



Keys to Establishing and Promoting A Paddling Trail or Blueways System

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Before Beginning

While the purposes of establishing a paddling trail are many fold—raising environmental awareness, creating a sense of place, promoting good health through outdoor recreation, bringing young people outdoors, and boosting eco-tourism—each individual paddling trail has unique qualities. Some are suitable just for day trips while others can feature overnight opportunities utilizing primitive campsites on public lands with little investment or river hubs and developed river camps with a higher investment, such as the Suwannee Wilderness Trail (<http://www.floridastateparks.org/wilderness/>). If primitive campsites are small, fragile, and in high use areas, composting toilets or port-a-lets may be desired, adding to cost. Creating a vision for a paddling trail and a list of

assets and challenges will help determine the budget and tasks required. Also, it may be important to decide whether the trail and associated amenities will be designed for paddlers only or open to other users, such as boaters.

Maps and Guides

- Create clear maps and guides that delineate launch points, distances, amenities such as water and restrooms, camping and campgrounds, nearby motels, restaurants and outfitters, and points of interest. Add waterfront lodging that has kayak-friendly docks and/or kayak launches, and add Great Florida Birding Trail designations. Provide gps points. Ground-truth maps and gps points.
- Ask someone new to the area to follow maps and guides to see if there are any points of confusion.
- Add safety information, historical and environmental background, wildlife spotlights, Leave No Trace guidelines, available shuttle services, ideal water levels if applicable, specific restrictions on adjoining lands, and potential environmental conditions (currents, extreme tides, obstructions, etc.).
- The National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program provides technical assistance to communities seeking to establish trails:
http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/contactus/cu_apply.html.
- More info about trail creation is available from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: <http://myfwc.com/boating/waterway/paddling-trails/>.

Raising the Profile

- Pursue state designation of trail(s) through the Florida Office of Greenways and Trails: <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/designation/default.htm>.
- Once maps and guides are completed and accessible online, seek inclusion in the Visit Florida trails and greenways website. New completed trails can be added at any time. To learn how to submit a trail, contact doug.alderson@dep.state.fl.us.

- Work with the Florida Paddling Trails Association to make sure the trail is published on their web site: <http://www.floridapaddlingtrails.com/> and take advantage of their blueways communities program. Encourage trail users to file trip reports on the site.
- Apply for National Recreation Trail designation with the Department of the Interior: <http://www.americantrails.org/nationalrecreationtrails/ApplyNRT.html>.
- Apply for inclusion in the new National Water Trails System: <http://www.nps.gov/watertrails/>.

Trail Management

- Designate a local person as trail manager to maintain and promote the trail. This person would also work closely with the area tourism development councils, chambers of commerce and volunteers in promotion endeavors and they can represent the trail at paddling festivals, conferences and other gatherings.
- Encourage paddling clubs to utilize the trail(s), do volunteer work, “adopt a trail,” and to spread the word. Designate a handful of volunteers to routinely patrol the most popular or most remote access points and have them file e-mail reports to a designated person. Such e-mails/reports can prove valuable when making a case to the state or prospective sponsors or other entities that the trail is actively monitored and used.
- Support existing outfitters and the development of new outfitters where there might be a void. Work with these outfitters to promote your trail by supplying them with free promotional material.

Branding and Advertising

- Develop a trail logo to be used on promotional literature and signage. Consider the development of a catchy trail name and motto.

- Allocate or raise funds to promote the trail(s) with rack cards, printed guides, and an interactive website. If budget permits, advertise in paddling publications such as *Canoe and Kayak*, *Sea Kayaker* and a host of others. Less expensive are advertisements on paddling club websites and in their newsletters.
- Install signs at trail access/ launch points. Use trail logo on signs.
- Create a short description (300 words or less) to use when replying to e-mails and/or requesting partnerships and other uses. This quick word picture describes what it's like on your trail(s) and who uses it in what ways.
- Create a PowerPoint program or film about the trail(s) that can be shown to a wide variety of groups around the region and state such as paddling clubs, environmental groups and civic organizations. The Florida Trail Association, although primarily a hiking group, is also interested in paddling trails, and they have chapters throughout the state.

