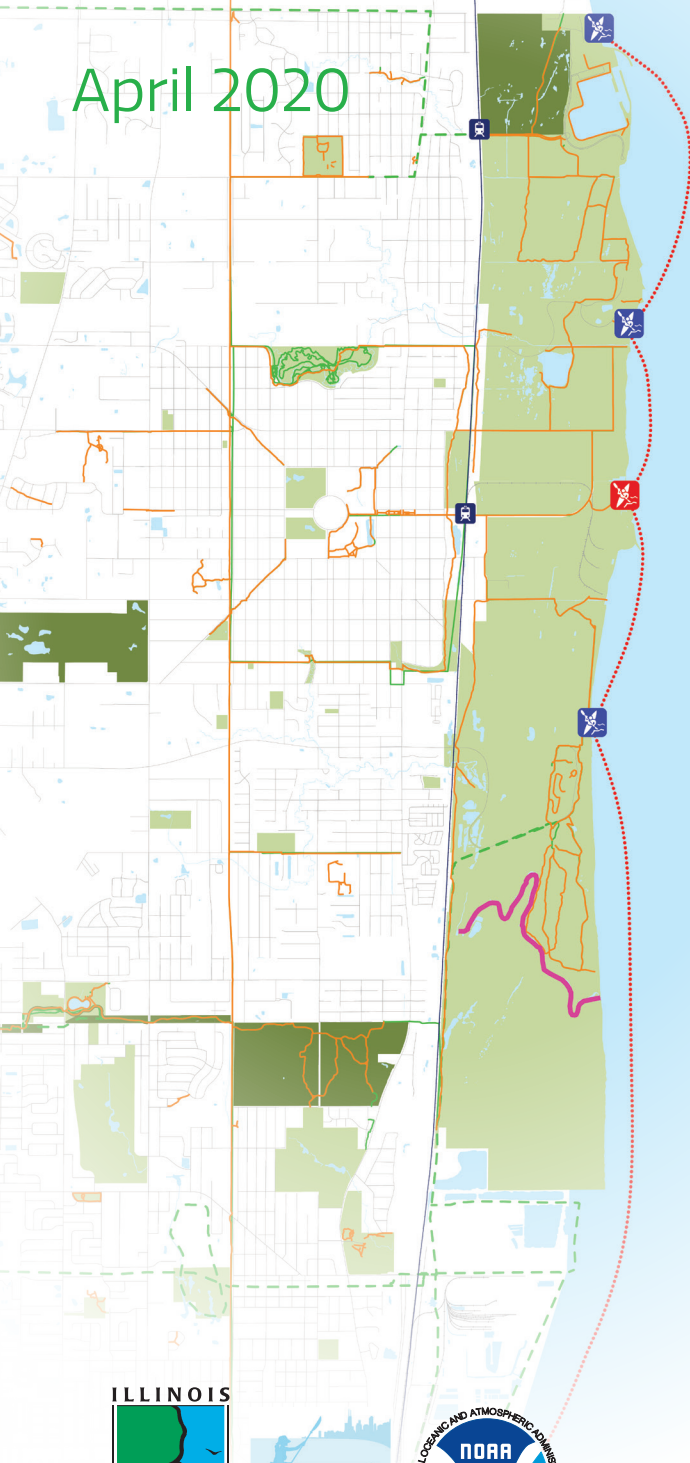


# Activating the Lake Michigan Water Trail in Northern Illinois, from North Chicago to Winthrop Harbor

April 2020



openlands



# Lake Michigan Watertrail Activating the Lake Michigan Water Trail in Northern Illinois, from North Chicago to Winthrop Harbor

April 2020

## PREPARED BY



Openlands  
25 E. Washington Street  
Suite 1650  
Chicago, IL 60602  
T: 312.863.6250  
info@openlands.org



Danielle Nelson  
Associate Ecologist/GIS Specialist  
Illinois State Geological Survey at  
Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
Coastal Management Program  
160 N. LaSalle St. Suite S-703  
Chicago, IL 60601  
T: 312-814-8566

## DESIGNED BY



Report Images Courtesy of IDNR and Openlands

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>		<b>i</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION &amp; PROJECT GOALS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>THE PLANNING CONTEXT FOR A WATER TRAIL ON LAKE MICHIGAN</b>	<b>5</b>
The Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trail Plan Other Regional Plans Municipal Plans		
<b>3</b>	<b>EXISTING &amp; FUTURE WATER TRAIL INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	<b>9</b>
Existing Water Trail Infrastructures Use and Potential Use of the Lake Michigan Water Trail Equity Considerations Safety Considerations The Lake Michigan Water Trail Gap		
<b>4</b>	<b>BENEFITS &amp; CHALLENGES OF A LAKE MICHIGAN WATER TRAIL</b>	<b>17</b>
Benefits Challenges Protecting Sensitive Areas		
<b>5</b>	<b>VISION &amp; RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>21</b>
Vision Statement Projects to Support the Vision Priority Projects Recommendations		
<b>APPENDICES</b>		<b>25</b>
Appendix A. Project List Developed by Stakeholders and Public		26
Appendix B. Events and Event Survey Results		30
Appendix C. Planning Meetings & Planning Meeting Participants		32
Appendix D. 2006 Northeastern Illinois Paddlers Survey		34
Appendix E. Funding Programs & Resources Relevant to Water Trail Development		36
Appendix F. References		38
Appendix G. Potential Site Specific Future Improvements		39



# Executive Summary

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

**Activating the Lake Michigan Water Trail from North Chicago to Winthrop Harbor is a project designed to connect local communities and visitors to Lake Michigan through programming and trail-improvement plans that will result in a well-used and safe water trail that brings quality of life, economic, and stewardship benefits to the adjacent communities.**

This project has been led by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Coastal Management Program (CMP), Openlands, and the five municipalities that comprise this 10-mile stretch of Lake Michigan shoreline: North Chicago, Village of Beach Park, Waukegan, Winthrop Harbor, and Zion. It is funded by CMP and Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI). The work included:



**Five paddling events** within the project area between 2018-2019 to raise awareness of the Lake Michigan Water Trail and at which a total of 405 people paddled on Lake Michigan in canoes and kayaks;



**Two planning meetings** with local governments, businesses, community leaders, and other stakeholders to identify a shared vision for trail development and to identify priority projects for achieving that vision;



A **survey of paddlers** who attended the 2019 water trail events to identify barriers to paddling on Lake Michigan and identify what amenities or programs are needed to increase participation in Lake Michigan Water Trail activities;



**Two open houses** to prioritize potential projects and receive comments, one at REI's Vernon Hills store on January 18, 2020 and the other at Waukegan Library on January 25, 2020;



The **on-line posting** of open house materials for public comment;



Drafting of this **action plan**; and



The culmination of this work will support the vision of an eventual designation of the entire **Lake Michigan Water Trail** as a four state National Water Trail.

## THE WATER TRAIL VISION

By leveraging the unique beauty and opportunities offered by Lake Michigan, we will improve and protect quality of life for surrounding communities and for visitors by offering access to the lake for children and adults of all skill levels, and realize the economic, educational, and stewardship benefits of an accessible, well used water trail.

## BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

A successful Lake Michigan Water Trail in this region will have many benefits for nearby communities and trail users alike. Key benefits realized by enhancing the Lake Michigan Water trail were defined by local government officials and community leaders as:

- ▶ **Improved access to Lake Michigan** and the water trail for residents of the five communities to improve quality of life and education and to create a community base that advocates for and stewards the health of the lake.
- ▶ **Economic development opportunities** that would result from attracting a new kind of visitor, drawn to this stretch of the lake to experience its beauty and pristine natural setting though a network of trails that offer biking, hiking, and paddling.

Implementing a vision for the enhancement of the Lake Michigan Water Trail requires project managers and partners to address a range of challenges. Primary challenges include:

- ▶ Potentially high costs associated with building and maintaining water trail access site infrastructure. Although simple access sites, such as sites on beaches, may not cost very much to establish, other amenities, like bathrooms, may cost more and also require maintenance.
- ▶ Difficulties posed by the current high water levels of Lake Michigan and the resulting shoreline erosion that is causing dangerous currents and shrinking beaches.
- ▶ Inherent difficulty of coordinating between the many entities and access site owners and managers that are key to a successful trail.
- ▶ The level of expertise necessary to navigate the trail given the potential for high waves, cold water, and dangerous conditions caused by rapidly changing weather and/or power boats.
- ▶ They need to serve two user groups: experts who often own their boat and equipment and who may do multi-day trips on the lake, and inexperienced or beginner paddlers and sailors who do not have their own boat or equipment and would need programming, guided trips, or paddling instruction in order to safely navigate the trail.

