



August 14, 2019

Dear Mr. Adams and Mr. Egelhaaf:

Please consider our proposal for the 2019 Regional Prosperity Microgrant Opportunity.

**Project Overview**

The waterways of Berrien County provide residents and visitors with public outdoor space, recreational opportunities, and social and economic benefits. The *Paddle Berrien Initiative* will provide clean, easily navigable, and publicly available water trails for Berrien County. Water trails are marked routes along rivers which provide passage way for small non-motorized boats such as kayaks, canoes, and paddle boards. The communities of Berrien County have expressed a demand for water trail development.

**Grantee Overview and Partners**

Cornerstone Alliance (CA) is a non-profit organization which focuses on improving economic development and investment in local communities. The development of water trails is a valuable advancement and benefit to communities economically, socially, and environmentally.

Cornerstone Alliance will implement this initiative in partnership with: Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, local municipalities (see list below), Two Rivers Coalition, Friends of the St. Joseph River, MDNR, Partnership for MEANDRS, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, and Berrien Conservation District.

The Berrien County water trails will include:

- Galien River
- St. Joseph River
- Paw Paw River
- Ox Creek
- Hickory Creek
- Dowagiac River
- Lake Michigan coastline

The communities which will benefit directly from the proposed project are:

- Niles/Buchanan
- Berrien Springs
- St. Joseph/Benton Harbor
- Coloma/Watervliet
- Riverside
- Stevensville
- Baroda
- Bridgman
- New Buffalo

**Funding Request and Timeline**

Cornerstone Alliance is requesting \$10,000 for updating, maintaining, and promoting the water trails of Berrien County. The *Paddle Berrien Initiative* is projected to take a year beginning in the fall of 2019 with a completion date set for Dec 2020. The breakdown of where these funds will go are as follows:

Develop and Install Signage – wayfinding and safety	\$3,000
Website Development	\$2,000
Plan Development for state designation	\$5,000

**Project Details**

Because the river already provides the physical trail, in comparison to land based trails, the cost of construction is minimal in comparison. However, improved and new public access facilities, signage and marketing and promotion are needed for effective and safe water trails. The funds from this grant will go toward developing infrastructure along the water trails including the installment and updating of signage and public access sites. Additional funds will go toward education to help promote the value that these water trails hold for the community. Outreach efforts will ensure public knowledge of conservation and preservation actions that can be carried out, allowing the project to achieve long-term sustainability.



### Project Benefits

Through the development and updating of water trails along the rivers of Berrien County, surrounding communities will benefit from economic and social enrichment. Water trail development enhances social capital and fosters a sense of pride for the natural features within the county. With efficient and strategic development of water trails, the outdoors can become an accessible space for those of all ages, physical and mental ability, and class to connect, spend time outside, and benefit from physical activity.

Studies have shown the economic benefits that water trails bring to a community, as they attract tourists and new money to their neighboring towns. Outdoor recreation was ranked as the third largest industry by the Outdoor Industry Association, and the outdoor recreation economy grew by five percent during the economic recession from 2005 to 2011. Additionally, paddle boarding is ranked as the largest growing outdoor industry. Thus, development of water trails in Berrien County has the potential to boost the local economy. By developing water trail infrastructure and educating the community about the benefits and uses of water trails, a sense of pride and stewardship for our regional waterways will be cultivated.

### Relation to Prosperity Plan Goals/Opportunities

The requested funds will go toward achieving the project's immediate and long-term goals. The Paddle Berrien Initiative fulfills several of the prosperity plan goals with its environmentally aware, community focused, and economically oriented plan. This project achieves the following Prosperity Plan Goals:

- “Promote existing and support development of new trails and natural areas . . .”
  - This project will include clearing paths for new water trail corridors and improving access points and facilities of existing water trails.
- “Encourage the development of additional public spaces in urban, suburban, and rural environment.”
  - By improving access sites, providing signage, and clearing waterways, water trails will become a significant public recreational facility.
- “Encourage a culture of learning.”
  - Increased education and outreach efforts will provide the public with opportunities to learn about their surrounding natural environment. Public outdoor recreation will allow children and adults alike to discover the beauty and community benefits that local rivers provide.
- “Develop infrastructure that can be sustained financially and environmentally over the long term”
  - Through community engagement, efficient management, and partner support, cost of upkeep will be reduced and environmental integrity will be upheld.
- “Maintain or improve environmental quality”
  - Increased involvement and attention to the waterways throughout the county, will ensure environmental awareness and integrity.

The long-term goals of the *Paddle Berrien Initiative* are to increase investment in infrastructure, improve the ecological health of the rivers, and encourage the community to take pride in these corridors and make them a desired destination throughout Berrien County. Taking this stance on the project allows for sustainable and efficient management of the water ways and facilities. Cornerstone Alliance hopes that this cooperative model can be applied to other areas for water trail development and management.

Sincerely,

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