Welcome, the River Awaits You…

Upper Mississippi River - User Stewardship Guide

Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee – Outreach, Recreation, Environmental Education and Interpretation Technical Section

UMRCC - OREIT

Upper Mississippi River

There are many ways to enjoy the Upper Mississippi River

Upper Mississippi River

Sailing

- Canoeing
- Kayaking

Click here for Water Trails

Water Skiing

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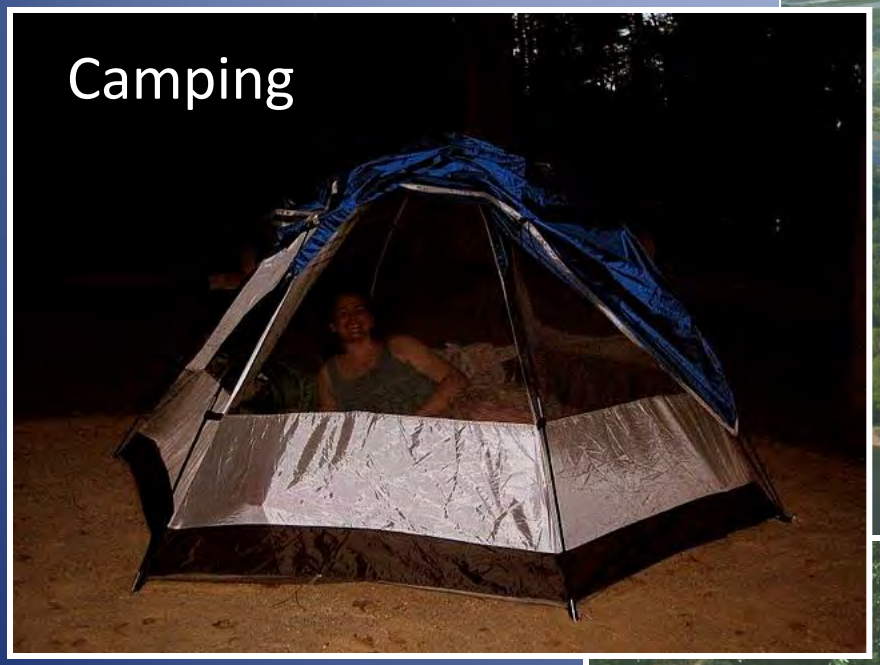

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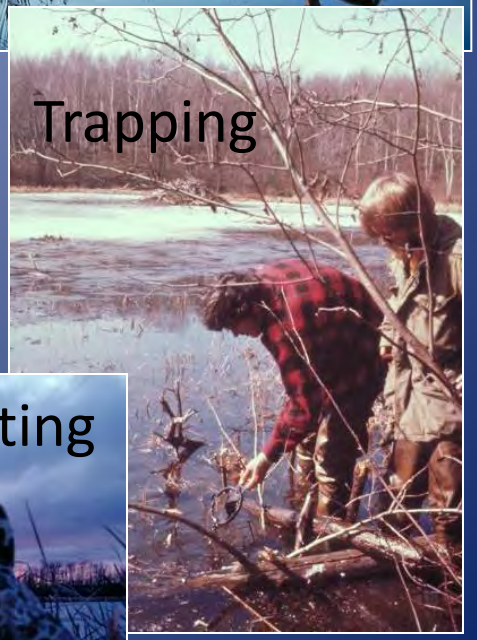
The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge extends from Wabasha, MN almost to Rock Island, IL. This combined with state wildlife management areas offer tremendous opportunities to enjoy the outdoors.



