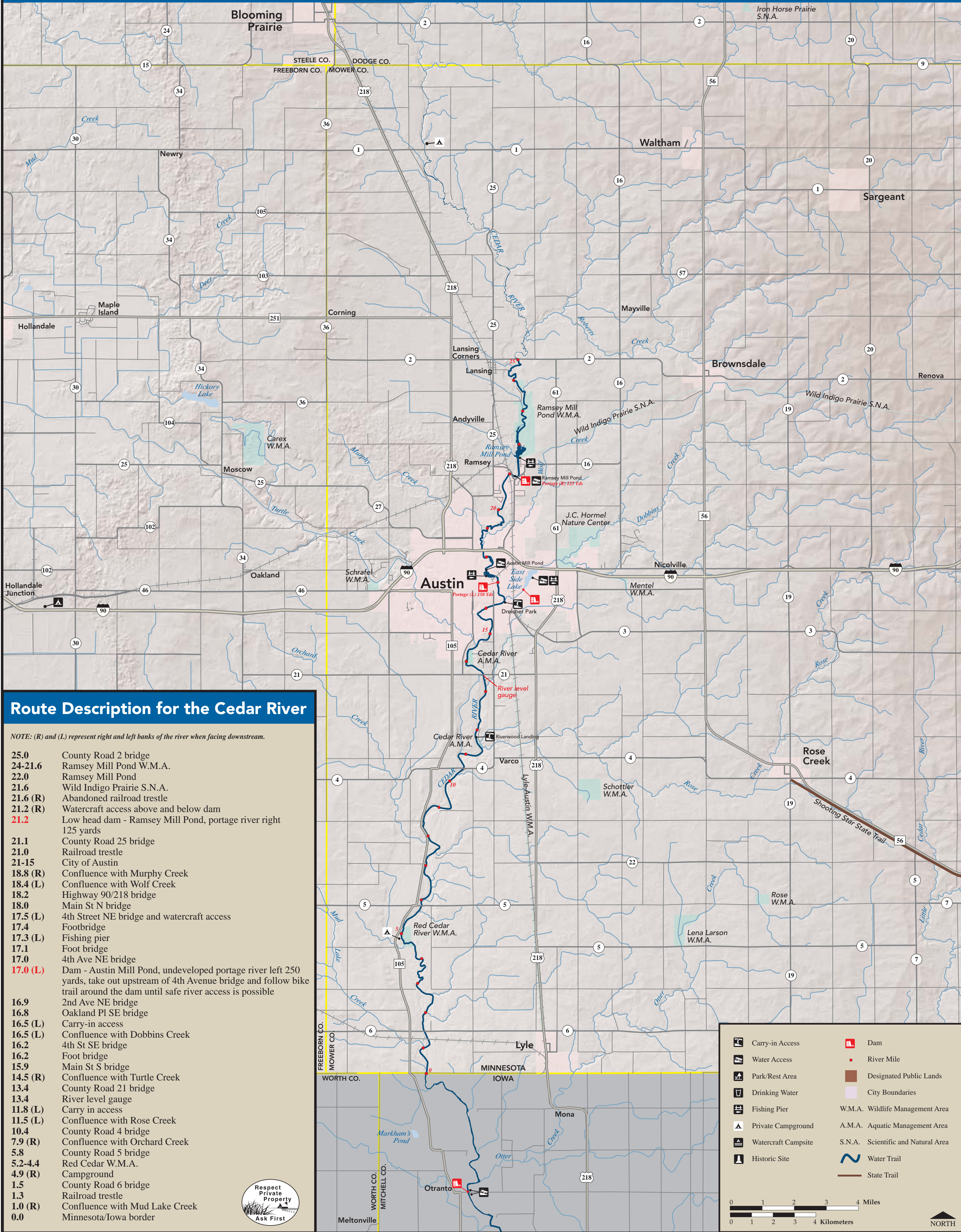



A WATER TRAIL GUIDE TO THE CEDAR RIVER



CEDAR RIVER

A STATE WATER TRAIL Guide

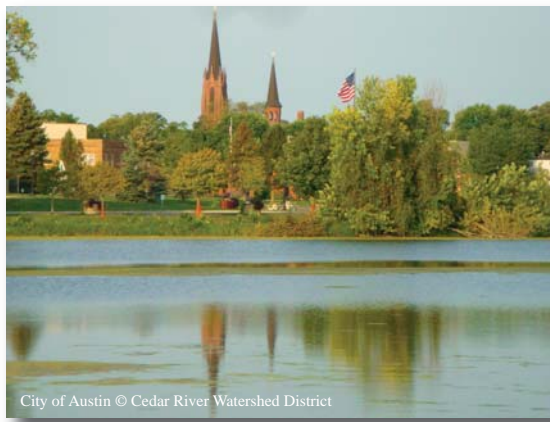


Minnesota State Parks and Trails
mndnr.gov/watertrails



© Cedar River Watershed District

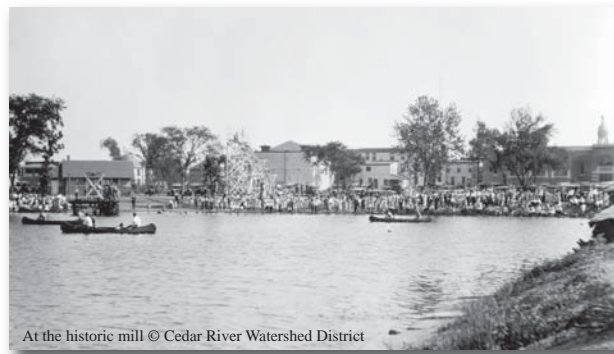
The Cedar River



City of Austin © Cedar River Watershed District

The 25 miles of Cedar River Water Trail in Minnesota are moderately flowing and easy to paddle from Lansing (just north of Austin) to the Iowa border, and follows Highway 105 closely. In total, this river runs about 329 miles, from the headwaters in Dodge County, Minnesota, to Louisa County in southeast Iowa, where it joins the Iowa River. From there, it winds its way into the Mississippi, as one of its major tributaries. The portion of this river that runs through Iowa is also a designated Water Trail.

Formerly known as the Red Cedar River, this waterway was put to good economic use when Austin first became established. The first saw and grist mills, built on the Cedar in 1854 and 1855 by Chauncey Leverich, supplied early settlers with lumber. In 1892, George A. Hormel created the Hormel Foods Corporation. Today, Austin is sometimes known as “Spam Town USA” because it is the birthplace of Hormel’s processed meat product, Spam.



At the historic mill © Cedar River Watershed District

The nearby J. C. Hormel Nature Center in Austin contains 507 acres of trails, woods and wildlife. One can find remnant and restored prairie, hardwood forest, wetlands and streams.

Two Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) – Ramsey Mill Pond and Red Cedar River– are

located between Lansing and the Iowa border. WMAs offer opportunities for wildlife watching and hunting. The Ramsey Mill Pond WMA contains a mix of wetlands, upland woods and established native prairie. The Red Cedar River WMA is mostly oak woodland and the western edge borders the river.

