

Upper Iowa RIVER PADDLER'S GUIDE



Welcome to the UPPER IOWA

Welcome to the Upper Iowa River, the most widely-recognized river in Iowa and one of the first in the nation to be nominated as a national Wild and Scenic River in the 1960s. Thanks largely to private landowners and organizations that own and care for it, the river corridor has retained its scenic and natural character and become a premier recreational river. You will share this river with local families, anglers, bird enthusiasts, campers, hikers and the wildlife that call this diverse corridor home. The river originates in LeRoy, Minnesota before meandering 136 miles to the Mississippi River near New Albin, Iowa. The river and corridor change along its length, going from a narrow and winding savanna river to a wider and more dynamic river flanked by dramatic vertical limestone palisades and forested bluffs.

RESPECT THE RIVER

Rules and Regulations: Below are guidelines that will be helpful when you paddle the Upper Iowa River. However, it is not a complete list of all paddling regulations and always be sure laws haven't changed. For more information, visit www.iowadnr.gov or contact the DNR Central Office in Des Moines at 515-725-8200.

- Respect Private Property:** Understanding the difference between meandering vs non-meandering streams is the responsibility of all river users. River mile 6 to the headwaters is considered a non-meandering river meaning river users only have the right to float on the water surface. The stream bed and banks are private property.
- Plan Ahead:** Prepare for extreme weather, hazards, & emergencies.
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces:** Visit in small groups (4-6) and only camp at designated campsites on public land.
- Dispose of Waste Properly:** Pack it in, pack it out.
- Leave What You Find:** Leave rocks & plants where you found them.
- Minimize Campfire Impacts:** Be sure to put out fires completely and only light a fire when they are permitted.
- Respect Wildlife:** Observe wildlife from a distance, do not approach.
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors:** Respect residents and other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.
- Boat Registration:** Required if canoes/kayaks are over 13 feet.

Dams are Dangerous: Dams come in many sizes but ALL dams are drowning machines no matter how small they look. Paddlers should portage around all dams and NEVER attempt to go over them.

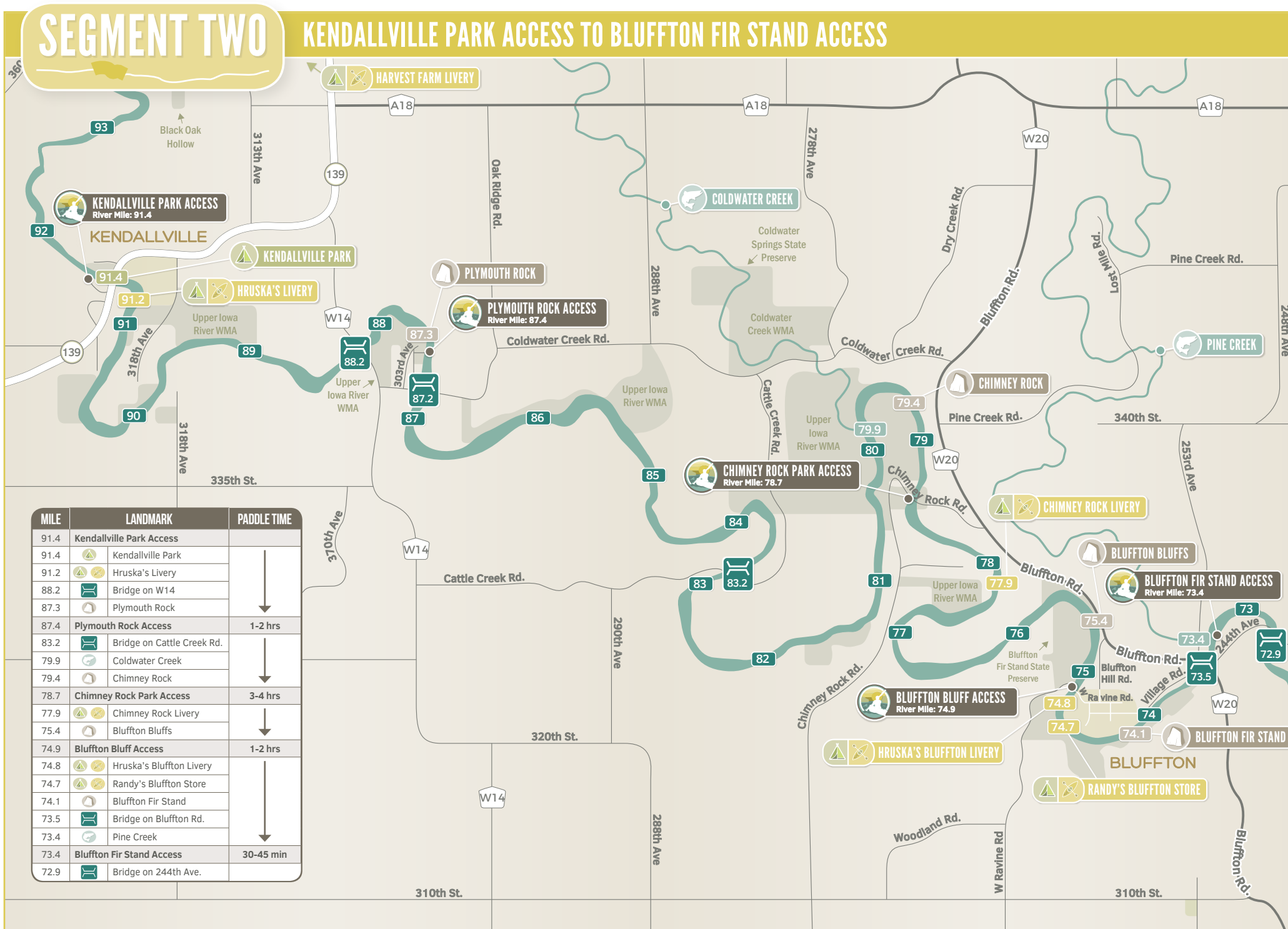
Life Jackets Save Lives: Be ready for the unexpected and always wear your life jacket. This message brought to you by the National Safe Boating Council.



