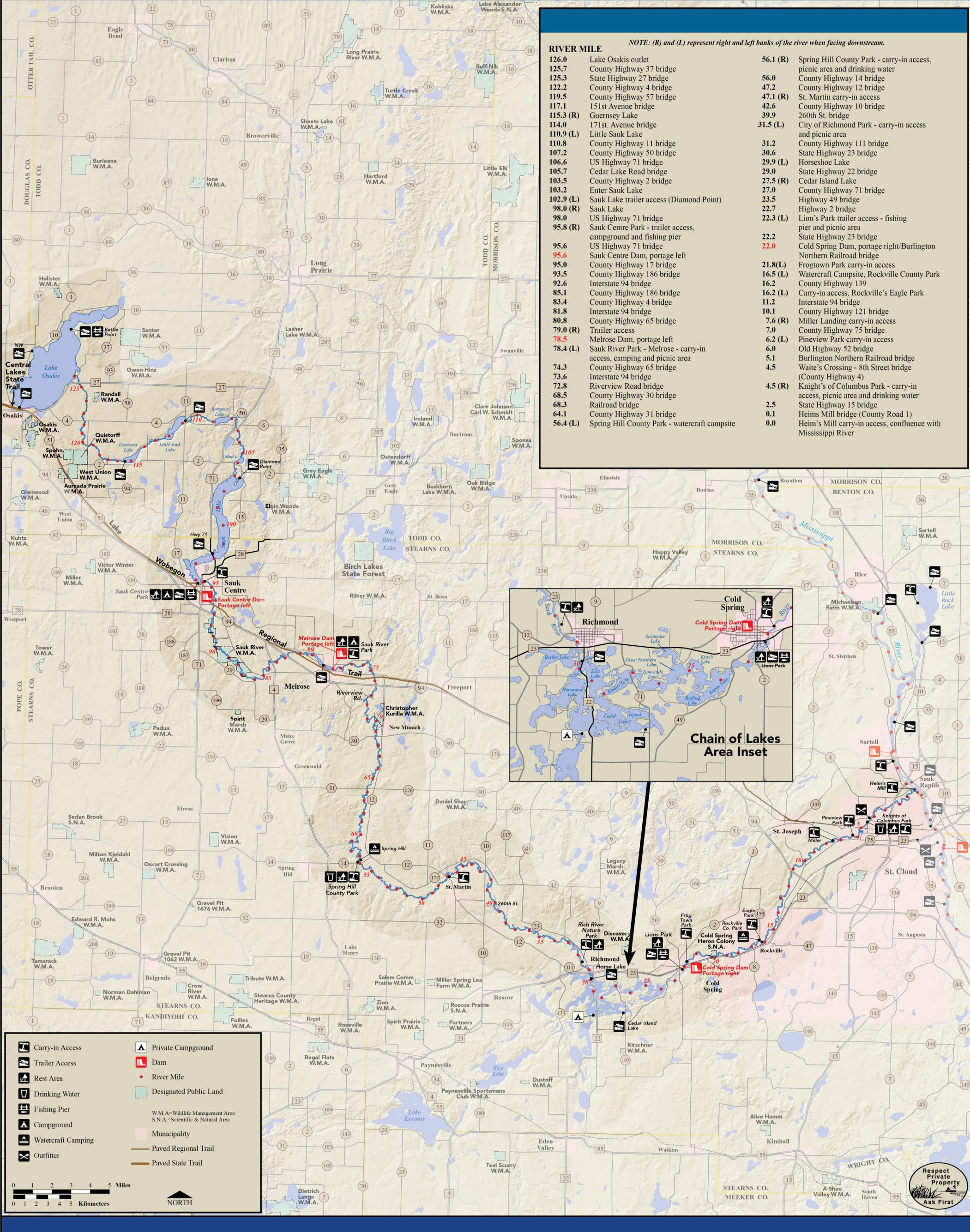


# A STATE WATER TRAIL GUIDE TO THE SAUK RIVER



NOTE: (R) and (L) represent right and left banks of the river when facing downstream.