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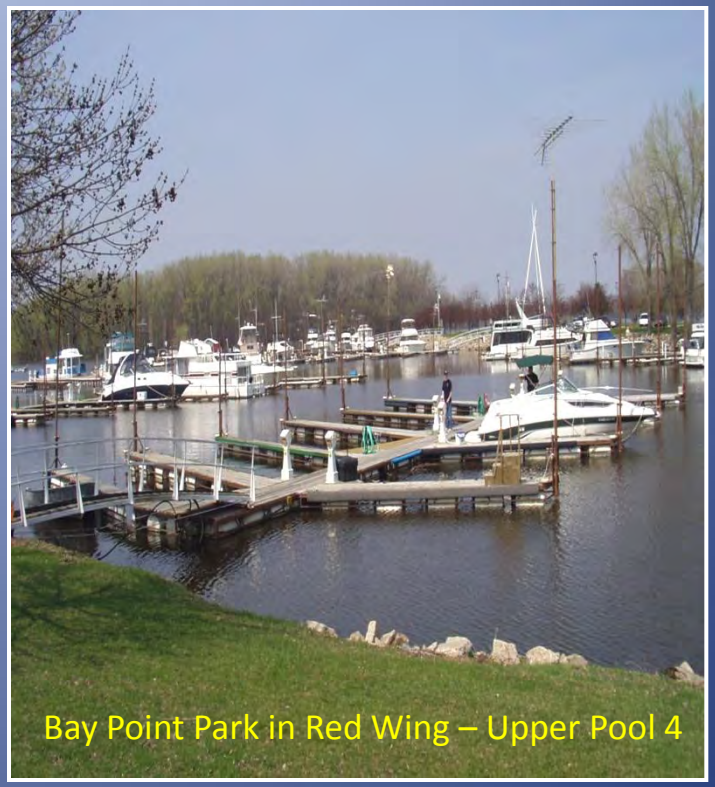
How do I access the River?

There are many public boat ramps, access points, fishing piers, campgrounds and beaches available up and down the River. In addition, there are private marinas, campgrounds and fishing floats.



Bay Point Park in Red Wing – Upper Pool 4

Great Alma Fishing Float in Upper Pool 5

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Before venturing out, there are few things to know…

- The Mississippi River is a big river with variable water depths, strong currents, large wind-generated waves, man-made structures, possible navigation hazards and lots of activities going on simultaneously.

- Boating on the Mississippi River requires that you understand river language including terms like right of way, wing dams, and closing dams.

- The Mississippi River floodplain contains a mix of private property and public lands managed for fish and wildlife habitat that are sensitive to certain types of activities. It is best to keep disturbance of wildlife to a minimum.

- There are a diverse array of users on the Mississippi and not all activities are totally compatible with other users or good for the health of the River.

Upper Mississippi River Basics…

Understanding River Language

What is a lock and dam?

To facilitate tow boat and barge traffic, the Corps of Engineers built a series of locks and dams between St. Paul, MN and St. Louis, MO to maintain a minimum of 9 feet of water in the main channel. The dams create a series of navigational pools. Each dam is a step in the river as it descends to the Gulf of Mexico. The locks are used to raise or lower boats to the next pool.

Lock and Dam 3 near Red Wing, Minnesota

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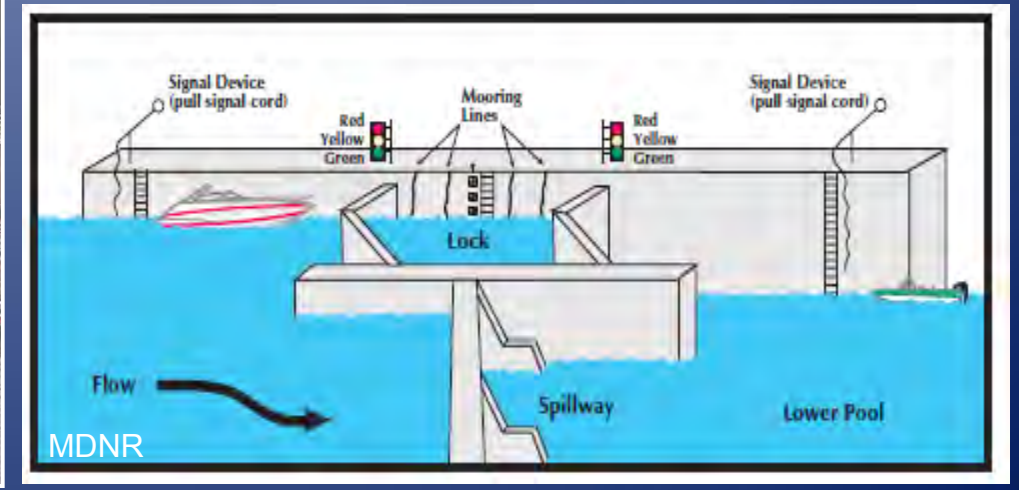
Upper Mississippi River Basics…

Understanding River Language

Locking Through - How do I get from one side of the dam to the other?