SEGMENT ONE: CHESTER ACCESS TO LITDKE MILL TAKE OUT This peaceful, 7-mile stretch of the Upper Iowa River from Chester to Lime Springs is one to enjoy early in the paddling season following spring rains, as low water levels during summer and fall make passage difficult. Fallen trees or "snags" may block the entire river and require portage. The riparian zone in this segment alternates between prairie, wetland, and basswood-maple bottomland forest. One of the most well-known remnant native prairies in Iowa, Hayden Prairie, is five miles from the Chester Access and worth a day trip! The Litdke Mill pond was created in 1860, when Litdke Mill and dam were constructed to power the grist mill and generate electricity for historic Lime Springs. Paddlers must take out before the dam. Litdke Mill still houses its original equipment and is one of the most intact historic grist mills in the nation.



SEGMENT THREE: BLUFFTON FIR STAND ACCESS TO CHATTAHOOCIE PARK ACCESS The opportunity to paddle past a waterfall and observe birds and wildlife along the way make exploring this segment of the river an excellent choice. The river flows past wooded bluffs that rise more than 300 feet from the river and provides paddlers with open views of the Upper Iowa River Valley. With attentive eyes and some luck, paddlers can spy a black-billed cuckoo, Acadian flycatcher, rose-breasted grosbeak, mink, soft-shelled turtle, or an otter. The springs at Malanaphy Springs State Preserve cascade directly into the river and create one of the most well-known waterfalls in Iowa. The rocks at the base of the falls make it easy to pull over and enjoy nature's artistry - but don't be fooled, this is not the access. The Malanaphy Springs Access is 0.9 miles downstream from the waterfall. For those who prefer to view the waterfall from dry ground, a mile-long hiking trail through the state preserve begins at the access point. The trail leads through a steep mesic forest on west facing slopes, with numerous rock outcroppings and more than 300 native plants. Hikers are asked to please stay on the trail to protect these sensitive plants and ecosystems, and to please observe all posted rules in this and other nearby State Preserves, which prohibit camping, fire, or removal of or damage to plants, animals, and other natural materials.

