The Minnesota River

The Minnesota River, once a vital highway for Indians, explorers, traders and settlers, is now a placid route for canoists. The Minnesota meanders to its conjunction with the Mississippi through a wide valley carved out by the glacial River Warren. Willows, cottonwood, elm, ash, maple and basswood line the banks; oak and cedar are found on the higher hills in the valley.

Below Le Sueur the riverbanks are sandy and eroded. Vines and roots try to cling to the banks with little success. The current sweeps a constant supply of snag trees and sandbars into the river. Gravel bars formed by tributary streams pinch the river at low water.

Wildlife

The Minnesota River is a haven for bird life. Several species of waterfowl and wetland birds use the river corridor for nesting, breeding and resting during migration. Pheasants and gray (Hungarian) partridge find thick cover in the valley floor for nesting and for protection from harsh winter storms.

Fishing

The Minnesota also supports a large fish population. Although carp and other rough fish predominate, anglers can take walleye, northern pike and smallmouth bass in deep pools below rapids and riffles.

Because of possible mercury contamination, keep smaller fish for eating, release the older, larger fish which have a higher concentration of contamination.

People, especially women of childbearing age and children, should strictly adhere to guidelines set by the Minnesota Department of Health. Complete information is available by calling 1-800-627-3529.

Planning a Safe River Trip

A successful river trip is safe. To enjoy a safe journey, you should prepare by acquainting yourself with your route. Choose a distance that is comfortable for you. Water levels can speed up or slow down your trip, get information about water levels from the regional DNR office, DNR website, or DNR Information Center.

Boating Information

• Wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device that state law requires to be on board the craft.
• Bring an extra paddle.
• All portions of this water trail are suitable for motor use.
• Register your watercraft. All watercraft must be registered in Minnesota or your state of residence.

Canoeing on Large Rivers

The wide variety of waters can provide an equally wide variety of hazards to canoeists. Although the Minnesota is often very placid, the current can be quick and powerful when the river is near or at flood stage. Most dangers can be anticipated and avoided. Start your trip with the proper safety equipment. Coast Guard approved personal flotation devices (PFD) should be worn at all times.

Hypothermia, a rapid loss of body heat, has killed many people who have swamped or tipped. Swimming soon becomes impossible in freezing water. Wear a PFD and stay close to shore if there is a possibility that your craft will swamp. Don’t overload your canoe. Snag-ridden waters often are trickier to navigate than whitewater. Underwater obstacles can easily trip a canoe. Watch carefully.

Rest Areas and Camping Sites

• Public rest areas are available along the route to rest, picnic and explore.
• Camp only in designated camping sites, which are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Management of the Refuge involves restoring wetlands, grasslands, and sask savannas, enhancing aquatic plant diversity through water level management, grassland management, exotic species control, and water quality monitoring.

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge is well known for bird watching. Annual migrations funnel hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, songbirds, and raptors through the valley. Other wildlife-dependent recreation uses on the Refuge and WPAs include: wildlife observation, wildlife photography, hunting, fishing, environmental education, and interpretation.

For more information, visit the website at http://midwest.fws.gov/MNValley

Sustainable Ecosystems

Outdoor recreation is dependent on a healthy and attractive natural environment. Sustainable outdoor recreation enables people to enjoy the outdoors without negative impacts on the environment.

Communities working together can improve water resources by promoting environmentally sensitive land-use practices along rivers and throughout watersheds. Natural shoreline buffers improve water quality by filtering out pollutants and sediments.

Healthy and diverse native shoreline plant communities are attractive and provide important habitat for birds and wildlife.

Photos by MN DNR
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