



Paddling enthusiasts prepare for series of adventures on Wisconsin's Fox River through Fox River Heritage Paddle 2010 events

By Michael King • Post-Crescent staff writer • March 30, 2010

Jeff Mazanec wants to share his passion for what he considers to be the overlooked, under-appreciated beauty and history of Fox River.

The Grand Chute resident came up with the concept of a series of kayak and canoe trips on the Fox River to promote awareness of the natural resource and appeal to people who have never paddled or traveled on the river.

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The Fox River Heritage Paddle 2010 — a series of 13 trips covering 125 miles over nine weekends — will launch April 24 in Portage. Participants will glide through the Fox Cities on July 24 as part of the popular Park-to-Park Paddle from Neenah to Appleton and finish Aug. 14 during the Baylake Bank Tall Ships Festival in Green Bay.

"We're calling it a [Journey of Rediscovery](#)," said Mazanec, a member of the organizing committee and president of the North East Wisconsin Paddlers Inc.

"Many of us cross over the Fox River on a regular basis but don't really appreciate its natural beauty and the tremendously rich history associated with the river," he said.

"There's no more intimate way to gain that appreciation than one paddle stroke at a time."

More than three centuries have passed since Father Marquette and Louis Joliet traversed the Fox and Wisconsin rivers as a route from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River and beyond for early settlers. Officials hope the event, along with the ongoing restoration of the historical [system](#) of Fox River locks, will draw attention to the Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway project that is seeking designation as a national heritage area.

The trip segments, which avoid difficult or possibly unsafe portions of the river, range in length from 3.4 miles (Kaukauna to Wrightstown) to 15.7 miles ([Marquette](#) to Princeton). All segments will be open to the public and led by certified instructors.

"We are setting the trip up so that participants will not have to be experienced paddlers," Mazanec said.

He said some of the segments are relatively lengthy and may be tiring for people who haven't paddled much.

"We have excluded parts of the route that are on open water with stronger probability of heavy boat traffic, wind or waves," he said. "There shouldn't be any appreciable fast water, other than possibly some of the upper stretches in April if we have a wet

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month.

"We will require that all participants wear their (life jackets) and will keep the group together as best we can while traveling."

A fee of \$10 per segment (paddlers younger than 16 accompanied by an adult are free) will be used to help cover expenses. Segment sponsorships are being sought to help defray costs.

Some opportunities exist to participate as a paddling passenger in the 28-foot Fox of the River Voyageur Canoe. Co-owner Glen Gorsuch said the Fox River events are "a great way to get folks out and enjoy parts of the river that they may have not seen before, and experience it with others that share the same interest, birders, plant life, wildlife and history."

Nonpaddlers are invited to programs on local history or culture at the conclusion of several segments.

The goal, Mazanec said, was to do a comprehensive look at the river "rather than paddling down the river or doing a river bank cleanup."

The Web site includes "paddle points" that note historical locations and other points of interest along the route. The Neenah-to-Appleton segment goes through the Menasha lock, which has been continually operating since 1856. It's also home to many of the paper mills that helped several area companies become world leaders in papermaking.

"Right now, it's an under-utilized resource," said Tom Young, a Town of Menasha resident who paddled the route solo a decade ago. "Here we've got something right in our backyard and we're hoping future generations can use that."

Young described those involved in the Heritage Paddle as an eclectic group of like-minded individuals who want to promote paddling and the river culture and history "right here at home."

Other organizers of the event include: Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway, Friends of the Fox, Fox Cities Greenways, the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, the Center for Land Use Education and Fox of the River Voyageur Canoe.

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