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Unique water trails map now available

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Key individuals involved in the Almanor Basin Water Trails Map project since its inception have been members of local volunteer groups concerned about the welfare and future of the Almanor Basin, and in the promotion of tourism. At Westwood Beach, from left: Nils Lunder, Ryan Burnett, Peggy Fulder, Charlie Plopper and Courtney Gomola.

After nearly two years of work by committee members of the Caribou Alliance of Trails and other volunteers, the first edition of the Almanor Basin Water Trails Map has been completed and is available for purchase.

The water trails map, the only one of its kind in the region, is specifically designed to highlight Lake Almanor's 34 miles of shoreline where hikers, boaters, bicyclists, kayakers and other users can plan their recreational activities, and at the same time boost local economic opportunities.

Essentially a grassroots effort, the water trails map is designed as a recreation atlas that people can purchase for \$10 at a number of outlets in Chester and eventually throughout the Lake Almanor Basin Area and beyond.

At the same time, the map includes an index of nearly 100 local businesses that provide specific services related to recreation and tourism.

Locals and tourists alike can use the water map when planning low-impact activities for day or weekend recreation, which saves time, gas and energy.

"The whole idea of the water trails map is to bring the business community that serves the tourist industry together in one place," explained Lake Almanor Watershed Group member Charlie Plopper, who also contributed volunteer hours to creating the map.

In addition to highlighting shoreline access to the lake, boat launching sites, camping supply stores, marinas and resorts, campgrounds, fishing spots, plus walking, biking and hiking trails around the lake, the water map lists grocery stores, restaurants, coffee shops, pizza parlors, pubs, gas stations, lodging, RV parks, picnic areas and more.

Details such as illustrations of native birds, information on wildlife, safety information, elevations, some local history and other useful information such as the website for current weather updates are also included.

A \$2,000 grant from the Rose Foundation, an organization that helps with small projects that benefit the community, was used to print an initial run of 1,000 maps, Plopper said. Another \$4,132 in donations from businesses and community members was received to help with the project.

The map includes additional sites like Butt Lake and the Mountain Meadows area near the town of Westwood, he said.

Plopper said that Plumas District Supervisor Sherrie Thrall got the water trails map project started by soliciting the original \$15,000 in seed money through the Sierra Nevada Conservancy - for which she is also a board member - so that Courtney Gomola of the Sierra Institute for Community and the Environment and the Lake Almanor Watershed Group, could begin work as the graphic artist for the unique map.

She designed the map as a team effort, Gomola said, working with a number of business people and community supporters to compile the information that appears on the water map.

Other key individuals involved throughout the Almanor Basin Water Trails Map project since its inception have been members of local volunteer groups concerned about the welfare and future of the Almanor Basin, and in the promotion of tourism, including the Lake Almanor Watershed Group, Sierra Institute for Community and Environment, Mountain Meadows Conservancy, Westwood Parks and Recreation Association and the Almanor Recreation and Park District.

These groups formed the Caribou Alliance for Trails approximately two years ago.

A handful of individuals took primary responsibility for collecting, collating, and designing the map and interpretive information, and for finding an appropriate publisher, identifying methods for distributing the map and for managing the finances, including Courtney Gomola, Charlie Plopper (LAWG, MMC), Peggy Fulder (LAWG, WWPRA) and Nils Lunder, director of the Mountain Meadows Conservancy, who took the lead in developing grant proposals to fund the production and printing of the map - costs not covered by funds from Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

Ryan Burnett, conservation scientist with Point Blue and member of the Lake Almanor Watershed Group, took responsibility for developing the information delineating some of the kayaking trails around the lake and providing photos for use on the website (almanortrails.org).

Plopper said several individuals generously provided assistance as the map was being developed, including Teresa Arrate, outreach and education coordinator for the Plumas Audubon Society, who provided the information on birds in the area and the nesting sites for grebes included in the map.

Chester Museum director Marilyn Quadrio offered detailed information regarding the history of the Big Meadows area prior to and after the construction of the dam.

Kirsten Bovee of the U.S. Forest Service provided information regarding flora surrounding the lake.

John Muir Laws donated the illustrations of flora and fauna found in the Almanor Basin.

Lorena Gorbet (LAWG, Maidu Summit Consortium) provided information regarding Native American history for Big Meadows.

Herman Oswald (MMC, Catching Concepts) delineated the sites for fishing from the shore or with human-powered vessels.

Megan Mallowney (USFS), and Mike Momber (PG&E) helped provide the information needed to list all the points of interest along Lake Almanor; and Sgt. Ian James of the Plumas County Sheriff's Office generously provided information, feedback and editing regarding public access, ownership, public and boating safety regulations and precautions to ensure that visitors will enjoy the lake in a safe manner without impinging on property rights.

Plopper said that Randy Wilson and Becky Osborn were extremely helpful in managing the funds for Gomola's salary support from Sierra Nevada Conservancy and assisting with printing draft copies of the map.

All the members of Lake Almanor Watershed Group and the Caribou Alliance of Trails provided feedback of the map during project review for the final version prior to publication.

During the Plumas County Board of Supervisors meeting Sept. 13, each supervisor got a copy of the new map, which is both water and tear resistant.

Supervisor Sherrie Thrall recognized the efforts of Nils Lunder and called Charlie Plopper the "primary person," who visited all the businesses to explain that there was no cost to them to be listed on the map.

She also thanked County Panning Director Randy Wilson for his grant administration.

"This is economic development at its best, with the community stepping forward," Thrall said.

Profits from the sales of the water maps go towards the printing of the next version of the map.

Businesses interested in carrying the map for public purchase can contact Mountain Meadows Conservancy, PO Box 40, Westwood, CA 96137 or call 284-7414.

Note: Additional reporting by Delaine Fragnoli

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