

White Paper:
**Kosciusko County's Hidden Gem: Promoting Recreational Use of the
Tippecanoe River**

Steve Foegley
John Comer
Dustin Mast

"We were winding our way through a narrow section of the river. The water seemed calm here -- deep and still. There was evidence beaver were at work along the riverbank -- a few small trees gnawed down to recognizable cones. Occasionally the water ahead of us would swirl -- a large fish darting for cover. A pair of mallard ducks, huddled near the river bank, watched us approach, only to explode suddenly from the water with a splash of wings and quacks."

"We rounded a sharp bend in the river, and the tree canopy above us gradually opened, the river becoming wide and shallow. Kingfishers and swallows seemed to like this part of the river, with open skies and convenient branches perched over the shallow waters."

As we approached a fallen tree along the bank ahead, we heard the splashing of water on the other side. We pulled our paddles from the water, drifting silently. A doe and her fawn were standing near the bank, alert and staring in our direction. I was sure they would dart back into the cover of the floodplain, but instead they began wading through the water in front of us toward the opposite bank! We were thrilled they did not panic at our approach, and as our canoe passed behind them, they disappeared into the deep shadows of the woods."

"Further downstream, the silence was again broken, this time by the distressed squawk of a blue heron, the huge bird sweeping down from a high branch and flying downstream. In the waters around us, on much smaller wings, colorful dragonflies joined a multitude of other insects, chasing and dodging like tiny helicopters, their wings occasionally skipping across the water."

Perhaps this is a description of a canoe trip through the wilderness of Canada. Or perhaps it is a canoe trip through an isolated nature preserve or state park. This is actually an account of a canoe trip, taken last fall in Kosciusko county. It was not an expedition to an isolated location, but a short, one hour canoe trip, less than one mile from the city limits of Warsaw! The river is the Tippecanoe, with beauty and solitude remarkably close to home.

The purpose of our KLA White Paper is to encourage the recreational use of the Tippecanoe River near Warsaw.

- We will present feedback from local groups to gauge public interest in the river.
- We will discuss the need for a public river access near Warsaw.
- Lastly, we will discuss ongoing efforts to clear the river of fallen trees and other debris.

COMMUNITY INTEREST – We have made contact with representatives from several local organizations to discuss their potential use of the Tippecanoe river. Most are aware the river exists, but do not make use of it. Boating or water-related activities usually take place on lakes. The river does not present an attractive option, in part because of the limitations of public access.

We contacted Dick McCleary, a representative of the local Boy Scouts. He was enthusiastic about the potential for better access to the river, which would allow them to make more frequent use of the river for their various activities.

Other local groups who could make use of the river include the YMCA, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, Grace College, and local public schools.

For individuals or families, canoeing is an affordable hobby. A new canoe and paddles can be purchased for under \$400.

PUBLIC ACCESS – For groups such as these to make use of the river near Warsaw, there needs to be public access to the river in order to park cars and launch or pick up canoes.

Most public access sites are owned by the state and managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Currently, the county has the Mollenhour Public Access Site, where the Tippecanoe River crosses SR 19, south of Etna Green. Closer to Warsaw, the Chinworth Bridge Park, three miles west of Warsaw on Old Rd. 30, provides access to the river on land owned by the Kosciusko County Historical Society. Further upstream, however, through the area closer to Warsaw, the only way to access the river is to cross private property. There are no facilities for launching a boat or canoe, or an area to park. This stretch of river is for the most part hidden among the trees and isolated across fields. This area would be ideal for a public access, which could be developed along a state or county road where the river crosses. This would allow the public to access the river close to Warsaw, and facilitate more recreational use.

The development of a public access is a lengthy, involved process. A good site must be located, ideally at the intersection of the river with an existing roadway. Once a potential site is identified, the land owner must be willing to sell or donate the land for public use. Then, a detailed process of approvals must be obtained from State and County government, to make sure the site meets environmental, zoning, and other public standards. This process can easily take years to accomplish.

Initially, we knew of a site that would be an ideal location for a public access. Unfortunately, the property owner was unwilling to sell or donate the land. We continued our search, and located another ideal site. This time, we were pleased to discover that the owner of this tract was willing to make it available to the public; in fact, he had already begun the process to donate the land to the DNR for development of a public access! This process began at least a year ago, and is currently in the final stages of approval by the state of Indiana. Once approved by IDEM, the project will be turned over to the Division of Land Acquisition, to transfer ownership to the Indiana DNR. Local zoning must be approved as well. This process will still take at least several months, and we cannot make the location public at this time. However, it is very encouraging to find this project well underway.

