

Increasing Access to Blue Way Trails: Feasibility of a Canoe and Kayak Launch Site

Recreation-Outdoor Lifestyle-Economic Impact



Making access and use of our natural resources more readily available to a greater number of citizens in Kosciusko County

April 10, 2018

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Class of 2018

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Executive Summary

What is a Blue Way Trail?

The idea of “blue way” trail has become a popular phrase. “The term ‘Blue Trail’ describes an effort by communities to improve access and protect their river and surrounding lands” (<https://www.americanrivers.org/rivers/discover-your-river/blue-trails/>). When you think “blue way trail” think in terms of navigable rivers and streams. Nationally, the US Department of Interior announced an initiative in 2011 to promote blue way trail access and sustainability. “Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today (Feb. 2012) unveiled the National Water Trails System, a new network that will increase access to water-based outdoor recreation, encourage community stewardship of local waterways, and promote tourism that fuels local economies across America” (US Interior Department, www.doi.gov). Kosciusko County has a great resource for such trails in the Tippecanoe River (TR). Outdoor recreation and use of the TR could be enjoyed and blue way trails could be established, but there are challenges to overcome.

Access Points for Canoes and Kayaks on the River

One challenge is access to the TR. There is currently difficulty in access to the TR and few publications about such access. “The put-in for the float between Warsaw and SR 19 is a low stream bank west of Warsaw, adjacent to Old Highway 30 at the rest park near the bridge over the Tippecanoe. The car shuttle beginning at the Old Highway 30 put-in runs west on Old 30 to SR 19. Continue south on SR 19 to the river. The Mollenhour Public Access Site adjacent to SR 19 has easy take-out facilities including a concrete ramp and a twenty-car parking lot” (DNR – www.in.gov/dnr/outdoor). While there is public access in this region, the distance of access would prohibit the casual or first time user. Our plan is to place an access point in Warsaw itself, making it possible for people to enjoy a boating experience that might only require 3-4 hours rather than a full day (See Appendix A).

Environmental Concerns

As with any project that introduces public access to a natural resource, there must be consideration given to environmental factors. In this case of this project, our team originally looked at access to the TR on CR 350 N just 1 mile west of SR 15. This is just east of Madison Elementary School. At the 350 N location, there is a bridge over the TR. Property in this area is owned by Indiana American Water and is a protected area. There is the start of a nice walking path and this seemed like a logical location. However, approximately 250 yards south of that location is a bed of federally protected Clubshell mussels (See Appendix B). A public access site in such close proximity to this bed would be problematic. Other concerns range from protected wetlands, to protected forest and vegetation.

Proposed Location

The current proposal for a launch site is to consider putting in a site on Lones Ditch located close to Smith Tire between Hidden Lakes and Kosciusko Soil and Water Conservation owned property. There is a small portion of this property that is owned by the State of Indiana (See Appendix C). Our proposal is to see an access site built at this location to allow access in Warsaw.

Feasibility and Grant Options

While it would be necessary for an existing not-for-profit (NFP) group or groups to make use of our research and “own” the project, there are existing grants monies available for the construction and upkeep of such an access site. The challenge is having all parties at the table to agree to such a proposal. The goal of this KLA Group was to identify existing challenges to feasibly put in an access site; to do reasonable research to determine if the idea was possible; and to identify possible sources of funding.

III. Blue Way Trails Utilization on the Tippecanoe River

A major goal stated in literature, websites, and word of mouth in Kosciusko County, is to increase outdoor activity. One area of great opportunity is the use of existing blue way trails. A challenge is the need for increased access on the TR by means of canoe and kayak launch sites. Here are some basic facts about the TR:

- The Upper TR watershed is the headwaters of the 225 mile long TR, which flows into the Wabash River, then the Ohio River, then the Mississippi River and empties into the Gulf of Mexico.
- The Miami and Shawnee Indians named the TR, *Kithtippecanunk*, or "place of the buffalo fish," which still can be found in the river. Its clear waters and wooded shores provide rich habitat for the abundance of fish, mussels and wildlife that live here. Very few streams in the upper Midwest can match the number of imperiled species or the overall species diversity that the TR supports.
- The Upper TR Watershed covers 236 square miles and includes portions of Kosciusko, Whitley and Noble Counties.
- Eventually, over 60 lakes in the region will drain into the TR.
- The Nature Conservancy considers the TR one of the top 10 rivers in America to preserve (Source: The Watershed Foundation - <http://tippecanoewatershed.org/our-watershed-land-lakes/>).

