



Prior to European settlement, the shores of the Fox River were home to Potawatomi, Chippewa, and Ottawa Tribal bands. The first Europeans to reach the Fox were French, beginning with explorer Jean Nicolet in 1634.

The Fox became a center for the fur trade, and by the 1850s, several locks and dams were built to navigate the river. These dams would eventually be used to power flour mills in multiple settlements along the Fox.

As flour production moved to Minnesota, the mills proved an ideal location for paper production, due to the proximity to lumber areas that could supply wood pulp. Several well-known paper companies were founded along the river, including Kimberly-Clark and Northern Paper Mills.

Unfortunately, industrialization of the paper industry produced hazardous waste, which was dumped in the river. Massive dredging and remediation projects were undertaken in the 21st century that have helped restore the Lower Fox to a healthy river ecosystem.

Today, the river is enjoyed year round by thousands of paddlers, boaters, and wildlife enthusiasts, and riverside running and biking trails abound in the Fox Cities. Though there are still challenges to be faced, the future health of the river looks strong.

Rebirth of a River

The Lower Fox River begins at the north end of Lake Winnebago. As the river crosses the walls of its old valley, it descends at a steep grade through the Fox Cities as it begins its 39-mile journey before emptying into the Bay of Green Bay.

The section of river between Little Lake Butte Des Morts and Kaukauna had a very steep and changing grade with very large falls at (using the original French nomenclature) La Grand Kaukilin (Kaukauna), La Petite Chute (Little Chute) and La Grand Chute (Appleton). The total drop of these falls is approximately the same as Niagara Falls, although over a much longer stretch.

The river drops around 164 feet (50 m) over this short stretch, and prior to the construction of European-style dams after 1850, the river had many sizable rapids.

The main stem of the Fox River in the Lower Fox River Basin is fragmented by a series of 17 locks and 12 dams that were built in the mid 1800's to aid navigation or produce power. These structures impeded the free movement of fish up and down the river and continue to do so today. The locks and dams also influenced the movement of aquatic exotic and invasive species into Wisconsin lakes and rivers.

After many years of rehabilitation the majority of the locks have been restored and are operable during the summer months, allowing larger and motorized boats to navigate the lower Fox River. More recently, Friends of the Fox and its partners have installed several portages around the locks, enabling canoeists and kayakers to explore the lower Fox River whenever weather permits.

Alongside improving recreational access to the river, the health of the river itself is improving. Formerly high level of PCBs have been remediated, with the Lower Fox River recently being delisted as an impaired waterway.

Today is a great time to get out and explore the Fox River, which includes many natural and cultural landscapes that co-mingle and create a fascinating journey. Don't forget to stop and visit restaurants, coffee shops, breweries, and other local shops that still call the riverfront home!

Source: Friends of the Fox Locks

Adventure FOX RIVER GUIDE



foxriverkayakingcompany.com

THE NEENAH LIGHTHOUSE
Put in at Shattuck Park for an easy paddle out and back to the lighthouse. This scenic landmark is also a great place to read, fish, and bird watch. Be sure to check out the nearby Bergstrom-Mahler Museum of Glass.

MENASHA'S GOVERNMENT CANAL
Paddlers can explore downtown Menasha's canal using the accessible launch at the Menasha Lock. Alternatively, take a stroll along the boardwalk past the new Racine Street bridge to the downtown Marina. Great views of boats, birds, and easy access to nearby cafes, restaurants, and breweries.

FRITSE PARK
Located on Little Lake Butte Des Morts, this park provides a great jumping off point to paddle, bike, or hike. The trailhead features a public boat ramp, bathrooms, and direct access to the Loop the Little Lake 5K trail. There is good fishing off the Friendship Trail trestle bridge, as well as great sunsets and people watching.

STROEBE ISLAND PRESERVE
This "hidden gem" represents the largest remaining wetland complex on the Lower Fox River. The marsh plays an important role recycling nutrients, filtering sediments, and providing habitat for a variety of aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals. The preserve is open to the public and includes a short hiking trail to Mud Creek.

HEARTHSTONE HISTORIC MUSEUM
Perched above the Fox River in Appleton, Hearthstone House was the first residence powered by a centrally located hydroelectric station. At that time, the house was the residence of Henry James Rogers, a paper company executive and entrepreneur. It's listed on the National Register of Historic Places and currently serves as a museum.



