

A STATE WATER TRAIL GUIDE TO THE BIG FORK RIVER

	Carry-in Access		Drinking Water
	Trailer Access		Outfitter
	Rest Area		Point of Interest
	Watercraft Campsite		
	Campground		
	River Mile		Designated Public Lands
	Rapids		Tribal Trust Land

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

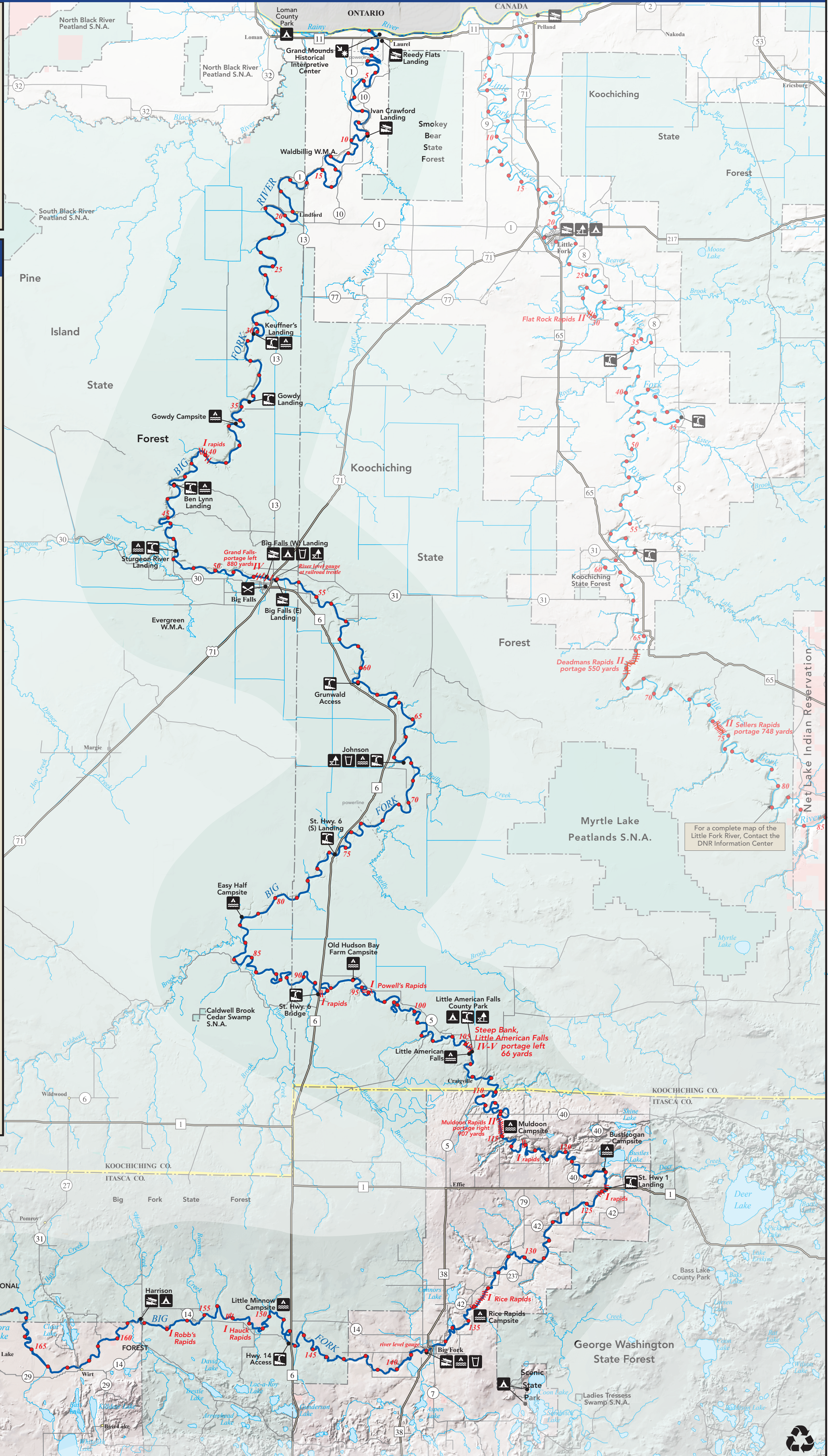
NORTH

Route Description of the Big Fork River

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

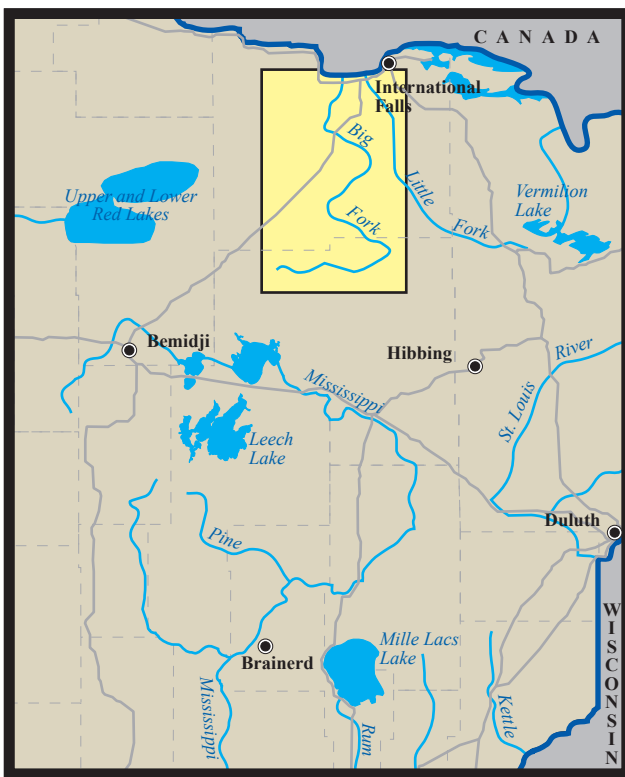
RIVER MILE

- 0.0 (R) Confluence with Rainy River. On right is Grand Mound Interpretive Center.
- 0.5 (L) Trailer access at Reedy Flats Landing, a Boise Cascade site on the upstream side of the State Highway 11 bridge.
- 1.4 Power line crossing.
- 8.1 (R) Ivan Crawford Landing trailer access.
- 19.0 (R) County Road 1 bridge, Town of Linford.
- 30.4 (R) Keuffner's Landing trailer access and watercraft campsite.
- 34.2 (R) Gowdy Landing carry-in access.
- 36.0 (L) Gowdy Campsite. The site has tables and fire rings.
- 40.0 Class I rapids.
- 42.9 (R) Ben Lynn Landing, a grassy clearing with a campground and carry-in access.
- 47.6 (L) Sturgeon River Landing. Carry-in access and campground, just above the confluence with the Sturgeon River.
- 52.5 (R) Big Falls West trailer access, campground and rest area with drinking water.
- 52.8 Railroad trestle with river level gauge.
- 53.0 (L) Big Falls East Landing trailer access. The beginning of a half-mile portage around Big Falls, which is a series of four falls dropping 40 feet in a quarter mile, rated Class IV. Cross the river via Hwy 71 Bridge. Put in at trailer access west of Hwy 71 below the falls on river right.
- 63.5 (L) Grunwald Landing carry-in access.
- 67.5 (L) Johnson Landing. Rest area near shore; campsite and drinking water up a gentle rise, several hundred feet from the river. The drinking water comes from an artesian well through a small pipe.
- 72.6 Power line crossing.
- 75.6 (L) Carry-in access at State Highway 6 bridge.
- 81.5 (L) Easy Half Campsite, a grassy clearing amid deciduous trees with picnic tables.