Upon approach to the lock, you can contact the lockmaster via channel 14 on your VHF marine radio or simply pull the signal cord on the lock approach wall. Upon receiving a green light, proceed slowly into lock and observe mooring lines spaced along lock wall. The lines should be held by hand and ***not tied to the boat*** while in the lock chamber. Do not tie a line to a recessed ladder. Insure that passengers remain seated at all times and keep hands inside the boat to avoid the chance of crushed fingers. Upon completion of the lock filling or emptying operation and when the gates are fully open, a signal will be given by the lock operator that it is safe to depart the lock.

Fisherman waiting to lock through at Lock and Dam 3 Corps

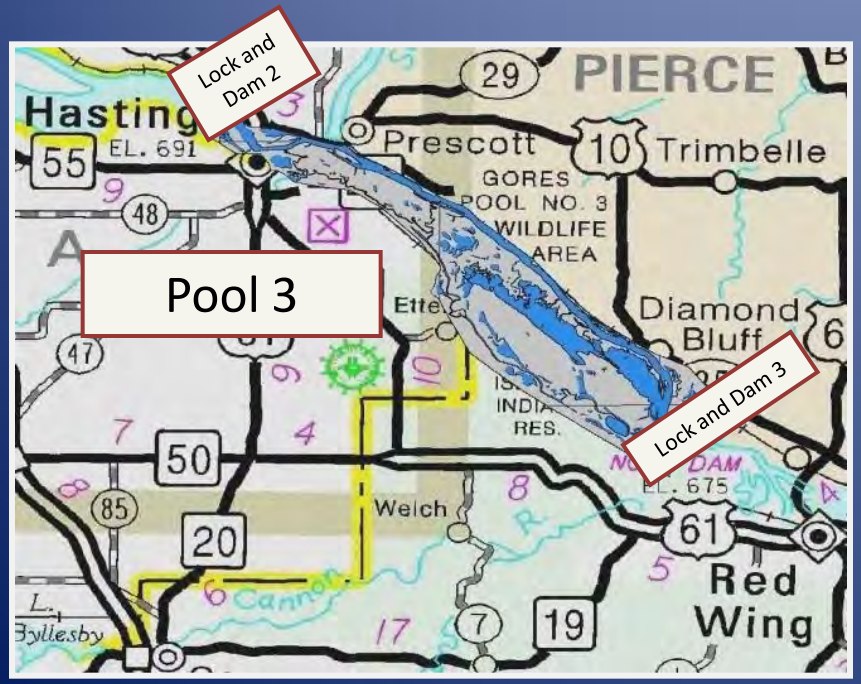


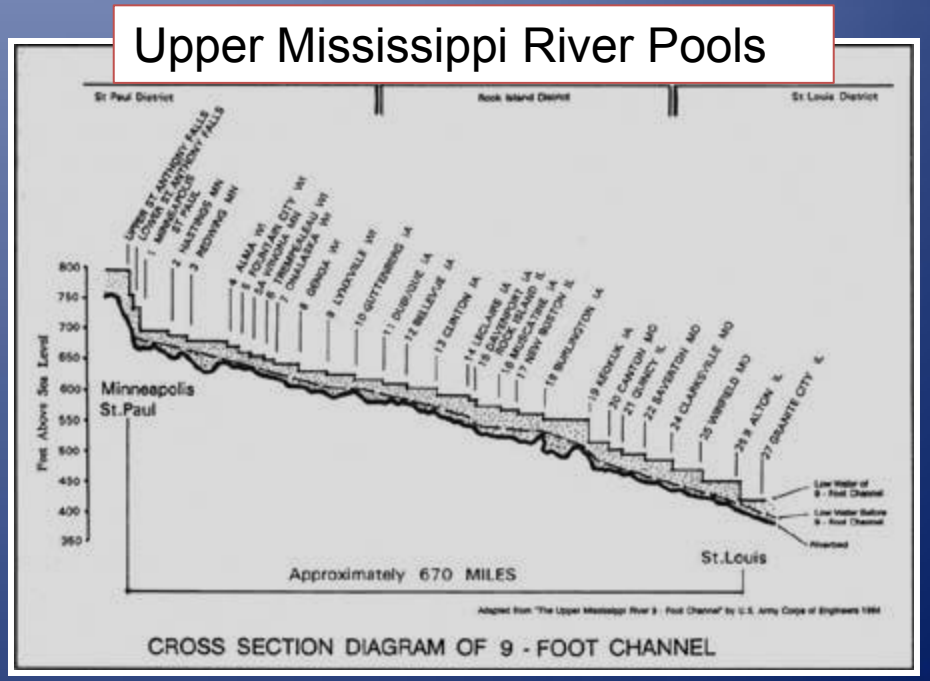
Upper Mississippi River Basics…

Understanding River Language

What is a Pool?

The stretch of river between two navigational dams is referred to as a pool. The pool is named after the number of the downstream dam. For example, Lock and Dam 3 creates Pool 3 above it to Lock and Dam 2 at Hastings.





Upper Mississippi River Basics

Understanding River Language