SUNSET PARK KAYAK LAUNCH
Several communities are adding self service kayak rental kiosks along the river. Currently there are rentals at Kimberly's Sunset Park and Heesakker Park in Little Chute.



NELSON FAMILY HERITAGE CROSSING
The David and Rita Nelson Family Heritage Crossing is a 1,100' bicycle and pedestrian connection between Heesakker Park in the Village of Little Chute and an expanded rail trail in the City of Kaukauna. Kayak rentals are available at the kiosk adjacent Heesakker Park off Sanitorium Road.



1,000 ISLANDS ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER
1,000 Islands is a 350-acre refuge along the Fox River in Kaukauna. Home to nesting eagles, herons, owls, bitterns, teal, coot, ducks, mergansers and song birds. It offers a nature center and many miles of trails, which can be used for hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. (Photo: Jason Thiel)



FOX RIVER LOCKS
The locks are operated manually with no electric motors, no pumps, or any automatic valves. Nearly 500,000 gallons of water move in/out during each "lockage" thanks to some clever engineering that took place over 150 years ago. (Photo: Fox Locks)



AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN
Visitors to the Lower Fox River have the opportunity to see white pelicans in many locations. With wingspans reaching up to 10' wide, pelican populations have rebounded since the banning of pesticides such as DDT and the recently completed Fox River PCB cleanup, one of the largest of its kind worldwide. (Photo: Bruce Danz)

Exploring the Lower Fox River Neenah to Kaukauna

This guide is intended to inspire residents and visitors to get out and explore the waterfront and waterways of the lower Fox River and northwest corner of Lake Winnebago. Some visitors come to see eagles, pelicans, and otters. Others come to paddle through the hand-operated lock system, bike the waterfront, or explore historic museums.

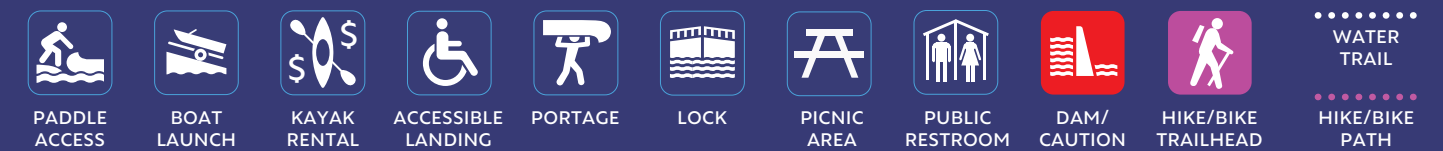
Wherever your adventure takes you, we hope this map helps orient you in the right direction. While the focus of this guide is on paddling and boat access points to the river, we also highlight two great biking/hiking trails along the waterfront. Enjoy your Fox River adventure!

To see detailed navigational charts, please visit: friendsofthefox.org/navigate/charts-maps.



Fox River Adventure Guide

This guide is intended to inspire residents and visitors to get out and explore the waterfront and waterways of the lower Fox River and northwest corner of Lake Winnebago. While the focus of this guide is on paddling and boat access points on the river, we also highlight great biking/hiking trails along the water (magenta dotted lines) as well as several waterfront parks and museums.



Recommended Paddles

Beginners will want to pick a single put-in and paddle out and back. It is also possible to do longer 1-way paddles with a shuttle. Unless you are a very strong paddler looking to do the entire 14 mile journey in one day, we suggest you start with an out and back paddle, like one of the paddles highlighted below.

