

Officials hopeful for future of paddling on Clinton River

By Heidi Roman - C & G Staff Writer - 06-30-2010



Photo by David Schreiber

Paddlers head downstream on the Clinton River from Clinton Township toward downtown Mount Clemens. Officials say that stretch of river is ideal for canoe and kayak trips.

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — Some Macomb County officials and outdoor enthusiasts hope that in the future, residents won't need to travel Up North for weekend canoeing and kayaking adventures.

The Clinton River could offer the same taste of nature paddlers seek elsewhere in Michigan, right in their own backyards.

Through parts of the county, the river winds through undeveloped wooded areas where animals drink and play. On June 17, local officials took a paddling tour from Budd Park in Clinton Township downstream to the YMCA in Mount Clemens.

“It always amazes me the amount of wooded area adjacent to the river, the natural beauty and the flora and fauna,” said Gerry Santoro, senior planner with the Macomb County Planning and Economic Development Department, who took part in the tour. “There are deer, and we saw blue heron. We were very impressed with the amount of wildlife.”

Santoro said, for the most part, the river is excellent for paddling sports in that stretch. There isn't too much debris blocking the way, and the river flows at a good pace.

Developing more opportunities for recreation along the river is part of the county's Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

“We're trying to set some goals to allow this type of activity to occur within a couple of years,” Santoro said.

Anne Vaara, executive director of the Clinton River Watershed Council, said there's a lot of planning going on to offer new places for people to rent, put in and take out canoes and kayaks. Oakland County has a sporting company that offers rentals, but Macomb County only has occasional events to offer canoe and kayak rentals.

"It's a beautiful river to paddle," Vaara said. "I think a lot of people don't realize that. It's not a hidden secret, but we've got this great river in our backyard."

Sheriff Mark Hackel said he's interested in exploring how the river could be a better asset to the county and improve the quality of life. He said he couldn't give specifics on what types of plans are being discussed, but said there's a lot of excitement brewing.

"We see a prime opportunity for things like Waterpalooza, Paddlepalooza and raft-offs, Boy Scout and Girl Scout groups camping along the shoreline," Hackel said. "We're going to encourage that and bring attention to the whole river experience."

The river has had problems with E. coli and other pollution, but Hackel said there is a lot of effort being made to clean up the water.

Where the tour took place, from Budd Park downstream to the YMCA in downtown Mount Clemens, is considered an easier paddling route that's good for beginners. The watershed council describes the trip as two hours of gentle paddling that can be done even in the late summer, when the water flow is low.

Other areas of the river make for nice paddling, but some have a number of logjams that require paddlers to portage. That's the case in the stretch from Yates Cider Mill to Riverbends Park and from Utica City Park to South Clinton River Park.

For more information about recreational opportunities and conditions on the river, visit the Clinton River Watershed Council's website, www.crw.org. The site includes river maps and streamflow data.

You can reach Staff Writer Heidi Roman at hroman@candgnews.com or at (586) 218-5006.