There are also two units of the Cedar River Aquatic Management Area (AMA) located south of Austin. AMAs ensure that critical fish and wildlife habitats will be conserved, non-boat public access to water resources will always be available, and habitat development on previously disturbed areas can take place.



© Cedar River Watershed District

One of these AMA units is a wetland restoration site created from former farmland. This site offers wildlife habitat, helps improve water quality and reduces soil erosion.

The Wild Indigo Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) is located along an abandoned Chicago-Milwaukee Railroad right-of-way, which gives it its strange shape. Over 340 different, rare plants can be found here. Hiking from the Cedar River to the city of Dexter provides a fascinating view of these rare species. SNAs are protected areas, so please visit the area with care.

Fishing

There are good fishing opportunities on this stretch of river. Notable fishing spots include the area around Austin for small mouth bass as well as around Lansing, where there have been reports of northern pike. Walleye and bullheads also are present, but bass – especially small mouth and rock bass – are most commonly caught.

Mussels and some rare fish species, such as the Ozark minnow, are great indicators of water quality. They are very sensitive to increases in

water siltation and pollution, and cannot survive in highly disturbed areas. You can help protect them by avoiding activities that increase erosion along the riverbanks and by disposing of trash properly.

Wildlife

There are interesting and rare wildlife species that can be seen on the Cedar River. Both of Minnesota’s threatened turtle species, the wood turtle and the Blanding’s turtle, are found in this river. Wood turtles prefer to nest in sandy, sunny areas along the river, while Blanding’s turtles may travel up to one mile away from water to lay their eggs.

