

## **Rancocas Creek Water Trail is Managed by**

Rancocas Pathways, a fully registered 501c3 organization

### **Trail Overview**

The Rancocas Creek is a most unique natural and recreational resource that has long served as one of New Jersey's most important tidal tributaries moving through an urban landscape. Comprising some 360 square miles, the Rancocas Creek Watershed serves multi-use needs of nearly one million residents residing within a half-hour ride of downtown Philadelphia-Camden. Yet, four well-placed public landings help connect oxbow channels and confluence or "Wishbone" of Rancocas Creek's north and south branches.

Found in the midst of a remarkable eye-catching tranquil setting, local residents and a steady stream of visitors transition from an urban to more holistic natural environment. They enjoy encounters with the Garden States "Wishbone's" wide open spaces, big sky's, abundant wildlife cohabitating with nearly 400 years of maritime heritage. This emerald-green ribbon winding through Burlington County represents the heartbeat of an emergent Rancocas Creek Greenway, an amazingly scenic and remote natural refuge situated just beyond the busiest commercial-transportation corridor on the East Coast. It is little wonder Rancocas Creek, and the array of public parks, to include the exceptional Rancocas State Park (with nearly 1200 acres), represent a blue-green string of jewels "hiding in plain sight" for the enjoyment of thousands calling South Jersey "home" and for all those hoping to discover, or rediscover, the 'garden' in Garden State.

Trail Length	Cumulative Water Trail Miles
12 miles Tidal “Wishbone” (phase 1)	12
8 Miles Tidal Main Stem (phase 2)	20
60 Miles Non-Tidal creek waters (phase 3)	80

### **Mission Statement**

Rancocas Creek Water Trail unites individuals, families, and communities to the Rancocas Creek’s recreational, economic, ecological, historical, and cultural values. Rancocas Creek’s Tidal “Wishbone” is the apex focal point for year-round recreation and sporting activities. Rancocas Creek's “Wishbone” boosts local economies that adds a richness and breadth to historical and cultural events along the Rancocas Creek tidewaters. The Rancocas Creek “Wishbone” enhances public access to 60,000 local residents, the larger community of South Jersey and for visitors to the Mid-Atlantic region. All ages and all abilities are able to enjoy the "Wishbones" multi-use activities along the Rancocas Creek tidewaters. The “Wishbone” promotes year-round diversity to public access to all socioeconomic groups who walk along its diverse park lands and protected open space areas, who enjoy exemplary fishing and wonderful, bucolic, peaceful tide-water kayaking. The “Wishbone” enhances educational opportunities for all age groups especially youth.

The goals of enhanced public access on the Rancocas Creek Water Trail “Wishbone” are to cultivate sustainable local economies, facilitate year-round diverse multi-use recreational access and opportunities, to support the relationship between health and recreation, to nurture physical activity, to highlight the collaborative spirit of communities and foster workable partnerships that enriches a healthy community as a garden to grow by highlighting heritage, culture, natural beauty and historical significance to residents and visitors alike.

## **Long Description**

Rancocas Creek Water Trail (RCWT) provides public access to the entire 360 square mile watershed and South Jersey's picturesque Rancocas Valley. New Jersey Pine Barrens National Reserve headwaters push the Rancocas Creek West. Three main streams, North, South and Southwest Branches, join at the Tidal "Wishbone". The Wishbone weaves together the North and South Branch water trails. The main stem flows west to enter the Delaware River. RCWT "Wishbone" is a natural treasure hidden in plain sight.

NJ's great polygon of green and its associated tidewater oxbow channels are the salient natural feature of the communities of Mt. Holly (founded 1677), Westampton (founded 1703), Hainesport (founded early 1700's), and Lumberton (founded 1683).

Mt. Holly's North Branch Water Trail allows paddlers to experience lively municipal parks and explore meandering oxbow channels passing through a National Historic District. Mount Holly Mill Dam caps the North Branch "Wishbone" before flowing through meandering, serpentine tidal woodland marshes and backwaters. The 1941 Army engineers Mount Holly Flood Bypass Channel froze in time these patterned oxbow channels. Now paddlers enjoy the eclectic, thriving, and vibrant village of Mount Holly. Cedar waters blend w tides to flow past old stone walls, a hand-dug mill race, over a unique tidal weir and down around creek side entities for commerce and refreshments.

Passing Timbuctoo, a documented stop on the Underground Railroad, a graveyard of African American Civil War soldiers and the site of the 1860 Battle of Pine Swamp and skirted by Burlington County's Long Bridge County Park storied backwaters, the North Branch passes under Horsehead Point, the eastern terminus of the Rancocas State Park's Bluewater Trail. Inside the State Park, hikers stroll along forested creek banks while paddlers float along. Long Bridge Park's wonderful vista overlooks the "Wishbone".

