

Playing It Safe

Hazards Found on Streams

Recreation on rivers and streams can be relaxing or thrilling, but it should always be safe. Water offers several real dangers, but with proper training, these hazards are easily managed. Boating safety classes that can teach you to handle water hazards are available around the state of Ohio. Contact the Ohio Department of Natural Resources at 1-877-4BOATER or www.ohiodnr.com for more information.



Paddlers should not boat on swollen rivers and streams like this high water on the Great Miami River in downtown Dayton.

Floods and Other High, Swift Water

Paddlers should never boat on a stream with water spilling out of the banks or on a stream that is unusually swollen due to high rains or snow melt. High water causes hazards such as low dams and strainers to become even more dangerous. Unseen obstacles such as floating logs or submerged trees may also threaten a boater. Swift currents are more likely to overcome a paddler's ability to avoid hazards and may make it more difficult to reach shore once in the water.

Water levels are monitored on rivers and streams throughout the state. Check local media and sources for warnings and current conditions.

Cold Water Immersion

Sudden immersion in cold water can be deadly. The initial "cold shock" can cause immediate, involuntary gasping, hyperventilation, panic and vertigo – all of which can result in inhaling water and drowning. It also can cause sudden changes in blood pressure, heart rate and heart rhythm that also may result in death. The longer you are immersed in cold water, the harder it is to control your body. Manual dexterity and coordination deteriorate rapidly, and within 30 minutes, hypothermia (cooling of the body's core temperature) can begin. Loss of consciousness and death with or without drowning can result.

To prevent cold water immersion, take all measures necessary to avoid capsizing your boat. Keep your life jacket securely fastened to help keep your head above water if you fall in the water.

You don't have to be submerged to become hypothermic. Wind chill, rain and perspiration can contribute to the condition. Uncontrollable shivering, slurred speech and lack of coordination are early symptoms. To guard against hypothermia, dress in layers using materials that wick moisture away and retain heat, such as silk, polypropylene, fleece and wool. Every boater should be able to recognize and know how to treat hypothermia.

Low Dams and Waterfalls

Low dams – like natural waterfalls – are deceptively calm and can be incredibly dangerous. Low dams may range from a 25-foot drop-off to a mere 6-inch drop-off. Water flowing over the dam forms currents that can trap objects and you. Backwash and re-circulating current can trap you back against the dam then underwater before you are pushed along the bottom only to be sucked back to the dam as you rise to the surface. This circulating motion repeats over and over again. The backwash currents may even suck you in if you approach too closely from downstream of the dam. The Great Miami River has many low dams, with additional low dams on its tributaries.



Low dams can be deadly and should always be avoided.

Safety tips to follow

- Know the location of all low dams and waterfalls on the river that you plan to boat.
- NEVER attempt to boat over a dam or waterfall.
- Portage (carry) your boat around a low dam and launch at a safe distance, well downstream of the backwash of the low dam.
- Boat with experienced, responsible boaters and learn from them.
- Watch for a smooth line connecting the banks. This may be the top of a low dam.
- Listen for the splashing sounds of turbulence and the dangerous currents at dams.
- Look for concrete retaining walls, which some dams have at each bank, making the dams easier to spot.

It is nearly impossible to escape the force of a low dam's currents.

Unless you are trained in low-dam rescues, never enter the water in an attempt to rescue someone trapped by a low dam. Immediately call for help, then throw a line from shore to the trapped person. Untrained rescuers should never approach the top of the dam or the backwash below the dam, even in a boat. The turbulence at the dam will easily capsize a boat.



Low dam location (view looking downstream)

It looks calm and peaceful, but a low dam is only 200 feet beyond this boat, well in front of the bridge.



Taylorsville Dam near Vandalia is one of MCD's five flood-protection dams.

Miami Conservancy District Dams

The Miami Conservancy District operates and maintains five large flood-protection dams (not low dams) in the Great Miami River Watershed. These dams hold back water only when river levels are too high to pass through the large concrete tubes (conduits) that pass through the dams. *Do not attempt to pass through the dam's conduits.* Underwater portions of the dam create unpredictable currents and turbulence, which can be extremely dangerous. Plan to start your river trip downstream from these dams or end your trip upstream from these dams.



Strainers

River obstructions that allow water to flow through them but that block or "strain" people and boats are known as "strainers." They are frequently found in the form of branches and limbs, log jams and flooded islands. Because the water flows through strainers, river currents may carry you and your boat right into the strainer. Those same currents will press against the side of your boat and cause it to tip. If you should fall into the water, the current will push you against the strainer and hold you in place with tremendous force. The current may hold you at the water surface or below the water. All strainers should be avoided.

