
Saugatuck commits to becoming part of national water trail

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The goal is to promote coastal public access by linking regional water trails to form a statewide water trail system along every mile of the Great Lakes shoreline.

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Saugatuck could soon become a stop on a national recreational water trail.

With a letter of support, the city committed itself to being a stop on the proposed trail. The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is working to get municipalities on board to submit an application to the National Park Service for a National Recreation Trail designation of the _____
_____.

The trail currently goes through three states, covers Chicago's lakefront and the entire coast of Indiana to New Buffalo in Michigan. The goal is to promote coastal public access by linking regional water trails to form a statewide water trail system along every mile of the Great Lakes shoreline.

"This will grant that extension to continue the trail all the way from Chicago to Manistee," said Kristopher Martin, an associate planner with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

Saugatuck previously tabled a letter of support to the commission earlier in March. At its city council meeting on March 27, council members passed a resolution, designating the Saugatuck Harbor as a stop along the Lake Michigan

Water Trail.

Originally Oval Beach was requested as an access point, but the city suggested the natural area because the Oval Beach waterfront is not accessible to watercraft because it is a swim area. Non-motorized boaters can stop at the area on the shoreline of Lake Michigan and rest.

“This will help it become the longest recreational-based water trail — that’s what the goal is,” Martin said.

Becoming part of the trail requires no funding or other commitments, aside from a resolution of support, from municipalities, said Saugatuck City Manager Kirk Harrier. The city of Holland committed to be part of the trail last winter, Martin said.

The Saugatuck area is at Saugatuck Harbor, directly next to Oval Beach to the north.

This means paddlers on the trail will have access to information about conditions and safety guides of paddling through each access point, which occur every three to five miles, Martin said. There are also benefits to municipalities.

“These communities will hopefully attract more visitors,” Martin said. “They can either shop, rest or eat while they’re paddling.”

The commission is working on getting more letters of support from all municipalities that relate to the water trail. Those letters will be submitted this summer to the National Park Service, which could nationally designate the trail.

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