

Lake Michigan

Northeast Illinois

Facts:

There are 63 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline in Illinois. There are numerous public access points and launch sites, but requirements vary depending on the municipality. Many locations:

- Require a daily launch fee
- Require an annual permit
- Charge higher non-resident fees
- Limit access to residents only
- Have seasonal restrictions

Safety:

Paddling on Lake Michigan can be dangerous and is only recommended for experienced sea kayakers with the proper equipment and training.

- Always wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (life jacket).
- Be sure to check the NOAA Marine Forecast before your trip and be aware of changing conditions.
- Be visible - always wear a bright colored and reflective life jacket and clothing.
- Leave a detailed plan with someone on shore that says where you're going, who you're with, and when you expect to be back.
- Paddle within your limits and abilities, don't put yourself in a situation where you feel uncomfortable!
- Watch for boat traffic and avoid shipping lanes - don't assume large vessels can see you.
- Learn re-entry techniques BEFORE you need them - take a safety or skills course so you feel confident you know what to do in an emergency situation.

[American Canoe Association Safe Boating Brochure](#)

Fish: Sportfish include Chinook salmon, Coho salmon, lake trout, and rainbow trout, especially during spring and fall. Closer to shore and around harbors, common catches include yellow perch, smallmouth bass, freshwater drum, and channel catfish

Wildlife: Birds including ring-billed gull, herring gull, Canada goose, mallard, double-crested Cormorant, great blue heron, American robin and red-winged blackbird. Mammals include raccoon, eastern gray squirrel, coyote (increasingly common even near city beaches) and white-tailed deer (more common in less developed stretches). Reptiles and amphibians such as painted turtle (basking on logs), common garter snake and American toad.

Landscape: Along the northeastern Illinois shoreline, especially at Illinois Beach State Park, you'll see sandy beaches and low dunes stretching along the lake, with open water reaching to the horizon, grassy dunes, marshy wetlands, and strips of prairie behind the beach. This is one of the only undeveloped natural Lake Michigan shorelines in Illinois.

In the Chicago area, the Lake Michigan shoreline shifts from natural beaches to a more urban waterfront, with long sandy city beaches backed by parks and skyline views.

Information:

The Lake Michigan Water Trail in Illinois offers a diverse paddling experience ranging from the metropolitan shores of Chicago to the secluded beaches of Illinois Beach State Park. Paddlers will enjoy unique views of Chicago's skyline, coastal bluffs, and globally rare dune and swale habitats.

Please be respectful of private property while paddling and only use designated water trail access sites or public boat launches to access the Lake Michigan Water Trail.

Reference:

Illinois DNR Lake Michigan paddling information

<https://dnr.illinois.gov/cmp/lake-michigan-water-trail.html>

Openlands suggested routes and maps

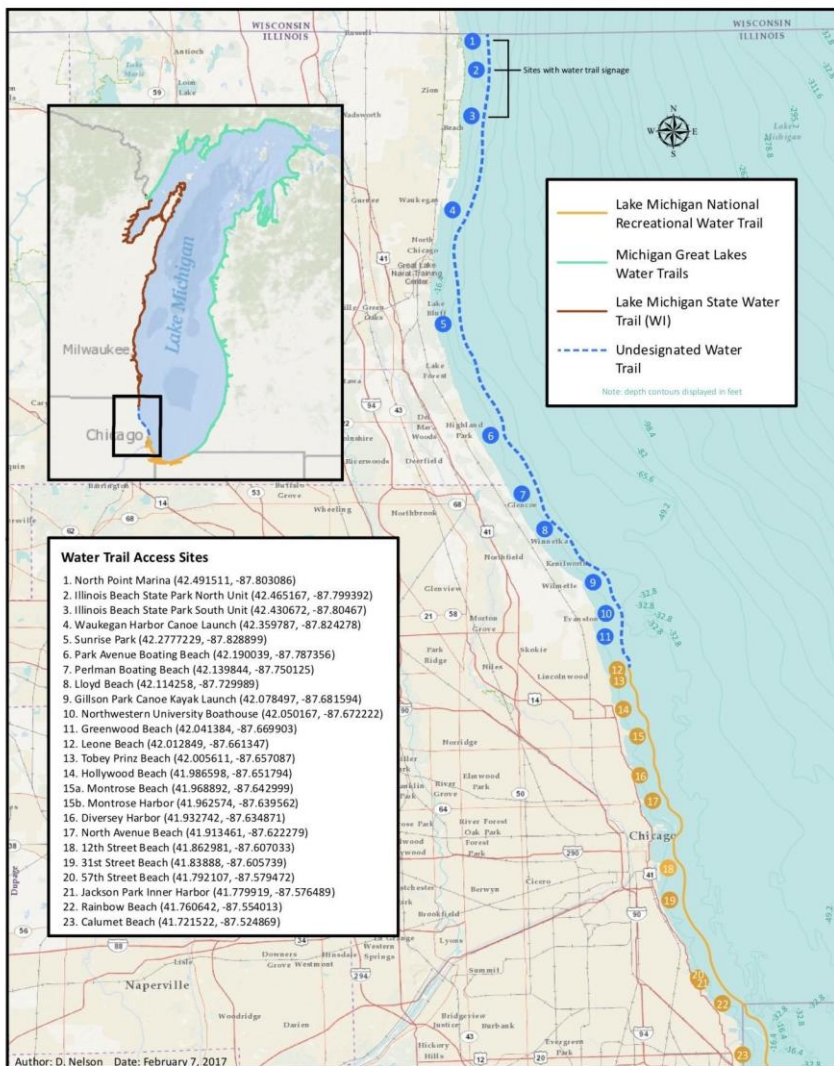
https://openlands.org/explore/paddle-illinois/?_sft_waterway=lake-michigan-water-trails

Chicago Park District Boat Launches

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/facilities/boat-launches>

Illinois DNR launch site map

<https://dnr.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/dnr/cmp/documents/projects/Lake%20Michigan%20Water%20Trail%202022.pdf>



Lake Michigan Water Trail in Illinois