The TR represents a truly marvelous natural resource for Kosciusko County. The Indiana DNR website (<https://www.in.gov/dnr/outdoor/4478.htm>) has an extensive write up on current access and more detailed information is available concerning the TR. Certainly, greater marketing is necessary to inform the general public about current access. However, there is a need to provide access that makes recreational use more feasible.

The promotion aspects of using the TR have been identified in a minor way by our team. The Indianapolis Star did a write up on March 22, 2014 that stated, “The Tippecanoe River arguably has the most beautiful scenery in Indiana for a relaxing canoe ride...Surrounded by calm nature, the river and surrounding state park are a sanctuary for many species of birds, including red-headed woodpeckers, warblers and wild ducks” (<https://www.indystar.com/story/life/diet-fitness/2014/03/22/indiana-canoeing-kayaking/6655347/>). It would appear that blue way trails access is being encouraged and should be promoted in order to accomplish many of the stated

goals in Kosciusko County such as, recreation, tourism, and greater appreciation of our natural resources.

IV. Current Access on the Tippecanoe River

One point of tension that has existed in this project is seeing the balance between protecting our natural resources and simultaneously increasing access for recreational purposes. While natural resources should and must be protected, increased recreation for simple enjoyment on the TR is doable. For example we have a local group that is demonstrating that both objectives can be achieved; The Paddle for Conservation Club (P4C - <http://www.p4cpaddleclub.com>). More will be said about this group and their efforts later in this paper. We thought it should be stated here that achieving both environmental objectives and also having access to the TR for recreational and learning purposes is possible.

There are seven current access points that run close to SR 15 and just west of Indiana SR 35 (SW of Winamac, IN) for canoe and kayak access that this team has identified with the aid of the DNR Website. The following are known current access points for the TR in this region:

- Drop in behind the Oswego mini-mart and restaurant just east of Leesburg on E. Armstrong Road.
- Warsaw to Route 19 - The put-in for the float between Warsaw and SR 19 is a low stream bank west of Warsaw, adjacent to Old Highway 30 at the rest park near the bridge over the Tippecanoe.
- Route 19 to Old Tip Access Site - Putting in at the previously mentioned access site, the car shuttle begins at SR 19 and the Tippecanoe River junction. Continue north on SR 19 and the Tippecanoe River junction. Then proceed west to Route 331 where you turn south through Old Tip Town to the take-out adjacent to Route 331. There is a concrete ramp and ample parking facilities.
- Old Tip Access Site to Menominee State Fishing Area - The put-in at Menominee State Fishing Area is the access used for take-out in the previous trip. To arrange your car shuttle, return to Old U.S. 31 and turn north. At SR 110 turn left (west) and go about 9 1/2 miles to SR 17. Cross the state highway and continue to 625 E. Turn left (south) on 625 E and go about three-quarters of a mile (passing the 750 N intersection) to a small road to the left which leads to Monterey City Park. The site has a concrete ramp, picnic area, pit toilets and ample parking facilities.
- Menominee State Fishing Area to Monterey – Put-in at Monterey City Park, which was described in the last section. It has facilities for parking, picnicking, launching and pit toilets. To reach the take-out point go west out of Monterey and follow the signs to Tippecanoe River State Park. When you enter the state park the gate attendant will direct you to the launch area which has a concrete ramp for easy take-out.
- Monterey to Tippecanoe River State Park - Alternative access sites are located in Winamac City Park. From SR 35 to reach the canoe access turn east on Washington St. in Winamac, across the bridge and watch for the park entrance on the left (north) side approximately 200 yards east of the bridge. Turn left and proceed to the canoe access

site. A boat launch is also available and can be reached from SR 35 by turning east on Main St. although the two access sites are about 250 yards from each other, the boat launch is almost a mile downstream from the canoe access.