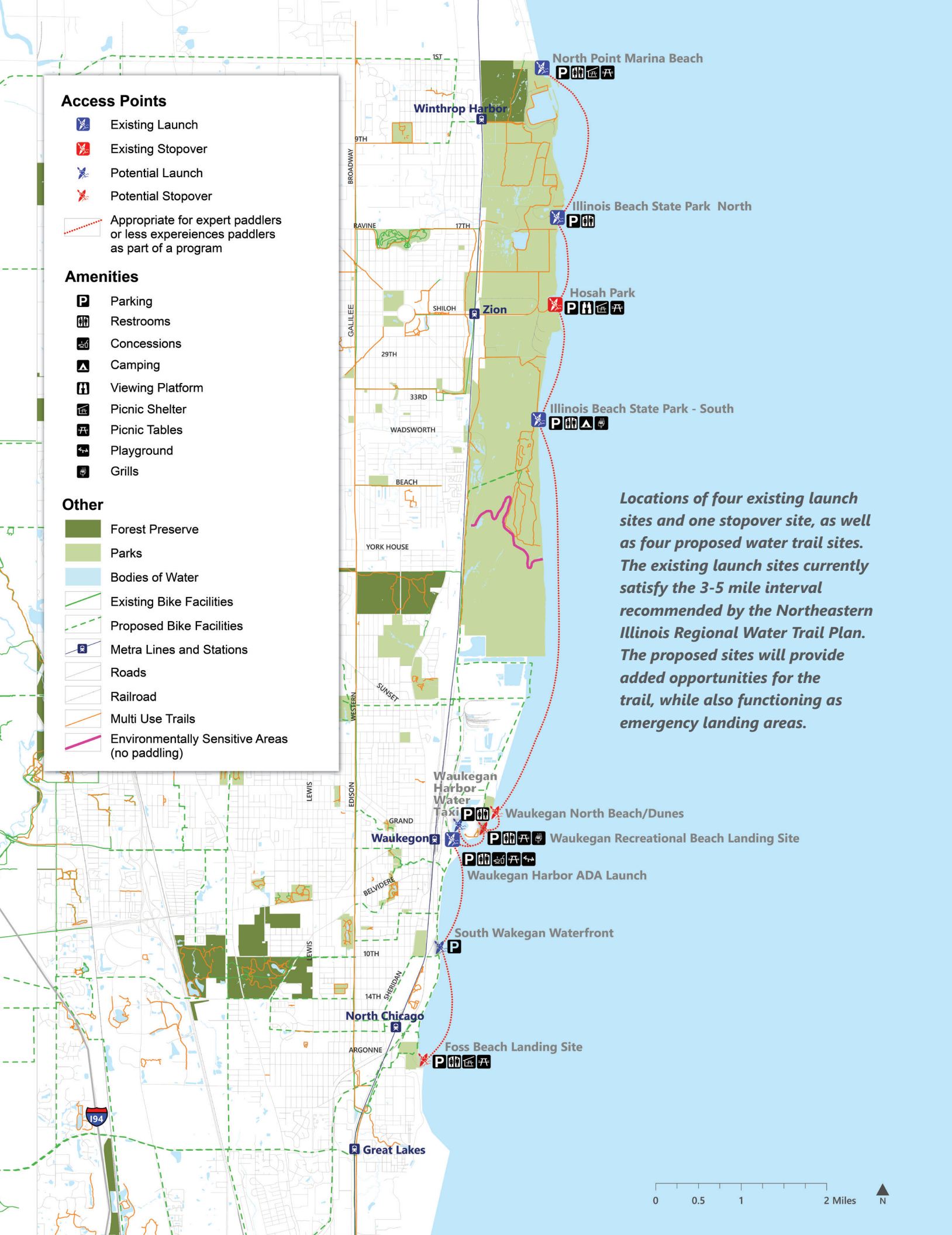
## EXISTING LAKE MICHIGAN WATER TRAIL INFRASTRUCTURE

The existing infrastructure of the trail offers four established launch sites between Waukegan and Winthrop Harbor, where non-motorized boats can be launched and taken out of the water. These are located at North Point Marina, Illinois Beach State Park North, Illinois Beach State Park South, and Waukegan Harbor. The established launch at Waukegan Harbor is ADA accessible and was installed in 2018. In addition to these four launch sites there is also an established stopover site at Hosah Park in Zion, Illinois where non-motorized boaters can stop, rest, hike, or picnic before going back onto the water. Existing launch sites are fairly closely spaced, allowing for trips of various lengths for those who wish to put in and take out at different access sites. There is currently no existing access in the 10 mile stretch south of Waukegan Harbor. Some water trail signage currently exists at the four established launch sites, as do parking and restrooms.

## FUTURE LAKE MICHIGAN WATER TRAIL INFRASTRUCTURE

During planning meetings, local governments also proposed site specific improvements at established sites, including kayak rentals, non-motorized boat storage facilities or racks, improved signage, and interconnected trails, including bicycle trails leading to water trail access sites. Four future water trail sites were proposed, two stop over sites located on beaches just north of Waukegan Harbor (at Waukegan Harbor North Beach/Dunes and Waukegan Recreational Beach) and two south of Waukegan Harbor (an access site at South Waukegan Waterfront and a stopover at Foss Park Beach).





PRIORITY PROJECTS

During a series of planning meetings, stakeholders brainstormed projects that if completed, would make the water trail a reality. Projects were considered that would support each of the following categories:

- Infrastructure
- Programming
- Safety
- Connectivity & Wayfinding
- Sustainability
- Engagement and Equity

A list of projects resulted. This list was refined by staff at Openlands and CMP to also consider responses from the survey administered at the 2019 paddling events. Potential projects were categorized as contributing to a water trail that is safe, equitable, and thriving.

- **Safe.**  
The trail will have ample information to allow citizens to make educated decisions about where and when to paddle. Training and guided trips will allow paddlers of all skill levels to experience the trail.
- **Equitable.**  
A water trail that is accessible to children and adults of diverse backgrounds, skill levels and abilities and creates paddling opportunities for adjacent communities, even those without their own equipment.
- **Thriving.**  
A well-used trail that inspires active stewardship, allowing ecosystems to flourish and that draws visitors, strengthening local economies.

In order to prioritize projects from the list in terms of which would be most impactful, or which should be done first, we sorted them into one of the three categories of safe, equitable, or thriving, with nine projects within each category. At public open houses and through on-line comments, members

of the public voted for three priorities in each category. The projects that emerged as top priority are as follows:

1. Create a **traveling environmental education** unit that would introduce community and school groups to the water trail.
2. Create **water trail maps** that show routes and access points, natural areas, overnight storage locations, and other local points of interest (lodging, restaurants, bars, cafes, cultural sites).
3. Support community-driven **water trail-related programming** (e.g., paddling camps, environmental education, entertainment, pop-up events).
4. Support water trail programming that **connects neighboring communities** and people from diverse backgrounds; work with community groups to understand their needs and interests.
5. **Partner with local and regional environmental organizations** for cleanup, restoration workdays, and other environmental stewardship events.
6. Develop a **model safety information** station at least one access point.
7. Establish a Lake Michigan Water Trail **Action Team** that will coordinate water trail building activities, funding, programming, and marketing activities.
8. **Link the water trail** to transit and existing and proposed bikeways and trails.
9. Equip access points with lighting, bathrooms, lockers, event staging areas, training areas, launching areas, car parking, bike parking, concessions, and other **amenities**.
10. Create a **kayaking club** that would host trips on Lake Michigan and allow people to increase their skills in a supervised setting.





# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION & PROJECT GOALS

Lake Michigan offers an abundance of unique habitats along its shores including sand dunes, wetlands, ravines, prairies, and savannas. During this planning process, local governments and stakeholders identified connecting people to this majestic space, including both the lake and its shoreline, as a key benefit of water trail development.

This plan is intended for agencies and organizations that will implement projects, as well as trail users, and potential users, and stakeholders who offer programming on the Lake. It is intended to lay out actions that will result in the realization of the benefits of water trail development identified during planning meetings and open houses. It is also intended to be a model of how to plan a water trail that meets the needs

of current users, attracts paddlers from other areas and provides a path for people from surrounding communities to learn skills that will allow them to begin using the trail.

Input from the five municipalities that comprise this 10-mile stretch of shoreline, including Beach Park, North Chicago, Waukegan, Winthrop Harbor, and Zion, as well as from other stakeholders, including county governments, paddling groups, businesses, harbor managers and entities who work to preserve shoreline habitat and wildlife, the paddling community, and the general public, was collected to inform the plan. Establishment of a well-used trail will contribute to the vision of creating a four-state National Water Trail on Lake Michigan. For more details on the planning process, refer to **Appendix C**.



## DEFINITIONS

### WATER TRAIL

A route along a lake, river, bay, or other waterway that is intended for use by people in small, non-motorized watercraft such as canoes, kayaks, small sailboats, or paddle boards. Water trails are the aquatic equivalent of hiking trails or bicycle trails, providing public recreation opportunities near sites with environmental, historical, or cultural significance. Like hiking trails, water trails can be interpretive in nature, with educational signage and guided tours to bring users a deeper experience on the trail.

### ACCESS SITE

A shoreline location where non-motorized boats can be launched or landed. Access sites can be classified as developed or carry-in.

### CARRY-IN ACCESS SITE

Shoreline and beach areas that provide easy public access for smaller non-motorized watercraft such as kayaks, canoes, and paddle boards. Often these sites are located on public beaches and may be located farther from parking than developed access sites. Public restrooms and other facilities and amenities may not be available.