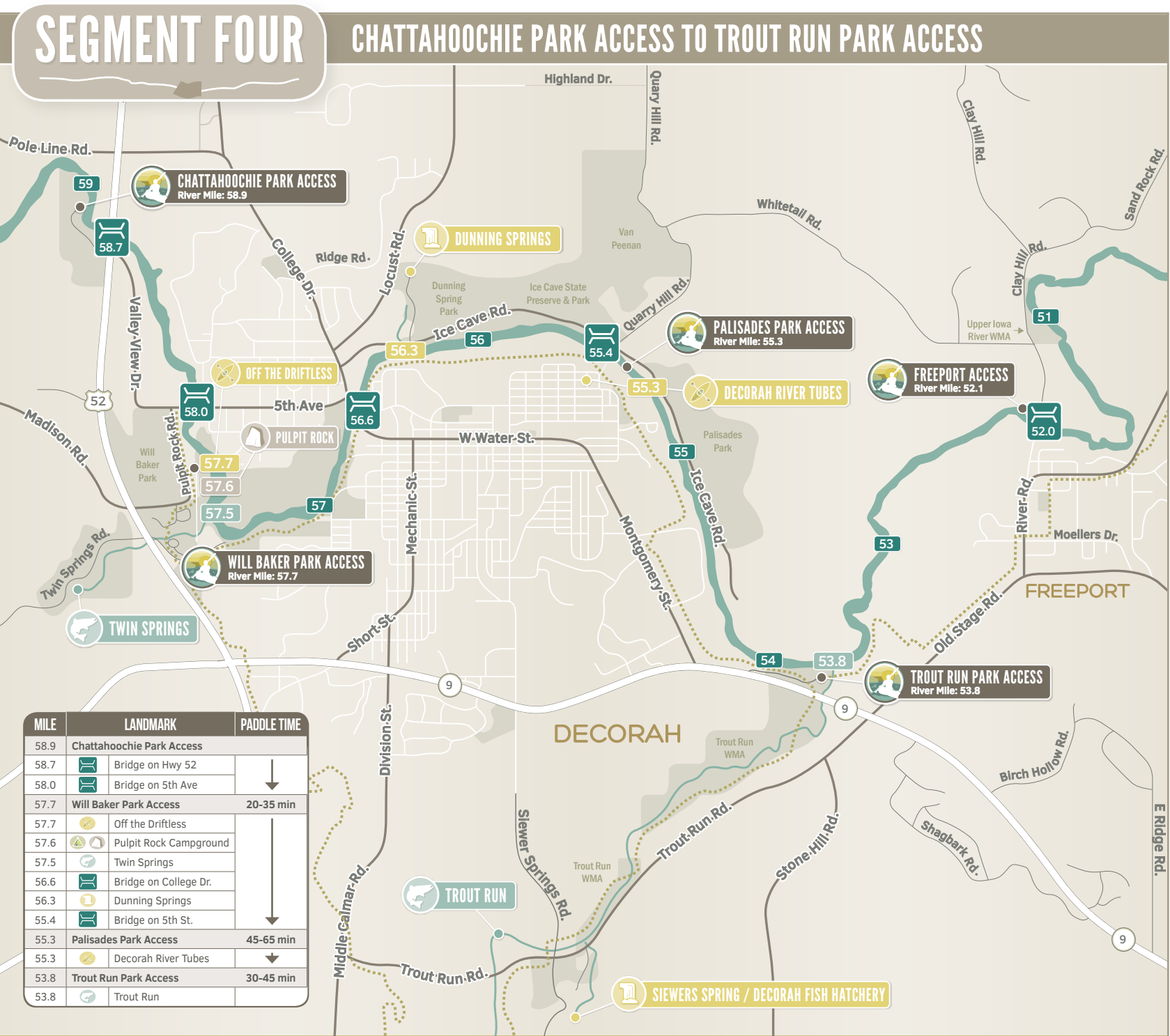


SEGMENT TWO: KENDALLVILLE PARK ACCESS TO BLUFFTON FIR STAND ACCESS The natural beauty and geologic majesty of this part of the river make it a favorite for many. The river is flanked by wooded bluffs with native white pine, red cedar, maple, cottonwood, and a variety of hardwoods including oak, walnut, and cherry. If you are quiet, you may encounter wildlife, including white-tailed deer, bald eagles, western painted turtles, great horned owls, northern leopard frogs, smallmouth and rock bass, walleye, and trout. The float takes paddlers through lazy S-turns that meander back and forth across the narrow valley, past towering limestone bluffs, pillars, and palisades including Plymouth Rock, Chimney Rock, and the famous Bluffton Palisades. The limestone that makes up these majestic features is over 450 million years old and was deposited during the Ordovician Age. The Bluffton Palisades rise 280 feet and extend 1/2 mile in length, making up the entire view in some sections. Located just upstream of the Bluffton Bluff Access, they are so frequently photographed that this bend in the river is referred to locally as "Calendar Corner". Just downstream from Bluffton is the Bluffton Fir Stand State Preserve, a 94-acre preserve that features a 140-foot limestone bluff and one of the largest populations of balsam fir in Iowa, a "boreal" tree species typically found in more northern climates. Over 340 native plants have been recorded in this preserve.

