



'A floating classroom' during annual paddling, camping sojourn

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The West Branch Susquehanna Sojourn — a five-day educational paddling and camping trip highlighting the West Branch of the Susquehanna River from Jersey Shore to Muncy — has been described as the ultimate environmental classroom for all ages to experience, said Michael Grasso, volunteer steward coordinator for the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership.

Registration now is open for the trip, which will be held June 17-20.

"Attendees will get a hands-on experience and a way to see our trails and rivers from a personal point of view," Grasso said.

Every year, about a dozen sojourns are held throughout the state on various rivers and streams.

This one is organized by the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership and its theme this year is "Closing the Gap: Connecting our Land and Water Trails."

To promote the theme, the sojourn will highlight efforts and projects to connect local land and water trails — specifically, extending the Pine Creek Rail Trail to Williamsport, Grasso said.

"The Susquehanna Greenway Partnership has been hosting sojourns on the West Branch since 2009. The purpose of our sojourns is to encourage physical activity in the outdoors, promote sustainable economic development through recreational and heritage tourism, increase community connectivity to the river and foster environmental stewardship," he said.

Last year, the sojourn was from Renovo to Jersey Shore. This year, organizers want to start from where they left off, he said.

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Last year's Susquehanna Sojourn on the West Branch of the Susquehanna River covered territory from Renovo to Jersey Shore. From June 17 to 20, the Sojourn will pick up in Jersey Shore and continue on to Muncy. Registration is open until June 1. The fee is \$285 per adult for all five days or varies from \$25 to \$65 for individual days. Fees are reduced for children 12 and younger.

"Attendees will experience breathtaking views from their boats along the river and their bikes along the Pine Creek Rail Trail and the Susquehanna River Walk, beautiful camping at Susquehanna State Park and Loyalsock Riverfront Park, and they'll have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors." (See ANNUAL, Page F-5)

The planned daily agenda for the June sojourn is as follows:

June 17: Shuttle day

- Sojourners will park their cars in Muncy and hop on a shuttle to Jersey Shore.
- Set up camp before the opening ceremonies where sojourners will become acquainted with the history of the sojourns and the towns they will visit.
- Take part in some fun activities so sojourners can get

to know each other better before they head to bed.

June 18

- After breakfast, ride a shuttle 20 miles up the Pine Creek Rail Trail and start the bicycle ride. It's a 2-percent downhill grade the entire way, so it's not too difficult for inexperienced bikers.

- Stop for lunch along the way at the Waterville Tavern while learning about the local wildlife and conservation efforts in the region.

- Get back to camp in the afternoon and have an hour or two to relax before the "Party in the Park" begins with live music and good food.

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Outdoors

Annual sojourn offers unique way to learn about river towns

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nty to explore the quaint river towns of Jersey Shore and Muncy and the riverside city of Williamsport," Grasso said.

Some other highlights attendees will experience are learning about the history of the sojourns and the towns, discovering local wildlife and conservation efforts in the region, enjoying live music, hearing about the lumber heritage of the region, witnessing a grand-opening celebration and ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new river access and meeting a local falconer, members of area Audubon Society chapters and local artists.

The sojourn is open to the public.

"Historically, the sojourn is attended by a mixture of experienced and novice paddlers. We would never turn anybody away due to lack of experience or fitness, but keep in mind that this is a paddle trip — not a float trip," Grasso said. Attendees will be expected to be able to

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June 19

- Break camp early and head down to the Jersey Shore River Access for the grand-opening celebration and ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new river access. The access will close a major gap in the water trail system, and the sojourners be the first to use it.
- After the celebration, enjoy a 10-mile paddle to the Linden river access for lunch while learning about the lumber heritage of the region.
- After lunch, take a nice and easy 3-mile paddle to Susquehanna State Park, along the river in Williamsport, then set up camp and relax before dinner.
- After dinner, hear from a local falconer and members of a local Audubon Society chapter about the local bird life. Williamsport is a hot spot for migratory bird watching. View the peregrine falcon nest in Williamsport.

June 20

- After a hearty breakfast, take a shuttle to the Hepburn Street trail head, then bike the

Susquehanna River Walk. Along the way, stop at a couple of points of interest to appreciate the views and the local art installations around the trail.

- Hear from the Lycoming County planning commissioner about local trail-building efforts.
- Take a shuttle to the Williamsport Water Authority sanitation plant for a tour of the facilities.
- Take a shuttle back to the bikes and ride them over to the Loyalsock Riverfront Park.
- Set up camp, eat dinner and learn about local Greenway and trail initiatives in the township.

June 21

- After breakfast, break camp and begin paddling to Muncy. Arrive at the Muncy public river access shortly after noon and hop on a shuttle to the Muncy Heritage Park and Nature Trail.
- Eat a catered lunch and listen to a presentation from the Muncy Historical Society about the local history and lore of Muncy.
- After the presentation, have the closing ceremony, then everyone is free to go. Recommendations for dinner will be provided. If you're feeling up for it, the Muncy Nature Trail is beautiful at this time of the year.

paddle 10 miles at a time. If you do not have any paddling experience on moving water, it is recommended that you receive some sort of instruction or experience before the sojourn.

"If you need a paddling lesson or to brush up on your skills, contact an outfitter near you," Grasso recommended. State parks also hold paddling events. Attendees must bring

some of their own equipment, including tents for camping as well as a kayak or canoe, and all the extras that go with an adventure like this, especially personal flotation devices.

Biking will require supplying your own bikes and helmets. "If you don't own a bike but want to ride, we have a limited number of loaner bicycles you can borrow at no cost. We do

not have helmets to loan out, though. It's first come-first serve, so register soon," Grasso said.

Meals and guide services, along with the scheduled activities, are included in the registration fee.

"Every morning, your gear will be loaded onto the gear truck and transported to that evening's campsite," Grasso said.

The West Branch Susquehanna Sojourn is much more than a paddling trip, though.

"It's a floating classroom, a hands-on experience, a way for people to see our trails and river from a personal point of view," Grasso said. "Local experts share their knowledge about the areas' wildlife, geologic and cultural history and local conservation efforts through riverside presentations. Attendees will learn how important the river is to local communities — and why it needs to be protected."

To register, visit www.susquehannagreenway.org/paddle-pedal-sojourn, download the registration packet and mail it in.