Northwest Indiana Water Trails Inventory

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Purpose:
- To expand environmental recreational opportunities through the creation of a comprehensive inventory of Northwest Indiana’s Water Trails including inventoried public access sites, feasible paddling routes, and specific resource conditions.
- To gain valuable experience extrapolating real field data into articulated environmental policy action points.

Background:
- Expand previous efforts aimed to increase paddler’s access and familiarity with the Lake Michigan waterways and other aquatic resources.
- Use completed data sets to aid a variety of policy initiatives centered around improving public access to water trails.
- Potential data destinations include the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association, Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Visitors Center, and the Great Lakes Sea Grant Network.

Site Description:
- Public access points and trail conditions along Lake Michigan, Deep River, Wolf Lake, Lakes of La Porte, East Branch Little Calumet, Kankakee River, West Branch Little Calumet, Trail Creek

Techniques & Equipment:
- Utilized GPS tracking camera to inventory essential features and amenities of public access points along each of the potential water trails.
- Documented general water trail conditions and potential obstructions including log jams, bridges, and dangerous flows.

Data and Results:
- The necessary field data was transposed into separate sections describing the physical conditions of the water body and existing/potential public access sites.
- Priority status was given for water trails with conveniently located access points, visually stimulating attractions, and without substantial woody debris accumulation.
- Sections of individual water trails were designated as high priority areas for both clean up and woody debris modifications.
- Special adherence was paid to the ecological benefits of woody debris during any alteration process.

Summary:
- At the end of the research period, eight bodies of water in Northwest Indiana had completed data sets and geo-tagged photo galleries.
- By interpreting field data sets, attending relevant environmental policy meetings, and working with prominent non-for-profit/governmental organizations I gained a new perspective and direction for both my professional and academic career.
- Northwest Indiana offers unique opportunities to paddle the same water ways used by Native Americans and the first settlers in the area.
- The data sets gathered by this research will expand the efforts to increase the scope, recognition, and access to the tremendous paddling opportunities offered by Northwest Indiana.
- In order to move forward with the project, additional data sets must be edited and completed as well as further development of the visual resources.

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