- 83.1 (L) Caldwell Brook joins.
- 91.5 (L) Carry-in access at State Highway 6 bridge.
- 91.7 Class I rapids.
- 94.0 (R) Old Hudson Bay Farm Campsite and rest area.
- 95.5 Powells Rapids, a Class I boulder-bed rapids.
- 104.8 Little American Falls—The river plunges over a six foot ledge into a deep pool flanked by 60 foot bluffs. This Class IV-V pitch bears scouting and probably a portage at any level. Portage left. A campsite with fire ring lies to the left of the falls. A county campground, picnic site and parking area are on the right bluff, up a steep trail. County Road 5 bridge. The site of Craigville, an abandoned logging town.
- 107.6 County Road 40 bridge.
- 113.5 End Muldoon Rapids, Class II. End of half-mile portage.
- 114.2 (R) Muldoon Campsite, off portage trail.
- 114.7 (R) Beginning of half-mile portage.
- 114.9 Begin Muldoon Rapids, Class II, a boulder half-mile stretch with two-foot waves in high water.
- 116.9 Class I rapids.
- 119.1 County Road 229 bridge.
- 121.1 County Road 40 bridge.
- 123.0 (R) Busicog Campsite. This large site has a fire ring and privy.
- 123.7 (R) Class I boulder-bed rapids begins at bend about 100 yards above State Highway 1.
- 127.2 County Road 42 bridge.
- 132.9 County Road 237 bridge.
- 133.1-134.2 Rice Rapids, a long, bouldery Class I stretch that washes out in high water.
- 134.0 (R) Rice Rapids Campsite.
- 137.6 Footbridge. Confluence with the Rice River.
- 137.8 State Highway 38 bridge. Town of Big Fork. River gauge on bridge.
- 138.0 (R) Trailer access and watercraft campsite. Drinking water available.
- 147.1 State Hwy 6 bridge.
- 147.3 (R) Hwy 14 carry-in access.
- 149.3 (L) Little Minnow campsite.
- 153.3 Hauck Rapids, Class I.
- 155.5 County Road 14 bridge.
- 157.1 Robbs Rapids, Class I.
- 158.3 (L) Harrison Landing, trailer access, campground, upstream of County Road 14 bridge, privies, tables, and fire rings.
- 171.3 (L) U.S. Forest Service trailer access and rest area on west shore of Dora Lake with tables and privy.



