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Paw Paw River “odyssey” to raise public awareness of water quality issues passes through the tri-cities

By Angela Stair

Kevin Haight of Hartford said he was shocked and saddened by the environmental devastation caused by the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and then the oil spill in our own back yard on the Kalamazoo River. It made him realize that the freshwater treasure we know as the Great Lakes is at risk as well.

To raise awareness of local water quality issues and raise funds for local conservation efforts by the Two Rivers Coalition and Freshwater Future, he decided to paddle down the Paw Paw River from the dam at Maple Lake in Paw Paw to the confluence of the Paw Paw River with the St. Joseph River by Benton Harbor; a 66-mile trip on the winding river.

Haight’s “odyssey” began August 22 in Paw Paw and the first leg of that trip took him 2.8 miles down the river to the bridge on C.R. 655, past logjams that he had to walk around.

Each leg of his journey is online for you to read his account in his own words of the river’s beauty and see pictures he has taken and posted for your pleasure. There are also video clips for you to view.

The Tri-City Record caught up with Haight as he began his eighth leg of the journey, when he entered the Tri-City Area at Hartford. He started at the C.R. 687 Bridge north of Hartford and went to Ma N’ Pa’s Country Kettle restaurant on M-140, north of Watervliet, on October 16

This time, Haight had 23 people join him to paddle the river; some were members of the Two Rivers Coalition but some were from the Michiana Paddlers out of Mishawaka, Indiana. David Fox from that group said this is the third time this year that his group is paddling that particular strip of river between C.R. 687 to M-140. He said it is one of the most beautiful rivers to paddle and is relatively clear of debris.

Haight said from Paw Paw to Lawrence was a challenge because of the tree logjams. He said Mike of Paw Paw River Campground and Canoe Livery in Watervliet has done a good job of keeping the river open for paddlers from Hartford to M-140.

On October 24, Haight traversed the river from Ma N’ Pa’s to Bundy Road, northwest of Coloma.

The next leg of his journey, Haight said, would be a short one of about one to two hours and will be from Bundy Road to Riverside.

The last leg of the journey is approximately 12 miles and will take him under I-196, through Sarett Nature Center, past Brown Sanctuary and the confluence with Blue Creek, and then into Benton Harbor. Times for these last two legs will be announced on the Web site.

Haight said he has had some phenomenal weather so far and has paddled nine of the last 11

weekends. A couple of mornings have been very cold, approximately 40 degrees. He said it was psychologically hard to jump out of the kayak and into the water to get around a tree when it was that cold.

The biggest problem he has had were the tree falls he would have to negotiate. One day he said he had to get out and portage around them 10 times.

To see Kevin Haight's comments on each leg of his odyssey, video clips and pictures, go to www.TwoRivers Coalition.org/odyssey.asp; and if you would like to make a donation to help conserve our waters, you can go to www.firstgiving.com/kevinhaight.



STANDING ON THE BANK OF THE PAW PAW RIVER...by Hartford, Kevin Haight prepares to embark on leg eight of his "odyssey." Seeing him off is Wayne Lerdal of Hartford (right) who was the first person to give a donation for the conservation work that will be done with contributions made to this cause. (Angela Stair photo)