### DEVELOPED ACCESS SITE

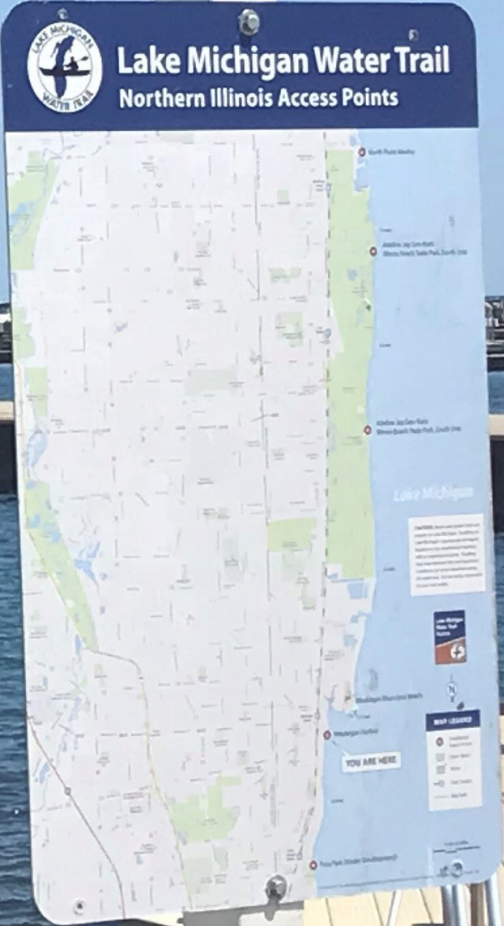
Paved or gravel launch areas that usually include a dock or pier for motorized watercraft. These sites may also provide ADA-accessible launches or facilities. Often, and especially on Lake Michigan, these sites are associated with harbors and marinas and they usually provide facilities and amenities such as restrooms, concessions, picnic areas, etc. Note that some facilities and amenities at harbors and marinas may not be publicly accessible.

### ALTERNATE ACCESS SITE

Carry-in sites for smaller non-motorized watercraft such as kayaks, canoes, and paddle boards that present some challenge to accessing the lake: steep slopes, undeveloped roads, long distance from parking, etc.

### STOPOVER SITE

Shoreline areas that are classified as day-use or emergency landing areas. These areas are intended to be accessed from the water and provide users with an area to stop and rest or land their non-motorized watercraft in case of an emergency or inclement weather. Picnic areas or other amenities may be provided. These sites do not provide a launching area or are too far from parking to be feasible access sites.







## CHAPTER 2

# THE PLANNING CONTEXT FOR A WATER TRAIL ON LAKE MICHIGAN

### **THE NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL WATER TRAIL PLAN (1999)**

The Lake Michigan Water Trail in Illinois is part of the *Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trail Plan*, adopted by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC, which is now the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, CMAP) in 1999. This plan set forth a vision for providing water trails to the public for non-motorized boating on ten waterways in Illinois, including Lake Michigan. It was sponsored by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and co-authored by Openlands, Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, and Illinois Paddling Council. It was developed with input from the paddling community, planners, recreation providers, natural resource agencies, and advocacy organizations. The plan proposes the following benefits of water trail development:

#### **Recreation.**

Water trail access encourages recreational use and improves the quality of life for area residents.

#### **Education.**

Paddling provides excellent educational opportunities including study of aquatic and shoreline ecosystems, and the historical importance of waterways.

#### **Economic Development.**

Use of livery services, restaurants, and lodging facilities by paddlers brings economic benefits to communities.

#### **Stewardship.**

Paddling provides a connection to nature that increases awareness and activism for water quality and river habitat.



The *Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trail Plan* suggests the development of access sites every three to five miles along each water trail to allow for trips of varying length and reasonably closely spaced access in case paddlers need to exit the trail unexpectedly.

The *Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trail Plan* presented maps of existing launch sites and specific suggestions for locations for new launches as well as describing selected paddling trips on the ten water trails throughout the region.

In addition to this plan that specifically targets water trail development in Northeastern Illinois, the concept of a Lake Michigan Water Trail is also embedded in other planning efforts.

## OTHER REGIONAL PLANS

In 2019, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) adopted the *Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan* (originally created in 1997) as part of the ONTO 2050 regional comprehensive master plan. Both the 1997 Greenways and Trails Plan and its 2009 update acknowledge the importance and the desire for a Lake Michigan Water Trail in Illinois.

The concept of a four-state, contiguous water trail, including paddling, biking, and hiking, around the entirety of Lake Michigan emerged at a conference held in 2012 in Saugatuck, Michigan. The state of Michigan completed Michigan's *Lake Michigan Water Trail Plan* in 2013 and the Lake Michigan Trails Network was established as a four-state planning group.

The state of Wisconsin has designated the Wisconsin portion of Lake Michigan as a state water trail. The portion of the Lake Michigan Water Trail extending from Leone Beach in Chicago to the town of New Buffalo in Michigan was designated as a National Recreational Trail in 2009 by the National Park Service. This portion of the trail showcases Chicago's urban shoreline and the natural beauty of the Indiana Dunes while providing outdoor recreational opportunities for the millions of residents and visitors to the area. Its designation demonstrates the potential in the goal of a four-state Lake Michigan Water Trail.

### Online Resources

*As the northern portion of Illinois' Lake Michigan water trail becomes further developed, Wisconsin's online resources can serve as an excellent model of how to deliver information to paddlers. Wisconsin's water trail maps note access points, emergency access points, bluffs, historic shipwrecks, and officially recognized camp site locations. The Wisconsin map can be accessed here: <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/name/lakemichigan/>*

*Openlands and IDNR both maintain maps and information for the Illinois section of the Lake Michigan Water Trail, which can be accessed at:*

*Openlands: <https://paddleillinoiswatertrails.org/2015/06/12/lake-michigan-water-trails/>*

*IDNR: <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/cmp/Pages/Lake-Michigan-Water-Trail.aspx>*

*Indiana and Michigan also maintain maps and information for their sections of the Lake Michigan Water Trail, at:*

*Indiana: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/outdoor/4461.htm>*

*Michigan: <http://www.michiganwatertrails.org/>*

## MUNICIPAL PLANS

The Lake Michigan Water Trail is not included in the local municipal plans created since 2015 by municipalities adjacent to the coastline between North Chicago and the Wisconsin border. While all the municipal plans refer to recreational opportunities, greenway planning, and natural open spaces located at Illinois Beach State Park (as well as other natural areas), the concept of a Lake Michigan Water Trail is not mentioned. This is a missed opportunity and the water trail should be included as these plans are revised or created afresh to capitalize on and reinforce water trail development.

There are additional planning coordination opportunities to advance the water trail. The first is the newly formed municipal stakeholder compact between Beach Park, Waukegan, Winthrop Harbor and Zion, which could present a collective body and forum for Lake Michigan Water Trail development. This collective could offer logistical coordination with each of these municipalities, for the trail to become not only an organized reality, but also a success from the point of view of both the users and the local stakeholders.

While it does not mention the Lake Michigan Water Trail specifically, the *Northern Lakeshore Trail Connectivity Plan* provides crucial guidance for improved walking and bicycling infrastructure within our project area. Included in these infrastructure improvement suggestions are specific steps to help connect walking and biking trails to Lake Michigan. the *Northern Lakeshore Trail Connectivity Plan* provides a model for improving the connectivity of walking, biking, and water trails. The available connections between these trails can also provide context and opportunities when planning potential new Lake Michigan Water Trail access sites.

The other planning initiative currently underway is the Lake Michigan Watershed Planning effort led by the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission. The geographical extents for this plan run north/south from just south of the Cook/Lake County Line to the Wisconsin border and east/west between Lake Michigan and roughly Green Bay Road. The goal of the plan is to "develop a regional strategy to improve water quality, manage stormwater, and enhance water resources by identifying, prioritizing and finding innovative solutions for issues facing the coastal environment." While this effort looks at water quantity and water quality issues related to stormwater runoff, important overlaps exist between the water trail and the watershed plan, and creation of a thriving Lake Michigan Water Trail will only increase the appetite and advocacy for water quality improvements.

For links to the various regional and local plans discussed here, see **Appendix F**.

*Lake County provides information for people looking for recreation opportunities. Their partnerships with cities, parks, and marinas within our project area provides a useful resource for things to do before and after spending time on the lake. Their calendar page lists events in the area. The calendar is visited often and would be a useful place to advertise future Lake Michigan Water Trail events. Access the site at: [visitlakecounty.org](http://visitlakecounty.org)*

*In addition, [Boatinglakecounty.com](http://Boatinglakecounty.com) provides information on Lake Michigan access points, lakeside dining options, and more.*





# CHAPTER 3

## EXISTING & FUTURE WATER TRAIL INFRASTRUCTURE

### EXISTING WATER TRAIL INFRASTRUCTURE

There is currently an established water trail within our planning area: the 10-mile stretch of Lake Michigan from North Chicago to Winthrop Harbor. This means there is a collection of access sites provided by land owners and managers and some signage on roadways, in parking lots, and on beaches. Established water trail access sites from north to south include:

- ▶ **A carry-in site** at North Point Marina in Winthrop Harbor;
- ▶ **A carry-in site** in the North Unit of Illinois Beach State Park;
- ▶ **A stopover site** at Hosah Park in Zion;
- ▶ **A carry-in site** in the South Unit of Illinois State Park; and,
- ▶ **An ADA-accessible site** at Waukegan Harbor in Waukegan.

In addition to providing non-motorized watercraft access to Lake Michigan, these sites have other basic amenities, as shown in **Figure 3.1**.



Figure 3.1. Lake Michigan Water Trail Site Amenities

SITE	BATH-ROOMS	PICNIC-FACILITIES	CAMPING	HOTEL	DINING	HIKING-TRAILS	PLAY-GROUNDS	SWIMMING-BEACH	VIEWING-PLATFORMS/BOARD WALK	PARKING
NORTH POINT MARINA	X	X			X	X		X		X
ILLINOIS BEACH STATE PARK --NORTH	X									X
HOSAH PARK		X							X	X
ILLINOIS BEACH STATE PARK--SOUTH	X		X	X	X	X		X		X
WAUKEGAN HARBOR	X	X			X		X			X

There is also signage at these sites, leading cars to the access sites and that show a map of access sites. For photos of existing signage see **Figure 3.2**.

The Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trail Plan recommends water trails provide access sites at a maximum interval of 3-5 miles to provide users with adequate locations to put-in, rest, and carry out. Current established access sites in this project area are spaced as follows, and meet the 3-5 mile interval criteria:

North Point Marina to Illinois Beach State Park North	2 miles
Illinois Beach State Park North to Hosah Landing	1 mile
Illinois Beach State Park North to Illinois Beach State Park South	2.5 miles
Illinois Beach State Park South to Waukegan Harbor	5 miles

For site specific potential future Infrastructure see **Appendix G**.

USE AND POTENTIAL USE OF THE LAKE MICHIGAN WATER TRAIL

Lake Michigan is already a comparatively well used water trail in Northeastern Illinois and has been for some time. In 2006 Friends of the Chicago River, Openlands, and the Northeastern Illinois Water Trail Council conducted a survey designed to shed light on Northeastern Illinois Paddlers, including who they are, what is most important to them when choosing a place to paddle, how much money they spend per trip (on gas, food, etc.), and where they paddle in Northeastern Illinois. For details on survey responses, see **Appendix D**.

The survey posed the question “What rivers and lakes have you paddled in the last year? How many times did you paddle each of these last year?”. Responses indicated that Lake Michigan ranked 4th out of 17 lakes and rivers listed, with 55 of the 250 respondents indicating that they had paddled it in the past year. The number of times that those 55 people reported paddling on Lake Michigan came to 301 total trips, which resulted in Lake Michigan ranking 3rd out of 17 lakes and rivers listed for the number of trips taken.

Figure 3.2. Existing Signage for Lake Michigan Water Trail



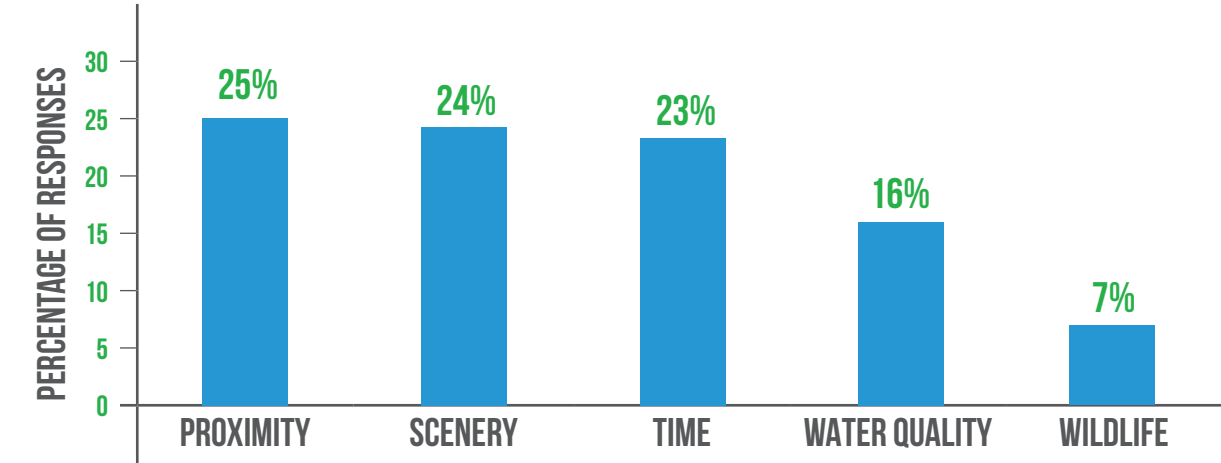


Although the Illinois portion of the Lake Michigan Watershed is only 100 square miles in size, (0.17% of the size of the state of Illinois) this watershed is home to half of the entire population of Illinois. Considering that the 2006 survey participants indicated that proximity was the most important factor in where they choose to paddle, water trail development on Lake Michigan, and the benefits it offers to communities in terms of recreation, education, and quality of life, has the potential to reach a large proportion of the Illinois population.

One of the goals of the trail is to help boost local economies. Trail improvements that enhance use have the potential to bring local financial benefits. The 2006 paddling survey found that respondents spent an average of \$34 per in-state paddling trip, and \$122 per out-of-state trip. Considering the number of visitors to the region, as well as the previously mentioned number of trips by local residents, enhancement of the water trail has the potential to bring money to local economies.

Public open house comments stressed the following ideas for economic development and trail sustainability that could be integrated in priority projects:

- ▶ Local businesses offer discounts to paddlers. Consider QR codes at launches (for example on signage) that could provide access to coupons, and information about businesses. This might be a way to help fund the water trail through advertisements. And/or provide a water trail passport book with stamps at access sites. Paddlers who collect stamps could then get discounts at local businesses.
- ▶ Donation boxes
- ▶ Maps of trail for sale
- ▶ Bigger social media presence



Proximity was the characteristic that most paddlers surveyed said was the most important to them when deciding where to paddle. This was followed closely by scenery and time spent on the water (i.e., a measure of distance between launch sites, and less applicable to lakes since paddlers can use the same site to put in and take out and define time on the water themselves).

EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

The planning area from North Chicago to the Wisconsin border is home to several diverse and underserved communities. The Lake Michigan Water Trail could offer opportunities to these communities if developed with them in mind.

Respondents to the 2006 paddling survey were, on average, 52 years old, with the majority being college educated males. More than half had an average income of \$70k or greater. This data indicates a need to reach out to other populations if water trails are to be equitable.

Underserved communities may lack opportunities to paddle and efforts to provide these opportunities could include programming that provides transportation to events where equipment, guides, and instruction are available. Entities that provide programming could work with community group leaders to design events and/or training that connects to or extends programming in which the groups are already engaged.

During a recent Lake Michigan Water Trail planning meeting a statement was submitted by a representative of a community group in Waukegan, Illinois. The group was undertaking a summer program which featured education about Lake Michigan with goals of fostering stewardship and love of the lake. The statement underscores the desire on the part of community groups to participate in paddling and the barriers they are experiencing.

“The hard economic reality... is that a number of our families do not own the equipment or have the skills discussed here today. Waukegan continues to [be] an under-resourced community and we serve families that reflect that... Our families have a desire to connect with the water trails that dot our landscape. Desire is not enough. We can have the will, but how are we going to make a way?”

The following suggestions for the creation of an inclusive water trail were offered:

1. Hire/assign community outreach contact
2. Create promotional materials, both digital and print, that look like the communities you serve
3. Have a fun, well publicized event during the summer months
4. Connect communities on a regular basis

Another consideration is multilingual outreach materials, maps, and signage, in at least both English and Spanish. The communities within the project area all contain significant populations identifying as Hispanic or Latino, according to the 2010 census. Given the metrics shown in **Figure 3.3**, failing to create multilingual materials could potentially exclude a large segment of the population.

Figure 3.3. Percentages of project area community populations identifying as Hispanic or Latino. All data from 2010 Census.

CITY	POPULATION	% OF POPULATION IDENTIFYING AS HISPANIC OR LATINO	POTENTIAL POPULATION EXCLUDED
BEACH PARK	13,638	14	1,909
NORTH CHICAGO	32,574	27	8,795
WAUKEGAN	89,078	53	47,211
WINTHROP HARBOR	6,742	8	539
ZION	24,413	28	6,836
TOTAL:			65,290



SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

A major challenge to developing the Lake Michigan Water Trail is the level of expertise necessary to successfully navigate paddling trips due to the potential for high waves, cold water, rough water caused by weather and/or power boats, and the potential to end up very far from shore.

The 1999 Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trail Plan states:

**“A trail on Lake Michigan presents considerations unlike those of water trails on creeks and rivers. A lake trail is defined only by the location of the access points. The distance paddlers can go from shore, the potential for high wind and waves, and high-speed power boat traffic make paddling on the lake a challenge, even for experienced users. The use of the water trail on Lake Michigan is recommended only for experienced and well-equipped paddlers or for less experienced paddlers accompanied by an experienced group or guide.”**

Carefully thought-out infrastructure improvements can help paddlers have a safer experience. For example, beaches along the Lake Michigan shoreline often do not require any improvements for launching and landing non-motorized watercraft, however, waves and currents in the shallow water can make launching and landing difficult and potentially dangerous. For this reason, protected beaches, ramps, and harbors are key elements of providing safe access to the Lake Michigan Water Trail.

One of the challenges of planning for the Lake Michigan Water Trail is paddlers, no matter what their skill level, need to be well informed, prepared, and equipped with up-to-date information before they set out on a trip.

For the experienced paddler this means providing readily available and current maps, information about access sites and resources for trip planning, including signage that can be seen from the water, accurate weather information, and locations where boats can be taken out of the water in case of emergency.

For the less experienced paddler, it means providing affordable programming that includes equipment, lessons, and guided experiences that build and reinforce interest in Lake Michigan. Offering safe access to the lake and an avenue for beginners to increase their skills on the water in a safe and fun environment will make the water trail truly accessible to adjacent communities.

Comments on this plan, by paddling organizations, have emphasized the need to provide guided experiences for non-experts. One such comment read: **“I would very strongly urge [the plan] to stay away from having any rental facility where people can just take out a boat and paddle wherever they want.”** This comment highlights both the inherent unpredictability of Lake Michigan (a major concern for both experienced and inexperienced boaters alike) and the need for guided experiences.