- Winamac Access Site to Pulaski - Using the Winamac State Access Site as a put-in, you can drive to the take-out by returning to the town of Winamac and taking SR 119 south to Pulaski where you turn right and cross over the river into town. Take the first street to the right and proceed two blocks and turn right again into the Pulaski Conservation club (Source: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/outdoor/4478.htm>).

This represents approximately 60-70 driving miles between major points. It would appear that access is limited on the TR in some cases. The absence of greater access does and has limited the use of the TR for recreational purposes. Our team is not suggesting that there are no current access sites. Multiple launch sites are available and well maintained. However, if a closer access point locally could be established, then having a family friendly drop-in point and pull-out point might allow for greater recreational consideration.

V. Challenges for Canoe and Kayak Access on the Tippecanoe River

First, finding a user friendly source of information about access on the TR is a challenge. For a first timer or a novice, some research must be done to determine how to go about finding what our team is calling “legal and proper access.” The DNR website, that has previously been mentioned, is one of the best sources for access information.

Second, access points are limited. While access points are available, two question that should be answered. First, are there easy to get to access points for first time users? Second, is there an access point that allows for a smaller duration of time on the TR? Boaters that might rent canoes for a 2-3 hour trip would find that difficult locally. Currently, the Warsaw to Route 19 put-in and pull-out is approximately 4-5 hours of boating. Farther north, from Oswego to Route 19 is a 5+ hour float.

Third, the location determination for an additional access site is critical. Our team looked at three possible sites for a boat launch. The consensus of the group is that finding a location that fits the following criteria is vital:

- An area that is accessible
- An area that can provide parking
- An area with few environmental concerns
- An area that can support site construction
- An area that local officials and experts can agree upon as being a good site
- An area that is marketable
- An area that state and local funders would want to support.

Fourth, the concern of funding and ongoing cost should be considered; is this project sustainable? Our group cannot provide an initial construction cost as we have learned it varies greatly from site-to-site. We will propose in section eight of this paper that IPAP/DNR grant funding would be, perhaps, the best way to proceed. If the DNR were to do the site, then the

price of the site would have to be determined by the army corps of engineers after surveying the land and water situation (<https://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/5498.htm>).

Finally, there needs to be greater awareness of the TR for pure enjoyment. For most of us working on the project, we received a great education about blue way trails access or lack thereof. The promotion and marketing of enjoying this local gem is limited. If local tourism could promote floating down the relaxing TR as a viable 2-3 hour family friendly adventure, then usage could potentially increase.

VI. Possible Launch Sites

This research began with an interview with the following individuals:

- Lyn Crighton, Executive Director of the Watershed Foundation
- Dr. Nate Bosch, Director of the Lilly Center for Lakes and Streams
- Chris Harrison, Operations Superintendent, Indiana American Water
- Ed Roberts, Paddle for Conservation
- Jeremy Skinner, City of Warsaw Planner
- Darci Zolman, Kosciusko County Soil & Water Conservation District.

In our first discussions with local advisement, a site on CR 300 N approximately one mile west of SR 15 and just east of Madison Elementary school was investigated. Our team met with Indian American Water Operations Superintendent, Chris Harrison. Indiana American Water owns the property on the east side of the TR (See Appendix B). The property has an existing walk-way and there are plans to put a new bridge in at this location in the next one to two years (estimate). This location seemed ideal with the existing walk-way in place and a willingness on the part of Indiana American Water to provide some access. We became aware of two major hurdles that led us away from this site. First, the forest and area around the forest are protected wetlands. Second, about 250 yards south of our proposed site is a bed of protected club shell mussels. To have a public launch site with increased blue way traffic did not fit well with the protected wetlands and the protection of the club shell mussels.

