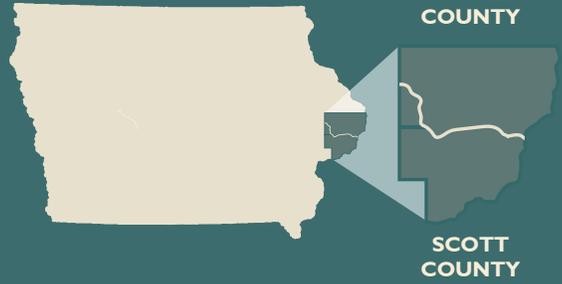


WAPSIPINICON RIVER WATER TRAIL



CLINTON & SCOTT
COUNTIES

The Wapsipinicon River is a meandered stream. That means that private property begins at the high water mark, typically where vegetation begins. The river bed, sandbars and banks up to the high water mark are held in public trust for the people of Iowa. Sandbar camping is allowed on meandered streams.



The Wapsipinicon's meanderings create a number of alternative channels, some of which end in shallow dead ends. Paddlers and other boaters should follow the strongest current when water levels are low.



THE WAPSIPINICON RIVER

meanders and frequently changes its mind as it braids its way through limestone cliffs and lowlands, on its route to the Mississippi River.



Oxbows and other backwaters, islands, and forests form the mosaic of habitats that are a boon for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife in the river corridor.



Great horned owl



The beautiful limestone bluffs and caves of Sherman Park will wow paddlers approaching or departing from Sherman Access. The Wapsipinicon River Education Center is located across the river from Sherman Access. The Center features educational displays and other information about the river and its inhabitants, and is worth a visit.



While progressing downriver, cabins become more frequent along the shoreline. These are mostly owned by people who enjoy the river for boating, fishing, or other forms of recreation. Small white and blue signs designate areas where people have placed their land in Emergency Wetland Reserve Program federal easements, meaning the land will remain undeveloped permanently.

The bottomland woodland of the lower Wapsipinicon River contains some large silver maples, sycamores, and cottonwoods. Look up and see the dancing leaves of cottonwoods as they twist back and forth on flattened stems; the giant, broad leaves of sycamores above their mottled creamy white and brown branches; and silver maple leaves, with silvery-white backsides that shimmer in the breeze.



Sycamores have mottled creamy white and brown trunks and branches.

WAPSIPINICON RIVER WATER TRAIL



KEY

- Beginner Level
- Intermediate Level
- Advanced Level
- City/Town
- Public Land
- Paved Roadways
- Gravel Roadways
- County Line
- Carry Down Access
- Boat Ramp
- Restrooms
- Drinking Water
- Shelter
- Camping
- Fishing
- Rapids

WAPSIPINICON RIVER WATER TRAIL



WAPSIPINICON RIVER WATER TRAIL

-  Wapsipinicon River Water Trail
-  Lost Lake Loop
-  Rock Creek Loop
-  Side Route
-  Portage Trail

NOTE:

Only paddlers with advanced skill levels should use this section. It requires paddling a short distance against the current in a large river (the Mississippi) that may have barges and powerboats, and skill at wayfinding through sloughs by following a map.

Lost Lake Loop offers a more primitive, wilderness experience, but only paddlers willing to commit to the rigorous physical demands it requires should attempt it. This 3-mile section requires a 1/3 mile portage, and perhaps additional short portages depending on water levels.

Call Clinton County Conservation ahead of time for current conditions: 563-357-0759



Jerusalem artichoke



The naming of the Wapsipinicon River is sometimes relayed as Native American folklore. One story features a young maiden named Wapsi and the son of a tribal chief named Pinicon canoeing on the river on the eve of their wedding day. The jealous Fleet Foot sneaks along the shoreline and shoots Pinicon through the heart. As Wapsi jumps to the aid of Pinicon, the canoe overturns. The two lovers drown in the swift current.

Although the story is appealing, the literal translation of “Wapsipinicon” is White Potato River or Swan Apple River - referring to Jerusalem artichoke plants that grow along the riverbank. In communities along the Wapsipinicon, the river is affectionately referred to as the “Wapsi(e)”.

A common snake seen in the water or sunbathing on rocks and logs is the northern water snake. This medium-to-large snake hunts for small fish, frogs, baby turtles, and invertebrates. Although nonvenomous, these snakes can be feisty. They likely will bite and defecate if handled but will swim by and keep to themselves if left alone. They can dive below the water, hang onto a rock or log on the river bottom, and hold their breath for many minutes.



Northern water snake

Massillon Area to Walnut Grove Access to Syracuse Wildlife Area to Sherman Park – 19.2 miles

In the final stretch of river nearing the Mississippi, the Wapsipinicon meanders between Clinton and Scott Counties, sometimes wholly in one, sometimes in the other. Paddlers are engulfed in a broad floodplain of bottomland forest dominated by silver maple. Where hills rise above the river, upland forests are diverse and beautiful. Rocky outcrops of shale, mudstone, and limestone line portions of the river.



Canada geese on a river island.