SHATTUCK PARK TO NEENAH LIGHTHOUSE, NEENAH

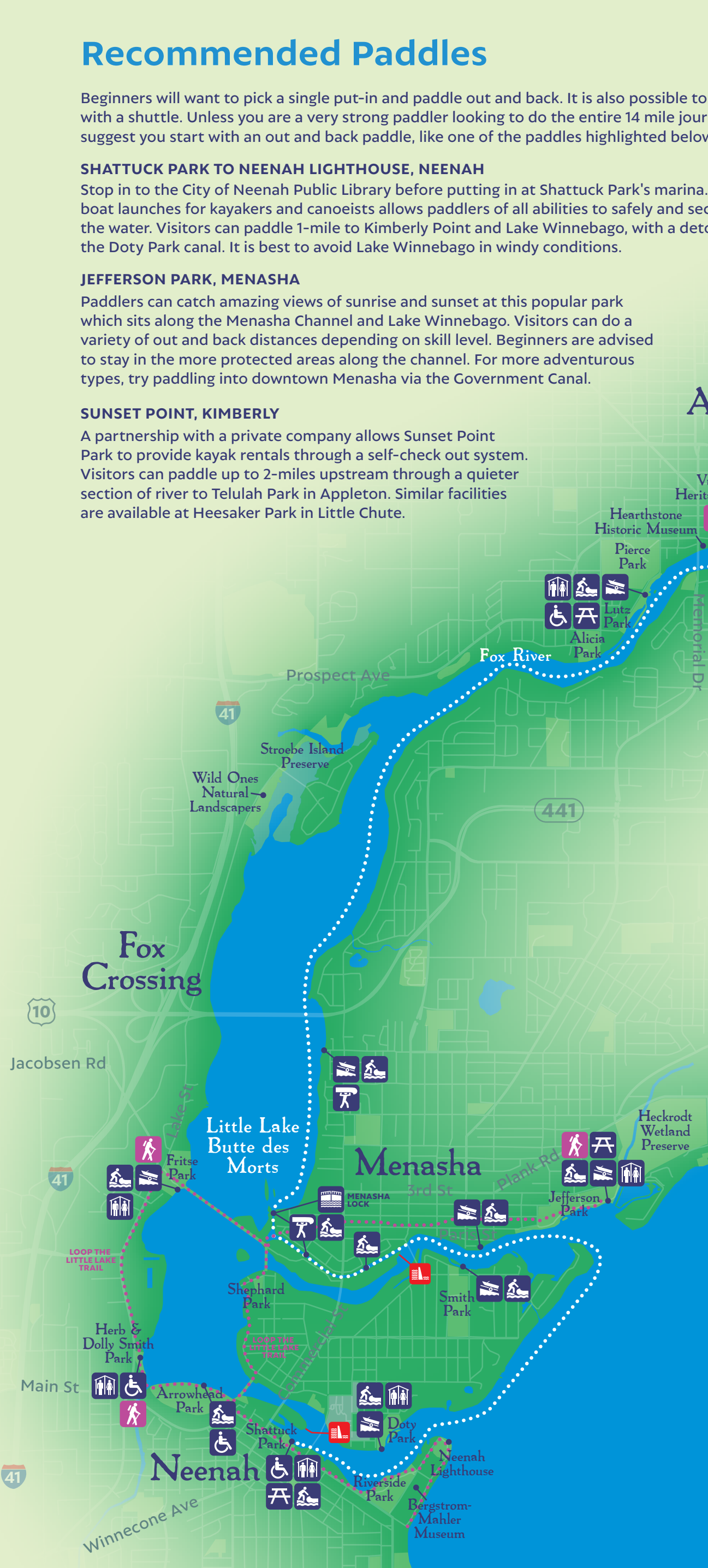
Stop in to the City of Neenah Public Library before putting in at Shattuck Park's marina. Accessible boat launches for kayakers and canoeists allows paddlers of all abilities to safely and securely access the water. Visitors can paddle 1-mile to Kimberly Point and Lake Winnebago, with a detour through the Doty Park canal. It is best to avoid Lake Winnebago in windy conditions.

JEFFERSON PARK, MENASHA

Paddlers can catch amazing views of sunrise and sunset at this popular park which sits along the Menasha Channel and Lake Winnebago. Visitors can do a variety of out and back distances depending on skill level. Beginners are advised to stay in the more protected areas along the channel. For more adventurous types, try paddling into downtown Menasha via the Government Canal.

SUNSET POINT, KIMBERLY

A partnership with a private company allows Sunset Point Park to provide kayak rentals through a self-check out system. Visitors can paddle up to 2-miles upstream through a quieter section of river to Telulah Park in Appleton. Similar facilities are available at Heesakker Park in Little Chute.



Get out and explore the Fox River

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

Many visitors come to fish the river, or to boat. In addition, the river and its environs offer opportunities for wildlife viewing, touring historic sites and downtowns, and hiking waterfront trails.

WHEN TO VISIT

The river is open year-round but most visitors float the river from late May through fall.

REGULATIONS AND SAFETY TIPS

Visitors must take responsibility for their own safety. The lower Fox River is a large, fast-flowing river and Lake Winnebago is a very large body of water prone to wind gusts.