The North Branch “Wishbone” channel passes the State of NJ’s Rancocas Natural Area. This provides permanent protection to the largest remaining stands of wild rice in New Jersey. Its unique location drives home “Leave No Trace” paddling principles. Rancocas State Park’s Bluewater Trail flows into 1,252 woodland and tidal marsh acres. At low tide, remains of mid-1800’s sand barges, creek tug-boats and sailing vessels attest to the Rancocas Creek maritime heritage.

Waltzing w tides, sandbars, currents and winds join the Bluewater Trail confluence of the North and South Branch. Here the apex presents open tidal water paddling. The Wishbone’s confluence is a wonderful outdoor fusion of geology, hydrology and open space.

Traveling the South Branch past Hainesport’s public boat launch completes the traverse of the Rancocas State Park Bluewater Trail. Paddlers skirt remains of 1800’s industrialization and maritime heritage and Hainesport’s Creek Turn Pottery public access site prior to reaching Lumberton Township’s Water Trail. South Branch vibrant wild rice tidal marsh oxbows are accessible via kayak. Free gated access is found at Lumberton’s public launch. “Wishbone” tides carry a paddler through the village, steeped in maritime and Americas heritage. The water trail passes under marl banks from which fossilized remains of Mosasaurs have been removed. Here at the junction of the Rancocas Creek’s South West Branch and the South Branch the “Wishbone” Southern border is reached.

Rancocas Creek Wishbone migratory ecosystems anchor on maritime heritage that harbors rare and endangered species. The “Wishbone” is well known for tidewater fishing. Seals are not strangers. Rancocas Creek marshes are an urban stop-over for migrating bald eagles, falcons, ospreys, warblers, glossy ibis, herons’ egrets and more.

RCWT “Wishbone” is a public asset to the public and paddlers alike that promotes individual, physical, and emotional health. Active collaborative conservation programs engage youth and citizens that are the future of the RCWT “Wishbone”. Students from local schools and Rowan and Richard Stockton University are involved in creek clean-ups, conservation programs and heritage surveys.

Gateways to year-round recreation water trail towns support the “Wishbone” transformative renaissance. Recreation and sports sustain a resurgent local commerce. The Wishbone’s narrative highlights the past, present, and future to visitors and residents. Rancocas Pathway’s, a 501c3 organization manages the “Wishbone” “Paddle Safe” program. This community-oriented injury control program anchors multi-use safety.

Forged at a crucible of civic partnerships RCWT gets people outdoors, involved in conservation and helps improve water quality. Trail markers indicate way-points and landings. Associated activities extend into hiking and mountain biking trails in Long Bridge County Park and Rancocas State Park. Public bathrooms are found at the Rancocas Nature Center and at Hainesport’s public landing. For those wishing to camp along the burbling “Wishbone” tidewaters, contact Mt. Holly’s recreation department. We extend an invitation to “Paddle Down”.

## **Best Management Practices (BMP)**

### **Recreation Opportunities**

Paddle trips on the “Wishbone” are varied. They run from 1 km (Mount Holly’s Oxbow Paddle circuit) to 12 miles in length (Mount Holly on the North Branch to Lumberton on the South Branch). Measured in time - 1 hour to 5 hours. Recreation and sports opportunities include exploration of tidewater heritage and natural landforms in the form of kayaking, hiking, relaxing, star-watching, mountain biking, jet skiing and motor boating; permitted camping along a cedar creek and Mill Pond, wildlife viewing, exploring tidal backwaters and marshes, nature photography, and viewing and experiencing a corner of New Jersey, “Hidden in Plain Sight”. Non-guided and Guided kayaking excursions are available on an hourly and daily. Eco-Link excursions facilitate hands-on, up close and local education and diverse interpretive information on the “Wishbone” unique natural environments, tidal ecology, heritage and communities.

Private liveries, individuals and groups canoes and kayak trips w at times associated shuttle services support non-motorized kayak excursions on and along the “Wishbone”. 4 rustic public launches allow access to various segments of the Rancocas Creek’s “Wishbone”. Launches are free. Paddlers are encouraged to support local creek side business in Mount Holly, Westampton, Lumberton and Hainesport. Donations are encouraged, complimented w the sale of Jersey Fresh Rancocas Creek watershed agriculture produce and sponsored outreach programs help defray the insurance costs of the Rancocas Creek Water Trail.

