

Forest Preserves of Winnebago County Rivers For Canoeing

RIVER MARKING SYSTEM

A river marking system has been implemented to aid in the reporting of emergencies. When using Winnebago County rivers, please note your location using the mile markers along the banks of each river. When summoning help in an emergency, provide the mile marker number and the name of the river to help police and rescue personnel respond to the proper location. R=Rock River, K=Kishwaukee River, P=Pecatonica River, and S=Sugar River.

SUGAR RIVER

Fast with riffles and deep pools, the Sugar River flows through “wild” country of wooded banks and secluded backwater areas. Other attractions include Colored Sands Nature Preserve, and Sugar River Forest Preserve near Shirland, which provides 80 sites for camping. Good fishing for smallmouth bass, walleye, northern pike, and channel catfish. Nelson Road canoe launch in Wisconsin to Two Rivers Forest Preserve in Shirland which is 15 miles and takes approximately seven hours. In Wisconsin at Sugar River and County T, you have to portage down the grass bank. At Beloit/Newark Road in Avon there is a gravel road at the bridge and also a DNR parking lot with a concrete boat ramp. The Sugar River Park of Rock County is posted closed 10 p.m. - 5 a.m. The canoe launch from Colored Sands Forest Preserve to Two Rivers Forest Preserve is 7 miles and takes approximately three hours.

PECATONICA RIVER

Flows from the Pecatonica Wetlands Forest Preserve at the Village of Pecatonica past Pecatonica River Forest Preserve, Trask Bridge Forest Preserve, and Two Rivers Forest Preserve up to Macktown Forest Preserve where it joins Rock River. Boat ramps in Summer Park and at the Winnebago County Fairgrounds on both sides of dam in Pecatonica. The launch on Farwell Bridge Road over Pecatonica River in Stephenson County has a gravel road to the bank. Going from the Pecatonica River Forest Preserve to Two Rivers Forest Preserve is 16 miles and takes approximately five hours. Going from Trask Bridge Forest Preserve to Two Rivers Forest

Preserve is 10 miles and takes approximately four hours. Pecatonica River Forest Preserve has a 15 site campground and boat ramp.

KISHWAUKEE RIVER

This rocky-bottomed stream flows through a beautiful, wooded valley and, with the exception of Belvidere, New Milford, and Cherry Valley, has little urban development near its shores. Except during heavy rainfall, the stream is relatively clear, and in the spring you can see smallmouth and rock bass hovering over their beds. Many rocky riffles and gravel bars characterize the 30-mile course from Belvidere, and during the last three miles to the mouth, the stream becomes abraded with many channels--some navigable and some not--but all are interesting and wild. You can pull out at Hinchliff Memorial Forest Preserve, a block upstream from the mouth. Fishing on the stream is excellent. Going from Baumann Park in Cherry Valley to Kishwaukee River Forest Preserve is 4 miles and takes approximately two hours. An easy two + hour trip is from the canoe access at Kishwaukee River Forest Preserve to the ramp at Atwood Park (Atwood Outdoor Education Center). There are other canoe launches at Espenscheid Memorial Forest Preserve, Oak Ridge Forest Preserve (south branch). There are four canoe access launch sites in Belvidere and Atwood Park in New Milford. The Kishwaukee River south branch from Oak Ridge to Blackhawk Springs is definitely for only canoes--narrow, winding, trees down, and so shallow at times it is only inches deep where you have to get out on foot. After crossing under Perryville Bridge into Blackhawk Springs (posted on walk bridge), the south & north branches join and the river becomes deeper and wider. After entering Kishwaukee River Forest Preserve under Blackhawk Road, it becomes shallow again with islands and there is a “Rock” bridge going across the river at the Sportsmen’s Park.

ROCK RIVER

Nearly all of the river’s 165 miles provide quality canoeing if a few simple rules are followed. The river has low head dams at Rockton, Rockford, Oregon, Dixon, Sterling (two dams), and Milan. Either plan your trip between a single pair or plan to portage around them. Never paddle near the

dams. The Rock River sports the largest population of northern pike in Illinois. Diversity is its key, with strong currents, calm pools, turbulence below the dams, shallow sloughs and islands. Atwood Homestead Forest Preserve, Hononegah Forest Preserve, Macktown Forest Preserve and Rockton Village all have boat ramps. Hononegah Forest Preserve has a 63-site campground.

