

Web site for outdoors people

Need a map of Van Buren Lake in Hancock County for a fishing excursion?

Or how about finding a deer processor down in Hocking County for the upcoming shotgun season? Or the location of bait shops, archery ranges, or license vendors in any corner of Ohio?

If it's outdoors — from gun shops and taxidermists to fishing guides and lakes or bird-feeders to binoculars — you can find it at a new on-line Web site www.thenaturalresource.com.

This is an idea — a one-stop shop for everything outdoors in Ohio — whose time has come and it is an idea come true thanks to Eric Kraus, an energetic, innovative 30-something entrepreneur from Waterville.

Kraus recently launched The Natural Resource, which he bills as "the state's only map-driven Yellow Pages for outdoors enthusiasts ... This is a pet project that just got bigger and bigger and bigger."

About eight months ago he started investigating "the technology that would make it happen," adding, "there was a niche that isn't being filled in Ohio. What I don't want to do here is reinvent the wheel."

The Internet, he notes, is fine, but it often offers too much information, or poorly organized information that leaves the individual browser bewildered and frustrated. Web sites too often are cluttered with outdated, irrelevant material and other clutter.

Kraus regards his on-line service as "the missing link between outdoor recreation enthusiasts and the businesses that support them."



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You can spend all afternoon just browsing and sampling the staggering array of resources and related information packed into the site. The broad categories initially include fishing, hunting, camping, boating, biking, and golf — yes, golf. Kraus' research said it is a good fit with the other activities. Other categories coming next year may include such specialties as birding sites, for example.

As for site reliability, Kraus said he and his staff are constantly refining without overwhelming outdoors folks with too much of the wrong kind of stuff. "It's got to be accurate, it's got to be [regularly] updated."

He initially spent well over 1,300 hours collecting data for the site.

"We've filtered and cross-referenced hundreds of public directories and outdoor-related data bases to help create a one-stop, information-rich tool focused on a state that's rich in outdoor recreational offerings. Its navigation is point-and-click simple, and its topographic mapping and aerial photography features provide a new and exciting level of detail that will help even the most avid enthu-

siast."

Currently The Natural Resource catalog includes more than 4,000 Ohio businesses, services, and public access areas.

Under the hunting category, for example, are more than a dozen subcategories that include license vendors, game check-stations, guides, gun clubs, butcher shops, taxidermists, and public access areas, among others. You navigate by region.

A biology/environmental science graduate of St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn., Kraus is a Toledo area native and avid angler, waterfowler, and outdoorsman since childhood.

He has collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, worked seven years as an environmental consultant, and is a board member and stewardship chairman of the Black Swamp Conservancy, the Perrysburg-based land trust that is doing so much to preserve agriculturally and ecologically significant land in the region.

He has had startup help from brothers Joe Kraus, a graphics designer, and Tom Kraus, a business development specialist. Harten Enterprises provided technical assistance with Web site development. "My background is biology, not IT," said Kraus.

He expects to sustain the site by selling subscriptions to businesses, which in turn will be able to advertise or just include name, address, and telephone number.

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