

# Skokie Lagoons

## Northeast Illinois

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**Facts:** The Skokie Lagoons is a Cook County Forest preserve consisting of seven interconnected lagoons. There are about 190 acres of water, within a larger preserve that includes woodland, floodplain, and upland areas.

### **Safety:**

There are three low dams that help regulate water levels. **DO NOT PADDLE OVER DAMS.** They are easy to avoid but can be hard to recognize if you are upstream from them and unfamiliar with their appearance. Look for the walls on either side and a line across the water stretching from wall to wall.

**Fish and Wildlife:** The Skokie Lagoons provide critical habitat for wildlife despite this area's transition from the "great marsh" Native Americans knew to the manmade lagoons dug out in the 1930s. Migrating ducks, herons, cormorants and mammals like coyote, mink, and gray and red fox all depend on the lagoons for food and habitat. A great variety of fishes including bluegill, sunfish and largemouth bass swim in the waters here.

The inner islands are home to dozens of native species of wildflowers and plants, and hundreds of species of birds including seventy species that breed and feed in the area during the summer months, such as night herons and red-headed woodpeckers to wood ducks and red-tailed hawks.

### **Landscape:**

Located between the Chicago Botanic Gardens and Erickson Woods Forest preserve the lagoons are an oasis of green in an urban setting. The presence of the islands adds a varied paddling experience, including narrower passageways to explore.

### **Restoring Skokie Lagoons:**

Four million cubic tons of soil were excavated to create Skokie Lagoons between 1933 and 1941. Fast forward to the 1990s, when the Forest Preserves removed one million cubic tons of sediment, in addition to approximately 40 tons of carp and invasive species, to improve the health and functionality of the lagoons.

Staff and volunteers continue to do restoration work on the wetlands, uplands and prairies surrounding the lagoons. That includes removing a thick curtain of buckthorn and other invasive species, cultivating native plants and dispersing native seeds to increase biodiversity.

### **Information:**

Skokie Lagoons is one of the Chicago River water trail system's most popular and accessible segments. Managed by Cook County Forest Preserves, the nature preserve includes seven interconnected lagoons, totaling 190 acres. Water flows gently southward from the Chicago Botanic Garden through the lagoons to the Skokie River. Three low dams keep the water levels below the inner islands. The water trail section between the Tower Road put in and Willow Road dam contains one of these unnamed low dams.

The lagoons feature a public boat launch, canoe and kayak rentals, fishing, biking and hiking trails and picnic areas. It is a beautiful location for paddling and suitable for beginners. The Tower Road Boat Launch entrance at Skokie Lagoons features an accessible trailer boat launch for canoes, kayaks, rowboats, sailboats and boats with electric trolling motors. Boat rentals are available from April to October.

**Reference:**

Cook County Forest Preserve information and maps

<https://fpdcc.com/places/locations/skokie-lagoons/>

Openlands

<https://openlands.org/paddle-illinois/skokie-lagoons>