Photos courtesy of Larry Reys



SEGMENT FIVE: CANOE CREEK ACCESS TO WILD LANDING ACCESS Leaving the river towns behind, this remote section of the Upper Iowa River provides users with limited services and an abundance of wild landscapes and wildlife. The river valley steadily widens and increases in size on its way toward the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. It is lined with spectacular views of both grand, tree-covered bluffs as well as treeless goat prairies now carefully looked after for the unique habitat this once common ecosystem provides. This segment of the Upper Iowa River corridor provides explorers with a way to observe the vast array of plant, insect, mushroom, and bird species of Northeast Iowa. Anglers will find the fishing in this section to be particularly rewarding, as no dams impede fish wishing to migrate upriver from the Mississippi. Known historically as the Onetoa River, the Upper Iowa River Corridor, especially in this area, was popular with early Native Americans, who built thriving villages adjacent to and overlooking the river. A detailed exploration of the history of the "Upper Iowa River & Its People" can be found in *Onetoa Flow*, a popular book authored by David S. Faldet in 2009.

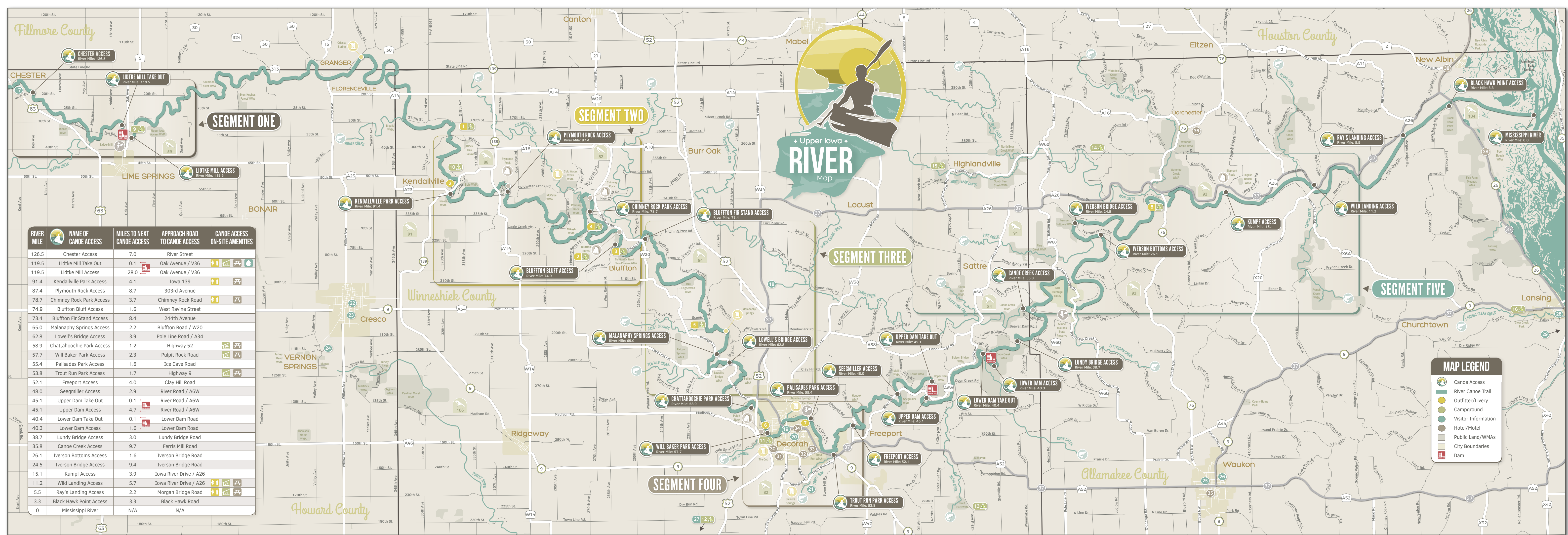


SEGMENT FOUR: CHATTAHOOCIE PARK ACCESS TO TROUT RUN PARK ACCESS Located in the heart of the Upper Iowa Watershed, Decorah, (pop. 8,127), is the watershed's largest community. The river segment through Decorah takes paddlers past or within walking distance of several natural features, including Pulpit Rock, Twin Springs, Decorah Community Prairie & Butterfly Garden, Phelps Park Bluffs, Dunning Springs, Ice Cave State Preserve, and the Decorah Palisades. Dunning Springs Park is home to a 200-foot waterfall. Just 1/2 mile from Dunning Springs, Ice Cave State Preserve is recognized as one of the largest known "glacières" (caves containing ice) in the Midwest. As the name suggests, this cave is known for its unusual deposits of ice that coat the inside of the cave well into summer. Decorah has many visitor amenities, including numerous retail shops, historic sites, dining opportunities, camping and lodging sites, over 500 acres of