

# Genesee – Finger Lakes Regional Blueway Analysis

*An Inventory and Analysis of Regional Blueway Opportunity Areas*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The *Genesee – Finger Lakes Regional Blueway Analysis* project was conceived as a means of propelling the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region forward with the establishment of a regional network of recreational canoe and kayak “water trails,” thereby advancing the larger goal of creating a statewide blueway system. Through this project, riparian, canal and lake corridors throughout the nine-county Genesee – Finger Lakes Region have been identified, described and ranked based upon their suitability for blueway use and designation. In doing so, municipalities and local advocates are provided with a valuable tool to assist them with their own efforts in planning for and establishing local blueway trails.

### What is a Blueway?

Blueways are small boat and paddling routes sometimes referred to as “water trails”. They typically combine recreation with environmental awareness and cultural interpretation, allowing users to travel along scenic waterways to designated stops along the way for rest, overnight stays, or enjoyment of land-based attractions in the vicinity. While many waterways in our state are presently used for recreational paddling, not all of these waterways can necessarily be considered to be an “official blueway”. The blueway concept serves as a framework for the planning and maintenance of recreational water trails. Blueways come in many forms and can also be in various stages of planning and completion. A variety of popular blueway corridors that are either being planned for or implemented across the state include the Hudson River Water Trail, the Mohawk River Blueway Trail, the Raquette River Blueway, the Black River Blueway Trail, the New York State Canalway Water Trail (following the Erie Canal), the Seneca River Water Trail, and the Lake Champlain Paddlers Trail.

A statewide system of blueway trails has been proposed as a means of connecting the many various blueway trails that are planned, underway or completed across the state. Initially, this will occur through the creation of a series of routes that are defined by local waterbody and community characteristics. Over time, however, as connections between these routes are strengthened and the routes themselves become better-defined, these routes have the potential to become an *integrated network* of connected water trails that will be recognized as part of a cohesive New York State Blueway Trail system.

### What is a “Blueway Opportunity Area?”

This project identifies those waterways in the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region which have the potential to serve as a blueway corridor in the future. In this sense, the lake, river and canal corridors outlined in this report represent opportunities for communities – hence the phrase “Blueway Opportunity Area.” In the end, it will be essential for communities to develop their own vision for their local waterways – residents



Photo taken on the Detroit Heritage River Water Trail (date unknown). Source: <http://www.michigantrails.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/Watertrail-Pict.jpg>

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and community leaders are ultimately in the best position to determine the most appropriate manner by which their waterways can be utilized. The blueway concept as illustrated in this report provides a framework that communities can use to foster new relationships between neighboring municipalities, to provide new destinations for water-based recreation, to create and enhance distinctive leisure opportunities for the public, and to make their communities better places to live.

### Project Principles

This project has five core principles:<sup>1</sup>

#### **1) Using a systems approach to blueway trail development.**

The “systems approach” hinges on the importance of fostering connectivity between individual water trails and other important regional assets, such as parks, cultural facilities, environmentally-sensitive locations, terrestrial trails and the communities where all of these assets exist. The ultimate objective of this approach is the establishment of an interconnected system of water trails in the region. The systems approach is closely related to the concept of “emergence” which states that the “whole” is greater than the sum of its individual parts. In this regard, the emergence of a regional blueway system can help to ensure the success of individual connector and spur trails, encouraging a “critical mass” of users throughout the entire network.

#### **2) Using blueways as a framework for community planning and environmental protection.**

Riparian corridors and other aquatic areas represent some of the most sensitive and ecologically-significant components of our natural environment. They are also some of the most sought-after places, playing host to intense industrial and residential development and highly prized for their recreational benefits. The blueway framework offers communities a proven approach to planning for and preserving these areas. In addition, this approach can be used to create new destinations with recreational and tourism potential for residents, businesses and visitors.

#### **3) Finding ways to empower, enable, and encourage communities to plan and build blueways.**

While many people may be aware of local canoe and kayak destinations, they may not be aware that a planning framework exists that can be used to manage and improve these paddling destinations. This report is intended to enable local officials, waterway advocates, planners and other stakeholders to explore, utilize, and unlock the potential of their local water resources using the blueway model. This approach has the potential to advance many local projects across the region by putting local municipalities at a strategic advantage in terms of resources,

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<sup>1</sup> “Project Principles” were adapted from those which were originally developed in the following text: Flink, Charles A., Kristine Olka and Robert M. Searns. Trails for the Twenty-First Century: Planning, Design, and Management Manual for Multi-Use Trails, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2001) pp 3.

