



Annual Paddle Festival Returns To Riverlands

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WEST ALTON, IL – The US Army Corps of Engineers, Rivers Project Office, will once again be partnering with the Mississippi River Water Trail Association as they host their annual PaddleFest at Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary on June 12th.

The Mississippi River Water Trail Association (MRWTA) exists to promote the safe public use of the Mississippi River Water Trail, which was developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in response to public requests for a water trail on the Mississippi River within the St. Louis District. This water trail was designated as a National Water Trail in 2012, and MRWTA works in close collaboration with USACE and other organizations to coordinate special events and volunteer opportunities that foster conservation efforts that will both further develop and support the trail. One special location along the 121-mile trail is the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary, which is a 3,700-acre area of public land in West Alton, Missouri that is managed by

USACE and was designated as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society in 2005. The Sanctuary is home to 1,200 acres of restored bottomland prairie and marsh, has over eight miles of hiking trails, and is a vital resource to over 300 species of birds. PaddleFest will be taking place in the Sanctuary's Ellis Bay.

“The Paddle Festival is a great opportunity for all ages to experience kayaking in Ellis Bay, a back-water slough of the Mississippi River,” says Josh Schulte, US Army Corps of Engineers Natural Resources Specialist and Recreation Team Lead for the Rivers Project. “This is all made possible through the great partnership with the Mississippi River Water Trail Association. The Mississippi River Water Trail Association provides skillsets to teach everyone about paddle safety, how to use a paddle, proper lifejacket fitting, maneuvering a kayak, and much more related to paddling on the Mississippi River.”

This event is returning in 2021 after COVID and the 2019 summer flood forced the event to be canceled the previous two years. “After a few years of encountering floods and a worldwide pandemic, this year we are very excited to bring PaddleFest back to Ellis Bay at the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary!” said Melissa Sauter, President of the Mississippi River Water Trail Association. “PaddleFest 2021 allows participants of all abilities the opportunity to safely experience paddling on the Mississippi River. Get outside and get moving with our certified kayak instructors while enjoying a beautiful diversity of birds found within their natural habitat along the Mississippi River!”

Experienced safety boaters will be on the water throughout the event to make sure all participants are safe and feeling confident throughout their paddle. Additional activities will be available on land for those hanging back from paddling, or for paddlers that want to explore the Sanctuary trails before or after their paddling session. Tickets for the event are \$10 for each individual over the age of 14, and \$5 for paddlers ages 13 and under. Each ticket is for a 1-hour time slot, and kayaks, lifejackets, paddles, and all necessary gear are provided. A limited number of tandem kayaks will be available for adults paddling with minors under 13 years of age. Pre-registration is required. The Audubon Center at Riverlands, another key partner of this event, is overseeing the registration process for PaddleFest, and tickets can be purchased on Audubon's website at riverlands.audubon.org.

For more information please contact Josh Schulte at 314-657-8535.