What is a River Mile?

The Corps of Engineers has marked the navigation channel with river mile markers as measured upstream from the mouth of the Ohio River to better navigate the River. River miles also appear on most maps of the river.

Why all the rock?

The Corps used rock to build wing dams, closing dams and shoreline protection as part of the navigation channel project. Rock rip rap protection is placed to limit shoreline erosion.

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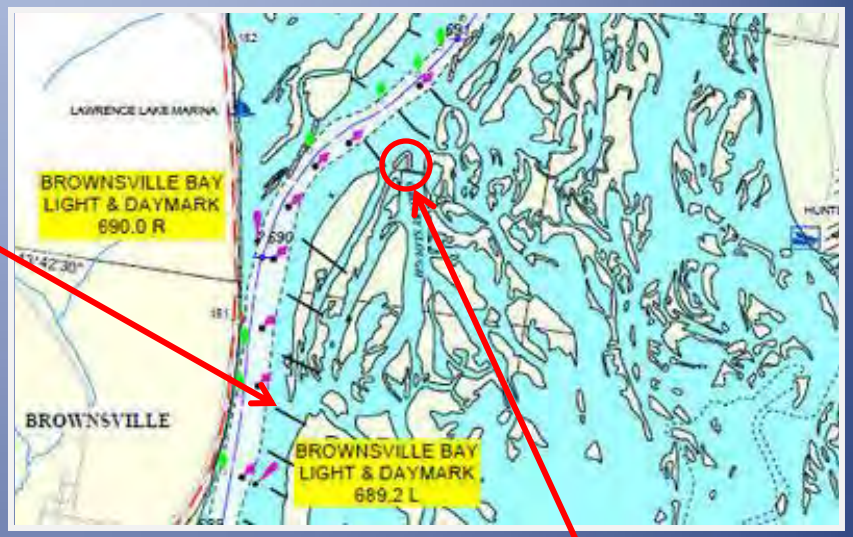
Upper Mississippi River Basics…

Understanding River Language

wing dams



closing dam

What is a wing dam?

Rock and willow matting are used to construct wing dams to concentrate river flow to increase the channel depth. The majority were built over 100 years ago and are often found almost completely underwater. If you are unfamiliar with the river, stay in the between the channel markers to avoid hitting wing dams with your boat.

What is a closing dam?

To further concentrate flow to reduce dredging, side channels were often blocked by closing dams made of rock. These structures are largely underwater and are usually not marked.

