



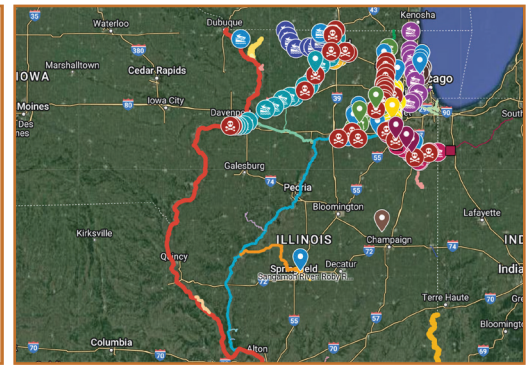
The Illinois Paddler

The Newsletter of the Illinois Paddling Council



Interactive River Map

By far, the most frequent question we get is “where can I paddle in Illinois?” We’ve now gone live with what we hope will be the most comprehensive and interactive statewide paddler’s map of Illinois waterways. Now available on our website [HERE](#), this map remains a work in progress and will require “crowdsourcing” to be as good as it can be. Take a look, zoom around and if your river isn’t here, let us know with as much information you may have about launch sites, blockages, points of interest, shuttle services and anything else of interest. Contact James Tracy about adding to our map.



Illinois HB 1568 “Water Rights” Bill

Our “water rights” bill, HB 1568 is washed up for the 2023 General Assembly Legislative Session. Significant opposition with highly misleading messaging coupled with an insufficient showing of strong and unified support combined to sink this effort for this year. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources continues to be oddly unsupportive of an initiative that actually supports their mission. The Illinois Farm Bureau is opposed despite the fact that this bill impacts agriculture and farming operations minimally, if at all. Stay tuned for details on an all-out organizational and educational effort to pass this bill in 2024!



Canoecopia

In early March, several of us staffed an IPC display booth at Madison’s Canoecopia – the largest retail show and conference devoted to paddlesports in the nation. We hosted near-continuous traffic of people interested in learning about paddling in Illinois and several that already do. Our lowhead dam simulator, which convincingly demonstrates the hazards of these dangerous features of too many Illinois rivers, was a consistent crowd draw. We enjoyed connecting with friends old and new including Chicago Adventure Therapy, Urban Rivers, Will Collins the “Buffalo Roamer,” River Action (sponsor of “Floatzilla”), the Coast Guard Auxiliary, not to mention our friends at the Prairie State Canoeists and the St. Charles Paddling Club and others too numerous to name. Join us next year!



Paddling the Fox River

By James Tracy

The Fox River is one of the crown jewels of the state of Illinois. Spanning 202 miles from Menomonee Falls, WI to Ottawa IL, the Fox River unites many of the western Chicago suburbs. This river forms the tri-cities area and Fox River Valley. It is well known to Chicago-area residents, but has also been featured in Hollywood movies as well. If you haven't visited it before, it should go on your list!



Wisconsin has roughly 80 miles of the Fox. The river backwaters begin in a swampy area by Menomonee Falls. The Fox quickly grows and helped form the waterside communities of Waukesha, Tichigan, and Burlington. It should also be mentioned that there is a Wisconsin Fox River up near Lake Winnebago and Green Bay. This is a different Fox River altogether.

Shortly after crossing over the Illinois border, the IL Fox River forms the Chain O' Lakes, consisting of Channel Lake, Lake Marie, Bluff Lake, Fox Lake, Grass Lake, and Pistakee Lake. The river exits the chain by Johnsburg, and starts to move south. It is a popular stretch for power boats. The lakes and river maintains their depth yearound, largely built up due to dams in McHenry and Algonquin. This section requires a water usage sticker, even for paddled boats. It is managed by the [Fox Waterway Agency](#).

Once you get downriver of the chain of lakes, there's a south-flowing stretch that takes you through Algonquin, Dundee, Elgin, St. Charles, Geneva, and Aurora. This stretch can be difficult due to frequent dams. 12 dams total in roughly 60 miles, essentially one every 5 miles. Fortunately, most of these dams have well established portage trails that help encourage paddling the stretch. A few towns have very long and challenging portages, including Elgin, South Elgin, St. Charles, and Aurora.