The meandering river forms oxbow ponds and wetlands, islands, and numerous backwaters. These abundant and diverse wetlands are a boon for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife. Turtles are among the most iconic species of the Lower Wapsi. Snapping, map, painted, and softshell turtles are abundant. Their tracks are common on beaches and mudflats, revealing where they crawled ashore to bask in the sun or lay eggs in the sand. Quiet paddlers may see them slip quickly back into the water from the banks ahead of them, or hear a sleepy turtle plop into the water off a log.

Deer, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, and fox squirrels are among the river wildlife that leave tracks on sandbars and mudflats, revealing their movements along the river. Evidence of beavers and otters are seen in slides on the shoreline and chewed willows left behind on beaches.

From bald eagles and other birds of prey to the smallest swallows and wrens, bird life abounds in the river corridor. Canada geese use the many beaches during the late summer and fall. Depending on the season, flocks of 20 to 60 can be seen and heard, honking noisily as they take flight ahead of approaching paddlers. Shorebirds of many species scurry and probe along the beaches and mudflats. Great blue herons and kingfishers seem to take flight around most every bend. Woodpeckers hammer on the many dead trees in the forested corridor.



Evidence of beaver activity.

Most of the river is forested and without obvious signs of human impact. Cropland only occasionally is visible from the river. Pastureland also makes some appearances and, in places where cattle are not fenced from the river, banks are broken down as the animals enter the water.

There are a lot of dead trees in the river, especially in outside curves. The river's meanderings have created a number of alternative channels, some of which end up in shallow dead ends. Paddlers need to follow the strongest current when water levels are low.

The six accesses in this section vary in quality and accessibility. Massillon and Walnut Grove have good ramps and are well marked. The Syracuse Wildlife Area access takes users to a broad sandbar, and only can be reached from the east, off U.S. Highway 30, and onto an old "Lincoln Highway" section which parallels Highway 30. Sherman Park contains a campground and picnicking area, toilets, and drinking water.

Directly across the river from Sherman Park is the Wapsi River Environmental Center access, with steps leading down to the river. The access is only for use by renters of the facility, and is more than 200 yards downhill from any parking.

The length of this stretch, presence of downed trees in river bends, and occasional dead end side channels, make this entire stretch appropriate for paddlers with at least an intermediate skill level. Beginners may try paddling the shorter 4 plus mile section between Massillon and Walnut Grove or the 6 plus mile section between Syracuse and Sherman Park.



Kildeer

Sherman Park to Allen's Grove Accesses to Gambriel Access – 21 miles

This section begins long the beautiful limestone bluffs and caves of Sherman Park. This karst topography is a magnet for photographers and lovers of unusual plants. Nooks and crannies in the rocks create rare microclimates for ferns, mosses, liverworts and a variety of rare plants. As the river progresses eastward, the limestone lining of the shoreline disappears. The wooded shoreline alternates between broad floodplain forests of silver maples and hillsides of old oaks and hickories, interrupted occasionally by row crops and pastures. In some places, very large, stately sycamores and cottonwoods stand out in the bottomland forest.

Beaches are large and plentiful all along the route, and backwater areas of oxbows and alternative channels provide important nursery areas for insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. The wildlife described in the previous section is even more abundant. Bald eagles are commonly seen in this stretch, as are great blue herons, kingfishers, and ospreys, a testament to the richness of the fishery in the Wapsi.



Green heron

As paddlers travel downriver, cabins become more common. The river is a great draw for people wanting to experience natural beauty, and for boating, fishing, and other recreational uses. Some landowners along the river have put their lands into Emergency Wetland Reserve Program easements. These covenants, identified by small white and blue signs, require wetlands be protected for flood protection and the greater health of the river corridor.

The Gambriel Access has a cement ramp pointed downriver and a nice eddy for paddlers. While no bathrooms or other facilities are provided, it is located near small towns and a restaurant. Allen's Grove Access, about a quarter mile south of the Y52/956 bridge over the river, has a cement ramp and an eddy, perfect for paddlers and other watercraft. Located along the south fork of the river, this section carries substantially more water than the north fork.

The 21-mile length of this section is daunting, and appropriate only for paddlers with intermediate to advanced skill levels. However, Allen's Grove Access provides a stop at approximately the 11-mile mark, and paddling to or from this half-way point provides a suitable trip for paddlers who have at least intermediate experience. The river has many side channels and river bends where the current can take paddlers into a tangle of dead logs. Paddlers are cautioned to choose their routes carefully.

Gambril Access to McCausland Access – 8 miles

The eight miles of river to McCausland Access are a contrast of landscapes. The north side of the floodplain is laced with backwaters, oxbows, sloughs, and dense

bottomland hardwood forest dominated by silver maples. The south side of the floodplain is similarly broad, but covered with cropland, with little to no natural vegetation to buffer the river from erosion. Paddlers will see big woods on one side and big corn on the other.

Cabins are occasionally found along the shoreline, usually in small groups. It is common to see a few “ditty poles” perched in front of a cabin, waiting for catfish to bite.