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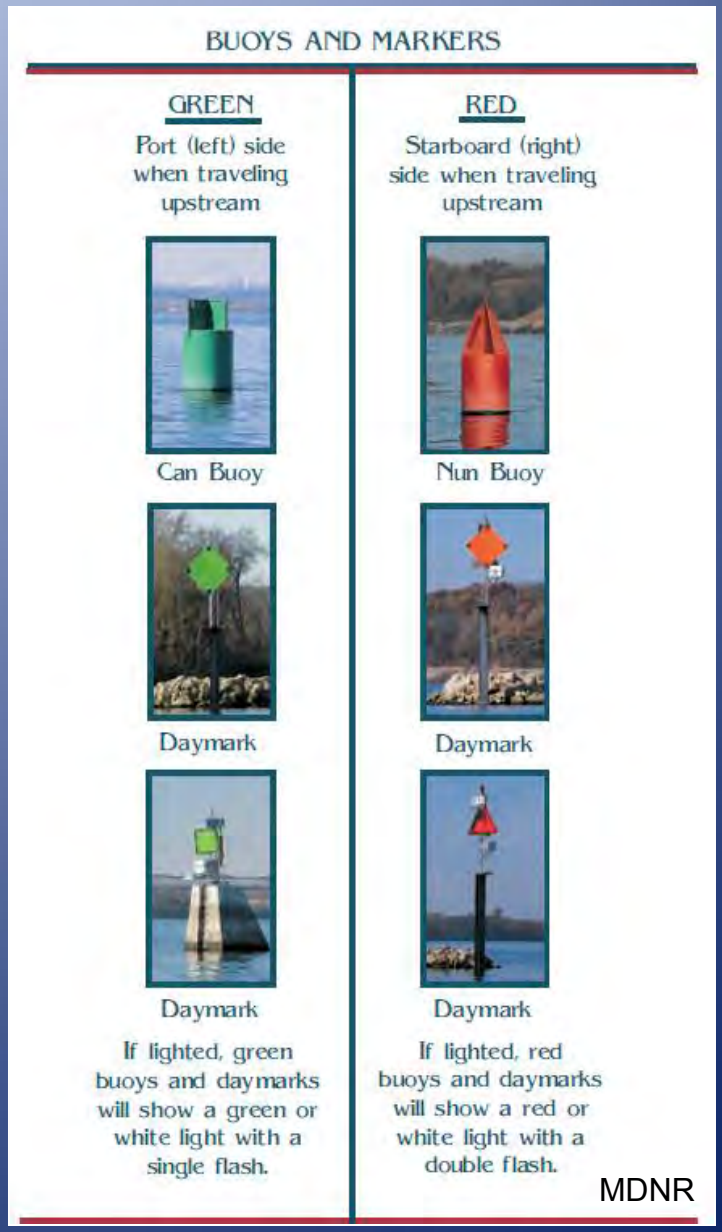
Upper Mississippi River Basics…

Understanding River Language

Navigational Aids

There are a variety of buoys seen on the river that direct traffic and warn of danger or provide information.



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Upper Mississippi River Basics…

Commercial Boat Traffic has the Right–of-Way

Tow boats run from March to December. When full loaded tows consist of a tow boat and 15 barges. It is prudent to give them a wide berth.

Typical stopping distance for a loaded tow is a mile or more!

Safety tips for Boating Near Barges

- When overtaking a tow stay to one side and out of the turbulent wake.
- After passing do not pull in front of the leading barge unless it is necessary.
- Turn your bow into the wake of the barge.
- Stay clear of the stern of a towboat as their propeller wash can overturn a small boat.

