

OTTERTAIL



Photo by Chad Koenen

Hank Kohler will follow the Leaf River during the early part of his canoe trip to the Gulf of Mexico this summer. Kohler will start his canoe trip in East Leaf Lake and finish in the Gulf of Mexico approximately 70-80 days later.

FROM EAST LEAF TO THE GULF

location and go as far as I can go to the south.”

So starting sometime in early June, Kohler is planning to leave from the same location on East Leaf Lake he left 42 years ago to go north, and this time head south to the mouth of the Mississippi River. While he reached out to his partners from his trip 42 years ago to see if they would be interested in reliving their experience once again, Kohler said the group politely opted against making canoe voyage to the south.

Growing up, Kohler and his family would often visit Beers Lake, in what is now Maplewood State Park, where they would go fishing rain or shine. Kohler joked when a person comes from Iowa, and has only a week in the area, a little bit of rain won't stop a person from going out on the lake to go fishing.

It was during one of those fishing trips that his dad sparked an interest in Kohler that would take him on an international canoeing trip to Canada.

“One day my dad asked me if I knew where this water goes too. I said the Mississippi and he said ‘no this water goes north,’” said Kohler.

In 1979, Kohler, his brother Keith and friends Rich Wiebke and Dennis Weidemann decided to head north from East Leaf Lake just outside of Henning to the York Factory at the Hudson Bay. The once in a lifetime 1,300-mile trip featured a surreal adventure of fun, imagination and out-back camping. They fished, camped and had a chance to follow the old fur trading route from Otter Tail County to Canada, which included the Otter Tail River and Red River of the North. Their story was even retold in Weidemann's book “The Water Goes North.”

“Our goal each day was to stay warm, stay dry and

“ I have to do something so that people that come after me can do those same time of things. I just want to safely paddle this river and help them raise some money.

- Hank Kohler of his love of fishing and wanting to give back to nature through a canoe trip

find something to eat,” said Kohler.

The group decided against seeking sponsors for the trip or to raise money for the adventure, yet wanted it to be about fun and fishing. Kohler said the group decided early on that if they weren't having a good time they wanted to have the option to quit at any time.

“We decided this is for the fun of fishing,” he said.

While his last trip was about having fun and enjoying nature, Kohler is hoping to give back and make this trip count for something extra special. Kohler is hoping to raise money for the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium and the Take CAARE program.

Kohler isn't setting a goal for his fundraising effort, but is just hoping his trip will help to further the efforts of the Take CAARE Program, which stands for Take Conservation Action through Advocacy, Research and Engagement.

The program is based in Dubuque, Iowa and teaches individuals and communities how to take responsibility for their local watersheds. They have also spearheaded several endangered species projects, with the hopes of saving critically threatened fish, amphibians and fresh water mussels. Kohler said the program reaches approximately 5,000 children each year and helps to get them excited about protecting the environment. Before leaving on his trip, Kohler said his goal is to raise

awareness for the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in Iowa and hopefully raise some money for their cause.

“I have to do something so that people that come after me can do those same time of things,” he said of his love of fishing and being outdoors. “I just want to safely paddle this river and help them raise some money.”

One important part of his trip is that it will be totally self funded, so any money he raises for his trip will be donated to the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium and the Take CAARE program.

“This is totally self funded. All and any expenses for myself and my paddle buddies we will take care of,” said Kohler.

Kohler expects his trip to the Gulf of Mexico will take anywhere from 70-80 days, of which he said will be an adventure to remember.

He is planning to camp as much as possible on his trip and while he is canoeing most of the trip himself, he will get help from a number of friends and family members who will be joining him on the trip at various points along the way.

“If you look at it, you get a sunrise and a couple of hours later you get a sunset. In-between you get an adventure,” he said. “I'm retired now, what else am I going to be doing.”

One thing that will make his trip a bit easier this time around is the advancement

of technology. When he made his trip north 42 years ago, Kohler said his group used an actual map to help them navigate along the way. This time he will utilize a cell phone with GPS on it so he will have an idea of what the weather will look like down the road and help him know where he is at all along the way.

Kohler is planning to update people about his adventure along the way on Facebook at @one water #one4water.

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COVID-19 RELIEF FUNDING

continued from 2

of the funding available. The remaining 34 organizations that were not in this priority group received funding because they demonstrated a minimum 20 percent decrease in revenue as a direct result of a COVID-related executive order. Grant recipients strongly represented communities throughout Otter Tail County, with 17 of the 21 zip codes in Otter Tail County represented.

“This program made it evident again that our business community is resilient and dedicated to serving their communities. We've heard from many organizations that this funding will help get them to what we're hopeful is the finish line of the pandemic,” said Amy Baldwin, Otter Tail County's Community Development Director and Executive Director of the CDA.

David Schornack, CDA Board Chairman and Director of Business Development and Sales at Ar-

vig is optimistic that the grants awarded will help stabilize businesses and nonprofits and help them with continued investment and success in their communities.

“The CDA board remains committed to investing in and supporting the recovery of businesses and nonprofits in Otter Tail County. This grant program demonstrated that commitment to being partners to our business community through the challenges of the pandemic,” he said.

By sharing information related to financial assistance, vaccine availability for businesses, and workforce recovery, the CDA will continue to be a partner to navigate the road ahead.

For any questions about how Otter Tail County and the CDA can support the business and nonprofit community, contact Amy Baldwin at cda@co.ottertail.mn.us or (218) 998-8050.

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Answers to Entertainment games

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