In Yorkville, there used to be a notorious dam, upriver from IL-47. It was rebuilt to still have a dam on the right side of the river, an island in the middle, and a whitewater course on the left. It now has better boat launches and a good portage path on river left. The whitewater course is called the [Marge Cline Whitewater Course](#), and is maintained by the City of Yorkville

On the Fox River that consists of this many miles, you can bet there are many great paddling trips. My favorites include:

Algonquin to Elgin: 11 miles/3-4 hours

Montgomery to Yorkville: 10 miles/3 hours

Yorkville to Wedron: 26 Miles/5-9 hours, but there are shorter, more manageable sections of this stretch.



The lower Fox begins after Yorkville. It is a 36 mile stretch to Ottawa, with just one dam in Dayton. This stretch also features the Dells, the most scenic 4 miles on the entire river. This section has a few public boat launches early on, but after Millbrook, all launches are private and paid until you get towards Ottawa. The water level is lower here, so there isn't much in the way of power boats, just the occasional fishing boat.

The Fox River ends when it merges with the Illinois river in the waterside town of Ottawa. The Illinois River goes on to flow over 200 more miles, and joins the Mississippi near St. Louis.

I personally know of just one person who has paddled the entire Fox River. [Jenni Schiavone \(of Friends of the Fox River\) completed a 10 day trip from start to finish in September of 2022.](#) As the river has many dams and speedboats, I don't necessarily recommend a trip of that nature to most.

The Fox River is a gem for paddling. Whether enjoying the suburbia of the tri-cities, the nature of the dells, or the bars of the Chain O' Lakes, the river is a fantastic opportunity for recreation. I highly recommend that you check it out!

Photos of the Fox River, courtesy of James Tracy.



A view of the shore of the Kankakee River, photo courtesy of James Tracy.

2023 Kankakee Watershed Conference

By Frank Koehler

The Illinois Paddling Council was a proud sponsor of the recently held Kankakee River Watershed Conference. IPC Board Member and Potawatomi Paddlers Association President, Frank Koehler was a co-chair of the conference, and James Tracy, IPC Board secretary, was a panelist.

More than 160 people attended the one-day conference held on Friday, March 10th, 2023 on the Kankakee Community College campus. Issues that were discussed included water quality and quantity, biodiversity, nutrients and agriculture, river recreation, watershed initiatives, and the impact of accumulating sand and sediment in the waterways. Attendees heard from representatives from Aqua Illinois (which provides potable drinking water to the communities of Kankakee-Bradley-Bourbonnais), the regional waste water treatment plant facility, IDNR and the Kankakee River State Park, Cities of Kankakee and Wilmington, Will County Forest Preserve District, State of Illinois and area Farm Bureaus, among others.



Frank Koehler, IPC Board Member, and James Tracy, IPC Treasurer, present at the Conference about the Potawatomi Paddlers Association, and the great benefits that the new IPC interactive map will have for the Illinois paddling community. Photo courtesy of Angel Crawford.

Of critical importance and impact on the watershed is the accumulation of sand and sediment in the waterway. Notwithstanding normal erosion, sand and sediment is largely attributable to the State of Indiana, and its straightening of the Kankakee River in the early 1920's, and the drainage of the Kankakee Marsh in the late 1800's. For more information on the marsh, readers should watch the movie "[Everglades of the North.](#)"

In recent years, the State of Indiana has enacted legislation creating the Kankakee River and Yellow River Basin Commissions. These tax-supported organizations, of which both the Kankakee County Board Chairman and Iroquois County Board Chairman are non-voting members, have undertaken a myriad of initiatives, including stabilization of river banks, removal of fallen trees, reconstruction of marshlands, development of storm water run-off ponds and other improvements which have significantly reduced the volume of sand and sediment in the waterway. It is thought that the Indiana legislation could serve as a model for similar legislation in Illinois, to facilitate addressing issues within area waterways.

Concurrently, Kankakee County, utilizing federal and state funding, is looking to begin sand and sediment removal near the confluence of the Iroquois and Kankakee Rivers, which has impeded boat access to the river, including limiting access of emergency rescue boats. The Will County Forest Preserve District is undertaking sand and sediment removal in the Braidwood area as well.