city parks, Luther College, and more than 30 miles of off-road and paved walking and bike trails. The Trout Run Trail is a paved trail that hugs the Upper Iowa River before weaving its way through 11 miles of the Driftless Area in and around Decorah. Even though the river carries paddlers through the center of the city, the river abounds in wildlife, including great blue herons, belted kingfishers, mink, and white-tailed deer. Numerous songbirds inhabit the Decorah Prairie and the surrounding bluffs. The historic downtown is most easily accessed from the Will Baker Park or Palisades Park Access via the Trout Run Trail. Museums, including Vesterheim National Norwegian-American Museum and the Porter House Museum, offer fascinating cultural side trips.

UPPER IOWA RIVER SEGMENT MAP LEGEND

- Canoe Access
- Upper Iowa River
- Public Land/WMA
- Community Boundary
- WARNING: Dam
- Bridge with Upper Iowa River Mile
- Upper Iowa River Mile
- Campground
- Livery/Outfitter
- Geologic Feature
- Waterfall or Spring
- Coldwater Trout Stream
- Cultural Heritage
- Decorah's 11 mile Trout Run Trail
- Paddle Time: Based on 2-3 mph

*Effort was made to assure the accuracy of information in this publication. Northeast Iowa R&D and its partners assume no responsibility in its use.



- 1 Harvest Farm Campground:** Facility with 60 campsites that rents canoes, kayaks, and tubes. 563-883-8562. 3690 318th Ave
- 2 Hruska's Canoe Livery & Campground:** Offer canoe, kayak, and tube rental on Upper Iowa River. 563-547-4566. 3233 347th St
- 3 Randy's Bluffton Store and Campground:** Camping with canoe and kayak rentals. 563-735-5738. 2619 W Ravine Rd
- 4 Chimney Rock Canoe Rental and Campground:** Offer canoe, kayak, and tube rental. 877-787-2267. 3312 Chimney Rock Rd
- 5 Hutchinson Family Farm Campground:** Offer canoe, kayak, and cabin rental. 563-382-3054. 2299 Scenic River Rd
- 6 Off the Driftless:** Tube, canoe, and kayak rental. Open Thur-Sun 10am-4pm/M-W by appt. 563-382-4641. 212 Pulpit Rock Rd
- 7 Decorah River Tubes:** High quality inner-tubes (includes shuttle). 563-379-8823. 701 Winneshiek Ave
- 8 Upper Iowa Resort & Rental:** Offering swimming, canoeing, cabin rentals, and fishing. 563-568-3263. 578 Lonning Dr

