

Moody on the Market



Posted: Monday, 18 April 2016 1:19PM

Community Pint Night for Clean Water

The Paw Paw River has long been considered the environmental jewel of Michigan's Great Southwest. Unfortunately, its final tributary, Ox Creek, is often forgotten or flat out ignored. If, however, Marcy Hamilton has her way, that will change dramatically in the near future.

Hamilton works for the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission in downtown Benton Harbor and she is heading up a coalition of environmental groups working on a grant project focused on water quality in Ox Creek. To help spur that project, Ox Creek will become the beneficiary of a Community Pint Night fundraising event at The Livery Microbrewery on Cinco de Mayo, Thursday, May 5th. That evening from 5pm until 8pm, a portion of all beer sales at The Livery, located at 190 5th Street in the Benton Harbor Arts District, will go to the Ox Creek project.

More than just beer drinking for a good cause will be happening on May 5, according to Hamilton. A community paddle event will take place earlier that day from 3pm to 5pm on the lower Paw Paw River. Paddlers will put in to the Paw Paw River at the launch site located on Graham Avenue in Benton Harbor, and Third Coast Paddling will have kayaks for rent at a discount for those who don't have their own boat. Interested parties can contact Kris Martin at kmartin@swmpc.org or 269-925-1137 x1521 to reserve a single or double kayak.

Paddlers will explore the lower reaches of the river led by members of Two Rivers Coalition, one of the groups working on Ox Creek. According to Hamilton, "It should be fun to paddle up the river and past the Edgewater development and golf course and who knows what else we might see. The last time I went paddling with Kevin Haight, president of TRC, we found a series of three beaver dams on Ox Creek within the city limits of Benton Harbor."

Hamilton adds (perhaps tongue-in-cheek) that the real goal of the paddle, “is to whet the whistle of the paddlers so they drink more beer at Pint Night.” A new kayak from Third Coast will also be sold at a silent auction at the Pint Night, again to raise money for Ox Creek.

Although there are multiple threats to water quality in Ox Creek, Hamilton says this project is looking at the two biggest problems occurring upstream, sediment from agricultural operations and storm water run-off from the hundreds of acres of existing pavement, especially around the Orchards Mall area.

One part of the project aims to educate farmers about best management practices that reduce or even eliminate soil running off their fields and then affecting water quality. Another part of the project involves transforming a portion of Wightman & Associates parking lot into a rain garden as a demonstration of how to reduce storm water runoff and provide beneficial habitat simultaneously.

In addition to the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission and Two Rivers Coalition, other local organizations working in partnership on the Ox Creek project include the Berrien Conservation District, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, Sarett Nature Center and Wightman & Associates.

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