

Calumet River Water Trail

East Central Illinois

Facts: The term “Calumet River” refers broadly to a system of waterways on Chicago’s far south side and adjacent Indiana that historically drained part of the region toward Lake Michigan. It includes several linked rivers and channels such as the Little Calumet River, Grand Calumet River, and the Cal-Sag Channel (short for Calumet-Saganashkee Channel).

Fish: Largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, catfish, bluegill, crappie, northern pike, carp (non-native), gizzard shad. Improving water quality has helped stabilize fish populations in recent decades.

Wildlife: The Calumet region sits along the Mississippi Flyway, making it important for migratory birds. Common species include great blue heron, great egret, double-crested cormorant, red-tailed hawk, belted kingfisher, mallard, and canada geese. It supports a variety of reptiles and amphibians including turtles, snakes and frogs. Mammals include deer, raccoon, muskrats, beaver and coyotes.

Landscape: A variety of landscapes can be seen including marshes and restored wetlands, prairie remnants, riparian woods. Industrial brownfield areas are undergoing ecological restoration.

Information:

The Calumet Area Water Trails offer diverse paddling experiences through industrial, natural, and historically significant landscapes. Note, the river flows west.

- Calumet River from Calumet Park Boat Ramp to Little Calumet Boat Ramp has industrial traffic, concrete and steel vertical bulkhead walls and powerboat traffic making this place for expert paddlers.
- Cal-Sag Channel runs from Little Calumet Boat Ramp west into the Worth Boat Ramp is also heavily used by industrial and motorized traffic. The section from Worth Village Boat Ramp to the Slough is lined with large stone rip rap making access difficult with the paddlable section ending at Worth.
- Little Calumet River runs from Riverfront Park to the Little Calumet Boat Ramp (8.5 miles) and is ideal for beginners. It follows a beautiful stretch of the river and although the river runs through populated urban areas, its banks are mostly wooded and wildlife is abundant.
- The 7-mile African American Heritage Water Trail runs from Beaubien Woods to the Alsip Boat Launch.

While water quality has improved over the past decades there are still bacteria and other pollutants in these rivers so diligent hand washing and keeping open wounds clean and dry is advised.

Reference:

Openlands - Maps and suggested itineraries

https://openlands.org/explore/paddle-illinois/?_sft_waterway=calumet-area-water-trails

Openlands - African American Heritage Water Trail

<https://openlands.org/projects/the-african-american-heritage-water-trail/>

NPS Indian Dunes - paddling the little Calumet

<https://www.nps.gov/indu/planyourvisit/east-calumet-river-paddling.htm>