FOR YOUR PERSONAL SAFETY AND THE PRESERVE’S PROTECTION

Remember...no matter what activities you intend to enjoy, proper planning and footwear will make a big difference in your personal comfort. During the summer season, insect and tick repellents are another must. **To avoid having your vehicle locked inside our gates, keep in mind that all preserves open at 7:00 a.m. and close ½ hour after sunset. In emergencies call 911.**

The rivers of Winnebago County are public bodies of water controlled by the state. Once you set foot on Forest Preserve land from the rivers (posted by white boundary signs) you are subject to provisions of the Forest Preserve District “General Use Regulations”. A violation of any of these regulations may result in the revocation of privileges of the responsible individual(s). A copy of these regulations is available by calling the FPWC Headquarters at 815/877-6100. Use good common sense on when to go on a canoe trip. During spring/flooding season the current may be too swift for safe operation and during the summer/drought season. The rivers could be low enough in spots you would have to portage over.

For maps showing locations of forest preserves, visit our website at www.winnebagoforest.org. For free maps and more information on canoeing/camping, call the District office at (815) 877-6100.

REGISTRATION

Non-motorized watercraft, canoe, kayak, paddle boat, or sail board, in Illinois are no longer required to be titled/registered in Illinois, unless the vessels have a motor or sail. You are now required to purchase a 'Water Usage Stamp' for \$6.00 per calendar year for each of the first three vessels, and \$3.00 each for any additional vessels. Please note: an agent fee of \$.50 will be charged per vessel. The stamps are good for one year. They expire on December 31st each year. Your Stamp can be adhered anywhere on the interior or exterior of the vessel as long as it is visible. Visit the Illinois Department of Natural Resources website to find vendor locations for purchasing water usage stamps. www.dnr.illinois.gov

Canoeists on Illinois rivers receive permission from landowners whenever utilizing private property. Many of the streams in Illinois are bounded by private land. Any stream that is not legally public and navigable is private and can only be used with permission from the landowners. Obtain permission from landowners before launching, take out, camping, picnicking, portaging, or parking vehicles on private land. Remember that your conduct will greatly influence the landowners attitude toward other canoeists.

CANOEING TIPS

- Plan your trip in advance.
- Know where all dams and other hazards are located.
- Know how long the trip will take.
- Know where your take-out point is and have a car waiting there.
- For overnight trips, know where public campsites are available.
- Find out river conditions before you go--high water can be dangerous.
- Don't trespass; get permission from the landowner.
- Carry out and dispose of all litter.
- Keep all supplies in water-tight containers.

RECOMMENDED CANOEING GEAR

- 16-foot or longer canoe with one or more spare paddles.
- Canoe repair kit.

- Two 25-foot tie ropes or stretch straps for securing supplies.
- Life preserver for each person required.
- Extra flotation devices if canoeing in rapids or fast water.
- Sponge or container for bailing.

RECOMMENDED PERSONAL SUPPLIES

- Fishing gear.
- Sweater or jacket.
- Extra change of clothes.
- Binoculars.
- Camera.
- First aid kit.
- Hat with sun visor.
- Sunscreen.
- Insect repellent.
- Tennis shoes.
- Rain poncho.
- Plastic garbage bags to protect your supplies and to carry out litter.
- For overnight trips your group will also need: tent, sleeping bag, ground cloth, tarp to protect gear, flashlight, cooking unit and utensils, matches in waterproof container, two buckets and soap (biodegradable) for washing dishes, food and drinks.

CANOEING SAFETY

- Portage around all dams.
- Don't overload your canoe.
- Each person should wear a life preserver.
- Know how to swim.
- Do not drink untreated water from rivers--use public water supplies.
- Do not carry firearms. It is illegal to shoot a rifle or handgun into or across any river in Illinois.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Some rivers have a lot of downed trees and will require careful maneuvering.

The Forest Preserves of Winnebago County is committed to enabling all to enjoy forest preserves and invites people of all abilities to discover the benefits of recreation at our sites, facilities, and programs. If you need special accommodations in order to access a preserve or facility, please contact the ADA coordinator by calling FPWC Headquarters (815) 877-6100.



CANOEING



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Our Mission: The Forest Preserves of Winnebago County is dedicated to protecting, conserving, enhancing, and promoting Winnebago County's natural heritage for the environmental, educational, and recreational benefits of present and future generations.