Big Fork River

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This information is available in alternative format upon request.

Minnesota State Parks and Trails Regional Unit

1201 East Highway 2
Grand Rapids, MN 55744
218-999-7923

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

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The Big Fork River



ITASCA CO. HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The low-lying, Big Fork valley is in places pastoral and in other parts wild. Much of this area is flat as a result of being what once was the bottom of Glacial Lake Agassiz. However, two water falls, Big Falls and Little American Falls provide a dramatic contrast to the mostly flat area which has topographic relief of less than 50 feet. Because this area was previously a lake bed, a lot of the area is covered in peat which is made up mostly of organic materials and is over 15 feet deep in some areas.

On the broader plain extensive ditching was done in the early part of the 20th century to turn this land into an agricultural nirvana but the efforts were unsuccessful. Today these peatlands are dominated by bog forest species of black spruce, fir, cedar and tamarack. Inland sites are commonly vegetated by aspen-birch and jack pine.

Forestry and tourism are the major land uses. A scattering of small farms are mixed within the forest. The areas of major development are the towns of Bigfork and Big Falls.

The water level in the Big Fork river generally peaks in late April and falls during the summer, when the rapids may be impassable. Heavy summer or autumn rains can raise the river to runnable levels. River levels are reported by the DNR during the boating season April through October. This information is available on the DNR web page or by calling the DNR information center. Some rapids will be too rocky to run if the gauge reading is much less than 4 feet. From Dora Lake to the Rainy River, the Big Fork drops 243 feet, 1.5 feet per mile.



Most of the Big Fork is considered the relatively easy class I-II (see "Rating White Water"). Only two stretches are more difficult, Little American Falls (Class III-IV) and Big Falls (Class IV-VI). All rapids can be by-passed, though some portages are difficult because of brush.

For the fishing enthusiast, the river provides an excellent and diverse fishery. Fish habitat and geographic character changes along the river offer a variety of fishing opportunities. Sturgeon, Muskie, Walleye, Small Mouth Bass and Northern Pike populations are present in the river.

The area is home to wildlife typical to northern Minnesota. Timber wolves, bobcats, lynx, beavers, otters, bald eagles and osprey are occasionally sighted. Big game includes moose, black bears and white-tailed deer. Ruffed grouse and several species of ducks are common.

There is some interesting history to this area. 2,500 years before Europeans settled, there was a succession of Woodland Culture Indians occupying the region. One of the most notable groups was the Laurel. People of this group built Grand Mound, a burial hill 40 feet high and more than 100 feet across at its base. Located near the mouth of the Big Fork, the site is part of Grand Mound Center, a Minnesota Historical Society facility. The Laurel gave way to the Blackduck, who may have been the direct predecessors of the Dakota. The Dakota, or Sioux, inhabited the region until the Ojibway (Chippewa) laid claim to the area.



