The Milwaukee Urban Water Trail is a canoe and kayak route through urban portions of the Milwaukee, Menomonee, and Kinnickinnic Rivers — with more than 14 miles of paddling. The trail enhances public recreational opportunities, preserves private and legal river access, and encourages stewardship.

Historic Attractions

Over the past few centuries, Milwaukee’s rivers have been used by Native Americans, fur traders, missionaries, and French explorers. The Kinnickinnic, Menomonee, and Milwaukee Rivers were heavily used for transporting wheat, lumber, and other materials throughout much of the water trail area. The DNR is reintroducing sturgeon, walleye, and other native fish to the rivers, and finding opportunities to expand, especially before West Milwaukee Park and Estabrook Park and along the Menomonee River. The water trail follows adjacent to the Milwaukee County Park - 23rd East Trail and the newly created Brown Deer Park, which provide quality linking and biking opportunities that could be combined with a paddling trip.

Cultural and Historical Attractions

Although Milwaukee and its natural harbor began as a Great Lakes port in 1837, many native tribes, fur traders, and missionaries were already utilizing the area. They enabled non-motorized boats. The Milwaukee Urban Water Trail is to encourage people to enjoy their rivers in a responsible way that protects our natural and cultural heritage. These connections help provide “a sense of place” within our watersheds, promote stewardship efforts, and bring it together as a community.

The Milwaukee Urban Water Trail builds on a series of efforts to bring life back to the rivers of Milwaukee. The Milwaukee River, Kinnickinnic River, and Menomonee River are part of a larger Great Lakes port in 1837, many settlers, fur traders, and missionaries were already utilizing the area. They enabled non-motorized boats. The Milwaukee Urban Water Trail is to encourage people to enjoy their rivers in a responsible way that protects our natural and cultural heritage. These connections help provide “a sense of place” within our watersheds, promote stewardship efforts, and bring it together as a community.

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Urban Wildlife Water Trail

People increasingly recognize that they don’t need to travel long distances to come to our urban wildlife, and the Milwaukee Urban Wildlife Water Trail includes an entire range of wildlife and natural habitats.

The Milwaukee Urban Water Trail builds on a series of efforts to bring life back to the rivers of Milwaukee by improving access, water quality, and wildlife habitat. The underlying goal of the Water Trail is to encourage people to enjoy their rivers in a responsible way that protects our natural and cultural heritage. Water trail enthusiasts are encouraged to respect these resources and communities that use them.

For more information about Friends of Milwaukee’s Rivers or to advocate for sound land use in the Milwaukee, please visit the FMR website at: www.mkeriverkeeper.org. 

Planning for a Safe Trip

Although Milwaukee Urban Water Trail is not as remote as many popular water trails, the power and speed of motorized and paddlecraft can increase interest in recreation, and improved public access. They enable non-motorized boats. The Milwaukee Urban Water Trail Building by Jones Island, near the mouth of a sewage treatment plant and the Port of Milwaukee, we remember a time when ice was harvested from the river now looked to the streets. Although Milwaukee and its natural harbor began as a Great Lakes port in 1837, many settlers, fur traders, and missionaries were already utilizing the area. They enabled non-motorized boats. The Milwaukee Urban Water Trail is to encourage people to enjoy their rivers in a responsible way that protects our natural and cultural heritage. These connections help provide “a sense of place” within our watersheds, promote stewardship efforts, and bring it together as a community.

In case of emergency, please contact the U.S. Coast Guard at (800) 332-4100 or visit their website at: https://www.uscg.mil/.

For more information on the water trail, please visit the FMR website at: www.mkeriverkeeper.org.

General Safety Tips

- Always use a Coast Guard approved Personal Flotation Device (PFD) and a whistle if required for a particular water trail. 
- Don’t let the curly cock not a paddler – always bring an emergency whistle.
- Consider seeking formal boating instruction, attend a safety course, or enroll in a boating lessons.
- Dress appropriately for the weather and anticipate weather changes, especially when paddling in cold water. Bring sunscreen, boat clothing, and a dry change of clothes.
- Never attempt to rescue a paddler in the water. Instead, throw a foam flotation device at the water surface where the paddler is located.
- When there is a fire, an emergency swim, and a rescue in progress, ensure you have a fire extinguisher.
- Do not paddle under the influence. If you are “out and about,” do not paddle.
- Avoid contact with contaminated sediments, especially in the vicinity of the mouth of the Menomonee River, PCB levels in high or low water.
- Be aware of water levels check the USGS website at: http://www.usgs.gov.

Water trail visitors are legal “botherers” that are being developed or redeveloped across the country. They enable non-motorized boats. The Milwaukee Urban Water Trail is to encourage people to enjoy their rivers in a responsible way that protects our natural and cultural heritage. These connections help provide “a sense of place” within our watersheds, promote stewardship efforts, and bring it together as a community.

For additional readings, please visit the Friends of Milwaukee’s Rivers website at: www.mkeriverkeeper.org.

Water Trail Visitors

During high water levels check the USGS website at: http://www.usgs.gov.
This map is not intended as a sole source for navigation. For additional information,
please consult State and local government agencies, marinas, and other public.

Route Description

[Continue with the route description as per the map]