



December 22, 2014

Dear Ms. Waters,

I am writing to you today as a representative for the American Canoe Association (ACA). Since our founding in 1880, the ACA has grown into the nation's largest and most active nonprofit paddlesports organization with 30,000 members and over 300 Clubs and Affiliates across the United States and abroad. The purpose of this letter is to express our support of the designation of a National Water Trail for the entire 133 miles of the Kankakee River from the headwaters of the Kankakee River in rural St. Joseph County, Indiana, to the Des Plaines River in Illinois.

.Many of our members from Indiana and Illinois, and around the country, have enjoyed paddling the Kankakee. This invaluable natural resource has created an important magnet for tourism dollars, provided opportunities for local business development, and is a vital educational and public health resource for the regional community.

The Kankakee River has a very unique place in US history. Less than a century ago, there was an area in the Midwest that resembled the swamplands of Florida's Everglades. Sometimes called the "Everglades of the North", The Grand Kankakee Marsh once saturated nearly a million acres in Northern Indiana and a portion of Illinois. The grand marsh was home to some of the highest concentrations of wildlife on the planet, with waterfowl so numerous they literally "blackened the sky." The marsh was called Chicago's food pantry. Industrialists made their fortunes from its seemingly endless natural resources. Many sought the riches of the marsh, but at a costly price. Today less than 5% of the Grand Kankakee Marsh has survived man's advances, but with a better understanding of the important role wetlands play in the environment, there is a renewed effort to restore part of what was lost. The Kankakee River National Water Trail effort we hope will be a big part of this overall effort.

Based on the benefits of the creation of the Kankakee River National Water Trail, including increasing community-based recreational opportunities, increased public access, tourism, economic growth, public health improvements, and environmental education, the American Canoe Association supports the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association and the Illinois representatives who are working together to apply for National Water Trail designation.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our comments on this public process and thank you for your stewardship of our National Water Trail System . If there is any way in which the ACA can be of assistance in helping to improve the viability of the Kankakee River as a paddling resource, please feel free to contact us at any time.

Sincerely,

Dave Burden  
ACA Policy Chief