The “Wishbone” is multi-use. Paddlers can expect seasonal interactions w jet skis, motor-boats, folks fishing, hunting and trapping. Stay alert when paddling, report any issues to the New Jersey State Marine Police or local police departments.

It is documented that on the average 1,700 paddlers are found on the Rancocas Creek Water Trail “Wishbone” during summer paddling season of June through September. These numbers are growing w greater number of visitors found during September, October and November. Spring months are also seeing an increase in use. Documented visits to Melpine Landing inside

Rancocas State Park are encountering an influx of paddlers. Lumberton's Canoe Trail annual Fall Float brings over 2,000 people onto the South Branch tidewaters in a single day. Each summer the kids of Mount Holly's summer recreation spend Friday morning's out and about the "Wishbone". These experiences on the "Wishbone" bolster Township school's curriculum. Here kids, parents, school administrators, teachers, paddling volunteers and local businesses support a unique interaction sustained on the principles of a Healthy Community.

In addition, motorized vessels account for approximately 2,500 visits each year along the "Wishbone". Due to the popularity of free access to Rancocas Creek tidewaters via the "Wishbone" that allows motorized vessels to reach the Delaware River Rancocas Creek marinas document waiting lists for berths that stretch out to 5 years. When the Rancocas Creek Water Trail is promoted during Fall and Spring there are robust corresponding number of paddlers.

Continuing a recreation heritage that is well documented to the mid 1870's paddlers to the "Wishbone" are not just local. Organized groups from throughout the Mid-Atlantic region are visitors. New Jersey's Outdoor Club of South Jersey, Delaware Valley, Lehigh Valley and regional outdoor clubs hold frequent paddle excursions. Continuing the American Canoe Associations heritage to the Rancocas Creek "Wishbone", documented to the late 1880's, local, state and regional ACA groups paddle the Wishbone regularly. Paddlers enter the "Wishbone" after concluding a paddle on Burlington County's North Branch Canoe Trail or from the East via the Main Stem and Delaware River. Since the inception of the Rancocas Creek Water, there is a well-documented increase in kayakers along the Rancocas Creek "Wishbone". Local retail sporting good stores attest that kayak sales have increased in relation to folks paddling the "Wishbone". It is fully anticipated that the trend of public use/access along the "Wishbone" will increase.

Attachment - List of organizations and company's providing livery services, rentals, shuttles and guided tours along the Rancocas Creek "Wishbone".

## **Conservation**

For New Jersey and the Mid-Atlantic megalopolis, the Rancocas Creek “Wishbone” is tucked away in a hidden corridor of South Jersey’s wet, wild and wonderful tidewaters. Public Access to the “Wishbone” is by 4 different public landings on 2 different tidewater channels. These public launches on the Rancocas Creek Water Trail are the most common means of access to the “Wishbone” Because the “Wishbone” is located smack dab in the middle of the most heavily populated State and is facing large scale development pressures there is an inherent ethos and environmental ethic or common-sense attitude that visitors seems to value the “Wishbones” ecology, peaceful natural setting and the need for conservations strategy’s to protecting it.

Once introduced to the “Wishbone’s” Mill Pond and Race, serpentine oxbow channels, wonderful backwaters, expansive tidal marshes, the confluence and more visitors are generally sensitive to the tidewater ecology and as such invest an ownership stake into the RCWT “Wishbone”. Many volunteers work as stewards along single areas of the Rancocas Creek Watershed around the “Wishbone”. These include and are not limited too local civic, environmental and historic committees. Mount Holly’s Main Street organization and the Townships environmental and historic commission get a special kudo’s tip of the hat for their actions on the tidewaters around Mount Holly Township.

Their actions galvanize others involvement in the “Wishbone” such as the Rancocas Conservancy, Pinelands Preservation Alliance and Pinelands Adventures, local Municipal Utility Authorities, the Burlington County Board of Freeholders and Burlington County Parks, the Rancocas Nature Center, the Rancocas Creek Association, organized fishing and hunting groups, civic groups like the local Rotaries, organizations in schools and universities throughout South Jersey , the Rancocas Valley and more. Informal groups of people also are found among the multi-users of the Creek supporting the tidal waters.

Each of these organizations have people and groups out and about the tidewaters on a regular basis. Local home and land-owners are engaged in issues w the Creek, likewise local business such as the Mill Race Shops in Mount Holly and the “Wishbone” brew pubs and breweries. Theirs is a collective, collaborative blending of action that facilitates the promotion of clean water that supports enhanced public access.

