

THE WINNING DESTINATION

Indiana's Biggest Kayak Fishing Tournament Hitting the Water In Hamilton County

Indiana's most popular kayak fishing event is coming to the White River August 12 when the Indiana Kayak Anglers hosts its annual White River Tournament.

Lines will be in the water from Anderson to the north all the way to Riverside Park near downtown Indy, meaning every inch of the White River flowing through Hamilton County is in the tournament boundary.

"It's our most popular event. The White River is a great fishery," said Matt Gibson, one of three directors of the Indiana Kayak Anglers. "It's very clean and has what's close to world-class smallmouth bass. There's good public access and its central location really helps us as well."

In past years the White River kayak event has neared 100 competitors. Gibson said that for the White River to reach that number was "historic and amazing." He said between 40-60 anglers makes a good field and between 15-20 qualify for September's championship event. The White River tournament in August draws fishermen from all over Indiana as well as neighboring states.

The popular White River event issues a cash prize for the winner and payouts for the top 10% of the tournament field. For example, if 60 anglers enter the tournament, the top six finishers will win a cash prize. There are also bonus winnings for the day's biggest bass caught. The winner is determined by the cumulative length of each angler's top five catches. The fish in the White River are a mix of largemouth and smallmouth bass.

The Indiana Kayak Anglers club competes from April to September each year, mixing in events in rivers and lakes throughout the season. An angler can enter with a kayak, canoe or standing paddleboard. Anything that's marketed as a kayak is an eligible vessel. The Indiana Kayak Anglers is free to join, so anyone can compete. There are tournament entry fees for each event, but no membership dues. An angler can simply download the TourneryX mobile app, set up a profile and hit the water.

The White River event this month is a catch-photo-release tournament, meaning the fish are released back into the water. After a fish is caught it is measured with a Ketch measuring board, and then a photo is taken and uploaded on an app to verify it was caught that day. The fish is then released back into the water.

Some anglers compete in the entire season, and some just come in for a couple events. The group awards an Angler of the Year winner, which is won by whoever has the most points in their three best events. An angler can qualify for the championship by winning an event or by placing in the points standings. The championship is in September, with the site not announced yet. The reason for the location secrecy is to prevent anglers from scouting the location and learning the good fishing spots.

Gibson says keeping the mix between lake fishing and river fishing is important strategically. A good fisherman needs to be able to fish both a river and a lake well enough to compete in the points standings.

“You have hard-core river guys where they spend the majority of their time fishing. You have other guys more comfortable on a lake. But to win angler of the year you need to be able to fish well in a river and a lake.”

Since the White River is the season’s biggest tournament, the competitors also will take some time on land to have a cookout, tell stories and bask in the camaraderie that comes with the sport.

“That’s another great thing about kayak fishing. We compete against each other, but we enjoy each other. It’s just a really strong fishing event.”