

16 paddling trails in Texas

When the Buffalo Bayou Paddling Trail is dedicated April 28, it will be the 16th Texas Paddling Trail and — at 26 miles — the longest in the state. Notable as an oasis for wildlife and tranquility in the nation's fourth-largest city, the Buffalo Bayou Paddling Trail is only the first of nearly a dozen paddling trails expected to be unveiled this year.

"There has been a huge surge of interest in the Texas Paddling Trails program over the past year or so," said Shelly Plante, nature tourism coordinator for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "Communities across the state have seen the benefits a designated paddling trail has on local economies, and canoeists and kayakers seem to be excited about exploring new waters."

May 2 brings the dedication of the Limestone Bluffs Paddling Trail on the Navasota River between Groesbeck and Mexia. Also, May 6, the City of Austin and the Austin Parks and Recreation Department will dedicate an 11-mile circuit on the capital city's downtown Lady Bird Lake (formerly Town Lake). And by early June, three trails will come online at Martin Dies, Jr. State Park near Jasper. The three trails will be the Neches Paddling Trail, Walnut Paddling Trail and Sandy Creek Paddling Trail.

The Brazos River will get two new paddling trails — one near Glen Rose

and one near Brazoria, and storied Village Creek near Lumberton will have an 8.5-mile reach designated as well.

Later in the summer, the Gonzales Independence Paddling Trail is slated

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- Denise Rodgers, local environmentalist

for unveiling on the Guadalupe River near Gonzales, and a new trail on the Colorado River near Webberville also will be dedicated.

The Red Bluff Paddling Trail, the third planned for the Colorado River near Bastrop, was set for an October opening, but has been postponed pending the sale of private lands along the route.

Denise Rodgers, co-owner of Rising Phoenix Adventures in Bastrop, was instrumental in getting more than 20 miles of the Colorado River designated as the El Camino Real and Wilbarger Paddling Trails.

"After we launched El Camino Real in 2007, we had about 1,400 people go down that trail the first year," she

said. "Last year, when we launched Wilbarger, we put about 3,200 people on the river. That doesn't count all the people who are coming and bringing their own boats. It's been incredible for our community."

Rodgers said that of the paddlers who rent boats from her livery, about one-third were from Bastrop and Travis Counties, and the majority of the paddlers she met were from Houston and San Antonio.

Plante said new paddling trails are officially opened only after local partners — cities, counties, river authorities or conservation organizations — have secured local support and made any necessary improvements to put-in and take-out locations on a proposed trail.

"This is a collaborative process between TPWD and local partners," Plante said. "We have significant technical and promotional resources we can put at the disposal of anyone who wants to establish a new paddling trail on public waters, but the process always starts at the local level."

Application forms and more information about both the benefits of paddling trails and how to create one are located on the TPWD Web site.

On the Net: Texas Paddling Trails: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/paddling-trails> and News Roundup: http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/newsmedia/releases/news_roundup/texas_paddling_trails/