Our team did briefly look at an existing site at Oswego. The Oswego mini-mart and restaurant has an area behind the location that allows for many boaters currently to launch from this area. Since this is already being used, to some degree, it would seem counter-productive for what our team was trying to do – look at a new site that would allow for ease of access and a shorter amount of distance on the TR.

In discussions with Indiana American Water and other local experts mentioned above, our team focused on the possible use of a small tract of land owned by the State of Indiana on Lones Ditch located at Anchorage Road and SR 15 (See Appendix D). This water way is fed by the Little Pike Lake and then feeds into the TR. This site does present many advantages such as;

- It has easy access

- It is central in the county
- Parking does appear feasible
- This water way stays fairly constant in water volume as it is fed by the Little Pike Lake
- The DNR using IPAP grant funding to pay for the project
- Agreement among local experts – Some TBD
- This location provides a shorter trip downriver of approximately 3 miles
- A location that could provide a first time boater with a positive experience.

Our team has focused upon this site and we believe it offers the best alternative to the original CR 300 N site. It would appear that this site offers the best viable option. Our team also recognizes that much work needs to be done such as consulting with all adjacent property owners, city officials, and county officials. The DNR would also want a basic feasibility study done for this location. There certainly will be a list of “to do” items. However, in looking at three possible sites, this seems to be the most advantageous option.

VII. Environmental Issues

This section of the paper is offered as a very basic primer in understanding about potential environmental issues that one might encounter when looking at possible canoe or kayak launch sites. There is more detailed information available on this topic that should be consulted prior to serious investment in any potential launch site.

Our team originally investigate the CR 300 N site as our first option. However, at our first meeting with many county experts, it was brought to our attention that within 300 yards of our proposed launch site was a large group of federally protected clubshell mussels. This species is of critical importance because they act as indicators of river health and provide filtration of river water.¹ Since this would be a public launch site, it creates a substantial hindrance to having a launch site at CR 300 N. Boaters may still float through this area without knowledge, but to create more traffic with knowledge of this protected species is prohibitive. This issue would need to be seriously considered at any launch site. To our knowledge, the proposed Lones Ditch site does not present this challenge.

¹ From the *Endangered Species Grant Report – Indiana, Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife* (Source: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/files/fw-15WildlifeScienceReportResearchProtectMusselHabitatTippeR.pdf>). “Today, freshwater mussels are the Midwest’s most imperiled animals. More than half of such species are federally listed as endangered, threatened, or as state species of special concern. The eight states of the Midwest (Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, and Missouri) range from having three to 11 federally listed species of freshwater mussels. Indiana is home to 10 federally listed freshwater mussels. Six of Indiana’s 10 species live in one river in northcentral Indiana. Once found in virtually all rivers in Indiana, the clubshell (*Pleurobema clava*), fanshell (*Cyprogenia stegaria*), rayed bean (*Villosa fabalis*), rabbitsfoot (*Quadrula cylindrica cylindrica*), sheepnose (*Plethobasus cyphus*) and snuffbox (*Epioblasma triquetra*) mussels now mainly reside in the Tippecanoe River. Removing any native mussel from Indiana waters has been illegal since 1991. Despite federal listing and legal protection, native mussel populations continue to decline” (Pgs. 2-3 of cited report).

Another general area that anyone seeking to spend time on the TR should be aware of is the Tippecanoe River Watershed Restoration Action Strategy (WRAS).² The WRAS has the stated goal of improvement of water quality for citizens along the massive TR area watershed. This paper provides an oversimplification, for brevity sake, of what should be known regarding this topic. However, any group looking at spending time fishing or boating on the TR should be aware of this action strategy. Indiana Department of Environmental Management Office of Water Management can provide more detailed information.

