

Abstract Submission for 5th Canadian River Heritage Conference

Title of Presentation:

Michigan's Heritage Water Trail Program:
Promoting Economic Development and Education through Paddling

Category: River Tourism and Recreation

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Abstract

Michigan like much of North America has a common set of public planning problems. Among these issues are local and regional economic development, improving primary and secondary education, reducing environmental degradation, increasing recreational infrastructure, and combating an obesity epidemic. With an unfunded mandate from the State of Michigan, we have developed a model in Michigan for water trail planning and implementation that is mostly self-funding. With 3,200 miles of Great Lakes shoreline, more than 120 lighthouses, hundreds of years of Native American, French, British and American heritage, and more than 11,000 miles of navigable rivers, Michigan is ripe for the development of water-based historical, cultural, agricultural and economic development-focused tourism. The Michigan Heritage Water Trails Program provides a starting point to protect the long-term value of Michigan's inland and coastal waterways, while creating opportunities to promote tourism, economic development, and the recreational benefits of its scenic beauty and cultural and historical heritage.

Heritage water trails are routes on navigable waterways such as rivers, lakes, and canals designed and implemented to foster an interactive historical education experience. Historical markers posted on the shoreline or on structures highlight historic events or themes related to the waterway. A companion guide provides a more detailed presentation of the historic material in addition to acting as a more conventional water trail guide with maps, put-in points, take-out points, rest stop locations, paddling conditions, etc. An interpretive program and exhibit at a local museum on or nearby the water trail may also be part of the experience. A website integrating the interpretive guides and an interactive Geographic Information System (GIS) will allow users to plan and select paddling routes, to access information on amenities on and near the rivers, learn about the rivers and watersheds, and to participate in river and coastline monitoring programs.

Biographical sketch:

Dr. Dave Lemberg, AICP is an Associate Professor of Geography at Western Michigan University at Kalamazoo, Michigan. His research interests include regional planning, landscape ecology, tourism planning, and Geographic Information Science. He has been the Director of the Michigan Heritage Water Trail program since 2002, helping to implement water trails on Michigan's rivers and Great Lakes shorelines. He has been involved in interdisciplinary research in the Environmental Sciences, and in WMU's new Canadian Studies program.