Along with turtles, Sandhill cranes are another common sight along the river banks. After overexploitation in the early 1900s, they have made a steady recovery in the state of Minnesota.



Sandhill Crane © MNDNR

Plants and Trees

The native tree species surrounding this stretch are bur oak savanna, tallgrass prairie and maple basswood forest. The bur oak is mostly on moraine ridges, the prairie on level or gently rolling hills, while the maple and basswood are in steep ravines or near streams.

This water trails offers a pleasantly wooded paddle for canoeists, and also flows through agricultural land. The highest elevation in the area is 1440 feet near Elkton, and the lowest point is at 1140 at the Iowa border.

Planning A Safe River Trip

A successful river trip is safe. To enjoy a safe journey, you should be prepared by doing the following:

- Get acquainted with your route. Plan your trip with a map before you depart and advise someone of your plans including planned departure and arrival times.

- Travel with a companion or group.
- Choose a distance that is comfortable for you, most people paddle two to three river miles per hour.
- Wear a U. S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device that state law requires be on board the boat for each person.
- Bring a first aid kit that includes waterproof matches.
- Bring an extra paddle.
- Be cautious of river obstructions, such as overhanging and dead trees in the river.
- You must pack out all trash.
- Leave only footprints; take only photographs!

Water levels can speed or slow you down. You can get information about water levels from the regional DNR office, the DNR website, or the DNR Information Center. Remember that much of the shorelands are privately owned. Respect and protect the water and shorelands.

Boating Information

- Register your watercraft. All watercraft more than 9 feet in length, including nonmotorized canoes and kayaks, must be registered in Minnesota or your state of residence.
- Not all portions of this water trail are suitable for motor use.



© Cedar River Watershed District

Rest Areas and Camping Sites

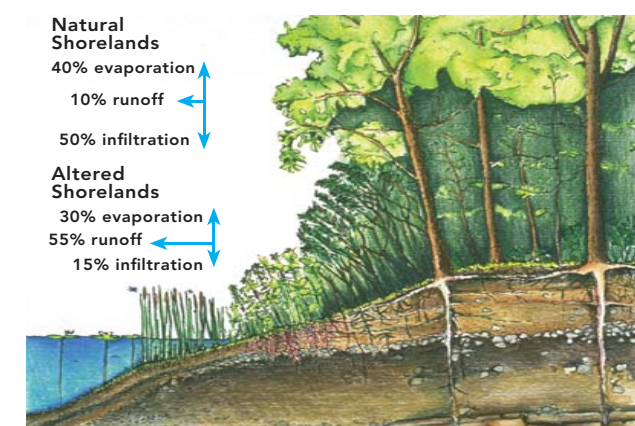
- Public rest areas are available along the route to rest, picnic and explore.
- Camp only in designated campsites, which are available on a first-come, first-served basis, unless otherwise noted.
- Bring drinking water. It is only available at a limited number of rest areas. Drinking river water is not recommended, but if you do it must be treated.
- Respect private property. Stop only at designated sites; much of the shoreland is private property.
- Be sanitary! Use designated toilet facilities or bury human waste away from the river.

Sustainable Ecosystems

Outdoor recreation is dependent on a healthy and attractive natural environment. Sustainable outdoor recreation enables people to enjoy the outdoors without negative impacts on the environment.

Communities working together can improve water resources by promoting environmentally sensitive land use practices along rivers and throughout watersheds.

Natural shoreline buffers improve water quality by filtering out pollutants and sediments. Healthy and diverse native shoreline plant communities are attractive and provide important shoreline habitat for birds and wildlife.



This information is available in alternative format upon request.

Online water trail information and maps can be found at mndnr.gov/watertrails

DNR Information Center

The DNR's Information Center is available to provide free publications of facilities and services as well as answers questions pertaining to DNR recreational opportunities in Minnesota.



The DNR Information Center
500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4040
651-296-6157 Metro Area
1-888-646-6367 MN Toll-Free

mndnr.gov



You can make a difference by joining the DNR Adopt-a-River Program. Be a clean up volunteer for a portion of your favorite recreation area. Call the DNR Information Center for a brochure, or visit mndnr.gov/adoptariver.

Cover Photo: MN DNR

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