

Tales of Water Trails: St. Croix River

Welcome to 'Tales of Water Trails' presented by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Our guests, Lynne and Bob Diebel, are experienced canoeists and kayakers who have paddled more than 2,400 miles of Minnesota water trails. They describe these routes for other travelers in their two books, *Paddling Northern Minnesota* and *Paddling Southern Minnesota*.

For this series of programs, the Diebels are sharing their insights about Minnesota's state water trails. The Minnesota DNR manages over 4,000 miles of water trails for canoeing and kayaking including the north shore of Lake Superior and dozens of rivers statewide.

Here are Lynne Diebel and Bob Diebel, talking about paddling on the St. Croix River.

Lynne:

In 1968, the St. Croix became one of the nation's first federal wild and scenic rivers. This river is the border between Minnesota and Wisconsin, and from Riverside Landing, out by Danbury, down to William O'Brien State Park, it provides some truly premium paddling experiences, especially for canoe campers.

Bob:

This river has a very wide buffer of natural area along its entire length. It's upstream of where we started, which is really not the scope of the Minnesota paddling book, but the Namekagon River from Wisconsin flows in, and that's another beautiful river to consider in this area.

Lynne:

St. Croix River State Forest and Governor Knowles State Forest in Wisconsin border the river for a great proportion of its length. There are no little towns until you get to St. Croix Falls and the big power dam at St. Croix Falls, but downstream of St. Croix Falls at Interstate Park – which is another milestone in Wisconsin and Minnesota history, because they have a joint state park – you can get on the river again and paddle down to William O'Brien State Park. And that is a particularly scenic paddle.

Bob:

The paddling is relatively beginner level, with a few exceptions. The river is pretty wide, and so deadfalls spanning the entire river would be very improbable. Trees that have fallen in the river can create the hazard of a strainer though, on any river. And that's to be avoided – you do not want to get

near a tree that's fallen into the river, because of the possibility of being drawn into the tree and down under the water by the branches.

Lynne:

Upstream of the Highway 70 River Center – and to help you out with the maps you should go to the National Park Service maps, they have a series of wonderful maps that are available online; you can get copies at the River Center in St. Croix Falls, or you can get copies at many of the landings – but upstream of Highway 70 there's a series of rapids, and depending on water levels, this can be quite challenging. This is where the Kettle and the Snake rivers flow into the St. Croix, and the river in this general area is a little bit wilder than it is on some other reaches.

The wildlife along the way, it won't surprise you to learn, is pretty abundant. There are snapping turtles to see, there are lots and lots of water birds like kingfishers and herons and eagles and red-tailed hawks. You'll see a lot of owls, because it's so wooded and they love wooded regions.

The dam at St. Croix Falls is of course an issue. You want to get out before the dam! It's a huge hydro dam, enormous one.

And when you're in the headwater area up by Danbury and Riverside Landing, the river can seem quite remote. It seems like a wilderness up there.

Bob:

This is a great river to plan a camping trip along. There's numerous campsites, and it's long enough that you can take a multi-day trip and have a great experience camping.

Lynne:

We really love the St. Croix, and this is a river that I think most Minnesotans treasure. Be sure to get out and paddle it.