VIII. Feasibility/Funding

Feasibility

The research of this team has led us to believe that the only possible attempt for success will be if someone local “owns” our research and begins to put an action plan in place. There is high interest in the development of greater blue way trails usage by many existing groups, (i.e., Lilly Center for Lakes & Streams; Watershed Foundation; Indiana American Water; Paddle for Conservation Club) but there is clearly the need for organization and greater collaboration. Locally, there is the Paddle for Conservation Club (P4C) that would seem to benefit from such ownership. This club states on their website that, “We are a nonprofit 501 (c) (3), volunteer based organization dedicated to promoting paddling, education and conservation. Our mission is to restore and enhance the Tippecanoe River, and Kosciusko county lakes and streams through hands on environmental stewardship in order to preserve our rivers, lakes and streams for the future. We aim to bring the community together through various cleanup projects and organizing family fun float trips which will foster a healthier environment and instill positive friendships amongst our members and community” (<http://www.p4cpaddleclub.com/about.html>). In working with Dr. Nate Bosch, Edward Roberts with P4C has agreed to own our project. Given their emphasis that is both upon conservation and recreation, it does provide the most sensible option. This project has a higher level of success given the involvement of P4C.

Funding

There are several possible options for funding this project. We offer the following as possible sources for future funding:

- There are grant monies available through the Indiana Public Access Program (IPAP). Our team has been in touch with the current Public Access Supervisor. This program is headquartered out of Camp Atterbury in Edinburg, IN. IPAP uses the Sport Fish Restoration Grant Funding. *This funding is only available to use on State owned or State leased property.* Obviously, the selected site must be approved prior. There is a lease agreement with the DNR that would need to be signed which outlines work to be done and the period of years that the DNR will maintain the site. The site would then become an official Indiana Public Access Site. We would then take over all permitting and material cost plus construction of the site. Please see Appendix E at the end of this paper to see examples of what the IPAP has done in other locations. The proposed property

² http://www.in.gov/idem/nps/files/wras_tippecanoe_part1.pdf.

launch site is public land and with approvals, could very well meet the requirements of this grant. Contact information is given at the end of this paper.

Another alternative source of funding that could potentially help with marketing and promotion, might be found more locally.

- The Kosciusko County Convention, Recreation and Visitor Commission, aka, KCCRVC, this Commission serves Kosciusko County by promoting tourism and recreation. In the grant application it is stated that “Expenditures under this subsection may include, but not limited to, expenditures for advertising, promotional activities, trade shows, special events, and recreation” (www.kcgov.com/eggov/apps/document/center.egov?view=item;id=1345). The application is clear that any applicant must be a not-for-profit corporation that will fit within the scope of KCCRVC. The case could be made that this is in pursuit of both increased tourism and recreation opportunities in the county. The application itself states that any questions in regard to pursuit of a possible grant should be directed to the Commission members listed on the website at www.kcgov.com.

This last option has been researched only in a basic way for this paper. However, local expert, Darci Zolman, Kosciusko County Soil & Water Conservation District, did point our team in this direction.

- There is one other possible source of funding for this project. The Land Conservation Assistance Network could potentially provide a grant for up to \$5,000. The Indiana connection is the Arrowhead Country Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D). “Arrow Head Country RC&D was authorized on March 4, 1975 with the participation of four counties in Northern Indiana. It was expanded first to eight and then to the present ten counties. Arrow Head Country Council Members are appointed by County Commissioners, SWCD Districts and Purdue County Extension Offices in the represented counties. The primary occupation of the Council has been the administration of grants issued for programs and projects initiated by individuals and groups in all 10 counties represented by Arrow Head Country. The RC&D also sponsors programs put on by the Education Committee (SWCD employees) and the Forestry Committee (state foresters, Purdue Extension Educators and NRCS employees) and other groups” (Source: <https://www.landcan.org/local-resources/Arrowhead-Country-RCD/12927/>).

A final consideration would be that some funds should be secured for signage both to indicate where vehicle traffic should go to enter the access location and on Lones Ditch to provide boaters with directions for accessing the TR.

IX. Final Summary

In putting together this project it was suggested by some local experts³ that our project might want to focus upon a particular aspect of TR utilization. There are many other ways in which the

³ Discussions with Lyn Crighton and Dr. Nate Bosch.