These are positive steps to keep the tidewaters clean. People being on the creek helps them report any activity that is impacting the “Wishbone” ecosystems. Common ground seems to be public access on exemplary tidewaters are as local as local should be. In addition these neighborhood assets of the “Wishbone” paddlers participate in clean ups of the Rancocas Creek tidewaters. Organized Adopt a Creek events and non-organized clean-up events – removing litter and other debris especially after winter and floods that despoil the “Wishbone”.

Multi-Use, a diverse regional demographic and development impact the “Wishbone” causing problems for people, birds and other wildlife. Individuals do their fair share of reporting incidents and helping out those in distress along the “Wishbone”. The combination of a unique paddling environment, multi-use and an emphasis on safe paddling on a regular and frequent basis has created an environment to establish the “Wishbone’s community-based injury control project. Invoking a Haddon matrix of countermeasures in the pre-vent/event/post event phases of incidents “Paddle Safe” crosses multi-use borders forges trust, accountability and responsibility among the many users of the “Wishbone”.

Adopt a Creek principles engage individuals, groups and organizations leading to enhanced public access on the commendable quality of the recreation and sport setting of the Rancocas Creek Water Trail “Wishbone”. Adopt a Creek programs facilitate stewardship, conservation and public access. Modeled on the Access Funds national recognized stewardship program, Adopt A Creek programs have been welcomed by creekside communities. Adopt a Creek events are held year-round and are specifically targeted to a location and or creek community. 3 years ago a single Adopt a Creek event was held. In 2018, 12 different Adopt a Creek events were had throughout the “Wishbone” proper.

Leave No Trace principles anchors the first step of restoring and preserving the “Wishbone”. See infographic.

As a for instance civic engagement on the “Wishbone” are found w passive beaver control that helps thwart and control beavers from housing in the walls and marl banks of the “Wishbone” oxbow channels. Involving 3 different government agencies and discussions w citizens and forums on what do with beaver. It is easier to work w the beaver then fight the beaver. All issues r/t beaver damage are passive in scope and nature.

An area under evaluation is the US EPA Classification of impaired waters on the “Wishbone”. EPA contends impaired tidewaters abutting the distal end of the “Wishbone” apex are from agriculture run-off. RCWT scientific and heritage surveys, backstopped by Stockton’s University’s Marine Field Station investigation on the “Wishbone” brought forth that impaired tidewaters are most likely from the site of the old match factory and phosphorous works.

Preserving the “Wishbone” factors into it the heritage of the creek. Leveraging the industrial past of the “Wishbone” facilitates program content, public outreach and community ownership. From this foundation specific areas of restoring the Creek are undertaken. The primary goal of the RCWT are ongoing biotic and heritage survey’s of the RCWT and identify areas of issues and concerns for further preservation and restoration.

## **Education**

“Education is Fun, Naturally” stewardship programs directs civic engagement along the RCWT “Wishbone”.

Rancocas Pathways goal is to manage the “Wishbone” as a natural resource for educational opportunities. Our objective is to promote, preserve and educate citizens about the Rancocas Creek’s “Wishbone’s” communities maritime heritage, it’s distinctive oxbow channels, ways a tidewater ecology enhances water quality and how improved public access supports healthy multi-use recreation and sports. For example, RCWT volunteers provide year-round kayak instruction and paddling events throughout the “Wishbone”. Volunteers facilitate “Kidz and the Creek” outreach w Mount Holly’s summer recreation program and w Mount Holly schools. Additionally, volunteers and staff provide collaborative based tidewater focused public programs through Burlington County’s Rancocas Nature Center. Private business on the Wishbone support areas of creek clean-ups, Paddle Safe programs, host forums and provide paddle craft rental and guided and non-guided outdoor excursions. Volunteers of the RCWT “Wishbone” provide information at community events and fairs on the “Wishbone” as a natural local asset.

Volunteers from RP and the RCWT led year-round discussions and events related to tidewater recreation, ecology, heritage and conservation. An annual sponsored Creek Forum is well attended. Topics include and are not limited to “Ice is my Vice” winter ecology, tidewater field science and Leave No Trace paddling. The “Wishbone’s” therapeutic recreational services for those with disabilities, (Have You Heard an Owl Call Your Name) are evolving following the premise of cooperative wilderness handicapped outdoor recreation modeled on the Universities of Idaho CW HOG therapeutic recreation program. Volunteers under the guidance of experienced Paramedics and Registered Nurses act as escorts for individuals either about to or have recently completed medical operations in a rehabilitative and restorative manner. Kayaking w older folks (a ‘Creek Walking’ programs) allows volunteers to gain an organized perspective direct from “Wishbone” old-time residents w knowledge of the Creek’s heritage to then pass these pearls of knowledge onto others.

