

# **WATER TRAILS**

The West Virginia Recreational Trail Advisory Board (WVRTAB) recognizes the increasing popularity of water sports, especially paddle sports on the lakes and streams of the state. Currently, there are only two designated water trails in West Virginia, the Walhonde Water Trail on the Coal River and the Upper Mon Water Trail on the Monongahela River. Additional groups and individuals have approached the State Trail Coordinator concerning the procedure for designating a water trail and the criteria for receiving such a designation.

## **WATER TRAIL**

**A water trail is a route on a stream, river or lake that provides boaters with a recreational, scenic, historical or educational opportunity.**

In response to these requests, the WVDOH staff tasked to work with the WVRTAB, in cooperation with the other interested individuals, developed the following criteria and procedure for getting a water body designated as a water trail. These criteria and procedures were approved by the Board at their April 26, 2008 meeting in Charleston.

## **BASIC CRITERIA FOR WATER TRAIL DESIGNATION**

1. One local organization must agree to be the primary sponsor of the trail and manage the trail.
  - a. The primary sponsor of the trail may be either a state or local government agency or a non-profit organization registered with the WV Secretary of State.
  - b. The primary sponsor of the trail is responsible for developing a proposal for designating and managing the trail.

c. Any number of organizations may partner with the primary sponsor in sponsoring, developing, maintaining and managing the trail.

d. Any application for grant funding for the trail or trailside amenities submitted to the WV Recreational Trail Advisory Board must be approved by the primary sponsor of the trail.

e. The primary sponsor of the trail is responsible for coordinating maintenance and upkeep of any public access points, trailside amenities, signage, maps, guides, or website developed with WV Recreational Trail Advisory Board awarded grant funds.

2. The water corridor must be contiguous or nearly contiguous waterway or series of waterways open to recreational use by paddlers or boaters.

a. At a minimum, the stream must be deep and wide enough for a modern Johnboat, canoe, kayak or similar boat to maneuver with no great difficulty.

b. The proposed water trail should primarily be flat water. Some shoals, rapids or falls are allowed but whitewater should not be the major feature of the stream.

c. Plans to construct portage trails around obstacles (such as falls or dams) or between water bodies should be included in the initial request for designation as a water trail.

3. The trail must have ample public access points for paddlers.

a. Public access points should be located about every five to ten miles or so along the water body. If the stream or water body does not currently have sufficient public access, suggested locations for additional public access should be included with the initial request for designation as a water trail.

b. At a minimum, public access points must include parking and a path or ramp to the water body.

c. Public access points may include any other normal trailside amenity such as informational kiosk, outdoor classrooms, restroom, benches, campsite, fire ring, picnic table, trash receptacle, etc.

d. Portage trails connecting public access points should be as short as possible and should be free from brush, branches or other obstacles.

e. Some state or local agency or non-profit organization must agree to maintain each public access point and its amenities.

f. Construction of new public access points must be coordinated with WV Division of Natural Resources/Wildlife Resources Section and must meet all WV DNR and States Organization for Boating Access (SOBA) design criteria. Public access points must be capable of accommodating all boats appropriate for the water trail.

4. A map, guide, signage, web site and/or other public outreach must be developed to provide complete information about the trail.

a. The map or guide must be developed and distributed free in cooperation with the local Convention and Visitors Bureaus and the WV Division of Tourism. Specialty maps (laminated, printed on bandanas or with other special characteristics) may be sold but the basic map printed on paper must be distributed free.

b. Accurate information must be included in the map or guide. All publications advertising the water trail must include mileage between services, the level of difficulty, basic water safety information and information concerning low-impact practices (Leave No Trace Code of Outdoor Ethics or similar program) as approved by WV DNR.

c. Signage should be developed to inform users on the river of river access points, camping facilities, portages and hazards.

d. Road signage should be developed to direct users to the river access points. These signs must comply with the Department of Transportation's *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.

5. Failure to actively develop and distribute marketing material, and advertise the water trail within thirty-six (36) months of designation may result in rescinding the designation as a water trail.

6. Funding for water trail infrastructure is available from the WV Recreational Trails grant program, Boating Infrastructure Grants (BIG) and the Wallop-Breaux Trust Fund administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. BIG grants are only available for facilities for use by transient boats over 26 feet in length. In WV the Wallop-Breaux grants are only available to the Division of Natural Resources.

## **PROCEDURE FOR DESIGNATION AS A WATER TRAIL**

1. Determine who will be the primary sponsor for the trail. All paperwork for designating the trail must be submitted by this group.

2. Invite additional non-profit/service/community groups, local government agencies and individuals to participate as co-sponsors.

3. Draft a request for water trail designation for submission to the WVRTAB Chair which includes the following:

a. a rough map showing the locations of roads, parks, cities or towns, county boundaries, water trail obstacles (dams or falls), existing and proposed public access points and proposed portage trails, and existing or proposed support infrastructure (shelters, comfort stations, key signage, etc.),

b. a description of the recreational, scenic historic or educational opportunities offered by this water trail,

c. a list of all participating sponsors and partners,

4. Submit this draft to the WVRTAB Chair for assistance in completing the designation process.

5. Establish a location in each county (such as the courthouse, a city hall or a public library) where concerned citizens may review a recent version of the draft request and provide comments on the proposal. This process must be continued for at least two months.

6. Hold a minimum of one suitably advertised public meeting in each county involved at a location near the proposed water trail. The most recent version of the draft request for water trail designation must be available for review at each meeting. The WV DNR District Biologist and the WVRTAB Chair must be notified of these meetings in advance so they may attend if they wish. All local governments along or near the proposed trail must be invited.

7. Revise the request for designation. The submitted request must include the following information:

a. Name, address and other contact information for the primary sponsor of the trail,

b. A list of all partners working with the primary sponsor,

c. A map showing the locations of the proposed water trail, roads, parks, cities or towns, county boundaries, water trail obstacles (dams or falls), existing and proposed public access points and proposed portage trails,

d. A description of the public planning process for the trail,

e. A description of how local governments along or near the proposed trail will be kept informed of the proposal,

f. A description of the recreational, scenic, historic or educational opportunities offered by this water trail,

g. A copy of the comments received and a short description of how the planners responded to them, if necessary.

8. Submit the request to the WVRTAB Chairman:

William C. Robinson, Chairman  
WV Recreational Trail Advisory Board  
WV Division of Highways  
Building 5, Room 863  
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East  
Charleston, WV 25305-0430

9. The WVRTAB will vote on all requests for designation of water trails either at any meeting or by a special email or mail-in vote.