

# Des Plaines River

## Northeast Illinois

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**Facts:** 133 miles (105 miles in Illinois) originating in Union Grove, WI and flowing through Lake, Cook and Will Counties where it meets the Kankakee River west of Channahon. Historically there were several small fixed dams on the river but these have been removed. There is a major dam, the Brandon Street Lock and Dam, south of Joliet.

**Fish and Wildlife:** Fish include bluegill, carp, catfish, rock bass, sauger and smallmouth bass. Mammals including deer, beaver, muskrat, coyote and fox. Birds include songbirds, owls, hawks, a variety of heron and waterfowl. The river is also home to reptiles, amphibians and a variety of invertebrates such as turtles, crayfish and dragonflies.

**Landscape:** The water trail changes its character from a prairie stream in the northern sections to a large urban river and then a major industrial waterway at the southern end.

**Information:** The Des Plaines is a slow-moving river. Paddling is best at higher water levels and the river may be impassable during dry summer months. The river floods regularly, overflowing its banks into adjacent woodlands and resulting in downed trees and blockages so caution is encouraged.

The Lake County and Cook County Forest preserves own a significant portion of the land in the northern portion of the river resulting in scenic paddling and a wild feel to the river. There are several launches (see Lake and Cook County Forest preserve links below) allowing ample opportunities for day paddles.

While the southern half offers few launch sites, of particular note is the historic Isle a la Cache, a Will County Forest Preserve site in Romeoville which includes a canoe/kayak launch and the museum.

The southern portion is mainly a shipping canal and there are safety considerations around the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District at Lockport, industrial barge traffic downstream of the confluence with the Sanitary and Ship Canal of the Illinois waterway and Brandon Locks in Joliet. This makes general recreation use difficult.

### Des Plaines River Canoe and Kayak Marathon:

The river is also home to the second oldest continual canoe race in the United States. The Des Plaines River Canoe and Kayak Marathon was founded in 1958 by Ralph Frese. The event course is 18.5 miles in the northern section of the beautiful river along with the option of a 5.25 mini-thon. There are numerous classes to accommodate people of all ages and skill levels and everyone is welcome to participate.

### Reference:

Openlands including a waterway access map and trip itineraries  
<https://openlands.org/waterway/des-plaines-river-trails/>

Lake County Forest Preserve launches and paddling info  
<https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/recreation/canoe-launches/>

Cook County Forest Preserve launches and paddling info  
<https://fpdcc.com/things-to-do/boating-canoeing-kayaking/#river>

Will County Forest Preserve launches and paddling info  
<https://www.reconnectwithnature.org/activities/canoeing-kayaking/>

Isle a la Cache, Will County Forest Preserve  
<https://www.reconnectwithnature.org/preserves-trails/preserves/isle-a-la-cache/>

Des Plaines Canoe and Kayak Marathon  
<https://www.canoemarathon.com>

