

Guardians of the West Fork Watershed
Press Release **May 5, 2015**



West Fork River Water Trail is in the planning stages

Imagine being able to put a canoe into the West Fork River at the base of the Stonewall Jackson Reservoir Dam and beginning a paddling trip that first takes you to Weston for a breakfast stop just opposite of the imposing Trans Allegheny Lunatic Asylum.

Then you're off again to a lunch break in Good Hope. First you pass through the easy rapids at the beautiful Jackson's Mill and Park. Then it's by the confluence of historic Hacker's Creek.

After lunch in Good Hope you head back onto the river and pass through one of the greatest concentrations of West Virginia wild flowers around. Past the high cliffs at Duck Creek, where Native Americans used to look down on the river and into the widest and deepest parts of the river where fish are plentiful.

You arrive in West Milford in the late afternoon at the site of a mill that operated from about the time of the Revolutionary War (1775–1783), just in time for a guided tour of the town's most historic landmarks and a tasting of the World's best pepperoni rolls.

By now, I think you get the picture.

The Guardians of the West Fork Watershed have established a West Fork River Water Trail committee of interested area citizens, paddlers, fishermen and agency representatives to help establish an officially designated water trail that runs the entire 75 miles from the Stonewall Jackson Reservoir all the way to the Monongahela River in Fairmont. It will be designed for non-motorized boating and paddlers of all abilities.

The long term goal of the Committee is to make the West Fork River Water Trail a recreational destination that will draw people from all over the world into our area. This will provide economic opportunities in the three counties through which the river passes -- Lewis, Harrison and Marion. It will also increase the activity on what is now an under-utilized, wonderful natural resource.

The plan is to provide numerous, well-marked public access points along the entire length of the river, as well as to reduce the hazards posed by the low head dams along the way.

There are 7 low-head dams along the West Fork River, which do create a cause for concern for safe boater passage of the river. From upstream to downstream, they are: Bendale Dam, Weston Dam, West Milford Dam, Highland Dam, Two Licks Dam, Hartland Dam, and Worthington Dam. Boaters need to plan their trips to stay away from these dams, because they can be deadly.

WV Division of Natural Resources provides a website with information on public access sites that they currently manage. http://www.wvdnr.gov/fishing/public_access.asp

The National Park Service - Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (NPS-RTCA) Program is assisting the West Fork River Water Trail project for the second year, upon request by the Guardians. It is one of only four projects accepted in West Virginia for fiscal year 2015. Throughout 2015, the NPS-RTCA staff is assisting the Water Trail Committee in project coordination, public involvement, fund finding, and access site assessment and improvements.

Progress has been made. New mapping of the access sites and a database documenting amenities has been revised. An intern has been hired for summer 2015, to assist with developing a water trail map and guide for publication, and for conducting paddle trips along the entire river to ground-truth the conditions.

In addition, steps are being taken to finalize the WV state designation of the West Fork River Water Trail. Public informational meetings have been held. Resolutions of Support have been received from the three counties and various towns along the way. A website has been established to provide public information, and to solicit public input and involvement. <http://www.guardiansofthewestfork.com/WaterTrail.html>

Water Trail Committee meetings are open to the public. Your interest, support and comments are invited. We are also seeking volunteers to join the Water Trail Committee to help bring this dream to life.

For more information, contact Jeff Reichel, Committee Co-Chair at westforkwatertrail@yahoo.com, or Peggy Pings at peggy_pings@nps.gov, 304-282-7464.

www.nps.gov/rtca

The RTCA is the community assistance arm of the National Park Service. Through RTCA, Park Service staff provide technical assistance to help communities and neighborhoods develop new trails and greenways, conserve rivers and protect and manage open space. These projects are locally-led with RTCA staff supporting community based conservation and recreation leaders. For more information, you can join the conversation at <http://www.facebook.com/RTCANPS>, or watch a video about our work in communities at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pkz8cpyr40>.

www.guardiansofthewestfork.com

The Guardians are a volunteer 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the preservation and improvement of the ecological integrity of the West Fork River, its tributaries, and its watershed.