

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Betsy Clayton
Lee County Parks & Recreation
(239) 533-7474
bclayton@leegov.com

CANOE & KAYAK MAGAZINE ANNOUNCES SOUTHWEST FLORIDA RACES

FORT MYERS, Fla., June 27, 2011 – A new competition for paddlers announced by *Canoe & Kayak* magazine is expected to draw Olympic-caliber athletes and other skilled competitors to Southwest Florida waters this fall.

The competition will include two races – one for the elite racers and the second designed for recreational paddlers – during the annual Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival, which is Nov. 3-6 on the Sanibel Causeway. More than 150 kayakers, outriggers and Stand-Up Paddlers are expected to participate.

"Fifteen-hundred paddlers already travel from all over North America to attend the Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival. We found this to be the perfect spectator location to bring in some of the world's fastest racers," said *Canoe & Kayak* Publisher Jim Marsh.

The race Nov. 5 will be called the Calusa Classic and will feature a 10-mile course in the waters of San Carlos Bay around the Causeway using the Sound Rowers classification for all paddle craft. Categories for this race include Sea Kayaks, Fast Sea Kayaks and Surf Skis. Outriggers will also have winners in the OC-6, OC-2 and OC-1 divisions. Racers will be broken into two groups: Open (18-45) and Masters Division (46-plus).

The Nov. 6 race is titled the Calusa Dash and is a four-mile competition for Stand-Up Paddlers. Recreational kayakers with boats 18 feet and under also can enter. Organizers expect the Calusa Dash to draw at least 50 SUP racers based on attendance at Southwest Florida's first SUP event this year, The Bay-to-Gulf SUP Race.

Both the fastest kayak and the fastest SUP will be awarded a \$500 first-place prize.

The race director for both the Calusa Classic and the Calusa Dash is Brian Houston, who is well known in paddlecraft racing for his tenure as director of the Captiva Sea Kayak Classic, which ran nine years in the waters off Tween Waters Inn on Captiva. He's been a mainstay in the Florida kayak scene for more than 20 years as a kayak instructor, Epic Kayaks representative, Southwest Florida-based naturalist and guide.

"Getting Brian involved was the key to putting together the race," Marsh said. "He's got the connections, the know-how and the attitude to turn this into one of the world's great kayak races. And that's our goal."

For Houston, the new race event offers a chance to collaborate with *Canoe & Kayak* and Lee County Parks & Recreation, which coordinates the Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival and is assisting with the races.

"The Calusa Classic and Calusa Dash will be a celebration of paddle sports because it includes not only kayaks and surf skis but outrigger canoes and SUPs," Houston said.

Registration for the Calusa Classic and Calusa Dash will be handled by the non-profit Florida Paddling Trails Association, which is assisting with the 2011 festival. Online registration will be available in July. Entry fees for the Calusa Classic are \$70 per racer or \$200 per OC-6 team. Entry in the Calusa Dash is \$45 per racer.

Since 2006, the Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival has offered seminars, guided trips, demonstrations, local races, a photo contest, a fishing tournament and social events for paddling enthusiasts. This year's event will include a film festival, on-water instruction and Stand-Up Paddleboard activities. The festival serves to highlight public parks along the Calusa Blueway Paddling Trail, a 190-mile marked-and-meandering saltwater trail that spans the coast and inland rivers along The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel.

For more information on the races, visit www.CalusaClassic.com. For information on the festival, visit www.CalusaBluewayPaddlingFestival.com.

###