CHIEF BUSTICOGAN, ITASCA CO. HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Chief Busticogan, a popular Chippewa/Bois Forte Chief, lived along the Big Fork River with his band in bark wigwams in the late 1800s. Many stories and folk lore exist in regard to this chief. In the 1880s he and his wife visited a logging camp where 60 whites had been stricken with smallpox. They buried the dead and nursed the survivors back to health.

Chief Busticogan was known as a remarkable, intelligent and dignified person who traveled the early Big Fork River country by birch canoe in summer and snowshoes in winter.

Busticogan's life ended tragically in 1908 when he and two other Indians visited Washington D.C. on a matter involving Indian lands. He was given lodging in a hotel with open flame gas lights. The men were used to kerosene lamps that were simply blown out at bed time. No one told them the gas keeps flowing after the flame is blown out. By morning, the fumes had killed the chief and his companions. Busticogan's wigwam on the banks of the Big Fork River was a place of hospitality open to the early river traveler for a meal, a friendly pipe and visit.

Logging at the turn of the century (late 1800s early 1900s) and the Big Fork River are closely connected and

rich in history. Many logging camps, towns and villages were established along the river during that period. Millions of board feet of pine logs were floated down the Big Fork to lumber mills in Ontario.

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.
- Be cautious of river obstructions, such as overhanging and dead trees in the river.
- Bring a first aid kit that includes waterproof matches.
- Bring an extra paddle in your canoe.
- 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 Parks and Trails 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.



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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.

Canoeing on Large Rivers

The wide variety of waters can provide an equally wide variety of hazards to canoeists. Although the Big Fork is often very placid, the current can be quick and powerful when the river is near or at flood stage. But 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.

The wind can often be deceiving. The terrain can "tunnel" the wind, increasing its velocity. Waves on open stretches can easily fill or flip an open canoe. 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 negotiate than whitewater. Underwater obstacles can easily tip 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 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. 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.

Rating White Water

Rivers and rapids are rated according to the International Scale of River Difficulty. Ratings are estimates based on observations at low or moderate water levels or on secondhand reports.

CLASS I. Easy rapids with small waves and few obstructions.

CLASS II. Rapids with waves up to three feet high. Some maneuvering is required.

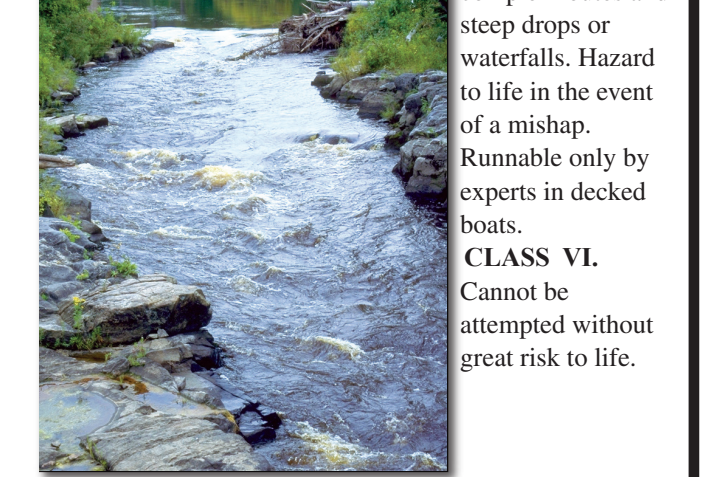
CLASS III. Difficult rapids with high, irregular waves capable of swamping an open canoe. Narrow chutes may require extensive maneuvering. Usually considered the limit for an experienced paddler in an open canoe.

CLASS IV. Long, turbulent rapids with high, irregular waves, constricted passages and blind drops. Decked

canoes and kayaks only; open canoes should be portaged.

CLASS V. Long, violent rapids with complex routes and steep drops or waterfalls. Hazard to life in the event of a mishap. Runnable only by experts in decked boats.

CLASS VI. Cannot be attempted without great risk to life.



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.