## RIVER MILE

126.0	Lake Osakis outlet	56.1 (R)	Spring Hill County Park - carry-in access, picnic area and drinking water
125.7	County Highway 37 bridge	56.0	County Highway 14 bridge
125.3	State Highway 27 bridge	47.2	County Highway 12 bridge
122.2	County Highway 4 bridge	47.1 (R)	St. Martin carry-in access
119.5	County Highway 57 bridge	42.6	County Highway 10 bridge
117.1	151st Avenue bridge	39.9	260th St. bridge
115.3 (R)	Guernsey Lake	31.5 (L)	City of Richmond Park - carry-in access and picnic area
114.0	171st. Avenue bridge	31.2	County Highway 111 bridge
110.9 (L)	Little Sauk Lake	30.6	State Highway 23 bridge
110.8	County Highway 11 bridge	29.9 (L)	Horseshoe Lake
107.2	County Highway 50 bridge	29.0	State Highway 22 bridge
106.6	US Highway 71 bridge	27.5 (R)	Cedar Island Lake
105.7	Cedar Lake Road bridge	27.0	County Highway 71 bridge
103.5	County Highway 2 bridge	23.5	Highway 49 bridge
103.2	Enter Sauk Lake	22.7	Highway 2 bridge
102.9 (L)	Sauk Lake trailer access (Diamond Point)	22.3 (L)	Lion's Park trailer access - fishing pier and picnic area
98.0 (R)	Sauk Lake	22.2	State Highway 23 bridge
98.0	US Highway 71 bridge	22.0	Cold Spring Dam, portage right/Burlington Northern Railroad bridge
95.8 (R)	Sauk Centre Park - trailer access, campground and fishing pier	21.8(L)	Frogtown Park carry-in access
95.6	US Highway 71 bridge	16.5 (L)	Watercraft Campsite, Rockville County Park
95.6	Sauk Centre Dam, portage left	16.2	County Highway 139
95.0	County Highway 17 bridge	16.2 (L)	Carry-in access, Rockville's Eagle Park
93.5	County Highway 186 bridge	11.2	Interstate 94 bridge
92.6	Interstate 94 bridge	10.1	County Highway 121 bridge
85.1	County Highway 186 bridge	7.6 (R)	Miller Landing carry-in access
83.4	County Highway 4 bridge	7.0	County Highway 75 bridge
81.8	Interstate 94 bridge	6.2 (L)	Pineview Park carry-in access
80.8	County Highway 65 bridge	6.0	Old Highway 52 bridge
79.0 (R)	Trailer access	5.1	Burlington Northern Railroad bridge
78.5	Melrose Dam, portage left	4.5	Waite's Crossing - 8th Street bridge (County Highway 4)
78.4 (L)	Sauk River Park - Melrose - carry-in access, camping and picnic area	4.5 (R)	Knights of Columbus Park - carry-in access, picnic area and drinking water
74.3	County Highway 65 bridge	2.5	State Highway 15 bridge
73.6	Interstate 94 bridge	0.1	Heims Mill bridge (County Road 1)
72.8	Riverview Road bridge	0.0	Heim's Mill carry-in access, confluence with Mississippi River
68.5	County Highway 30 bridge		
68.3	Railroad bridge		
64.1	County Highway 31 bridge		
56.4 (L)	Spring Hill County Park - watercraft campsite		

## Chain of Lakes Area Inset

- Carry-in Access
  - Trailer Access
  - Rest Area
  - Drinking Water
  - Fishing Pier
  - Campground
  - Watercraft Camping
  - Outfitter
  - Private Campground
  - Dam
  - River Mile
  - Designated Public Land
  - Municipality
  - Paved Regional Trail
  - Paved State Trail
- W.M.A. = Wildlife Management Area  
S.N.A. = Scientific & Natural Area

0 1 2 3 4 5 Miles  
0 1 2 3 4 5 Kilometers



## Sauk River

MINNESOTA  
STATE PARKS  
AND TRAILS  
ESTABLISHED 1891



### The Sauk River

Originating at Lake Osakis in Todd County, the Sauk River meanders southeast for 125 miles until it joins up with the Mississippi River on the northern side of St. Cloud. Although the entire river is a state-designated canoe and boating route, the northern portion of the river from Lake Osakis to Guernsey Lake is generally considered impassable most of the year because of low water levels.

Over the 125-mile length of the Sauk River it drops from an initial elevation of 1320 feet above sea level at Lake Osakis to 992 feet above sea level at the confluence with the Mississippi River. The river flows through several lakes along its route including the "Chain of Lakes" near Richmond, where more than 80 miles of continuous shoreline are encountered over a river length of less than 8 miles.



Melrose Dam



As increased settlement took place, fur trading took a backseat to agriculture and the logging industry that were becoming more important for the region. Logging of the hardwood forests soon became a vital interest, and the Sauk River provided a corridor for the passage of wood to the rapidly developing St. Cloud area. The granite industry likewise flourished with this growth and the numerous granite outcrops along the river as well as many other sites in the county were obvious targets for exploitation of this resource. Prominent evidences of this industry still exist today along the Sauk as well as in the "Granite City" of St. Cloud.

Throughout this time, the development of a substantial agricultural economy provided for the development of mills along the Sauk. With the advancement of railroads to the area, the small mills along the river declined in usefulness, however evidence of these sites exist today along the river, with Heims Mill still operating where the Sauk enters the Mississippi.

### Vegetation

Throughout a good portion of its length (the western two-thirds), the Sauk River (and the various lakes it flows through) defines part of the major transition from prairie to hardwood forest. Historically, to the southwest of the river were landscapes of open prairie and scattered oak savanna, to the northeast were more extensive savannas and closed canopy hardwood forests. The river served as a natural firebreak. Fires that started on the large open expanses of prairie to the west were often unable to jump the river. And thus trees were able to persist in much greater abundance with the lower fire frequencies east of the river. Today, the countryside has been transformed by agriculture but the landscape is still more open to the southwest and more wooded to the northeast.