This section is appropriate for advanced beginners to intermediate paddlers.



McCausland, downriver to the Z30 bridge.

McCausland to Hwy 67 to Mississippi River to Rock Creek Park – 12 miles

Below the McCausland Access, paddlers are fully engulfed by broad floodplain forests and wetlands. Large silver maples dominate the forest, with occasional cottonwoods and sycamores. Large beaches, mid-river sandbars, logs in the water, side channels, and sloughs define the river’s character. Wildlife is abundant, and includes all species mentioned in previous sections. Wood ducks scatter from their hideouts beneath log piles, and geese stand knee deep on mid-river sandbars in groups of 20 or more. Great horned owls slip quietly through the woods. Spring and early summer are especially alive with sounds of frogs and songbirds. Late summer brings the hum of cicadas, so constant that it becomes almost unnoticed.

The relative lack of bridges and roads, and abundant wildlife, make this stretch of river seem especially wild and beautiful. Shoreline trees continually erode along the river, sometimes falling in and blocking considerable portions of the river and side channels.

Some sloughs, like the ones leading into Ben Martinson Wildlife Area, get plugged with logjams, making watercraft passage impossible and an attempted portage around them dangerous. Only expert paddlers with excellent paddling, portaging, and way-finding skills should attempt this. The river divides at what is locally known as Kingfisher Island.

W A P S I P I N I C O N R I V E R W A T E R T R A I L

The smaller channel on the north side of the island leads into the Ben Martinsen Wildlife Area and access. However, because the channel is notorious for downed trees and channel-wide logjams, it is not recommended for even advanced paddlers.

In the last section, the main channel below Kingfisher Island courses a mile to the Hwy 67 Bridge and then another three miles to the Mississippi River. Paddlers must navigate north up the Mississippi, hug the west shoreline to minimize the current, follow the sloughs, and then travel about two miles back into Rock Creek Park Marina and Access. This also is part of the route for the Lost Lake Loop, a challenging 3-mile loop through changing backwater sloughs. Some of these are only available when water levels are high enough. Call Clinton County Conservation for current conditions: 563-357-0759.

Only paddlers with advanced skill levels should navigate this section. It requires paddling a short distance against the current in a large river (the Mississippi) that may have barges and powerboats, and skill at way-finding through sloughs by following a map. Only advanced paddlers, who are willing to endure the more physical challenges of portaging, should attempt Lost Lake Loop. However, for those who are up for it, this primitive, wilderness experience has a lot to offer.

Rock Creek Loop is mostly a series of open, shallow water routes with minimal flow. While barges are hardly a problem here, you may encounter shallow draft watercraft. You also may have to carry-over (portage) an access road in the Sodus Slough section during low water levels; at higher levels you can paddle over it. The only direct access to the loop with parking is by way of Rock Creek Park Access. As long as one remains clear of the main channel of the Mississippi, this section is appropriate for beginners.

BE SAFE OUT THERE!

Keep your trip enjoyable by following these safety TIPS:

- Pack only essentials and keep them in waterproof bags.
- Check the river water levels and currents before each trip.
- Know the weather forecast, including areas upstream, and stay aware of the weather on your trip.
- Make sure someone knows your planned entry and exit points and estimated times.
- Always wear a properly-fit life jacket.
- Expect overhanging trees, logjams, and other obstacles, such as bridge abutments or big rocks. If paddling around them is not possible, get out and portage around them. Grabbing onto tree branches may capsize your paddlecraft.
- Always portage around lowhead dams. Surface appearance can be deceiving. Undercurrents can be strong enough for drowning.
- If you capsize, remain on the upstream side of your boat to prevent being pinned.
- Dress appropriately for weather conditions (including air and water temperatures), and avoid weather and water conditions beyond your skill level.

KNOW YOUR SKILL LEVEL!

- **BEGINNER:** Segments are generally less than six miles. Hazards are few and easy to avoid in normally slow-moving currents. Users can easily access these segments from parking areas, and will not need to portage, except to walk a boat around some shallow riffles or to make the going easier around an obstacle.
- **INTERMEDIATE:** Segments are generally less than nine miles. Users should have ability to recognize and avoid hazards in moderate river flow. The need to portage is rare, but users should be able and willing to carry boats and gear a short distance. Access to the river may involve a short portage, and the launch or take-out may be a bit difficult.
- **ADVANCED:** Segments may exceed nine miles. Hazards are likely and often occur in fast-moving water. The need to portage may be frequent or may involve carrying boats and gear a long distance. Access to the river may involve a portage, and the launch or take-out may be from steeper banks or faster moving water.

BEHAVE AS A GUEST!

- Respect private property. Only use public lands and access points.
- Be considerate of others in your group and on the banks.
- Give anglers a wide berth.
- Never change clothes in public view.
- Never litter. Always pack out trash.
- Do not disturb wildlife.

For more information, visit:

www.iowadnr.gov/paddlingsafety

Photography:

All photographs are attributed to Jim Pease unless otherwise noted.