RIVER CLEANUP – Once public access is improved, another challenge must be dealt with to make the river more “user-friendly”. In many sections of the river throughout the county, there are numerous fallen trees, which block passage downstream. While it is possible to portage a canoe over and around these obstacles, it makes the trip more hazardous and difficult, especially for children. The cleanup of these trees would be an ongoing process, since every wind storm brings the potential of another fallen tree. This is a problem especially in areas where the river is narrow.

This type of cleanup, especially in areas with large fallen trees, requires an organized effort. We are pleased to report that these efforts are already underway! In August 2003, a group organized by the Soil and Water Conservation District met to clear a portion of the Tippecanoe River north of Warsaw (see attached article).

The SWCD desires to continue organizing this cleanup to lengthen the “canoe corridor”. However, concerns about liability are complicating their efforts. A solution to this dilemma may be to organize an association of volunteers and interested community members, to plan a strategy for regular maintenance of the river and to promote its use.

In conclusion, we have been pleased to discover that, from the feedback we received from various local groups, there is interest in the use of the Tippecanoe River for recreational purposes. Efforts are already underway to clear the river of fallen trees and other debris. And – our most encouraging discovery – a generous property owner near Warsaw is currently working with the DNR to donate a parcel of river frontage for the creation of a public access site.

If you are not familiar with the Tippecanoe River, we encourage you to purchase or borrow a canoe, and check it out for yourself. A good place to begin your exploration is at the Chinworth Bridge, three miles west of Warsaw. The water there is wide, and the current is slow and relatively shallow, making it safe for beginners. Paddle upstream and float back, or float downstream for a while and then paddle back to your vehicle.

If you are interested in seeing the river developed into a better recreational resource for the community, please contact Steve Foegley at 269-6576. The formation of a “River Association” for Kosciusko County is only an idea at this point, but community interest and funding can make it possible.

The Tippecanoe River is a precious natural resource, and is a hidden gem in our county. It is a beautiful, healthy river, and it provides a recreational opportunity that has been overlooked by many. Making the river more accessible will promote its use by the community – adding yet another facet to the quality of life in Kosciusko County.

October 1, 2003

Resource Report- Kosciusko County SWCD



CREATING CORRIDORS — Dozens of volunteers gathered on Saturday, Aug. 23, to create a 10- to 15-foot wide corridor through logjams formed in the Tippecanoe River from CR 100E to CR 300N.

Canoeing the Tippecanoe — **Once again becoming a reality in Kosciusko County**

The Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District has recently begun an initiative to re-establish a marvelous recreational opportunity here in our county. The Upper Tippecanoe River from Lake Tippecanoe to the IDNR public access site at SR 19 had become choked with logjams, making it very difficult to travel the river by canoe or boat. This beautiful stretch of the Tippecanoe, with its abundant fish and wildlife resources and scenic value, was scarcely used by our citizens.

In July, a group of interested people met to discuss and assess the problem, and then canoed the river to determine where the logjams were located. This group of people included representatives of the following agencies and organizations: SWCD, County Surveyor, Natural Resources Conservation Service, IDNR Division of Fish and Wildlife, Center Lake Association, Drainage Board, The Nature Conservancy and Lake Tippecanoe Property Owners Association.

After inspecting the river, it was decided a segment of the river from CR 150E to CR 700E could be opened up for canoeing by using hand tools and lots of volunteer labor. Another segment of the river below CR 700E and above SR 19 was determined to be too choked with logs for a volunteer clean out.

After the fact-finding meeting, SWCD, IDNR and County Surveyor personnel met with IDNR-Division of Water officials to determine if permits were needed to create a canoe corridor in the upper segment of the river. After hearing the proposed plan, SWCD was given permission to organize a volunteer clean out effort within IDNR guidelines for logjam removal.

On Saturday, Aug. 23, more than a dozen enthusiastic volunteers met at the USDA Service Center to head to the river to begin work. When the day was done, the weary crew had created a 10- to 15-foot wide corridor through the logjams from CR 100E to CR 300N. This effort would not have been possible without the help and equipment supplied by Randy Millar, Ed Braun and Matt Burlingame of IDNR-Division of Fish and Wildlife. SWCD thanks these gentlemen for their assistance.

The beautiful Tippecanoe River is once again accessible to canoes from Oswego to Warsaw. This is a very nice stretch for anyone to canoe, including families, due to the firm gravelly bottom and typically shallow depths.

This group is hoping to schedule another work day later this fall, to open up more of the river below CR 300N. If anyone is interested in helping with this effort contact the SWCD office at (574) 267-7445. Ext. 3.