

Park and Recreation Board Approves \$48,400 Paddle Trail Study

by K_Guice

Bend is known for its great recreational opportunities and the Bend Metro Park and Recreation District is evaluating options for adding more to the area.

Tuesday, September 5, the board voted unanimously in favor of a \$48,400 feasibility study that will identify the improvements needed for completing a continuous paddle trail along the Deschutes River.

Deschutes River near The Old Mill - Photo by Richard Burton "There has been a huge growth in the use of the river for recreational purposes in the last couple years," said Bruce Ronning, director of planning and development for Bend Metro Park and Recreation District.

"There has been a big growth of paddling using hard-shell boats," he said. "So, there is clearly a demand."

The engineering firm will ascertain the feasibility of completing the paddle trail, evaluate existing barriers and opportunities.

It will classify levels of river difficulty along the trail for both whitewater and moving-water paddling use based on standard rating systems including the international Scale of River Difficulty and the American Canoe Association Moving Water Classifications.

"The feasibility study will include all of the elements it will take to make the paddle trail accessible," Ronning said.

The study will consider the scope of the river, safety, potential boat access points, portage routes that utilize existing or planned elements of the Deschutes River Trail, local land use regulations and existing land uses, adjacent public and private land ownership and potential private property conflicts, according to documents from Bend Metro Park and Recreation District.

"One of the big issues is safety," he said. "Safe passage around the dams and other obstructions in the river will be reviewed." That includes bridges, weirs and other potential hazards.

They study will also look at regulatory issues including local, state and federal regulations. In addition, the engineering firm will be evaluating existing and needed vehicle access, parking, restroom facilities and changing areas.

Opportunities for enhanced whitewater kayak and canoe play, potential whitewater play sites, and a whitewater event venue will be identified.

The potential whitewater sites would provide a slalom course, teaching areas for various skill levels and a range of "park and play" activities for both kayak and canoe users.

Recreation Engineer and Planning (REP) based out of Boulder, Colorado has been selected to conduct the engineering evaluation. "They have done a lot of work like this in the past," Ronning said.

Some of their recent work ranges from a whitewater play park in Reno, Nevada to a boating park in Durango, Colorado.

REP will participate in various meetings with the district staff, local stakeholders, private land holders who may be affected and regulatory agencies.

The public is also invited to get involved. "It will be a very public process," Ronning said.

"We want it to be a broad and open community discussion, because we want it to meet the needs of the entire community not just the paddling community," he said. "We want to hear from everyone."

Over the course of the next several months REP will be required to provide detailed written reports of their findings, including drawings, charts, maps, plans and photographs, per the Bend Metro Park and Recreation District.

The final report is expected to be completed in February of 2007.

Park and Recreation Board Approves \$48,400 Paddle Trail Study by K_Guice