Learning is Fun, Naturally (c) programs are modular year round outreach and on-water trail program with kayaks being a tool to enhance awareness, gain interest and promote involvement of youth as Creek path finders.

Burlington County Parks Lyceum of Science and Natural History provides a variety of educational programs on the Rancocas Creek and its natural and cultural heritage. The Park System capstone event is a well-attended Fall Float festival. Mount Holly's environmental committee under the leadership of Randi Rothmel have replanted trees along the creek, rehabilitated tidewater buffers and conducted biotic surveys of the North Branch oxbow's in and around Mount Holly. Success of these efforts and actions was witnessed first-hand during the Summer Flood of June 2019 when replanted areas held the tidal creek bank in place. Pinelands Adventures leads guided kayak trips on the South Branch that leave and return to the Lumberton Launch.

Rancocas Pathways is forging partnerships with local school districts to offer STEM related creek-centric activities through the Creek as a natural classroom.

Westampton Township's Timbuctoo holds an annual day long program on issues of the Underground Railroad along the Rancocas Creek, honors a burial site for African American Civil War Soldiers and the presents to the public the evolution of the hamlet of Timbuctoo since 1826.

Rancocas Pathways furnishes education on heritage, oxbow channels, tide-water ecology, conservation, bird watching, paddling and hiking. Under development is a webinar entitled "Rancocas Creek Wishbone's Tidewater Ecology and Cultural Heritage." Each season Rancocas Pathways offers a free day of kayaking and relaxing that advocates stewardship of natural resources, public access and water quality to residents and visitors alike.

The Director of the Rancocas Pathways attends meeting and public discussions w the "Wishbone" communities numerous historical society's and environmental committee's to develop plans for showcasing local history of the "Wishbone", including celebration of 400 years of maritime history. Since the inception of the RCWT volunteers work with community

organizers along the “Wishbone” to help enhance the awareness the “Wishbone” as a local, regional, State and Federal value-added public resource. Rancocas Pathways collaborates among multi-users, organizations and w ad-hoc and formal discussions on the preservation and public education of the heritage elements of the “Wishbone”. One of the objectives of the RCWT is to build in paddlers a focus on personal responsibility and accountability that the ethos of clean water and a healthy community is a garden to grow. A yearly Rancocas Creek Forum and Book Fair is a targeted focus of community outreach that anchors the ownership for the “Wishbone” among local communities.

## **Community Support**

There is demonstrated community, public, individual, business and government support for the RCWT “Wishbone”. Mount Holly completed a Delaware Valley Regional Planning Authority funded Master Public Access Plan in 2016 that spells out public access points and issues for developing creek front areas in and around the Rancocas Creek North Branch tidewaters. Westampton Township though its actions allow natural debris from the “Wishbone” to be composted at the Township compost yard which in turn is used by local farmers to grow crops along the “Wishbone”. Hainesport purchased 25 acres of land on the South Branch for development into a creek centric public access point. Lumberton public canoe/kayak launch is the cornerstone of Lumberton’s official South Branch tidewater Canoe Trail. These actions compliment resolutions of support and endorsements from municipal agencies, organizations and individuals along the “Wishbone” and elsewhere.

Rancocas Pathways is an all-volunteer registered 501c3 organization. Its purpose is to develop and manage the application of the RCWT as an NWT, to promote conservation, and water quality, and assist in the development and implementation of a regional Rancocas Creek Water Trail Community Coalition.

Four public parks along the “Wishbone” specifically have unobstructed water access for kayaks, and of these only one is a ramped boat launch. Placement of ADA kayak launches are being researched at all landings. In 2019 vandals absconded w one ADA launch that was under development. Maintenance at these access points is robust. After floods, seasonally, during the winter, after public events volunteers’ clean landings, remove debris and work w municipality’s and other agencies to sustain public access along the tidewaters.

Vandalism of the “Wishbone” signs, trail makers and at launches is a recent, Summer of 2019 issue. Public education and enhanced awareness are being undertaken along the “Wishbone” both officially and unofficially to thwart such actions.

Burlington County Health Department, and the Rancocas Valley's Mount Holly MUA provide data on water quality on the "wishbone" before, during and after each paddling season. Schools are engaging w curriculum on the "Wishbone". Business likewise. Partnerships are cultivated as more organizations get involved w public access and promoting water quality along the "Wishbone"

Rancocas Pathways interacts w all the municipalities along the Wishbone and their neighborhood associations to gain NWT designation for a RCWT plan. This process became the foundation of enhanced public access that promotes water quality.

