



Calling all Kayakers

7th Annual Niantic River Regatta

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By Suzanne Thompson

7th annual Niantic River Appreciation Day

Save the River-Save the Hills, Inc. is welcoming kayakers to get out on the Niantic River this weekend for some fun, music and a chance to win T-shirts, if not a new kayak, at its 7th annual Niantic River Appreciation Day on August Saturday, August 21st. More environmental education activities for all members of the family have been added, according to Deb Moshier-Dunn, vice president of the Waterford-based grassroots environmental nonprofit organization that works to reduce pollution into the estuary and advocates preservation of the Oswegatchie Hills on the East Lyme side of the river.

“We’re giving kayakers a chance to show their solidarity for preserving the last unspoiled and undeveloped, yet still unpreserved salt-water frontage in all of Connecticut,” Moshier-Dunn said, referring to the 238-acre stretch of the Oswegatchie Hills that Middletown developer Glenn Russo has proposed to develop into high density housing. STR-STH has “legal intervenor” status in the court cases that Russo has brought against the Town of East Lyme, which has denied the developer's applications to change its zoning to allow development of the open space.

“This stretch of the river is a great place to see the herons, osprey, kingfishers and other birds in their natural environment,” Moshier-Dunn said. More than 125 people showed up for last year’s event, which is free and open to the public.

This year’s regatta is planned for Saturday, Aug. 21, starting at 10 a.m. with a parade of decorated kayaks and a nature-themed scavenger hunt on the water. Kayakers are invited to pack their own lunches to enjoy on the river while local guitarist and singer Vince Thompson entertains them from a perch on Point Comfort. Thompson, who draws inspiration from Merle Haggard and Hank Williams and mixes in rhythms of jazz and rock & roll, is no stranger to the water, having worked many years as a deck officer aboard large ships before settling in Connecticut.

The annual “braggin’ rights” kayak races for commemorative T-shirts starts at 1 p.m. At 1:45, a drawing will be held for a kayak and paddles; this is open to STR-STH members and regatta volunteers. All participants are eligible to win other prizes, including gift certificates donated by local businesses. There also will be kayak safety clinics and STR-STH membership and Niantic River Watershed information booths. Regatta T-shirts and other STR-STH gear also can be purchased.

STR-STH, which operates the DEP-funded marine sewage pump-out boat for boaters on the river, will provide a portable potty on land for the kayakers.

Seasoned kayakers looking for a day-long paddle can launch at the kayak platform in Cini Park, under the bridge in Niantic, on the East Lyme side, or Mago Point, Waterford, and come three miles up the river to in front of 47 Oswegatchie Road, Waterford. Paddlers who want to put in closer to Point Comfort and the Hills can call Moshier-Dunn at 860-444-9247 to register for limited parking. Rain date is Sunday, Aug., 22; watch STR-STH’s Facebook page for day-of updates. See www.savetheriver-savethehills.org for more details.