- 9 Litke Mill Park & Campground:** 30 site campground with fishing, canoeing, and playground. 563-547-3634. 3425 Oak Ave
- 10 Kendallville Campground:** 28 site campground with canoeing and fishing access. 563-534-7145. 3480 K Park Rd
- 11 Pulpit Rock Campground:** 136 site campground next to the river with opportunities to canoe. 563-382-9551. 505 Pulpit Rock Rd
- 12 Lake Meyer Campground:** 160-acre campground, park, and nature center next to Lake Meyer. 563-534-7145. 2546 Lake Meyer Rd
- 13 Sampson Springs Campground:** 50 AMP RV campsites in walking distance from Trout River. 563-382-4849. 2271 133rd Ave
- 14 Big Joe's Little Campground:** 15 campsites & 3 cabins located near North & South Bear Creek. 563-497-3500. 351 Willow Dr
- 15 Bear Creek Cabins & Campgrounds:** 20 campsites & 8 cabins along South Bear Creek. 563-546-7722. 3497 Highlandville Rd
- 16 Red Barn Resort & Campground:** 125 RV campsites, trout stream and restaurant. 563-538-4956. 2609 Main St. Hwy 9
- 17 R&S Fuel:** Convenience store and gas station located in downtown Chester. 563-565-2631. 304 Main St
- 18 Seed Savers Exchange:** Visitor center, heirloom seed bank, and 8 miles of hiking trail. 563-382-5990. 3094 North Winn Rd
- 19 Winneshiek County Visitors Center:** Information about events, lodging, and restaurants. 563-382-2023. 507 W Water St
- 20 Winneshiek County Recorder's Office:** Location where canoe registrations may be purchased. 563-382-3486. 201 W Main St
- 21 Decorah Fish Hatchery:** Trout rearing station and home of the "Decorah Eagles." FLA. 563-382-8324. 2321 Siewers Spring Rd
- 22 Howard County Courthouse:** Location where canoe registrations may be purchased. 563-547-9211. 137 N Elm St
- 23 Howard County Welcome Center:** Information about events, lodging, and restaurants. 563-547-3434. 101 2nd Ave SW

- 24 Howard County Conservation:** Information about recreation and natural resources. 563-547-3634. 11562 Valley Ave
- 25 Allamakee County Tourism:** Information about events, lodging, and restaurants. 563-568-2624. 101 W Main St
- 26 Allamakee County Courthouse:** Location where canoe registrations may be purchased. 563-568-2204. 110 Allamakee St NW
- 27 Winneshiek County Conservation:** Information about recreation and natural resources. 563-534-7145. 2546 Lake Meyer Rd
- 28 Main Street Lansing:** Visitor center to help answer questions about where to eat, stay, and shop. 563-538-9229. 391 Main St
- 29 Driftless Area Education and Visitor Center:** Visitor center with interpretive displays. 563-538-0400. 1944 Columbus Rd
- 30 Country Inn and Suites:** 50 room hotel near the Upper Iowa River in Decorah. 563-382-9646. 1202 Iowa 9
- 31 Fairfield Inn & Suites:** Hotel near the Upper Iowa River in Decorah. 563-382-8800. 2041 Iowa State Hwy 9
- 32 Quality Inn & Suites:** 58 room hotel near the Upper Iowa River in Decorah. 563-382-2269. 705 Commerce Dr
- 33 Super 8 Motel:** 60 room hotel near the Upper Iowa River in Decorah. 563-382-8771. 810 Iowa 9
- 34 Hotel Winneshiek:** Turn-of-the-century historic 34 room hotel and restaurant. 800-998-4164. 104 E Water St
- 35 Stoney Creek Inn:** 39 room hotel with stone fireplace themed suites. 800-659-2220. 407 Rossville Rd
- 36 Sportsmen Motel:** Motel with 8 campsites located within a 1/2 mile of Waterloo Creek. 563-497-3615. 2753 Hwy 76
- 37 Driftless Area Scenic Byway:** 138-mile scenic driving route known for its natural & scenic attractions.
- 38 Great River Road:** collection roads that follow the course of the Mississippi River through Iowa and 9 other states.



- A FISHING ADVENTURES**



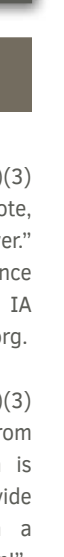
- B CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURS**



