

Water Ways

Floating docks provide ports for Bayou Teche paddlers

The Bayou Teche Paddle Trail is a little more kayak and canoe friendly, thanks to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's Center for Louisiana Studies.

The center steered a project to place four floating docks on the paddle trail, which stretches along most of Bayou Teche's roughly 130 miles, from Port Barre to near Berwick. It winds through 13 parishes, and 15 towns and communities.

Created in 2012, the paddle trail is managed by the TECHE Project. TECHE stands for Teche Ecology, Culture, and History Education. The nonprofit organization established the paddle trail to improve Bayou Teche for boaters, kayakers, canoeists and swimmers. The bayou is on the Environmental Protection Agency's federal list of impaired waterways because of runoff and sewage pollution that harms fish and wildlife.

The TECHE Project began with a small group of volunteers who plucked litter and debris from the bayou. It has ballooned to about 200 members and partners with local civic leaders, governments and businesses to coordinate public cleanups. Those efforts enlist the help of boat, kayak and canoe owners, who clear Bayou Teche of everything from discarded appliances to clumps of water hyacinths, an invasive, fast-growing species that clogs the bayou with thick mats of vegetation anchored to a dense network of roots.

Volunteers, however, need spots to launch and dock small watercraft. Tourists need places where they can go ashore at towns along the trail for a meal or duck into a local attraction, such as a museum. Places along Bayou Teche with launches for bigger, motorized boats lack entry spots for kayakers and canoeists.

Jennifer Ritter Guidry, assistant director of programming and special projects at the Center for Louisiana Studies, was a member of the original group that established the Bayou Teche Paddle Trail. She is principal investigator of an \$83,000 federal grant secured by the University for placement of four docks and gangways in each parish along the trail.

Docks were placed in Loreauville and Charenton in June. The others were installed in Port Barre and St. Martinville in July.

The four spots were chosen for a variety of reasons,



The dock's design makes it easy for paddlers to get in and out of kayaks and canoes.

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including need and availability of viable property. They were also chosen for proximity to attractions along the banks. The dock in St. Martinville, for instance, sits at Evangeline Oak Park, which holds the fabled tree named for the heroine of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous poem.

"Paddlers can disembark at the park, and the downtown district is right there, with plenty of things for tourists to do. There are several museums, lots of restaurants, and an opera house," Ritter Guidry said.

The Federal Highway Administration awarded the grant as part of its Recreational Trails Program. The Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism administered the funds. The Floating Dock Shop of Baton Rouge provided and installed the docks. Each cost about \$20,000.

The four docks are the first of a total of 15 that the TECHE Project will install with the help of partnerships, such as the one with the Center for Louisiana Studies.

Because of such efforts, the Bayou Teche Trail is a National Water Trail, 21 waterways recognized by the National Park Service for local endeavors to keep them clean and sustainable. It's the only National Water Trail in Louisiana.

Each of the four docks will become property of their respective cities or, in the case of the dock in Charenton, the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana. The dock in the small community sits on the tribe's reservation. Each of the four communities will be responsible for managing and maintaining their respective docks.

Learn more about the Bayou Teche Paddle Trail at techeproject.org

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