

Playing It Safe

Hazards Found on Streams

Recreation on rivers and streams can be relaxing or thrilling, but most of all it should 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.



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, and warnings may be issued by the Division of Watercraft.

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 Stillwater River has 12 low dams, with several more low dams on its tributaries.



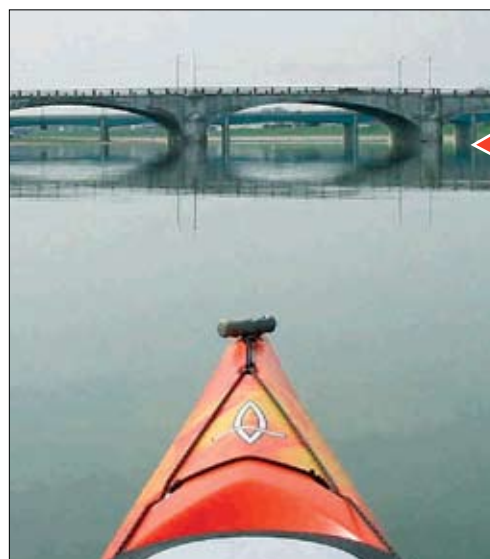
Low dams can be deadly and should always be avoided.

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.
- Scout the river and know the location of hazards. Talk with boaters who are familiar with the river to gain additional knowledge.
- 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.



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



Englewood Dam 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, 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 personal watercraft 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.

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.

Planning a Trip

- 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. Remember to contact the person once you have returned safely.
- Check river water levels and flow information for any river warning and flood information. Check a stream gage level, if available, on the United States Geological Survey's web site at <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/oh/nwis/rt>.
- Dress properly and bring extra clothes in a waterproof bag. Wear appropriate footwear.
- Know the location of all dams and other hazards, and carry your boat around these hazards.
- Do not overload or unevenly load your craft.
- The streambed may be privately owned. Be sure to put in and take out only at public access points.
- Match weather and stream conditions to your skills.
- Camp only in permitted areas.
- 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.
- Secure your vehicles at the put-in and take-out.
- Use insect repellent and sunscreen.

Possible Day Trip

Once you have carefully read the sections on Planning Your Trip and Playing It Safe, 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.*

Lauver Road bridge 21 to Fenner Road bridge 24 (4.5 miles)

SW 28.0 (Stillwater River Mile) Parking is provided on the downstream side and river right (west side) at the Lauver Road bridge. The parking area can be accessed by the public at any time for fishing and boating and is owned by the Indian Hills 4-H camp.

SW 27.5 DAM south of Lauver Road bridge. This lowhead dam is immediately downstream of the canoe launch. Safe portage can be found on the left as you are paddling downstream. *Be aware that rivers are constantly changing and that appropriate portage may be different every time you are on a river. Be careful to scout out safe portage based on the river conditions when you are paddling.*

SW 27.0 SR 718 Riverside Access Reserve. This park is owned and managed by the Miami County Park District.

This stretch of the Stillwater River plays host to a variety of wildlife including belted kingfishers, great blue herons, wood ducks, and many songbirds. There is also plenty of habitat - deep holes and structure - for good fishing. Smallmouth bass are abundant along this section. The riverbanks are forested.

SW 25.0 Penny Road bridge

Between the Penny Road and Fenner Road bridges the Stillwater River makes several big bends. At different times of the year the sand and gravel that washes downstream can form large beaches along the riverbanks and islands in the middle of the river. This means that the path of the river could look and flow differently after each rain event.

SW 24.0 Rt. 48 bridge. There is no public access from the bridge to the river at this location.

SW 23.5 Land at Fenner Road bridge. The parking area is downstream of the bridge on river right (west side).

