

River users may get trails in waterways

By Matthew Santoni
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Southwestern Pennsylvania already has a growing network of riverfront hiking and biking trails, but a Monaca-based group is seeking ways to make trails out of the rivers themselves.

The Ohio River Water Trail Council seeks to designate portions of the Ohio River, Beaver River and Little Beaver Creek as "water trails," a series of designated paddling routes, landings and access points for canoers, kayakers and small-boat owners.

A \$10,000 grant from the Port of Pittsburgh Commission will help the group study and install safety improvements and access points so it can get an official designation from the state, said Vincent Troia, the council's executive director.

"We've been so industrialized throughout our history, and now that the rivers are getting cleaned up we have a great opportunity," Troia said. "The popularity of canoeing and kayaking is rising. ... We have all these resources in the area and we need to take advantage of them."

Hannah Hardy, a project manager with the Pennsylvania Environmental Council -- a member organization of the group that reviews and approves new water trails -- said the water trail council will have to determine whether there is enough access between land and water along the proposed trails; identify any dangerous areas; and set up safety and navigational aids either online, in signs along the river, or in guidebooks the group can print and sell.

Official designation as a state water trail would get the rivers listed on the Fish and Boating Commission's website, give the council access to technical seminars on topics like environmental stewardship and trail marketing, and help communities along the rivers draw additional tourists, Hardy said.

The water trail council will meet at 4 p.m. today at the Monaca Municipal Building, 928 Pennsylvania Ave.

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