



# Water Trail Users Guide

## TRAILS FOR OHIOANS: A Plan for the Future

**...A statewide venture to improve existing trails and ensure smart planning of future trails**

Trails are an important component of Ohio's outdoor recreation system. They come in various lengths, run through different environments, and accommodate a multitude of outdoor activities from hiking and biking to horseback riding and paddling. Trails are managed and maintained by a variety of groups including all levels of government and many trail organizations.



*"Trails for Ohioans: A Plan for the Future"* is an Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR)

initiative that identifies statewide issues affecting trails, recommends strategies for addressing these issues, and sets criteria for future recreational trails in the state. The plan serves as a comprehensive source of information on recreational trail participation in the state with suggestions to enhance these activities.

Recognizing the many benefits of a statewide trail system, and in an effort to increase awareness of the benefits of water trails, various divisions within ODNR initiated the Ohio Water Trails program. The goal of this program is to promote awareness of public paddling access by partnering with local communities to develop designated water trails on Ohio streams.



Water trail plans are initiated at the local level: Communities, user groups, or park districts recommend existing sites for a proposed trail, and the Ohio Water Trails team evaluates the trail, working with local partners to ensure safe, suitable access. The goal is to designate trails across the state and produce publications such as this one that promote safe access and wise use.



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## Outdoor Ethic

### Plan ahead.

- Consult a river guidebook or map. Scout the area prior to boating it.
- Call local contacts to find out about current conditions or events that may affect your trip.
- Choose a stream classification that matches your boating skills.
- Check for river warning and flood information. [waterdata.usgs.gov](http://waterdata.usgs.gov) (see *Real-time Water Flow*)

### Prepare for extreme weather, hazards, and emergencies.

- Know the locations of all dams and hazards. Be prepared to portage (carry your boat around) these hazards.
- Be prepared for any unknown event. Know how to get to roads if you must “walk out.” Know the local emergency phone number and know where you are along the trail in case you need to request emergency assistance.

### Be aware of all Ohio boating laws as well as any local rules and ordinances.

- Be sure you have the required safety equipment onboard including a properly fitted, U.S. Coast Guard-approved, lifejacket for each person.

### Travel on durable surfaces — rock, gravel, and sand.

- Use existing, improved access sites.
- When using a natural river bank to launch your boat, minimize your impact by staying clear of vegetation or mud.
- Don't wander while portaging. Stay on the trail if there is one.

### Dispose of waste properly — Pack it out.

- Repackage food to minimize waste.
- Never throw cigarette butts, fishing line, bait containers or any other garbage into the water.
- Plastics are especially dangerous to wildlife. Baggies, six-pack rings, and other clear plastics float on the water — invisible hazards to fish, birds, and other wildlife.

### Leave what you find.

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

### Respect wildlife.

- Observe from a distance; don't feed, follow or approach wildlife.
- Control pets or leave them at home.

### Be considerate of other visitors.

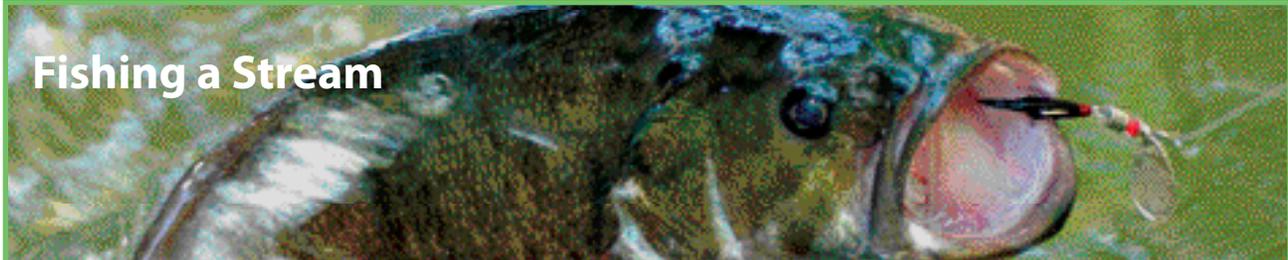
- Avoid boisterous behavior. Let nature's sounds prevail.

### Respect the privacy and rights of landowners.

- Although the access points highlighted in this guide are located on public property, most of the shoreline along the water trail is privately owned. Respect the privacy and rights of landowners by obtaining permission before entering any privately owned land.
- Many landowners enjoy the stream's peace and solitude from their property. Share the same courtesy that you would want. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is usually welcome.



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## Fishing a Stream

If you haven't considered packing a fishing pole for your next float trip, maybe you should. Streams provide some of the best fishing in Ohio — if you know where to look. Fish hang out where they can eat, and where they can eat depends on the current.