- C BIRDWATCHING**



- D WATERFALL WAYFINDING**



- E GEOLOGIC JOURNEYS**

CAMPGROUNDS, VISITOR INFORMATION & LODGING FACILITIES

UPPER IOWA RIVER PADDLING TRIPS AND ITINERARIES

The Upper Iowa River supports cold and warm water fish species but three dams restrict fish movement and species prevalence. Smallmouth bass, walleye, trout, and non-game fish are abundant throughout the river. Trout are especially prevalent near the mouth of coldwater streams, and more than 30 of these streams make their way into the Upper Iowa River. Below the dams, sturgeon, northern pike, flathead and channel catfish, yellow perch, and white bass migrate up from the Mississippi River. Smallmouth bass and walleye prefer rocky or sandy substrate, especially in the deepest pools. Dead trees, boulders, and root balls provide fish habitat, but beware, they also create dangerous under currents. Local trout fishing maps and guides can be picked up locally or downloaded from northeastowariver.org. The IowaDNR.gov fishing website provides information on fishing regulations, licenses, and weekly fishing reports. Connections with other local anglers can be made through the Iowa Coldwater Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, or the Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association.

CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURS

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BIRDWATCHING

The woodlands, bluffs, habitat diversity, remoteness, and other natural characteristics of the river corridor make it a bird haven. It is part of the Mississippi River Flyway, near a Globally Important Birding Area, and connected to large, remote tracts of private and public forests, wetlands and prairies, wildlife management areas (WMAs), and other natural areas. Hundreds of species migrate through in the spring and many additional species nest along the river. A 2014 survey identified eight eagle nests visible from the river during full foliage. More would be visible if the leaves weren't blocking the view! During winter months, open sections of the river help birds and other wildlife find food to survive and thrive. The number of bird species reported in Iowa's Breeding Bird Atlas for areas near the river is noted on the map. Check out bba.iowabirds.org, iowadnr.gov and iowauadubon.org to learn more about local birding opportunities or get in touch with the local Iowa Ornithological Union, which offers information by county as well as GPS coordinates.

WATERFALL WAYFINDING

The Upper Iowa River Watershed boasts hundreds of springs and dozens of beautiful waterfalls, including the largest spring in Minnesota, Odessa Spring. Odessa and Malanaphy Springs are accessible from the river. Dunning Springs, Twin Springs and the second largest spring in Iowa, Siewers Spring are all nearby. Siewers Spring provides water for the fish hatchery in Decorah as well as one of the nation's most universally accessible trout streams, Trout Run. There are four man-made dams that create waterfalls of their own which although pretty, are extremely dangerous. Do not paddle over them or near them, from either above or below. Their undercurrents are drowning machines. All of the coldwater streams that flow into the river are fed by springs. Coldwater Creek, which emerges from the base of a 100-foot tall bluff is publicly accessible in the Coldwater Spring State Preserve one mile north of the river at the only natural entrance to Coldwater Cave, a National Landmark, and Iowa's longest cave.

GEOLOGIC JOURNEYS

Rising more than 250 feet from the river along several stretches, towering limestone bluffs, chimney rocks, rock outcroppings, cliffs, and entrenched meanders add interest to Upper Iowa River excursions. Watch for the most well-known landmarks: Plymouth Rock, Chimney Rock, Bluffton Palisades, Pulpit Rock, Phelps Park Bluffs, Decorah Palisades, Elephant Head Bluff, and Blackhawk Bluff. Many consider these majestic features to be the river's hallmark. Fossils are often identified within the limestone bedrock or in rocks lining the bottom of the river. Together, the sights above and below create a sense of isolation, a deep sense of history, and confirm that the river is in the Driftless Area, an ancient and unique Midwest landform bypassed by the last continental glacier. In the words of canoekayak.com, "Tucked away in an isolated corner of northeast Iowa is a cliff-lined gorge that the glaciers forgot to flatten: the Upper Iowa River valley." For more information about the geology of the Upper Iowa River Watershed, visit www.iuhciowa.edu/igs/publications/uploads/TIS-54.pdf

OUTFITTERS & LIVERIES

UPPER IOWA RIVER PADDLING TRIPS AND ITINERARIES

BIRDWATCHING

WATERFALL WAYFINDING

GEOLOGIC JOURNEYS

PARTNERSHIPS

The Upper Iowa River Alliance is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, whose mission is to "Promote, protect, and enhance the Upper Iowa River." Donations to the Upper Iowa River Alliance can be sent to PO Box 346, Decorah, IA 52101 or made at www.upperiowariver.org

Northeast Iowa RC&D is a 501(c)(3) non-profit who works with partners throughout the region. Their mission is to "recognize opportunities and provide leadership to make Northeast Iowa a vibrant, place-based model for the nation!"