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Contact: Steve Kellman
Corbin Design
231.947.1236
steve@corbindesign.com

Corbin President Takes Part in Oakland County BlueWay Exploratory Workshop

Traverse City, MI – Corbin Design President Mark VanderKlipp took part in a day-long workshop with senior Oakland County planners Oct. 23 to evaluate the potential for “blueways,” or recreational water trails, in this southeast Michigan county.

Oakland County is home to dozens of rivers and streams including the Clinton, Huron, Rouge and Shiawassee rivers. The planners, from the county’s office of Planning and Economic Development Services, are exploring how to best encourage users of small, non-motorized boats to access and explore these local waterways and public stopping points along the way.

Corbin Design’s work on wayfinding projects for land-based trails recognizes that users, on foot or bicycle, can explore and learn at their own pace. But blueways are a unique challenge: motion is a major object of the activity, and exploration is influenced by the rate the water is moving and an individual’s ability to absorb information and understand the environment while navigating this moving body of water.

This has implications for safety and regulations, especially with regard to parking, launching, landing, private property restrictions and connection points between blueway systems. Clearly defining the pathway, which changes constantly and must be understood prior to launch, is critical to a safe, positive experience.

Add to this the interpretive opportunities to help members of the public understand and appreciate the natural resources in the greater Detroit area, and the result is an intricate web of information, regulation and direction that can reside within the context of the network of blueways. Designing a system that fits that context is the challenge.

An equally important goal of the system is helping people see the larger picture, that of preservation and good stewardship. Attracting thoughtful, engaged citizens who contribute both time and funding is a key goal of making these trails more accessible.

The group of planners, community activists and advocates for education, mountain bike racing and other outdoors activities was looking for assistance in creating a draft plan for those communications, and the potential for signage elements along the pathways. After a lunchtime hike along one of the waterways, VanderKlipp assisted the local groups in understanding where wayfinding logic and signage could play a part.

Next steps include working more closely with the county planners as funding becomes available to support and enhance the blueways for public use.

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