

At the head of the trail

By Janet Hayes - HP Correspondent | Posted: Sunday, October 4, 2015 6:00 am

BRIDGMAN - Bridgman's lakefront assets are getting high marks from the Great Lakes Trail Towns Planning Initiative team, which is evaluating several Southwest Michigan communities for water trail launch sites and trail heads.

"Bridgman just needs to step up its accessibility to add to its great infrastructure already in place," said team member Cindy Burkhour of Access Recreation Group. The remarks followed a recent tour of the Weko Beach boat launch and beach house.

She said the beach house and ramps were ADA compliant, but universal accessibility means even wider walkways, using the example of two people abreast carrying a kayak.

The stretch between Warren Dunes and Weko Beach is very high on paddlers' list of favorites, said Marcy Colclough of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission. She said that extending the Lake Michigan Water Trail from New Buffalo to Bridgman was a natural next-step.

The high-water access offered at Bridgman, versus an inlet or river launch site, led Burkhour to envision a welcome plaza providing easier access for those with difficulty maneuvering on deep sand.

The plaza could include other trail head amenities such as a beach transfer system, launch area that won't harm boat bottoms, secure storage units for boats and gear, water bottle filling stations, shaded areas, accessible picnic tables and trail signs to downtown attractions

Bridgman's directional kiosks and signs were commended by Harry Burkholder, director of planning for Land Information Access Association, the group that is leading the trail planning initiative funded by Michigan's Coastal Zone Management Program.

While noting the "great job" on the Bridgman's gateway arch, Burkholder noted the need for bike racks and other services downtown for those arriving via bike trails.

Burkholder plans to present the group's findings and recommendations to Bridgman before the end of the year.