

# The Lake Michigan Water Trail



## What is a water trail?

- A water trail is route along a lake, river, bay, or other waterway that is intended for use by people in small non-motorized watercraft such as canoes, kayaks, small sailboats, or paddle boards
- Water trails are the aquatic equivalent of hiking trails, providing public recreation

opportunities near sites with environmental, historical, or cultural significance. Like hiking trails, water trails can be interpretive in nature with educational signage and guided tours to bring users a deeper experience out on the trail

- Designated water trails provide safe public access for non-motorized watercraft, have publicly available and up-to-date access information (e.g. signs, maps, guidebooks, or websites), and are actively supported and maintained by at least one organization or community. Water trails can be designated by the National Park Service or at the state level by Natural Resources Departments or other state agencies

## The Lake Michigan Water Trail

- 75 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline from Chicago, Illinois to New Buffalo, Michigan is designated as a National Recreational Water Trail by the National Park Service
- Wisconsin has designated all 523 miles of their shoreline as The Lake Michigan State Water Trail as a Department of the Interior-supported initiative by the Wisconsin DNR and the Wisconsin State Park System
- Michigan has designated the majority of it's shoreline as parts of Regional Water Trails, supported by planning or development agencies, communities, and Michigan DEQ's Coastal Zone Management Program

Once fully designated, the approximately 1,600 mile route will be the longest continuous-loop water trail in the world, providing public access to thriving metropolitan centers, National Lakeshores, biologically-rich natural areas, islands, rocky cliffs, and nearly everything in between



**1,638 miles**

Shoreline length of Lake Michigan (including islands)



**275,000 acres**

The area of sand dunes in Michigan alone. The Lake Michigan shoreline is home to the largest freshwater dune complex in the world



**22,300 miles<sup>2</sup>**

The surface area of Lake Michigan, making it the 5th largest lake in the world



## What can a designated water trail do for your community?

- Designation of any kind has the potential to bring in additional support via grants for access site improvements, consistent and recognizable regional signage, and advertisements
- Designation opens the door for more opportunities to connect with area paddling groups and outfitters to increase the recreation offerings for your community members. Designation also increases the visibility of water trails to non-local paddlers and can provide an economic boost to the region

A study on the economic impact of the North Forest Canoe Trail (a 740-mile water trail from northeastern New York to northern Maine) found that local paddlers spent an average of \$5/day and non-local paddlers spent an average of \$46/day when using the trail. This type of economic impact has been echoed across a number of studies throughout the U.S. and with the continued growth of paddlesports, this trend is likely to continue.

- Increasing the number of people that recreate on the lake can also raise awareness of environmental issues, leading to increased stewardship. People that use Lake Michigan for recreation are often the staunchest supporters of improving water quality and habitats throughout the Lake Michigan watershed

## So, what can you do to support the Lake Michigan Water Trail?

- Get out on the water! The easiest thing individuals can do to support their local water trail is to use it!
- If you manage the beaches in your community, work with local stewardship or paddling groups to promote your access points. Think of ways your community can work with others in the region to improve the experience of paddlers and provide a safe and fun day out on the water
- If you work with communities, spread the word. The more local community support a water trail has, the greater the potential for it to become a destination, bringing local and non-local paddlers alike to enjoy all the coast has to offer



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