Stakeholder comments on this plan have stressed that the use of canoes is generally not appropriate on Lake Michigan. Programming in large voyageur canoes, with a guide or guides in the canoe with participants, can be an exception when it takes place in protected areas like those designated in harbors and at protected beaches. Traveling between launch sites outside of protected areas should be reserved for expert paddlers who have, and are experienced in the use of, kayaks designed for large, unprotected waterways with rough water and waves, such as the great lakes.

Stakeholders also caution that it is very important to convey that taking a lesson or several lessons and/or participating in a guided trip will not impart the experience needed to paddle the lake independently. Entities offering lessons and trips should provide this messaging to participants, as should printed water trail materials, websites, and signage.

THE LAKE MICHIGAN WATER TRAIL GAP

The 35 mile stretch of Illinois Lake Michigan shoreline just south of the 10 mile planning area considered in this document (South of North Chicago to the northern border of Chicago), constitutes a gap in the water trail. **Many of the municipalities here charge high fees to non-residents for beach access, parking, and/or launch site use or require non-residents to apply for a limited number of seasonal use permits.** This gap will need to be addressed before the Illinois Lake Michigan Water Trail will be complete and before a four state National Water Trail can be considered.

This current planning effort works to strengthen the trail where municipalities and stakeholders are enthusiastic to build the trail, and to serve as a model for trail development. When the Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trail Plan was issued in 1999, it was noted that a water trail user pass could be issued to paddlers by communities that restrict access to their beaches. This has never come to fruition, but this, or other planning with municipalities within the gap stretch that are open to considering public access to the trail, might be opportunities to close this water trail gap in the future.

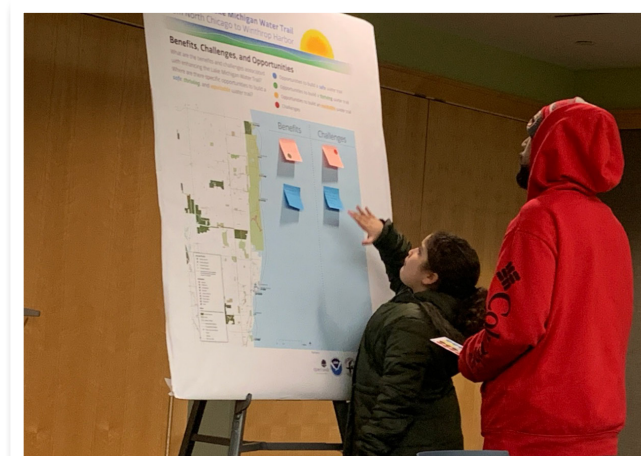
- Public open house comments also stressed the following ideas to enhance safety on water and land:
- ▶ Place channel 16 (distress frequency) call boxes at water trail locations
  - ▶ Develop a Water Trail Club
  - ▶ Make sure access locations have up to date trail information
  - ▶ More closely spaced stops in North Shore in gap area
  - ▶ Better water trail signage at beaches
  - ▶ Establish kayak storage and tie up facilities in secure areas to prevent theft
  - ▶ Make people aware of paddling clubs and where to get instruction
  - ▶ Improve safety of parking lots
  - ▶ Find a way to indicate water temperature on or near trail signage
  - ▶ Have local clubs host events on water trail, teaching and promoting safe paddling
  - ▶ Promote phone apps that can give up to date information on
    - ▷ Wind speed
    - ▷ Wave height
    - ▷ Any current warnings





## CHAPTER 4 BENEFITS & CHALLENGES OF A LAKE MICHIGAN WATER TRAIL

Benefits and challenges to enhancing the Lake Michigan Water Trail were defined and prioritized by municipal participants, then divided into first, second, and third priorities by the same participants.



*Benefits of developing the water trail identified by local governments included stewardship, respectful use, and appreciation of the lake and associated ecosystems. Open house comments from the public echoed this.*

### **Public Open House Comments:**

- ▶ Create a water trail club, with chapters coordinating stewardship and cleanups
- ▶ Grow Stewardship
- ▶ Increase awareness of environmental issues
- ▶ Promote beach clean up events at trail locations



# BENEFITS

## FIRST PRIORITY (F):

- ▶ Bringing Lake Michigan into our communities and provide connections to the lakefront (F1)
- ▶ Bring in a new type of visitor/user by offering lakefront activities (F2)
- ▶ Stewardship/need a generation to use Lake Michigan so they will want to protect it (F3)

## SECOND PRIORITY (S)

- ▶ Make communities aware of what we have/ stewardship as a natural outcome (S1)

## THIRD PRIORITY (T)

- ▶ More opportunities to regionalize events (T1)
- ▶ Use Lake Michigan for education/connect to schools and school curriculum(s) (T2)
- ▶ Image of lakefront/rebrand as pristine setting (T3)
- ▶ Our responsibility to respectfully use, and to promote respectful community use of this majestic space (T4)
- ▶ Promoting recreation/healthy lifestyle (T5)



# CHALLENGES

## FIRST PRIORITY (F)

- ▶ Money and personnel for building and maintaining infrastructure (F1)

## SECOND PRIORITY (S)

- ▶ Need the right people at the table, including IDNR decision makers (S1)
- ▶ Coordinating between the different branches of IDNR, permitting agencies, communication between branches, general bureaucracy concerns (S2)
- ▶ Coordination of plans so they fit together; fit water trail objectives into local and regional plans (S3)
- ▶ Lake Michigan water level; shoreline erosion (S4)

## THIRD PRIORITY (T)

- ▶ Vandalism/stolen access site or safety signs (T1)
- ▶ Balancing conflicting uses – any use will have an impact of some sort (T2)
- ▶ Safety, including rough water, drownings, E. coli and other water quality concerns (T3)
- ▶ Diversity of landowners (T4)
- ▶ Stakeholders and businesses need to form partnerships for funding (T5)
- ▶ Non-motorized access (T6)
- ▶ Figure out and maintain compatible uses that will lead to people valuing the lakefront and stewarding/advocating for it because they use it (T7)

# PROTECTING SENSITIVE AREAS

Another challenge to be considered is the need to protect sensitive resources along the shoreline. Some of the shoreline includes Illinois Nature Preserve. Sensitive areas should not be used as stopover sites. Shorebird nesting areas exist in the area covered by this plan and need to be protected. In addition, Dead River at Illinois Beach State Park South should not be paddled into. Damage to high quality environmental resources could result and hazardous conditions including quicksand can be present.

Information for paddlers and educational programming around the water trail must clearly indicate where access, stopover and paddling are permitted and where they are not. Signage in some areas, like the confluence of Dead River with Lake Michigan, should be placed and maintained.

Trash receptacles should be present and maintained at designated access and stopover sites. These should be designed so that trash cannot blow out and so that wildlife cannot pull trash out.

Water trail information must emphasize how to use the trail responsibly to preserve the natural areas associated with the lake.





# CHAPTER 5

## VISION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### VISION STATEMENT

Input from community stakeholders and municipal partners was used to draft the following vision statement for the trail:

*By leveraging the unique beauty and opportunities offered by Lake Michigan, we will improve and protect quality of life for surrounding communities and for visitors by offering access to the lake for children and adults of all skill levels, and realize the economic, educational, and stewardship benefits of an accessible, well used water trail.*

### PROJECTS TO SUPPORT THE VISION

Local governments and other stakeholders brainstormed a list of projects that would enhance the trail. Projects were considered for each of the following categories:

- ▶ **Infrastructure**
- ▶ **Programming**
- ▶ **Safety**
- ▶ **Connectivity & Wayfinding**
- ▶ **Sustainability**
- ▶ **Engagement & Equity**



In addition, several projects that would make the lake more attractive to visitors and communities emerged from the survey of water trail users that we conducted at our 2019 paddling events at Waukegen Harbor and North Point Marina.

The planning team then divided the projects into the categories of safe, equitable, and thriving, and requested public input at open houses and on-line about how these projects should be prioritized. Participants were asked to vote for three of nine projects in each category (safe, equitable, and thriving). The following priorities emerged:

PRIORITY PROJECTS

- ▶ **Water Trail Maps.**  
Create water trail maps that show routes and access points, natural areas, overnight storage locations, and other local points of interest (lodging, restaurants, bars, cafes, cultural sites).
- ▶ **Environmental Education.**  
Create a traveling environmental education unit that would introduce community and school groups to the water trail.
- ▶ **Community Programming and Paddling Camps.**  
Support community-driven water trail-related programming (e.g., paddling camps, environmental education, entertainment, pop up events).
- ▶ **Organizational Partnerships.**  
Partner with local and regional environmental organizations for cleanup, restoration workdays, and other environmental stewardship events.
- ▶ **Action Team.**  
Establish a Lake Michigan Water Trail Action Team that will coordinate water trail building activities, funding, programming, and marketing activities
- ▶ **Safety Information Station.**  
Develop a model safety information station at least one access point
- ▶ **Kayaking Club.**  
Create a kayaking club that would host trips on Lake Michigan and allow people to increase their skills in a supervised setting
- ▶ **Link to Transit and Trails.**  
Link the water trail to transit and existing and proposed bikeways and trails.
- ▶ **Access Point Amenities.**  
Equip access points with lighting, bathrooms, lockers, event staging areas, training areas, launching areas, car parking, bike parking, concessions, and other amenities

A full list of projects can be seen in **Appendix A**.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the successful enhancement of the Lake Michigan Water Trail will require coordination across jurisdictions, establishing a Lake Michigan Water Trail Action Team that will coordinate water trail enhancing activities, funding, programming, and marketing is a necessary first step to make a safe, equitable, and thriving water trail. This group could be formed by representatives from each municipality and/or park district, land owners and/or managers of each launch and potential launch or stopover site, and other stakeholders, including representatives of local business, tourism, community groups, paddling organizations, clubs, and other interested parties.