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planning, and knowledge. In addition, stakeholder outreach has been a central component of the project in an effort to encourage local ownership of individual projects.

### 4) Using technology to better visualize and promote blueways.

A wide array of information collected for this project has been incorporated into a Geographic Information System (GIS). Local access points, complementary facilities and other key planning information for over 200 different sites have been collected and recorded. This database will be made available to future blueway planners as they begin to conduct site-specific planning for their own local blueway projects.

### 5) Encouraging greater coordination and collaboration in regional waterfront planning.

This project seeks to encourage and establish an atmosphere of regional cooperation and accomplishment by inspiring local projects. It seeks to facilitate regional collaboration by establishing a reliable set of baseline data that can be utilized by neighboring municipalities toward the implementation of projects that transcend local municipal boundaries. In doing so, it will bring New York State closer to synthesizing the vision for a regional and statewide network of paddling trails.

## How to Use this Document

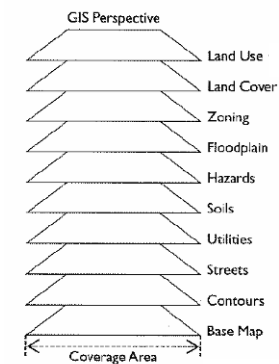
Regional waterways have been identified and evaluated using a standard, objective approach, described in detail in the next section of this report. The purpose of this process has been to identify those waterways which may be suitable for future blueway use and designation – identified herein as “Blueway Opportunity Areas.” The corridors described in this document have been observed to be viable paddling destinations (albeit on a seasonal basis only in some cases) for one or more of the variety of sport paddling conditions (ranging from challenging whitewater to recreational flat-water).

This document is intended to expedite the identification of potential future blueway corridors in the G-FL Region and to facilitate the planning of those corridors. In some instances, blueway planning and other similar recreational planning activities may be ongoing within certain corridors; in such instances, information included in this document may be able to complement those activities. In most cases, the corridors identified in this document transect the boundaries of multiple cities, towns, and villages, making intergovernmental cooperation a necessity and a key element in the success of any future blueway development.

### What is a GIS?

A Geographic Information System (GIS) is a collection of computer hardware, software, and geographic data for capturing, managing, analyzing, and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information.<sup>2</sup>

Examples of geographic data sets:



<sup>2</sup> For more information on geographic information systems, visit ESRI at <http://www.gis.com/whatisgis/>. Last viewed online 4/20/10.

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To this extent, the document is intended to encourage dialogue and facilitate regional collaboration by establishing a reliable set of baseline data that can be utilized by neighboring municipalities toward the implementation of projects that transcend local boundaries. Furthermore, while the ranking procedures utilized in this report attempt to prioritize potential corridors, the ranking results should not be over-emphasized. Each waterway is special and unique. Regardless of how their waterway ranks in this report, communities should continue to focus their attention on creative approaches to “re-envisioning” their local waterways using the blueway framework as an adaptive approach to planning for and enhancing those spaces.

### **PROJECT DISCLAIMER**

#### **This report is not intended to act as a guide for paddlers.**



Raquette River Falls, Adirondack Park,  
Franklin Cnty, NY. 8/03.

This report is intended to be used as planning tool to facilitate planning activities only. Maps and associated corridor descriptions included in this report are not appropriate for use as navigational aids. Natural and man-made hazards to navigation may be present in areas described in this report including rapids, waterfalls, weirs, dams, downed limbs and other similar obstructions or dangers. Further, the threat level of such hazards can fluctuate due to changes in water levels or as a result of other circumstances, such as severe weather events or human intervention.

Paddling is an inherently dangerous sport; paddlers should consult with appropriate guidebooks and professionals knowledgeable with the locations described herein before exploring those waterways.

For more information on paddling safety, refer to the webpage “The Freedom of Paddling,” a publication of *Boat US – Foundation for Boating Safety and Clean Water*. Available online at the following address: <http://www.boatus.org/onlinecourse/reviewpages/boatusf/project/info7f.htm>

Additionally, safety guidelines developed by the Genesee Waterways Center provide a comprehensive review of safe paddling procedures for people paddling within the New York State Canal system, the Genesee River, or on the variety of surrounding waterways in the Genesee – Finger Lakes area. Available online at the following address: <http://www.geneseewaterways.org/Safety.htm>