Initial focus was on introducing the concept of a water trail to multi-users of the Rancocas Creek. These introductions provide feedback and discussion points on a variety of issues. Listening to individuals and residents along the "Wishbone" provided a distinctive snapshot on the heritage, ecology, character and opinions of each separate community along the Wishbone. This foundation is one of a comprehensive RCWT plan that covers, using basic principles of multiple objective planning, a plan to enhance public access that promotes water quality along the Wishbone tidewaters.

Rancocas Pathways holds on the average 3 community presentations and workshops though out the "Wishbone" each month. The average attendance at such formal and informal programs is about 20-25 people. Since 2015 over 2,500 people have participated in these discussions. Some of these forums take place outdoors on a launch site w folks on jet skis. Social media is the crucible of these interactions. Facebook, twitter, a web site are all experiencing increased visits. Likewise, Facebook sites like "Calling all Kayakers", "South Jersey Kayaking" and others also are seeing an increase in use analytics. Presentations on the RCWT are tailored to the heritage of each Wishbone community. The central theme at these forums is the vision for water trails and a National Water Trail on the Rancocas Valley "Wishbone". All participants are given an opportunity for discussion or questions. Written comment forms provided opportunity for feedback. The interest in the RCWT are overwhelmingly positive.

Community support is the foundation of sustainability. Advocacy for the RCWT is outstanding. As part of the RCWT Plan an objective was increase individual and neighborhood asset maps into community ownership. Water trail towns by their very actions display various levels of interests. This analytic of community involvement is factored into the HERO (Heritage as Opportunity) database. Developed specifically for the RCWT this tool allows participation and evaluates a feedback loop r/t participation in community actions and partnerships.

## **Public Information**

By focusing on the RWCT “Wishbone” the public gains a greater awareness of the differences in heritage, natural history, the role of oxbow channels and lakes and commerce encountered. This narrative of living landscapes are part of the Rancocas Creek “Wishbones’ Maritime Cultural Landscape. A connection between the maritime heritage of the Rancocas Creek is best viewed through the lens of a past of settlement, agriculture, industrialization, the demise of tidewater traffic, the rise of leisure activities and now today year-round multi-use recreation and sport.

The online “Wishbone” mapping portal integrates easily accessible information on access points, venues to get refreshments and meals, and areas of interests throughout the Wishbone.

Art provides the silent tidewater “Wishbone” a voice. Hugh Campbell, Mount Holly resident in the 30’s to the late 60’s captured the essence of the Rancocas Creek “Wishbone” through a prolific collection of landscape paintings. This self-taught artist permanent exhibit is found a short stroll from the “Wishbone’s” oxbow channel up at Robert Mill’s Burlington County’s architectural masterpieces, the Historic Court House, Prison Complex and Wardens House (stone construction completed in 1811). Campbell integrated people, viewsheds and communities w “Wishbone” landscapes. Today viewing his work one stretches and explores vibrant “Wishbone” settings. His creative art naturally, invested in featured seasons one by one as endless beauty, from the lush spring with the sound of its birds, to warm summer sunshine reflecting of the “Wishbone” tides, to the exuberance of the seven-color autumn and winter whispered tides that covers the “Wishbone” all white in a soft gentle blanket. Infographics conveys Campbell’s gentle message of flowing tidewaters.

RCWT relies on social media as the main driver of getting the word out and about. From here discussions arise from multi-use along the Wishbone. Social media connections allow visitors and residents alike direct and immediate daily if not hourly information on Wishbone paddling conditions. A quarterly "Paddle Notes" is widely distributed online. Paddling action alerts are released during floods, ice, high and low water conditions and other issues impacting safe paddling.

The RCWT “Wishbone” is a "green trail". We strive to reach Zero Paper Waste (ZPW). All material, maps, brochures and infographics are available online. Rancocas Pathways forwards material via PDF files or information links to interested individuals and groups. Active participation in the Delaware River Estuary and other environmental and business communities, such as with the Philadelphia Maritime Exchange, the local and regional rotary and other community service organizations, schools, public fairs, pub nights and such allows volunteers of the “Wishbone” to spread the word.

Rancocas Pathways has curated multi-lingual “Wishbone” trip planning information, photos, maps and points of interest on its website ([www.rewnt.com](http://www.rewnt.com)).