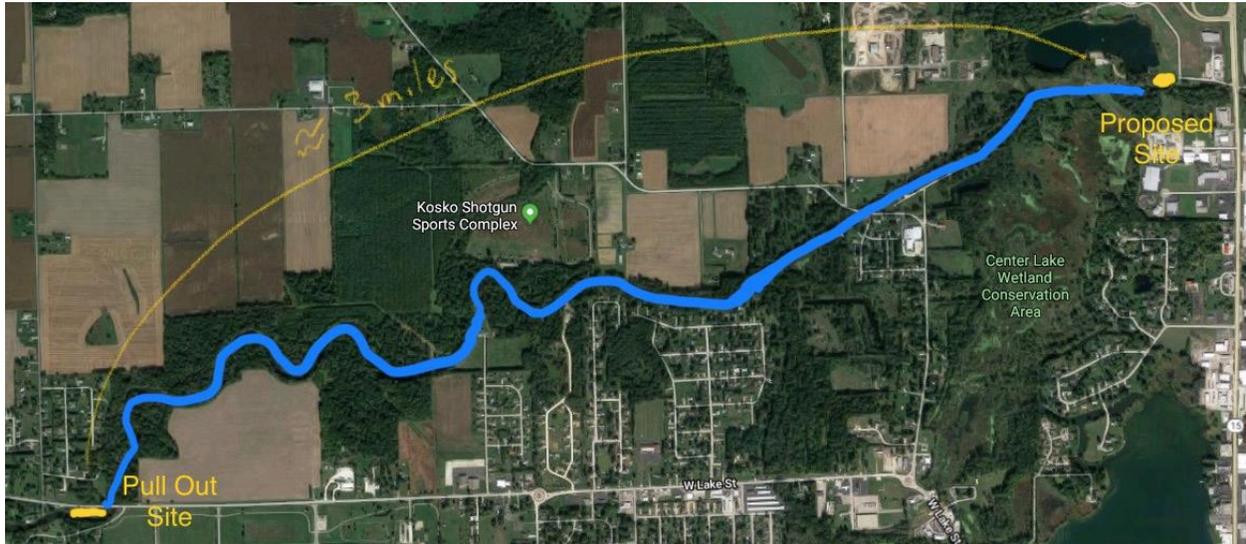
original CR 300 N location could be utilized for green way trails or nature conservancy studies. The focus of this team has been upon a practical outcome for TR accessibility. If there is a desire to make the TR a natural resource that can be appreciated while also providing recreation, then it would seem logical that shorter distances should be provided by way of put-in and pull-outs for canoes and kayaks. Our team would offer the following conclusions:

- The CR 300 North site is not an appropriate site for a canoe or kayak launch due to the protection of club shell mussels in that area.
- The proposed launch site on Lones Ditch appears to be a good place in which to add an additional put-in and pull-out site.
- Funding seems to be available for the Lones Ditch site from what our research has revealed.
- While there are other concerns to address, (i.e. best location for parking; how to keep motor boats out; etc.) the Lones Ditch site appears to address the majority of concerns.
- If the P4C group will own our research, then both environmental and recreational concerns could be addressed.

We believe this project can and should be used by P4C, and other such groups that may be formed, to increase access in a way that respects both the need for conservation and access to the TR by way of a more local access point.

Appendices

A.



B.



C.



D.



E.



E. (Cont.)



Randy Patrick, Owner, Hidden Lakes - hiddenlakeski@yahoo.com

John Richardson, Cardno Consulting, Clubshell Mussel expert – (574) 586-3400

Edward Roberts, Director, Paddle for Conservation - p4cpaddleclub@gmail.com

William Seeger, Public Access Supervisor, wseegers@dnr.in.gov, this is the key contact for IPAP and DNR grants for access

Jeremy Skinner, Warsaw City Planner - Jskinner@warsaw.in.gov

Darci Zollman, Kosciusko County Soil & Water Conservation District - darci.zolman@in.nacdnet.net