

Illinois has a long history of exploration and travel along its thousands of miles of waterways.

Today, many of us retrace this history as we paddle our way past river landscapes once visited by Marquette and Joliet—and Lincoln. Our 16th president, who once ferried a shipment of goods down the Sangamon and Mississippi rivers, valued the state's water resources enough to include plans for navigational improvements along the Sangamon River in his 1832 platform.

Although Illinois is known as the Prairie State, it also is a water-rich state. We at the Department of Natural Resources encourage you to explore and enjoy these waters safely as you discover Illinois afloat.

Whether your time on the water is for a little paddling exercise, or you boat while fishing, wildlife watching or taking photos, make it a point to explore the waterways of Illinois this summer. Wherever you live, there's a waterway near you, and here are a few examples:

In northwest Illinois, you may access state-owned water trails along the Rock and Mackinaw rivers, travel down the historic Hennepin Canal or spend a pleasant afternoon paddling Pierce Lake at Rock Cut State Park.



Segments of the Illinois and Michigan Canal, the Kankakee and Fox rivers and Loon Lake at Silver Springs State Fish and Wildlife Area provide paddlers a diversity of excursions in northeast Illinois.

A highlight of water trails in east-central Illinois is the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River, Illinois' only federally designated Wild and Scenic River.

While in the area, enjoy time on the 12 lakes open at nearby Kickapoo State Park, or float 5 miles of the Embarras River accessible from boat ramps at Fox Ridge State Park.

West-central Illinois' Kaskaskia River is accessible for canoeists and kayakers at numerous locations, and more than 1,700 water acres await modern explorers at Sanganois State Fish and Wildlife Area.

The Lower Cache River Trail in southern Illinois offers paddlers a 3- to 6-mile canoe or kayak experience through a magnificent cypress-tupelo swamp where some of the oldest trees in Illinois stand.

Always make it your personal mission to explore Illinois' waters safely. For the past 16 years, boating accidents have claimed an average of 13 lives a year. So far this year, 14 fatalities already have been recorded.

We want everyone to return from the water safely. By practicing a few, simple

precautions, you can minimize your chances of becoming an unfortunate statistic.

- Always wear a personal flotation device. Nearly 80 percent of the lives lost in Illinois boating accidents could have been prevented if the person had been wearing a personal flotation device.
- Let someone know your plans before you leave.
- Take an Illinois Boating Education Course. Each of us—young and old, novice and experienced—has the responsibility to keep this lifetime leisure activity free from tragedy and personal loss. For information on upcoming courses, visit www.dnr.state.il.us/safety/boat.htm.
- Know your limitations and don't boat in conditions you aren't comfortable with.
- Do not operate any watercraft while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Stay alert and mindful of potential dangerous situations. Do not boat or wade immediately above- or below-stream of low-head or run-of-the-river dams on publicly navigable waterways.

As warm weather beckons us outdoors for time on Illinois' many rivers and lakes, have fun. Relive the history. Stay safe. Enjoy Illinois.

Marc Miller

For additional information on canoe and kayak opportunities, visit www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/programs/canoe_kayak.htm.