Foot Entrapments

If your boat capsizes, do not attempt to stand or walk if you are in high, swift-moving water. You may pin a foot between submerged rocks or debris. Once pinned, the force of the current can push you under the water and hold you there. Always keep your feet up, pointed downstream, and swim to calm water before standing.

PHOTOS: Ryan Hulvat, Dusty Hall and Sarah Hippensteel

Personal Flotation Devices/ Life Vests

More than 80 percent of all boating fatalities occur because the person wasn't wearing a life vest. Many people think a personal flotation device (PFD) or life vest says "non-swimmer," but the truth is, no boating expert would be without one. And PFDs have come a long way since the bright orange, uncomfortable life jackets of your youth. From inflatable PFDs worn around the waist – that open only if they hit water – to lightweight life vests, everyone can find a comfortable PFD to insure a safe trip.

Watercraft Laws and Boater Responsibility

- All watercraft, including canoes, kayaks, stand-up paddleboards, motorboats and most inflatable rafts, must be registered.
- United States Coast Guard (USCG) approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) are required for every boater.
- Children under the age of 10 are required to wear a properly fitted, USCG approved PFD at all times while on a watercraft less than 18 feet in length.
- It is illegal to operate any watercraft – boats, canoes, kayaks, jet skis, etc. – under the influence of alcohol.
- It is illegal to litter in any ditch, stream, river, lake, pond or other water area.
- Children under the age of 12 operating a watercraft must be directly supervised by an adult and may not operate PWCs such as jet skis.

Boating Etiquette

Group size and paddling skills are an important consideration in choosing a waterway for your trip. The recommended minimum is three boats. No one should paddle alone.

Each person has specific responsibilities in the overall group organization. The safety of the group is dependent upon everyone carrying out these responsibilities.

The lead boat is the first boat and should carry an experienced river runner. The lead boat:

- Sets the pace and continually evaluates the pace for the rest of the boats.
- Selects and communicates to the rest of the group the route to follow.
- Scouts the route when a clear section isn't visible.
- Carries first-aid and rescue equipment.

The sweep boat is the last boat and should carry an experienced rescuer. The sweep boat will only pass other boats in the event of an emergency and:

- Carries first-aid and rescue equipment.
- Assists with keeping the group together.

The remaining boats have a responsibility to stay in between the lead and sweep boats. (If a boat inadvertently passes the lead boat, it should immediately stop and wait for the lead boat to pass.)

The remaining boats:

- Maintain space to avoid collisions, but still stay compact as a group.
- Always keep the next boat upstream and downstream in sight; stop if the downstream boat isn't visible.
- Communicate boating instructions.



Planning a Trip

For the most up-to-date information on river access points and hazards visit www.miamiconservancy.org/recreation/planatrip.asp

- Scout the land area and stream prior to boating it.
- File a "float plan" with a reliable person, indicating where you are going and when you will leave and return.
- Check river water levels and flow information for any river warning and flood information. Check a stream gauge level, if available, on the United States Geological Survey's web site at <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/oh/nwis/rt>.
- Dress properly. Wear appropriate footwear.
- Know the location of all dams and other hazards, and carry your boat around these hazards.
- The streambed may be privately owned. Be sure to put in and take out only at public access points.
- Carry adequate drinking water.
- Be prepared for the worst. Know how to get to roads if you must "walk out."
- Display courtesy and respect to other stream users.

Possible Day Trip

Once you have carefully read the sections on Planning Your Trip and Safety, you may want to explore the trip listed below. *Be aware that rivers are constantly changing and that new hazards may occur at any time.*

Taylorsville Dam [GM 91.0](#) to **Island MetroPark** [GM 81.7](#) (9.3 miles)

[GM 91.0](#) (River Mile) - Parking is provided at the downstream side of Taylorsville Dam. A carry-in boat ramp is available for easy launch. Check for park hours, but generally the gate is unlocked from dawn to dusk.

This stretch of the Great Miami River plays host to a variety of wildlife including Belted Kingfishers, Great Blue Herons, and many songbirds. There is also plenty of habitat – deep holes and structure – for good fishing. Smallmouth bass are abundant. The first section of the trip is heavily forested although you are just a few miles from downtown Dayton. As you paddle south, the scenery becomes more urban.

Just after launching, you float through an area that commonly has strainers – downed trees and logs – and then paddle under the I-70 bridge.

- [GM 90.3](#) I-70 Bridge
- [GM 88.4](#) Rip Rap Road Bikeway Bridge
- [GM 88.2](#) Rip Rap Road at Fishburg Road
- [GM 86.2](#) Needmore Road Bridge

H [GM 85.8](#) DAM - PORTAGE LEFT. This dam helps the City of Dayton recharge the aquifer.