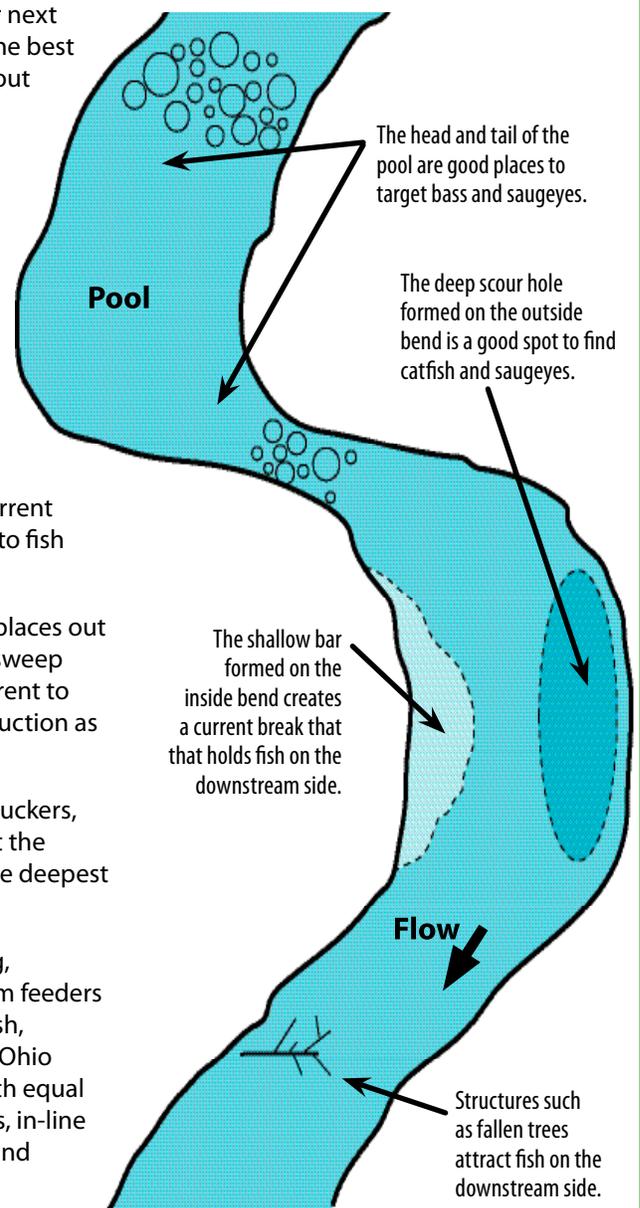
Predatory fish (smallmouth bass, rock bass, saugeye) feed where the current sweeps prey past them. Some fish seek shelter close to the current; they dart in to the current to feed and out of the current to rest. Other species of fish aren't built to fight the current and prefer deeper pools with slower-moving water.

Predatory fish wait in deeper water at the head of the pool (just below the riffles) or at the tail of the pool for prey to wash past them. Present your bait by casting upstream, either up into the riffles or near the swifter current at the tail of the pool, and allow the current to deliver it to fish waiting below.

Rocks, logs, and other obstructions in the pool provide places out of the current for fish to rest while they wait for prey to sweep past. Cast upstream of these rest areas, allowing the current to carry the bait past the fish. Retrieve as close to the obstruction as possible without snagging.

Panfish (sunfish, crappies) and bottom feeders (catfish, suckers, carp) prefer deeper pools where they don't have to fight the current. Target these species by fishing natural bait in the deepest area of pools.

Natural and artificial baits are effective for stream fishing, depending on the species of fish you are seeking. Bottom feeders prefer natural baits that are typical to the habitat. Crayfish, minnows, hellgrammites, and worms work anywhere in Ohio. Predators and sunfish strike natural and artificial bait with equal enthusiasm. Smaller is better for artificial baits. Small jigs, in-line spinners and crankbaits that match the color of prey found within the stream are good choices.





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## Common Hazards

To have a safe trip, boaters must be aware of the various types of hazards encountered on any stream. Learn to recognize these hazards and manage your risk appropriately.



### Foot Entrapments

If your boat capsizes, do not attempt to stand or walk if you are in swift-moving water. You might slip and pin a foot between submerged rocks. Once pinned, the force of the current can push

your body under water and hold it there. Always keep your feet up, pointed downstream, and swim to calm water before standing.

### Floods and Swift Water

Novice paddlers should never boat on streams when water is spilling out of the banks. High water causes hazards such as lowhead dams to become even more dangerous. Unseen obstacles such as floating logs or submerged trees may also threaten a boater. Flood levels are monitored throughout the state. Know the water conditions before you go.

[waterdata.usgs.gov](http://waterdata.usgs.gov)



### Lowhead Dams and Waterfalls

Never attempt to boat over a dam or waterfall. Lowhead dams can range from a few inches to a couple of yards in height.

Small dams can look harmless, particularly in swollen streams, but they are very dangerous because of the turbulence at the base of the dam. Boats as well as people may become trapped in this hydraulic. Know the location of lowhead dams and waterfalls. Carry your boat around the hazard and launch at a safe distance downstream. Scout a river or stream in advance of any boating trip and avoid these hazards.



### Strainers

River obstructions that allow water to flow through but block or “strain” people and boats are known as strainers. Overhanging branches, downed trees, log jams, and flooded islands all are potential strainers. All strainers should be avoided, especially in swift water.



### Cold Water Immersion and Hypothermia

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 water inhalation and drowning. It can also 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.

The best prevention for cold water immersion is to take all measures to avoid capsizing your boat. Keep your life jacket securely fastened to help keep your head above water if you fall overboard.

You don’t have to be submerged to succumb to hypothermia — 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.



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- Never boat alone.
- Wear a lifejacket at all times, particularly in moving water. By law, children under 10 must wear life jackets of an appropriate size.
- Dress for the water temperature. Bring an extra change of clothing with you in a waterproof bag. Pack your cell phone in this bag.
- Neoprene shoes or tennis shoes with woolen socks are recommended footwear.
- 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.
- Do not overload or unevenly load your boat. Keep the weight in the boat centered from side to side and bow to stern. The lower and closer the load in the boat is to the boat's centerline, the more stable it will be.
- Always maintain three points of contact (for example, two hands and one foot touching the boat) while moving around in the boat.
- Do not attempt to stand or walk in swift water.
- Be prepared to swim. If the water looks too hazardous to swim, then don't boat on it!
- NEVER boat over lowhead dams.
- Portage (carry your boat around) any section of water about which you feel uncertain.
- If you capsize, hold on to your boat unless it presents a life-threatening situation. If floating in current, position yourself on the upstream side of the capsized boat.
- Carry plenty of drinking water.
- Avoid overexertion and guard against extreme weather conditions.