While the Wishbone is a one unique tidewater body it is composed of the North and the South Branch, oxbow lakes and its apex the confluence. The “Wishbone” has a Google map that contains points of interest that are near or on the water trail. The points of interest consist of places to eat, shop, sleep or camp, as well as way points of museums, heritage sites, natural areas, ecological points and landings. There are over 112 assets for paddlers to enjoy on the 3 different water trails that make up the Rancocas Creek “Wishbone”. This concentration of heritage allows paddlers to paddle their own adventure. The Wishbone map portal appreciates access points, length of the trail and skill level needed for paddlers. The most popular route is the 6-mile paddle from Mount Holly to Melpine Landing, Rancocas State Park. This paddle traverses passes through the Mount Holly Historic District and down past Timbuctoo, Westampton, skirting Long Bridge County Park backwaters past the Rancocas State of NJ Natural Area, into the broad expansive wild rice marshes and down into the leafy, great lawn landing at Melpine.

Safety is important with multi-use on the tidewaters. Besides the community based “Paddle Safe” injury control program one will find links to the U.S. Coast Guard, and the NJ State Marine Police and current weather conditions. When planning paddle trips on the “Wishbone” the Map portal highlights a variety point of interest. The website is an ever-changing repository information about the “Wishbone” water trails. A mobile version of the website can be accessed smartphones.

Pathways has a created using a collaborative community process the “Wishbone” activity map brochure that highlights areas of interest and suggested routes that can be downloaded from the website. The brochure offers up paddling tips and important local information. The map brochure can be attractively displayed, as it shows all the Wishbone in entirety. The website is a great source of information for those seeking paddling opportunities along the “Wishbone”. The scope and span of “Wishbone” on-site trail markers expands. Volunteers place signage that marks water access points and water trails. “Wishbone” access points require physical improvements like parking, proper walkways and restrooms.

## **Trail Maintenance**

Collaboration is the mother's milk of the "Wishbones" water trail maintenance. Involving the municipalities along the "Wishbone" along w various civic groups, schools, business, entities and informal clean-ups volunteers are crux.

Municipalities and the State of New Jersey Rancocas State Park are the responsible entities for maintaining public access boat landings to the "Wishbone" Using established Adopt a Creek principles "Wishbone" volunteers engage local community groups in litter cleanup, debris removal and beautification at public access points, in partnership with these local government agencies and entities.

Melpine Landing sits squarely in the middle of Rancocas State Park. NJ State Parks are developing plans for infrastructure improvements at this access point including a hard-packed gravel road, and improved access to the launch area that will be designed, constructed and maintained by incorporating sustainability principles. Local construction and farmers have pledged resources to help enhance access at Melpine Landing. A Friends of Melpine Landing, a 501c3 organization is undergoing a review for possible status as an official NJ State Parks Friends organization. The 4 kayak access points along the Wishbone compliment access and commerce through proposed improvements based on patron use.

In-season weekly if not daily litter and debris sweeps of the "Wishbone" take place. Monthly "Wishbone" clean-ups take place. Rancocas Pathways works to instill into the multi-users of the "Wishbone" a sense of ownership to "leave no trace. Businesses along the "Wishbone" stress zero impacts, the Mt. Holly Environmental Committee (and others) conduct community-centric creek clean-ups and drain painting campaigns. Local water company's and the County health department forward results of water tests of safe paddling.

When increased turbidity hit the “Wishbone” in 2018 the source was traced to a local construction site. Discussions ensued and erosion fences erected. When a local creekside landowner cut down trees on the Creek discussions addressed issues leading to NJDEP involvement w the landowner voluntarily placing creek bank restoration measures in place. When people were leaving long-line fishing rigs in place (highly illegal) discussions did not work w persons. The local game warden initiated a discussion and no more long-line fishing. This then got informative the persons doing such action children got involved in Mount Holly’s summer creek related program. Now that family is one of the strongest advocates for keeping the creek clean.

Local MUA's and environmental committees up and down the “Wishbone” are doing creek bank clean-ups and education to keep the creek bank cleans. When a local homeless encampment sprung up, subsequently removed by law enforcement, volunteers from the “Wishbone” helped remove debris from the site. When tree's blow down and block the channel, volunteers remove such natural debris.

Community historical societies are turning into a wealth of information on the “Wishbone”. Distilled down being present at the Burlington County Historical Society's monthly round tables allows a wonderful venue to exchange ideas, enhance one’s education and helps w program development. Ignoring local knowledge is counter-productive to the “Wishbone” narrative.

Adopt a Creek events are particularly successful for cleaning the channel, removing debris, sprucing up a landing, facilitating discussions w landowners and the like. The main landing for the RCWT “Wishbone”, Melpine Landing, access road was washed out in summer freshet. Working w landowners, the local farmer who farms the land, the state and county, others and volunteers the culvert is being replaced. By keeping the issues contained under the umbrella of an Adopt a Creek event “Wishbone” access is maintained in all areas of the Creek.

