Online water trail information and maps can be found at mndnr.gov/watertrails.

Des Moines River

The Des Moines River flows through a flat, iron shaped plateau, called the “Coteau de Prairies” by early French explorers. The bedrock is similar to that of the Red River Valley of the north, with generally sedimentary rocks covered by typical glacial deposits.

Stream flow usually peaks in early to mid-April. Heavy rains can cause the river to flood. Because there are few rivers to cause canoeists problems in low water, the level is usually sufficient for canoeing. From the Talcott Lake Dam to the Iowa line, the river drops 135 feet, an average of 1.98 feet per mile.

The Des Moines River has few rapids, and none are more difficult than Class I. Downed trees and logjams can present a hazard occasionally.

From Windom to Kilen Woods State Park. The river valley is bounded by low hills; willow, green ash, slippery elm, and various grasses line the banks. The banks become higher near the park; the river flows between 100-200 foot bluffs covered with oak and basswood forest.

From Kilen Woods to Jackson are increasingly taller hills and bluffs, woodlands crowd the river and screen from view farm buildings and cultivated land.

Wildlife

White-tailed deer, beaver, squirrels, mink, muskrats, wood ducks, mallards, turtles. A variety of bird life exists, including eagles, hawks, bank swallows, baltimore orioles, blue herons and kingfishers.

Fishing

Northern pike, walleye, crappie, channel catfish, yellow perch, black bullheads.

Planning A Safe River Trip

A successful river trip is safe. To enjoy a safe journey, you should be prepared by doing the following:

- Get acquainted with your route. Plan your trip with a map before you depart and advise someone of your plans including planned departure and arrival times.
- Travel with a companion or group.
- Choose a distance that is comfortable for you, most people paddle two to three river miles per hour.
- Wear a U. S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device that state law requires be on board the boat for each person.
- Bring a first aid kit that includes waterproof matches.
- Bring an extra paddle in your canoe.
- Be cautious of river obstructions, such as overhanging and dead trees in the river.
- You must pack out all trash.
- Leave only footprints; take only photographs!
- Be sanitary! Use designated toilet facilities or bury human waste away from the river.
- Respect private property. Stop only at designated sites; much of the shoreland is privately owned. Respect and protect the water and shorelands.
- Respect private property. Stop only at designated sites; much of the shoreland is privately owned. Respect and protect the water and shorelands.
- Bring drinking water. It is only available at a limited number of rest areas. Drinking river water is not recommended, but if you do it must be treated.
- Respect private property. Stop only at designated sites; much of the shoreland is privately owned.
- Be sanitary! Use designated toilet facilities or buryhuman waste away from the river.

Boating Information

- Register your watercraft. All watercraft more than 9 feet in length, including nonmotorized canoes and kayaks, must be registered in Minnesota or your state of residence.
- Not all portions of this water trail are suitable for motor use.

Rest Areas and Camping Sites

- Public rest areas are available along the route to rest, picnic and explore.
- Camp only in designated campsites, which are available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Bring drinking water. It is only available at a limited number of rest areas.

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 shoreline habitat for birds and wildlife.

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