The Water Trail Action Team could jointly take on priority projects to enhance the trail, identifying funding sources, applying for grants, and soliciting proposals for work. **Appendix A** presents a full list of projects and codes them according to:

1. The benefits and challenges of trail development that they address; and
2. The category (safe, equitable, and/or thriving) into which they fit. When choosing projects to address, it is recommended that the team prioritize a balance so that safety, equitability, and thriving economies and ecosystems are all represented, and so that a variety of benefits and challenges of trail development are included.

The Water Trail Action Team could also potentially coordinate with Lake Michigan Water Trail managers from other states, and/or with a four-state planning committee if one is currently meeting. Since Wisconsin is immediately north and has designated Lake Michigan as a state water trail, communicating with water trail managers in Wisconsin, and thinking about how to leverage efforts and resources across states might be a priority.

The combination of dramatic changes in Lake Michigan water levels we are currently experiencing, future uncertainty as to water levels, and the expertise necessary to paddle Lake Michigan, may argue for the prioritization of a coordinated system of trails, that offer hiking, biking, and paddling, and branding them as a related trail system so trails that will allow communities and visitors to connect with the lake (even if from land) are available at all times to everyone regardless of skill level. An example of a branded system of trails that includes a water trail can be seen on the Rock River National Water Trail. Current and future water level extremes and uncertainty also point to the need for more dedicated public access at harbors from docks so there are alternatives to beach access.

The water trail action team could consider the many resources that are available to assist in funding and developing projects. **Appendix E** presents information and links to these resources. In addition, the American Canoe Association ([Americancanoe.org](http://Americancanoe.org)) and Illinois Paddling Council ([Illinoispaddling.info](http://Illinoispaddling.info)) are resources for safety, training, and development of water trails. For example the American Canoe Association offers classes that lead to certification of paddling instructors, which could be an important resource for staff of entities wanting to offer paddling lessons or guided trips.

Finally, the water trail action team, if composed of diverse stakeholders, can bring a variety of expertise to trail development. For example, a strong outreach effort will help to bring communities to Lake Michigan for trainings or events. The partnership of community groups, municipal, and local governments, and other stakeholders that specialize in outreach can help make this, and many other projects successful.





# APPENDICES

- APPENDIX A. PROJECT LIST DEVELOPED BY STAKEHOLDERS AND PUBLIC**
- APPENDIX B. EVENTS & EVENT SURVEY RESULTS**
- APPENDIX C. PLANNING MEETINGS & PLANNING MEETING PARTICIPANTS**
- APPENDIX D. 2006 NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS PADDLERS SURVEY**
- APPENDIX E. FUNDING PROGRAMS & RESOURCES**
- APPENDIX F. REFERENCES**
- APPENDIX G. POTENTIAL SITE-SPECIFIC FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS**



APPENDIX A. PROJECT LIST DEVELOPED BY STAKEHOLDERS & PUBLIC

The table below presents a full list of projects and codes them according to:

- 1. The benefits and challenges of trail development that they address;
- 2. The category (infrastructure, programming, connectivity & wayfinding, sustainability, safety, and/or engagement & equity) into which they fit; and
- 3. The goal (thriving, safe, and/or equitable) they addressed.

When choosing projects to address, it is recommended that the team prioritize a balance so that safety, equitability, and thriving economies and ecosystems are all represented, and so that a variety of benefits and challenges of trail development are included. The codes for benefits and challenges are defined on page 18 in **Chapter 4** of this document.

#	Project Description	Project Categories	Benefits Addressed	Challenges Addressed	Goals Addressed
1	Link the water trail to transit and existing and proposed bikeways and trails. For example: Set up stations where bicycles are available for rent on trails/roads that lead to water trail access points with kayak rentals that are guided or take place in a supervised area for safety	Infrastructure Connectivity & Wayfinding Safety Engagement & Equity	F1, F2, S1, T3, T5	S4, T2, T4, T7, T3	Thriving Safe
2	Support water trail programming that connects neighboring communities and people from diverse backgrounds; work with community groups to understand their needs and interests	Engagement & Equity	F1, F2, F3, S1, T2, T5	T7	Thriving Equitable
3	Create a traveling environmental education unit that would introduce community and school groups to the water trail	Engagement & Equity	F1, F2, F3, S1, T2, T4	T3, T7	Thriving
4	Partner with local and regional environmental organizations for cleanup, restoration workdays, and other environmental stewardship events	Engagement & Equity	F1, F2, F3, S1, T4	T2, T7	Thriving
5	Create short-term and overnight storage locations for canoes and kayaks	Infrastructure Safety	F2, T5	T6, T7	Safe

#	Project Description	Project Categories	Benefits Addressed	Challenges Addressed	Goals Addressed
6	Create water trail maps that show routes and access points, natural areas, overnight storage locations, and other local points of interest (lodging, restaurants, bars, cafes, cultural sites)	Connectivity & Wayfinding	F2, T4, T5	T7	Thriving
7	Offer programming that crosses the state line (i.e. starts in IL and goes into WI or vice versa) to connect the Lake Michigan Water Trail in IL and WI	Connectivity & Wayfinding Programming	F2, T1, T5	S4, T5	Thriving
8	Create a kayaking club that would host trips on Lake Michigan and allow people to increase their skills in a supervised setting	Safety Programming Engagement & Equity	F1, F2, F3, T5	T3, T6, T7	Safe
9	Link water trail programming to community events and economic development efforts	Programming Engagement & Equity	F1, F2, F3, S1, T1, T5,	T6	Thriving
10	Develop a program at North Point Marina or Waukegan Harbor for those who want to develop paddling skills Establish a "Lake Michigan Kayak Certification" that involves both online and on-the-water training components	Programming Engagement & Equity Safety Sustainability	F1, F2, F3, T5,	T3, T6	Safe
11	Offer paddling tours on the water guided by expert paddlers	Safety Programming Engagement & Equity	F1, F2, F3, S1, T5	T3, T6	Safe
12	Offer paddling camps through park districts and community groups	Safety Programming Engagement & Equity	F1, F2, F3, S1, T2, T4, T5	T6, T7	Safe
13	Explore the feasibility of the setting of rules and requirements by access site owners and managers for use of the water trail: (1) requirements for PFDs, whistle, pumps, etc. (2) adoption of a flag system with red flag meaning no access	Safety		T3	Safe



#	Project Description	Project Categories	Benefits Addressed	Challenges Addressed	Goals Addressed
14	Develop a model safety information station at least one access point	Safety Infrastructure		T3	Safe
15	Establish a Lake Michigan Water Trail Action Team that will coordinate water trail building activities, funding, programming, and marketing activities	Sustainability		F1, S1, S4, T4, T5	Equitable Thriving
16	Develop multilingual water trail maps, marketing materials, and wayfinding signage that guides people from nearby transit hubs and bikeways to the water trail	Connectivity & Wayfinding Infrastructure Engagement & Equity	F1, S1, T5	T7	Equitable
17	Equip access points with lighting, bathrooms, lockers, event staging areas, training areas, launching areas, car parking, bike parking, concessions, and other amenities	Infrastructure	F1, F2	S5, T6,	Safe
18	Ensure that water trail access points and launching points are ADA accessible	Infrastructure Safety Engagement & Equity	F1, F2, T5	T6, T7	Equitable
19	Engage volunteers in water trail maintenance and environmental stewardship activities	Sustainability Engagement & Equity Programming	F1, F3, S1, T4	T7	Equitable
20	Equip visitors, residents, and business owners with information about how to be good stewards of the water trail, protect the natural environment, and participate in water trail planning activities and events	Sustainability Engagement & Equity Programming	F1,F2, F3, S1, T4	T7	Equitable
21	Adopt social equity as a principle that guides future water trail building and programming activities	Programming Engagement & Equity	F1, F2	T7	Equitable

#	Project Description	Project Categories	Benefits Addressed	Challenges Addressed	Goals Addressed
22	Ensure that residents, business owners, and community organizations benefit from the water trail	Engagement & Equity	F1, S1	T7	Equitable
23	Ensure that future water trail building activities include green infrastructure, environmental education signage, and other green building elements	Infrastructure Sustainability	F3, S1, T2, T4	T7	Thriving
24	Advocate for policies that protect land and water resources	Sustainability	S1, T3, T4	T2, T7	Thriving
25	Ensure that the local workforce benefits from infrastructure installation and maintenance activities through local hiring and workforce development programs	Infrastructure Engagement & Equity	F1	F1, T1, T7	Thriving
26	Support community-driven water trail-related programming (e.g. paddling camps, environmental education, entertainment, pop-up events)	Programming Engagement & Equity	F1, F2, F3, T1, T2, T5	T7	Thriving
27	Create community gathering spaces at water trail access points	Engagement & Equity Infrastructure	F1, F2, S1	T7	Thriving