[GM 85.8](#) to [GM 81.0](#) The Great Miami River becomes wider and more shallow – although deep holes can form after each rainstorm. Depending on recent weather, the river can be slower in the last stretch and require more paddling effort than in the earlier miles. This stretch also has fewer trees along the banks, so wind may be encountered.

[GM 81.7](#) LAND at Island MetroPark. There is a boat ramp on the left bank, and ample parking is nearby. Check for park hours, but generally the gate is unlocked from dawn to dusk.

Outdoor Ethic

Dispose of litter properly – pack it out

- Repackage food to minimize waste.
- Never throw any garbage into the water.
- Plastics are dangerous to wildlife – baggies, six-pack rings, and other clear plastics float on the water.

Display courtesy and respect to riverfront landowners

- The access points highlighted in this guide are located on public property, but most of the shoreline – and river bottom – are privately owned.
- Many landowners enjoy the stream's peace and solitude from their property. Share the same courtesy that you would want.

Leave what you find

- Leave artifacts and natural objects undisturbed.
- Avoid introducing non-native species, including live bait, by cleaning equipment between trips.

The Miami Conservancy District

The Miami Conservancy District protects the region from flooding, preserves the quality and quantity of water, and promotes the enjoyment of our waterways. The organization dates back to 1915 and is a political subdivision created by state law.

The Miami Conservancy District:

- Operates and maintains five dry dams, 55 miles of levee and other flood protection features in its system.
- Monitors the area's groundwater and surface water to protect the aquifer, which supplies 90 percent of the region's drinking water.
- Owns or maintains 40 miles of recreation trails for biking, skating, walking, jogging and enjoying.
- Coordinates a water quality credit trading program that allows the region to improve water quality better, cheaper and faster.
- Works with communities to help identify and respond to water resource concerns.

The Miami Conservancy District operates throughout the Great Miami River Watershed which drains about 4,000 square miles in southwest Ohio.



All the access-point information was provided by the following county park districts. Please contact them for more information.

Logan County

Indian Lake State Park
12774 State Route 235 N
Lakeview, Ohio 43331
937-943-2717

Shelby County Park District

PO Box 873
Sidney, Ohio 45365
For local calls: 497-7171
For all other calls: 937-773-4818
www.shelbycopark.org

Miami County Park District

2645 East SR 41
Troy, Ohio 45373
937-335-6273
www.miamicountyparks.com

Five Rivers MetroParks

1375 E. Siebenthaler Avenue
Dayton, Ohio 45414
937-275-PARK
www.metro parks.org

Warren County Park District

300 East Silver Street
Lebanon, Ohio 45036
Lebanon 513-695-1109
Cincinnati 513-925-1109
www.co.warren.oh.us/parks

MetroParks of Butler County

2051 Timberman Road
Hamilton, Ohio 45013
513-867-5835
www.metro parks of butler county.org

Hamilton County Park District

10245 Winton Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45231
513-521-7275
www.greatparks.org

Report Spills

Report spills, abandoned drums, and other environmental emergencies 24 hours a day at 1-800-282-9378.

Safety information provided by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Watercraft and The Miami Conservancy District.



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The information contained in this map is believed to be accurate. Interpretation and use of the map and its contents are the responsibility of the user.

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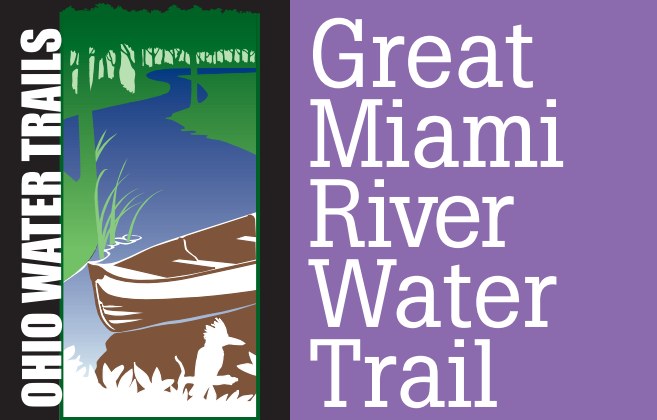
38 E. Monument Avenue
Dayton, Ohio 45402
Phone: (937) 223-1271
www.miamiconservancy.org



The Great Miami River Water Trail originates upstream from Indian Lake and flows southwest to its confluence with the Ohio River, west of Cincinnati. The watershed includes the Great Miami, Stillwater, and Mad rivers; and is known for its water supply, recreation, industries, productive farmland and high-quality streams. The middle and upper Great Miami River contains some of Ohio's best smallmouth bass fishing.



Enjoy the Great Miami River Water Trail & Play It Safe!



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