The Kankakee River runs from its origin near South Bend, Indiana, to the confluence with Des Plaines River near Channahon, Illinois, where it forms the Illinois River. In 2016, the Kankakee River was designated a National Water Trail, one of only 3 rivers in the county with that designation. The Kankakee River is also recognized as one of the cleanest rivers in Illinois.

Flowing for a total of 59 miles in Illinois, the Kankakee River contains three dams and twelve larger tributary streams, including the Iroquois River. The Kankakee River is predominantly a clear shallow stream with gravel-rubble riffles, sand bottom pools and marsh areas along the upper portion. Larger pools are formed by dams at Momence, Kankakee, and Wilmington, as well as by the Dresden Lock and Dam on the headwaters of the Illinois. The Kankakee River is one the highest quality streams in the state, offering excellent sportfishing and recreational opportunities.

A Youtube video of the all-day conference will be available in the near future on IPC's webpage as well as the webpage of the [Potawatomi Paddlers Association.](#)



2023 Illinois Canoe and Kayak Racing For Fun, Camaraderie, Competition *(against yourself or others)*

By Don Mueggenborg

Legends say the first canoe race was shortly after the 2nd canoe was built. In Illinois, the Des Plaines River Canoe, Kayak, SUP (Stand Up Paddleboard) Marathon was first run in 1957. (My first race was 1969).

WHY RACE?

For some it is the camaraderie – being on the river with many other paddlers, telling “war stories” afterward. I have met some pretty interesting people at races.

For some it is the Personal Challenge – can I do it, can I beat the time I did in the last race? It is certainly an accomplishment.

Of course, the ultimate goal in a race is to beat someone else, your friend, your neighbor... or just that guy in the red shirt, or the blue hat. Or to win an award for the best time in your class.

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES

The IPC circuit is 7 races. Championship points are counted for your best four races (one over half) in the same class. Points are awarded with ten points for every first place finish, nine points for a second place finish, eight for third and so on down to zero depending on finish order. A qualified racer has to complete at least 4 out of the seven races (or in the case of this year, six races). If a person competes in more than four, then their best 4 races count for the point total. Points are tallied for the best of four sanctioned races and the person with the most overall points is the overall Statewide Paddling Champion! Trophies are awarded at IPC’s Annual Gathering of the Paddlers, our annual IPC meeting in the Fall.

Races include classes for men, women, mixed, masters, competitive or recreational, sea kayak, recreational kayak, racing kayaks. In some races they will make a class for you if you don’t fit into a class they have.

2023 RACING SCHEDULE

Saturday, May 6 – Current Buster – Fox River, Pottawatomie Park, St. Charles. There are morning and afternoon races, with no extra charge for the 2nd race. They will provide a class for you.

Sunday, May 21 – Des Plaines River Canoe, Kayak, SUP Marathon. Libertyville to Mt. Prospect. The grand-daddy of them all. Usually over 500 boats compete in 21 classes. A long race (18 miles) and a short race (5 miles). Most paddlers are recreational boats.

Sunday, June 18 – IPC Voyageur Landing Race at Voyageur Landing Forest Preserve in Elgin, IL. This is an 8 mile upstream downstream race so no shuttling is required because the race starts and ends in the same location. Total mileage about 8 miles.

Sunday, July 23 – Pontiac Canoe and Kayak Race on the Vermillion River in Pontiac, IL (details for 2023 race are so far unavailable)

Saturday, September 9th - Joe Kowsky Memorial Race on the I&M Canal & DuPage River.

Sunday, September 17 – Vic Hopp Memorial Race on the Fox River at Fox River County Park, near Silver Lake, WI.

Sunday, September 24 – St Charles Canoe Club Fall Classic Race at Ferson Creek Park in St Charles IL. “You bring a boat we will have a class for it.” Short Course is 5 miles and the Long Course is 9 miles. All races begin and end at Ferson Creek Park, no shuttling required.

The IPC is fully powered by our paddler community!

The IPC is an all-volunteer, member supported organization which relies on the generous financial support of paddlers like you! Please keep your membership up to date (which at \$15/year is a DEAL!) and consider an additional donation at the bronze (\$50) or gold (\$100) level or higher, as you are able.

Find this newsletter and other great resources on our website!

Go to illinoispadding.org or follow the QR code to access the River Map, upcoming events, and other paddling resources.