Report Spills

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

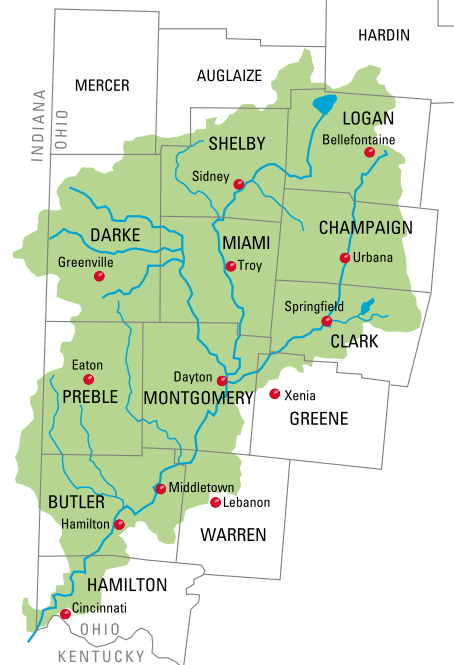
The Miami Conservancy District

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, 60 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 34 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.



Stillwater State Scenic River

In 1975, the Stillwater River and Greenville Creek System became Ohio's eighth scenic river. Designated sections include the Stillwater from Riffle Road bridge in Darke County to its junction with the Great Miami River in Dayton (58 miles), and Greenville Creek from the Ohio border to its confluence with the Stillwater (35 miles).

Ohio pioneered the river preservation movement in 1968 with passage of the nation's first scenic rivers act. The legislation created a state program to protect Ohio's remaining high quality streams for future generations. Scenic rivers are classified and designated according to the outstanding qualities a stream possesses. Ohio's Scenic Rivers Act provides three categories for river classification—wild, scenic and recreational. These criteria examine the stream's length, adjacent forest cover, biological characteristics, water quality, present use and natural conditions.

Through most of their course, the Stillwater River and Greenville Creek meander with a gentle grade across the glaciated plains of western Ohio. With excellent habitat and good water quality, the Stillwater and Greenville Creek Scenic River system provides exceptional fishing.

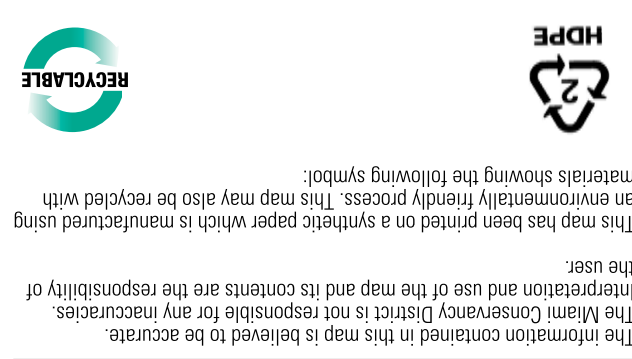
All of the access-point information was provided by the following county park districts and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. Please contact them for more information.

Darke County Park District
P. O. Box 801
4267 State Route 502
Greenville, Ohio 45331
(937) 548-0165
www.darkecountyparks.org

Miami County Park District
2535 Ross Road
Tipp City, Ohio 45371
(937) 667-1086 or (937) 335-9547
fax: (937) 667-0919
www.miamicountyparks.com

Five Rivers MetroParks
1375 E. Siebenthaler Avenue
Dayton, Ohio 45414
937-275-PARK
www.metrotparks.org

Ohio Department of Natural Resources
Division of Natural Areas and Preserves
2045 Morse Road, Building F-1
Columbus, Ohio 43229
(614) 265-6453
www.ohiodnr.com/dnap



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The Stillwater River Watershed, located in southwestern Ohio, drains 673 square miles in north, central, and southern Darke, western Miami, and northwestern Montgomery counties. The Stillwater River Water Trail has its headwaters in northwest Darke County near the Ohio-Indiana border and flows southeast to its confluence with the Great Miami River just north of downtown Dayton. The watershed includes Greenville, Ludlow and Painters creeks and is known for its recreation, productive farmland and high quality streams. Significant natural features include Greenville Falls and Ludlow Falls. The Stillwater River Water Trail is renowned for some of the Midwest's best smallmouth bass fishing.

Enjoy the Stillwater River Water Trail & Play It Safe!

Map & Guide

2007 Edition

The Stillwater River Water Trail Play It Safe