APPENDIX B. EVENTS & EVENT SURVEY RESULTS

LAKE MICHIGAN WATER TRAIL PADDLING EVENTS

This planning process began in the summer of 2018 with a series of kick-off events at three existing Lake Michigan Water Trail access sites: North Point Marina, Illinois Beach State Park, and Waukegan Harbor. The events were used to promote the Lake Michigan Water Trail, drum-up excitement for the upcoming planning process, and offer a chance for local community organizations to interact with the public. Wilderness Inquiry, a nonprofit organization that provides opportunities for people of all abilities and backgrounds to experience the outdoors, attended the events and provided 24-foot Voyageur canoes for attendees to paddle in free of charge. Guided, 30-minute trips introduced community members to Lake Michigan and provided a fun and safe experience for people of all ages and skill levels. Community groups that provided educational information, demonstrations, and activities centered on Lake Michigan, water safety, native wildlife and habitats, water quality, and stewardship included:

- ▷ Lake County Forest Preserve District

▷ Lake County Health Department

▷ Faith in Place

▷ League of Women Voters

▷ Lake County Audubon Society

▷ Illinois Department of Natural Resources’ Coastal Management Program and Clean Marinas Program

▷ Wildlife Discovery Center
- ▷ Alliance for the Great Lakes

▷ Openlands

▷ Shedd Aquarium

▷ Illinois Paddling Council

▷ Coast Guard Auxiliary

▷ Zion Park District

▷ Village of Beach Park

▷ National Park Service

Based on information collected from the 325 residents and visitors who paddled at the events, 40% of them were first time paddlers and 55% were from the zip code in which the event occurred or an adjacent zip code. Thus the 2018 events succeeded in reaching over 150 new and local paddlers.

In August 2019 two additional public paddling events were held at Waukegan Harbor and North Point Marina in Winthrop Harbor. Wilderness Inquiry again attended the event at Waukegan Harbor, offering guided, 30-minute trips to introduce community members to Lake Michigan and both events offered short, guided kayak trips provided by Northwest Passage. Community groups providing educational information and activities for the 2019 events included:

- ▷ Lake County Audubon Society

▷ Faith in Place

▷ Coast Guard Auxiliary
- ▷ Illinois Department of Natural Resources’ Coastal Management Program

▷ Openlands

▷ Northwest Passage

We had 80 residents and visitors paddle at these two events, including children from the summer program of the Waukegan-based community group, Cool Learning Experience.

In conjunction with this planning process, Openlands and CMP prepared a survey that was administered to all adult participants at the 2019 events in order to find out whether and where they had paddled in the past, what barriers they experienced when considering paddling on Lake Michigan, and what amenities would need to be present for them to paddle on Lake Michigan in the future. We received 36 survey responses. 75% of the adults who attended these events had paddled before, with most indicating they have previously paddled on rivers but not Lake Michigan. The 25% of respondents who had not paddled before indicated that they had not had the opportunity, did know how to get started, or did not feel ready to paddle on their own. Suggestions of programs or amenities to increase usage of the Lake Michigan Water Trail included:

- ▶ Source of kayaks, canoes, and other equipment

▶ Easy access to the lake

▶ Access to instruction

▶ Others to paddle with

▶ Harbor stops with restaurants

▶ Paddling/bird watching programming

Participants were also asked about barriers to using the Lake Michigan Water Trail, responses included:

- ▶ Lack of equipment

▶ Lack of clubs or interest groups

▶ Lack of information and access

▶ Inexperience

▶ The perception/reality that Lake Michigan is dangerous or unsafe due to cold temperatures, high waves, and power boats.

▶ Lack of restaurants, bars, and coffee shops and places to tie up your kayak while visiting eating establishments along the Lake Michigan Water Trail

The questions asked on the survey were:

1. What is your zip code?

2. Have you paddled before?

3. If yes, where?

a. And if yes, check all types of paddling trips you have taken

i. Guided experiences at events \_\_\_\_

ii. Unguided day trips \_\_\_\_

iii. Multi-day trips \_\_\_\_

4. If you have not paddled before, why not?

5. What kinds of programs or amenities are necessary to attract you to paddle on Lake Michigan?

6. What are your primary barriers to paddling on Lake Michigan?



# APPENDIX C. PLANNING MEETINGS & PLANNING MEETING PARTICIPANTS

In 2019, Openlands and the Illinois Coastal Management Program collected input for Lake Michigan Water Trail Planning from local governments and other stakeholders.

In February 2019, we held a meeting with municipalities and Park Districts within our planning area, asking them to annotate a map with the projects related to the water trail that they are undertaking or that they would like to undertake and discuss the needs and vision for the water trail. This meeting was attended by

- ▷ Waukegan Park District
- ▷ Village of Winthrop Harbor
- ▷ Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- ▷ Illinois Beach State Park
- ▷ Zion Park District
- ▷ Village of Beach Park
- ▷ Foss Park District
- ▷ City of Waukegan

We also asked them to identify the greatest potential benefits of a Lake Michigan Water Trail and the greatest potential challenges to its successful establishment. Once we had a list of challenges and benefits, we asked participants to vote on the three in each category that they thought were most important. After the meeting, Openlands created a draft vision statement for the water trail based on information collected on benefits of trail development.

In April 2019, Openlands and the Illinois Coastal Management Program held a second meeting that included local governments and a wider group of stakeholders and that yielded ideas for priority projects to support the development of the trail. This meeting was attended by

- ▷ Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- ▷ Openlands
- ▷ Lake County Board
- ▷ Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI)
- ▷ Northwest Passage
- ▷ Illinois Paddling Council
- ▷ League of Women Voters
- ▷ Forest Preserve District of Lake County
- ▷ Lake County Health Department
- ▷ Cool Learning Experience
- ▷ Village of Beach Park
- ▷ Zion Park District
- ▷ North Point Marina
- ▷ Waukegan Harbor
- ▷ City of Waukegan
- ▷ Waukegan Park District
- ▷ WYC Youth Foundation (Sailing School)
- ▷ Illinois Beach State Park Steward
- ▷ Foss Park District

and these participants considered the draft vision statement, and projects that would support the following elements of the water trail:

- ▶ Infrastructure
- ▶ Programming
- ▶ Safety
- ▶ Connectivity
- ▶ Sustainability
- ▶ Engagement and Equity

Attendees participated in break out groups to discuss projects that should be pursued. Each break out group included four to seven people and they noted the high points from their discussions on large sheets of paper. These notes were then translated into a project list and project details by Openlands and Illinois Coastal Management staff (**Appendix A**).



APPENDIX D. 2006 NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS PADDLERS SURVEY

2006 PADDLING SURVEY

Friends of the Chicago River, Openlands, and the Northeast Illinois Watertrails Council conducted a public opinion survey of NE Illinois recreational paddlers in 2006. This survey was designed to build awareness of the positive contribution paddlers make to the local economy of the region and to better understand the needs of the community.

The survey was mailed to 1500 randomly selected individual households who registered their non-motorized watercraft (canoe/kayak) with the State of Illinois. It was also distributed electronically to members of NE Illinois paddling clubs, participants in the Flatwater Classic canoe race, and members of the public who requested maps from the water trails council.

Findings:

- 1. The average number of NE Illinois Canoe trips in 2005 was 14. The median was 7.
- 2. The average number of canoe trips taken out of state in 2005 was 4. The median was 2.
- 3. The majority of the trips in NE Illinois lasted 2-4 hours (48%). Second highest was 4-6 hours (30%)
- 4. The preferred paddle launch site was Natural River Bank (64%) with Concrete Pad second (13%), and floating pier third (10%).
- 5. The most important qualities when choosing a location for a paddling trip was proximity, followed by scenery, length of time on the water ,water quality and wildlife.
- 6. The average expenditure per 2005 paddling trip in NE Illinois was \$34.
- 7. The average annual expenditure in NE Illinois was \$266.
- 8. The average expenditure per 2005 paddling trip out of state was \$122.
- 9. The average annual expenditure out of state was \$334.
- 10. The average age of paddlers was 52.
- 11. The paddling population is overwhelmingly male (78%), female (22%).
- 12. The education level is very high, 76 % with college degrees.
- 13. The annual income level is above average. 58% listed 70K+.

Conclusions—Economic Impact:

- 1. If we wish to extrapolate the survey responses to the number of people in NE IL who registered their boats with the state, we could extrapolate to the 15,000 owners who registered non-motorized watercraft in NE Illinois in 2005. With an average number of trips per household of 14, this would mean there were approximately 210,000 paddling trips in 2005. The economic impact of this paddling for NE Illinois communities in 2005 would then be \$7,140,000. It is possible that the survey respondents represent a group that takes more trips than the average canoe or kayak registrant, however, water trail enhancement may also attract more people to make more trips and could have substantial economic impact for surrounding communities and businesses.

Geographic Summary:

Respondents were asked questions concerning their use of particular Water Trails in Northeast Illinois in 2005.