The river starts in wetlands dominated by shrub willows, cattails, and sedges. As it flows southeasterly it first passes through groves of woods dominated by oak, green ash, and basswood. Prairie grasses and wildflowers are often present along the banks and on steep slopes near the river. Several lakes are part of the river's course in its upper reaches. Narrow strips of riverine forest dominated by silver maple, tree willows, ashes, and elms become more common in the floodplain through the middle and lower reaches.

Near Richmond, the river turns to a more northeasterly course. Here it leaves the prairie landscape behind and the countryside becomes more rolling and wooded with hardwood forest often bordering the floodplain woods.

The chain of lakes area is almost entirely surrounded by hardwood forests dominated by red oak, bur oak, aspen, and basswood. An interesting patch of tamarack swamp occurs on part of a broad groundwater seepage plain on the north bank near Rockville. The golden fall color of the tamaracks stand out among the typically more subtle reds and yellows of the hardwoods.

Through the lower reaches of the river, exposures of granite and similar rocks are occasionally encountered. These are unusual desert-like habitats with drought-tolerant plants such as brittle prickly-pear cactus and small-flowered farnelower growing in the crevices alongside prairie grasses. Sand and gravel bars, with their unique flora of small specialized annuals, become exposed during low water levels.

Near the river's confluence with the Mississippi River, the floodplain widens somewhat and supports larger patches of riverine forest. These areas are often flush with early spring wildflowers such as Virginia waterleaf and white trout lily.

### Geology

Some of the oldest rocks in the world can be found in the various outcroppings along the Sauk. A few of these rocks have been dated back more than 3 billion years. A geological feature known as a "whaleback" is found in the "Chain of Lakes" area, containing examples of this ancient rock. The whaleback, along with the moraines, are the two prominent glacial features found along the Sauk. The St. Croix moraine is exposed in some areas along the river, and evident in much of the landscape. River terraces are also noticeable as the river flows through Rockville, being carved from the outwash of the various glacial advances and retreats of the ice age.



Spring Hill Park

### Wildlife

The dynamics of a river system provide for an array of habitat types that are home to many varieties of wildlife. The marshy edges are home to different species of waterfowl, great blue herons and many kinds of songbirds along with the occasional muskrat, beaver, otter and mink.

The forest and grasslands create a mosaic along the Sauk Valley that is inhabited by many game species such as grouse, pheasant, and whitetail deer. These game species along with waterfowl species are common in and

around the two state managed wildlife areas south of Sauk Center. It is not uncommon to view birds of prey including the bald eagle, owls and various hawks.

### Fishing



The most abundant species in the Sauk are white sucker, black bullhead, redbone and carp. Sport species found include black crappie, northern pike, smallmouth bass, walleye and channel catfish. Anglers seeking walleye and channel catfish seem to be fairly successful and pressure appears to be very light. Bank angling opportunities are generally limited to bridge crossings. Some angling occurs at the City Park in Cold Spring and a fishing pier has been placed there and at Rockville.

Other places where angling occurs: below dams at Sauk Lake, Melrose and Cold Spring; and at the confluence of tributaries such as Getchel, Cold Spring and Mill Creeks. The Chain of Lakes, located between Cold Spring and Richmond, offer good angling for panfish, walleye and channel catfish.

### 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!

Water levels can speed or slow you down. You can get information about water levels from the regional DNR office, or check the DNR website, or the DNR Information Center. Remember that much of the shorelands are privately owned. Respect and protect the water and shorelands.

### 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-serve basis.

- 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 private property.

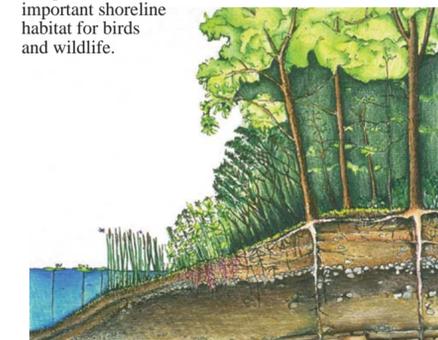
- Be sanitary! Use designated toilet facilities or bury human waste away from the river.

### 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.



The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

This information is available in alternative format upon request.

### Minnesota State Parks and Trails Area Office

940 Industrial Drive South, #103  
Sauk Rapids, MN 56379  
320-255-4279

Online water trail information and maps can be found at [mndnr.gov/watertrails](http://mndnr.gov/watertrails)

### DNR Information Center

The DNR's Information Center is available to provide free publications of facilities and services as well as answers questions pertaining to DNR recreational opportunities in Minnesota.



500 Lafayette Road  
St. Paul, MN 55155-4040  
651-296-6157 Metro Area  
1-888-646-6367 MN Toll-Free

[mndnr.gov](http://mndnr.gov)