RCWT “Wishbone” issues w PWC and motor boats hinges on local shops and marina’s catering to such craft. Here “Wishbone” volunteers stress to their customer's a clean machine does not dump oil in the creek. Boaters and PWC help w creek clean-ups and to some extent local owners facilitate machines running clean. Discussions about electric powered and or bio-diesel fuels are on-going. Noise, no-wake principles and associated impacts are discussed in an environment of mutual respect and honesty.

In the wintertime landings areas and kayak access points are kept clean by paddlers who live in and around such landings, or landings convert to iced slides into the Creek. Don’t get us wrong it’s not a huge rosy picture on the Creek. Much is needed to reduce the impacts of man on the Creek. This includes future ways to involve more and more people w the Creek. The yearly Rancocas Creek Forum is but one example of sustainable civic engagement.

Leave no trace is the foundation principle of access on the “Wishbone”.

As the scope and scale of the “Wishbone” enlarges so to do the responsibilities of maintaining the “Wishbone” grow. Nourishing involvement from volunteers requires a huge dollop of creativity. Check out an Adopt a Creek event and creek clean-ups for the various ways public interest is maintained.

## **Planning**

The Rancocas Creek Water Trail “Wishbone” Plan is a template of using grass-root organizational principles combed into multiple objective planning principles to cultivate a sustainable community focused diverse coalition in support of the NWT application. The plan is and will and does change on a regular basis.

Rancocas Pathways hydrogeological investigation of the Rancocas Creek “Wishbone” focuses on heritage/historical aspects and multi-use of the “Wishbone”. The plan factors in ecology, geologic factors; oxbow channels and lakes, topography and morphology. Photogeological techniques allow “Wishbone” volunteers to ascertain geology, soils, soil moisture, vegetation, land use patterns and other multi-use features. This info is condensed down to areas of awareness that lead to enhanced water quality. Paddlers are prompted to take bags w them and take out what others leave behind.

A general principle of planning is to involve all parties that impact the “Wishbone” and vice-versa. Multiple purposes and multiple projects can lead to a counter-productive confusion where nothing gets done. Using established multiple objective planning analysis that factors in a single resource (the Wishbone) that feeds, supplies, agitates multiple outputs and products. Surrogate worth trade-offs anchor community involvement of public access and promoting water quality on the “Wishbone”

Volunteers are developing virtual field trips along the “Wishbone” that allow multi-users of the Rancocas Tidewaters to see and learn about the features of the water trail online. This planning tool supports the development and management of online geospatial content for real-time smartphone apps that will enable paddlers to gain information about trail features and events while on and about the “Wishbone”

Mt. Holly allows free public access to the “Wishbone”. Volunteers conduct free kayak lessons for the summer recreation program. Lumberton opened a kayak ramp on the Rancoas Creek, Wishbone volunteers help at the Lumberton Float Fest. Tradeoffs enhance public access.

Evaluations of issues and actions along the Wishbone navigate to optimizing multiple use, economic analysis, environmental /social assessments that balance economic, environmental and social benefits, costs and values (North r., Editor).

The current social media structured ad-hoc informal group involving people in the development and management of the “Wishbone” must evolve. As such basing this as a model to plan and develop the future of the “Wishbone” an official water trail planning committee, the Rancocas Creek Coalition, along with various subcommittees (based on Best Management Practices) will meet several times per year to review the Wishbone water trail plan and implement improvements, suggest promotions evaluate concerns to the water trail. Planning timeline over the next 10 years envisions the following Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III.

Phase I – Wishbone Centric. Design and install interpretive trailhead signage at different waypoints and access points along the water trail. Make improvements to access points along the Wishbone to facilitate easier and safer vessel put-in and take-out. Cultivate a website to disseminate information about the “Wishbone”. Conduct various community and issue centric public “Wishbone” water trail events to enhance public awareness that promotes water quality and sustain civic engagement.

Phase II – Expand scope of the “Wishbone” to the Rancocas Creek Main Stem.

Advance public discussions in a campaign to promote awareness of the Rancocas Creek and its ecological value, its heritage and its water trails. Modeled after the formation of the “Wishbone” conduct multiple interpretive small group paddle events along the water trail to educate paddlers about the natural features and cultural history of the water trail.

Phase III will research other areas of the Rancocas Creek watershed for formal inclusion in the Rancocas Creek Water Trail.

### Mapping Toolbox (complete)



Copy and Paste to review Tidal Wishbone Online Rancocas Creek Water Trail Map Portal

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1Tcbs4wXvC3c17WF3gnYrBo23nDldkft&ll=39.99902397065807%2C-74.87269107551265&z=14>

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