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Residents enjoy kayaking and canoeing on the Hockanum River

BY BARBARA ARMENTANO ReminderNews

In late September, six members of the Hockanum River Committee launched five kayaks and a canoe at the Laurel Marsh section of the Hockanum River.



Al Barnett and Art Plante canoe the Hockanum River. Photo courtesy of Jeff Feldmann.

"A perfect day for a paddle," said Jeff Feldmann, a professional photographer who loves this area, which offers lots of wildlife to see and photograph.

A new member of the group, Glenn Pillion, was making his first kayak voyage . Al Barnett paddled the canoe, and Art Plante cast his fishing pole, hoping that the trout were biting.

Manchester offers nine trails for hiking , biking, skating and fishing along the Hockanum. There are seven launching areas to put in a kayak, canoe, raft or other floating devices for paddling or fishing. Motor-operated vehicles are not allowed.

The Manchester portion of the Hockanum River begins at the Quality Inn area in Vernon and ends at the Laurel Marsh Trail on Burnside Avenue in East Hartford. Laurel Marsh has lots of wildlife , especially birds that fly over this area on their migration routes. Many black birds swoop in and out of the marsh, looking for food and enjoying the wind currents. There is an observation platform where walkers can stop and enjoy the wonderful views of the marsh.

At different times of the year, wildflowers bloom along the river. Otters and snapping turtles also make appearances . The roar of water falling over the dam could be heard as the boats neared the end of the waterway.

Feldmann said a trip down the river is a great way to spend a fall afternoon. "No fish were caught, but no one tipped over and fell in," he added.

Most of the land adjacent to the river is preserved as the Hockanum River Linear Park and is owned by various towns or private property owners. Most have granted easements or granted deed to allow hiking trails on both sides of the river.

The ease of kayaking varies, with the most difficult section being along the Oakland Trail. That area of the river contains class I and II rapids, so new kayakers should start in flat water, which is easy to paddle. Inexperienced kayakers should check the length of the river before paddling through.

The HRPC members spend a great deal of time and energy keeping the trails cleared for hikers. Although the area is modest in size, there are some heavily-wooded areas and only the occasional sounds of Interstate 84 highway traffic.

In July 2008, Gov. M. Jodi Rell recommended vacationing in Connecticut instead of traveling out of state, due to the rapid rise in gas prices. The Hockanum River trails are a great place to hike, picnic, enjoy nature or enjoy water sports. There are several Web sites with complete information about trails and water launching areas, such as www.hockanumriverwa.org (Hockanum River Watershed Association) and www.connecticutwatertrailsassociation.com.

Individual trail maps are available at the Customer Service Center in Manchester .