ABOUT THE WATER TRAIL

This section of the river is one of transition, from the wetlands and forests of the Chippewa National Forest, through the town of Grand Rapids, to the lowland hardwood forest of Aitkin County. Along the way you will pass hills that were once piles of glacial debris. The city of Grand Rapids lies at the center of these hills. South of Grand Rapids, the river enters an ancient glacial lake bed where it twists back and forth through the soft soil. Look for white and red pines, oaks, maples, birches and aspens that create a home for diverse wildlife.

This portion of the Mississippi River is flat and slow moving, offering easy paddling with no major rapids. As you approach the town of Grand Rapids, you will need to watch for two dams about three river miles apart. One dam controls the level of Lake Pokegama and the other provides hydropower to the Blandin Paper Company. Both must be portaged. Make sure you know what side of the dam to portage.

TRIP PLANNING AND SAFETY

• Plan your trip with a map before you leave. Tell someone your plans, including put-in and take-out times.
• Travel with a companion or group.
• Most people paddle 2-3 river miles per hour.
• River levels can affect your speed and trip safety. Check conditions at mndnr.gov/river_levels.
• Don’t underestimate the power of wind and waves, especially on large lakes.
• Be cautious of obstacles in the river and avoid overhanging and dead trees.
• Bring clean drinking water and a waterproof container with a first aid kit, waterproof matches and extra clothes.
• Wear a life jacket at all times while on the water.
• Purchase a license for your non-motorized watercraft if it’s more than 10 feet in length. If you’re not from Minnesota, check your state’s watercraft license laws.

WATERCRAFT CAMPING

• Camp only in designated campsites, which are often available on a first-come, first-served basis. State and national forests do allow dispersed camping. Be sure to check regulations before your trip.
• Riverbed camping next to private property is not permitted.
• Stay off private property. Stop only at designated sites; much of the shoreland is private property.
• Be sanitary! Use designated toilet facilities or bury human waste away from the river.
• Follow the rules for firewood. State forests allow you to gather dead wood for a fire, but state parks do not.

RECOMMENDED DAY TRIP

Steamboat Access to Blackberry Bridge Access

• Put-in location: River mile 1,178.9
• Take-out location: River mile 1,170.9
• Length: 8 river miles

Paddle past farmland and wooded river banks. Just downstream of the Prairie River, watch for swallows nesting in the sandy banks. This trip offers easy paddling with no significant rapids. You will find small sections of riffles when the water is low. Stop for a great picnic spot at Sucher’s Campsite if it is unoccupied.

EXPLORE ON SHORE

Schoolcraft State Park
River mile 1,199.5

The Vermillion River joins the Mississippi River here. Camping (fee required), public access and drinking water (no showers) are available at the park. Pull into the boat landing to hike a trail and explore. The park is named for Henry Rowe Schoolcraft who charted the headwaters of the Mississippi River with Anishinabe guide Ojibwindib. mndnr.gov/schoolcraft

PROTECT THE RIVER

Your experience on the river depends on a healthy environment. As you explore the beauty of this waterway, also do your best to protect it.

Protect Your Waters
Before launching...before leaving
• Clean off aquatic plants and animals.
• Drain all water away from the landing.
• Dispose of unwanted bait in the trash. mndnr.gov/invasives/aquatic

Buffer Protection
The Minnesota buffer law establishes new vegetation buffers along rivers, streams and ditches to help filter out chemicals and sediment before they reach waterways. mndnr.gov/buffers

PROTECT THE RIVER

More Information
mndnr.gov/watertrails
• River level reporting
• River conditions reporting
• Interactive water trail map
• Recommended routes
• River rapids definitions
• Virtual tours
Search for outfitters at exploreminnesota.com

This document is available in alternative formats to individuals with disabilities by contacting info.dnr@state.mn.us.
651-296-6157, or MN Relay 711.