Media Outreach

- Invite travel writers and bloggers on guided trips of the trail(s) so they can feature them in publications (e.g. *Canoe & Kayak*, *Sea Kayaker*, newspaper travel sections). For film crews, an accompanying motorboat will likely be necessary.
- Reach out to a waterfront hotel, RV park or campground and get them to agree to put up the invited journalists free of charge for a night or two. Travel writers rarely come without free lodging.
- A library of outstanding photos and video clips that is available to the media can be very helpful. Encourage volunteers, paddling clubs and trail users to take photos and have a designated e-mail address where they can submit them. Photos can also help to woo travel writers, enhance press releases, and document active trail use for grant applications. Paddlers depicted in photos should be wearing life jackets and photo release forms should be used if subject's face is showing.

- A talented local freelancer or staff member can be encouraged to write articles to submit for publication.
- Create an ongoing trail newsletter.
- Put out periodic press releases about trail happenings and improvements. Include stock photos.

Events

- Sponsor paddling festivals, kayak and canoe races and other events to help promote the trail(s). Establish at least one annual event that tourists can plan their vacations around. Work with local paddling clubs on these events.
- Work with groups such as Paddle Florida on establishing multi-day excursions for large numbers of paddlers down the trail(s) if possible.

Long-term Support

- Seek grants or matching funds for capital park projects and land purchases along the trail(s) and for trail events.
- Support or help develop a certified green guides program. For example, the Tallahassee Community College teaches a green guides program in Wakulla County every semester, and the Florida Green Guide Association came about as a result.
- Gauge annual trail usage and economic impacts over several years. This will go a long way towards developing political support and gaining funding for trail improvements. Universities will sometimes help with these studies as part of class projects.
- From Betsy Clayton of Lee County's Calusa Blueway: "If you build it, they will come" doesn't always apply to paddling trails at the beginning. Get a local club, outfitter or a parks & rec department to set up a trilogy of free "learn to paddle" sessions along the trail during the tourist season/good weather so you attract

tourists and locals. Tell them you'll teach them the basics of kayaking and only keep them on the water 45 minutes. Use 15 minutes of that session to explain your blueway, what it is, what a blueway is, how to get maps, how to help, etc.

Basically you set up a situation where you teach a bit and then anoint a group of ambassadors to go out and do word-of-mouth advertising.

Supporting Economic Facts and Trends

- Since the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail was established in 2005, two new state parks were opened and overall attendance at the river parks increased from 500,000 per year to 750,000 annually between 2004 and 2008, a 50% increase. Direct economic benefit during this period rose from \$20 million in 2004 to \$39 million in 2008. About 5,000 paddlers per year use the Suwannee's established "river camps," and these camps properly dispose of an estimated six tons of human waste a year, waste that may have otherwise ended up in the river.
- Since the first phase of Lee County's Calusa Blueway was established in 2003, the number of outfitters doubled and there was a significant rise in the number of "micro-entrepreneurs" in the form of various types of guides and interpreters (fishing, fossiling, photography, Calusa lore). Participation in their annual paddling festival rose 70% in 2007 and 112% in 2008. The festival currently has 17 lodging partners that offer packages, 80 participating businesses, and 24 outfitters. Bed tax money is used to help support the trail.
- In 2006, 4.2 million people participated in some form of wildlife viewing in Florida, generating more than \$3 billion in economic impact, almost doubling 2001 figures (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). Many people view wildlife from a kayak or canoe.
- Kayak fishing is extremely popular, part of Florida's \$4.3 billion fishing industry.
- During the Great Recession of 2008, overall visitation to Florida was down, but participation in nature-based activities was 66.7% among all visitors, an increase

of 11.5%. Approximately 80% of Florida residents suggest nearby natural, cultural and historical sites to out-of-state friends or family when they visit.

- During the Great Recession, kayak sales dropped the least (6.9%) compared to all other boating sales categories (2008 National Marine Manufacturers Assn.).
- According to the National Association of Homebuilders, trails are the most sought after community amenity that Americans seek when buying a home.