As a general rule of thumb paddling is not advised when the river is above 6,000 CFS (cubic feet per second). Scan the QR code to see current water flow data.



LODGING, FOOD, SERVICES

Most Fox Cities downtowns are readily accessible from the river, or just a short walk away. In addition, several restaurants are located directly on the water, providing options to snack or eat a meal along the way. To help plan your trip visit the Fox Cities Convention and Visitor's Bureau at foxcities.org or scan the QR code.

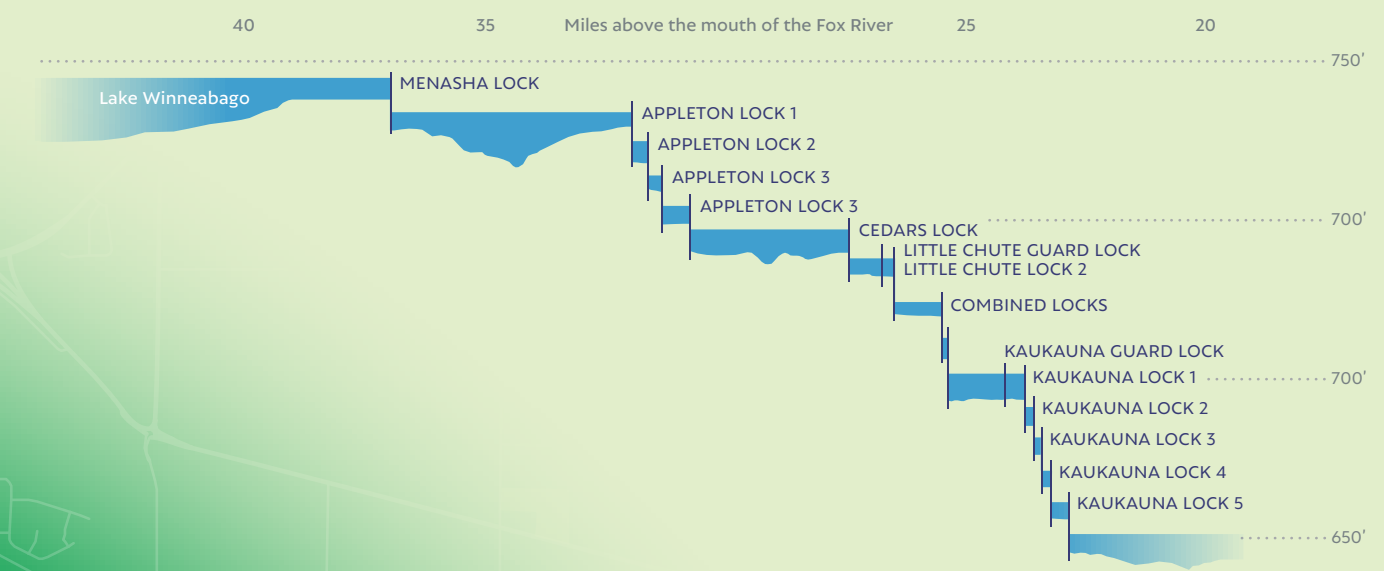


ACCESSIBILITY

The Friends of the Fox, Fox Cities Greenways, and neighboring municipalities have installed several ADA accessible boat launches along the river. These launches are very convenient and provide a safe way to enter and exit the river. All visitors are encouraged to use them.

FOX RIVER LOCK SYSTEM

The locks are owned by the State of Wisconsin and managed by Fox Locks. Public use day passes are required for boaters wanting to pass through the lock system and see the hand operated locks up close. Visit foxlocks.org or scan the QR code (paddlers can also portage around the locks for free).



THE FOX LOCKS ELEVATION PROFILE

The 39-mile lock system on the Lower Fox River features 17 lift locks and 2 guard locks. Lift locks lift and lower boats by changing the water level in the lock chamber. The locks average about 10 feet of lift each. Guard locks divert the flow of water when the main locks need to be closed for repairs. Boats traveling the system to Green Bay are lifted or lowered a total of 168 feet—a vertical drop nearly equivalent in height to the total drop of Niagara Falls. As of publication, the Menasha Lock remains closed indefinitely due to the presence of the Round Goby, an aquatic invasive species. Fox Locks is working with the State of Wisconsin and the Federal Government to find an acceptable solution to prevent the spread of the Round Goby into Lake Winnebago.