The following rivers and lakes are ranked by the number of survey respondents who indicated they had paddled that river or lake in 2005:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Fox River (124 respondents had paddled it in 2005) | 9. DuPage West Branch (43 respondents)    |
| 2. North Branch Chicago (86 respondents)              | 10. DuPage Mainstem (38 respondents)      |
| 3. Upper Des Plaines (65 respondents)                 | 11. South Branch Chicago (29 respondents) |
| 4. Lake Michigan (55 respondents)                     | 12. Salt Creek (27 respondents)           |
| 5. Kankakee (52 respondents)                          | 13. DuPage East Branch (10 respondents)   |
| 6. Kishwaukee (50 respondents)                        | 14. Chicago River – other (8 respondents) |
| 7. Nippersink (47 respondents)                        | 15. Calumet Sag Channel (4 respondents)   |
| 8. Lower Des Plaines (44 respondents)                 | 16. Calumet River (3 respondents)         |
|   | 17. Little Calumet (1 respondent)         |

The following rivers are ranked by the total number of trips survey respondents indicated they took on those rivers in 2005:

- |                                     |                                 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Fox River (total 868 trips)      | 10. DuPage River Mainstem (102) |
| 2. Upper Des Plaines (481 trips)    | 11. Salt Creek (49 trips)       |
| 3. Lake Michigan (301 trips)        | 12. South Branch Chicago (44)   |
| 4. North Branch Chicago (291 trips) | 13. DuPage East Branch (17)     |
| 5. Lower Des Plaines (244 trips)    | 14. Chicago other (15)          |
| 6. Kankakee (181 trips)             | 15. Calumet (5)                 |
| 7. Nippersink (138 trips)           | 16. Cal Sag Channel (4)         |
| 8. DuPage West Branch (113)         | 17. Little Calumet (1)          |
| 9. Kishwaukee (110)                 |                                 |



# APPENDIX E. FUNDING PROGRAMS & RESOURCES RELEVANT TO WATER TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

## THE ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES’ BOAT ACCESS AREA DEVELOPMENT (BAAD) PROGRAM

Financial assistance through this program is available to local governments for the acquisition, construction, and expansion/rehabilitation of public boat and canoe access areas on Illinois’ lakes and rivers. The program provides up to 100% of approved project construction costs and 90% of approved land acquisition costs. Grant awards are limited to a \$200,000 annual maximum per project. Revenue for this state funded program is derived from marine motor fuel tax and boat/canoe registration fees.

Examples of eligible project activities include:

- ▶ Water frontage land acquisition for public access areas; and
- ▶ New construction or renovation of
  - ▶ Boat/canoe launching ramps and courtesy docks;
  - ▶ Restrooms and security lighting;
  - ▶ Parking areas, access roads and walkways; and,
  - ▶ Other boating related facilities deemed appropriate by IDNR.

Grant submission deadlines and instructions for completing grant applications can be found at the following web address:

<https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/AEG/Pages/BoatAccessAreaDevelopmentProgram.aspx>

## THE ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES’ RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM

This program provides funding assistance for acquisition, development, rehabilitation, and maintenance of both motorized and non-motorized recreation trails.

The RTP program can provide up to 80% federal funding on approved projects and requires a minimum 20% non-federal funding match. Applications for grant assistance must be received by IDNR no later than March 1 of each calendar year.

Examples of eligible project activities include:

- ▶ Trail construction and rehabilitation;
- ▶ Restoration of areas adjacent to trails damaged by unauthorized trail uses;
- ▶ Construction of trail-related support facilities and amenities; and,
- ▶ Acquisition from willing sellers of trail corridors through easements or fee simple title.

Instructions for completing grant applications for the RTP can be found at the following web address:

<https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/AEG/Pages/FederalRecreationalTrailsProgram.aspx>

## THE ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES’ COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

This program can provide grant funding to support the planning and execution of projects that improve public recreation and access to Lake Michigan. Requests for Proposals are announced annually in the beginning of the year.

More information about these grants, along with current RFP’s can be found at the following web address:

<https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/cmp/Pages/grants.aspx>

## NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RIVERS, TRAILS, AND CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (RTCA)

This program provides assistance and support to natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects throughout the country. National Park Service (NPS) staff will provide general project support, such as outlining community resources, assisting with public outreach and participation strategies, creating action plans, etc. No monetary grants or assistance are associated with this program, but identifying funding sources is a method of project support offered.

Applications are due June 30. However, contacting a program manager to determine how NPS staff can help and to answer any questions about the project is required prior to application deadline.

Application guidelines and application form can be found here:

[https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/upload/RTCA\\_Application\\_2019\\_Final.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/upload/RTCA_Application_2019_Final.pdf)

Contact info for regional program managers can be found here:

<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/contactus.htm>

## RIVER MANAGEMENT SOCIETY “PREPARE TO LAUNCH” RESOURCE

This is a detailed ebook/pdf/powerpoint that walks planners through evaluating access sites for construction or updating. It functions as a good resource for understanding what is necessary for safe and accessible launch points. It also provides many examples of different launch types and construction options. It could be a good source of concrete ideas for improvements at existing launch sites or for construction of new launch sites.

Resource can be found here:

<https://www.river-management.org/prepare-to-launch->



APPENDIX F. REFERENCES

- ▶ *Stakeholder Compact: Zion, Beach Park, Winthrop Harbor, Waukegan, North Chicago*  
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/lake-county-news-sun/ct-lns-lake-county-lakefront-trail-system-st-0417-story.html>
- ▶ *Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trail Plan*  
<https://paddleillinoiswatertrails.files.wordpress.com/2017/07/northeastern-illinois-regional-h2o-orig.pdf>
- ▶ *Multistate Plans for a Continuous Lake Michigan Water Trail*  
<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/name/lakemichigan/>  
<https://wmsrdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Lake-Michigan-Water-Trail-Plan.pdf>  
<https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/cmp/Pages/Lake-Michigan-Water-Trail.aspx>
- ▶ *Lake Michigan Watershed Plan*  
<https://www.lakecountyil.gov/2418/Lake-Michigan-Watershed>
- ▶ *2003 Waukegan Lakefront Master Plan*  
<https://www.waukeganparks.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Appendices4-6-LakefrontVisionForEstPreserveandTransportationPlansReduced.pdf>
- ▶ *2005 NIPC Regional Framework Plan*  
<https://www.csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/2040RegionalFrameworkPlanNIPC2005.pdf>
- ▶ *2016 Village of Winthrop Harbor Comprehensive Plan*  
[https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/338430/WH+Draft+Plan\\_Final+Plan\\_October+2016.pdf/bbf9529a-eeb1-4dbc-9535-647e5f93d382](https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/338430/WH+Draft+Plan_Final+Plan_October+2016.pdf/bbf9529a-eeb1-4dbc-9535-647e5f93d382)
- ▶ *2013 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Illinois Beach State Park Regional Sediment Management Plan*  
<https://www.lrc.usace.army.mil/Portals/36/docs/projects/illinoisbeach/1%20-%20Main%20Report%20and%20EA.pdf>
- ▶ *2019 Northern Lakeshore Connectivity Plan*  
[https://www.thelakotagroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019\\_0924\\_ECR.pdf](https://www.thelakotagroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_0924_ECR.pdf)
- ▶ *2006 Regional Trail Plan*  
[https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/38976/Published\\_GWTP\\_Document.pdf/94703a09-42ee-4caa-9cd3-d949426e0ba4](https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/38976/Published_GWTP_Document.pdf/94703a09-42ee-4caa-9cd3-d949426e0ba4)
- ▶ *2009 Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan*  
[https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/38976/Published\\_GWTP\\_Document.pdf/94703a09-42ee-4caa-9cd3-d949426e0ba4](https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/38976/Published_GWTP_Document.pdf/94703a09-42ee-4caa-9cd3-d949426e0ba4)

APPENDIX G. POTENTIAL SITE-SPECIFIC FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

General needs for the development of the water trail include places for lessons, guided programming, and sources of boats and equipment; places to store and tie up kayaks for those with their own equipment; interconnected biking, hiking, and water trails; and signage, maps, and information.

Below are site specific potential projects suggested by water trail site owners and managers, municipalities and park districts, and the general public. This may be useful for planning a trail that is safe, equitable, and thriving, and has spaces for paddlers or different skill levels.

Potential Projects		
Site	Site/Owners/Managers/Municipalities	General Public (2019 Event Surveys) & Public/Stakeholders (Open Houses)
North Point Marina	Develop interconnected land and water trails, offer kayak rentals,* establish a good place to stay overnight, use natural setting as an attraction	Establish places to tie up kayaks for distance paddlers; develop coffee shops, eating places, attractions for stopping kayakers; allow public kayak access in the harbor as well as on the beach
Illinois Beach State Park (North and South)	Develop kayak storage at IBSP South, offer kayak rentals,* need development of places outside the park where visitors can go, such as restaurants and rainy-day activities	Consider signage for a system of connected hiking, biking, and water trails that highlights the lake and lakefront resources and makes spaces for people to connect with the lake from land***
Village of Beach Park	Develop connected trails fro Sheridan Road to the lakefront, promote recreation on the lake, develop an appealing Sheridan Road corridor	
Hosah Park	High light as a great stop over site, great for birding, develop stewardship programs	Consider making this site part of paddling/birding programming
Waukegan Harbor (and South Waukegan Waterfront)	Develop signage, including safety signage and interpretive signage, encourage "micro business opportunities that could serve the water trail, develop more bathroom facilities, and better road and bike access to Waukegan Harbor. Develop an Audubon bird/beach stewardship program; considering a water taxi between the harbor and the beach north of it	Consider Waukegan Harbor as a place for paddling instruction/programming; development of "safety/information" station**
Foss Beach	Working to improve the beach and minimize dangerous currents; develop access to the lakefront this is a future stop over site for the water trail once the beach is improved	

\*do no establish rental where people can take kayaks out unsupervised  
\*\*include safety information at all sites  
\*\*\*this is a general recommendation for all sites, but is particularly apt at IBSP