Upper Mississippi River Basics…

#1 Rule – Know the Rules before you go

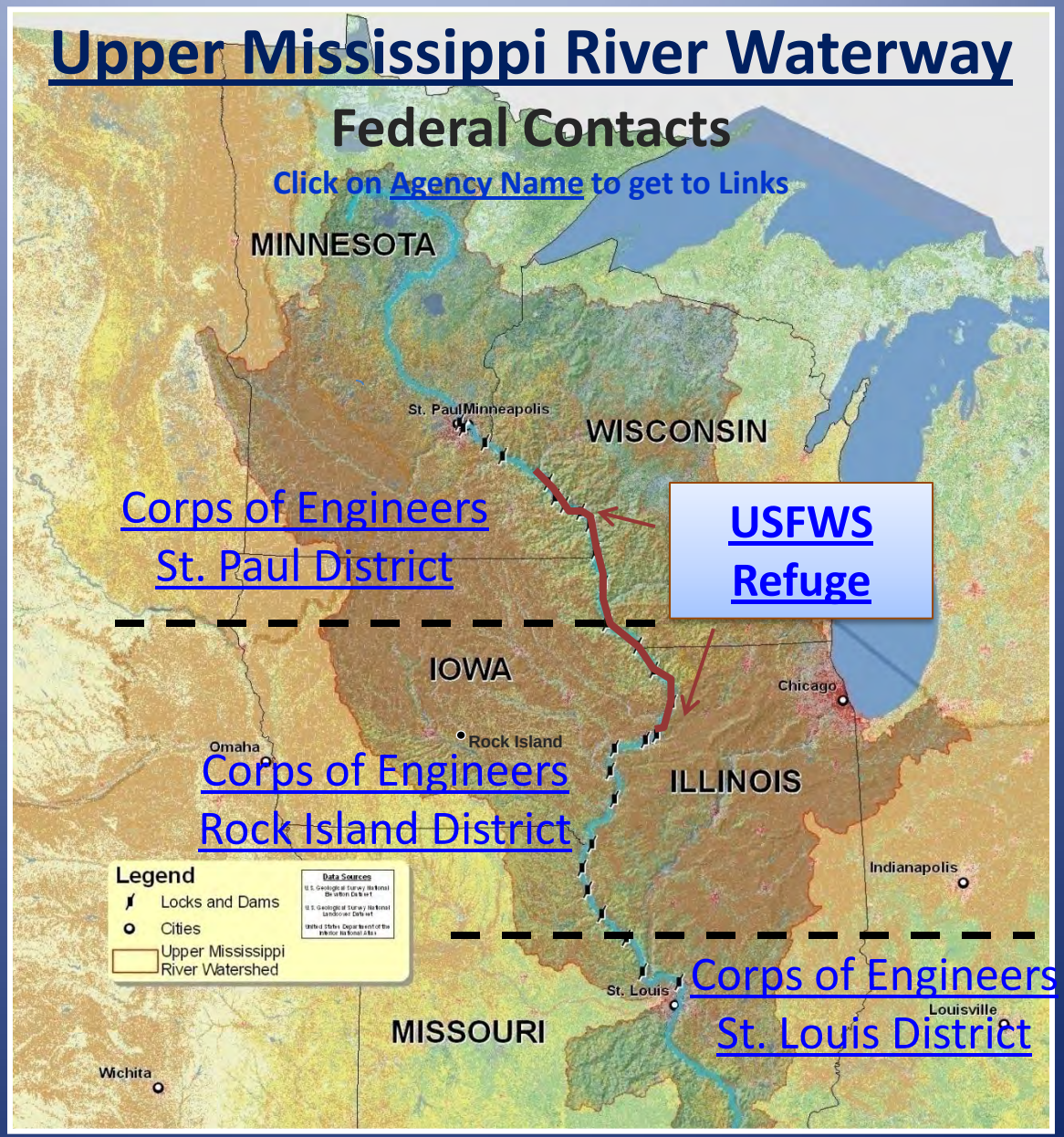
A number of agencies have regulatory jurisdiction over activities on the Mississippi River including:

- States of MN, WI, IA, IL and MO
- US Coast Guard
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US EPA
- US Fish and Wildlife – Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge
- Local Units of Government

You need to know where you are on the river.

Upper Mississippi River Basics…

Major federal land and water managers along the Upper Mississippi River



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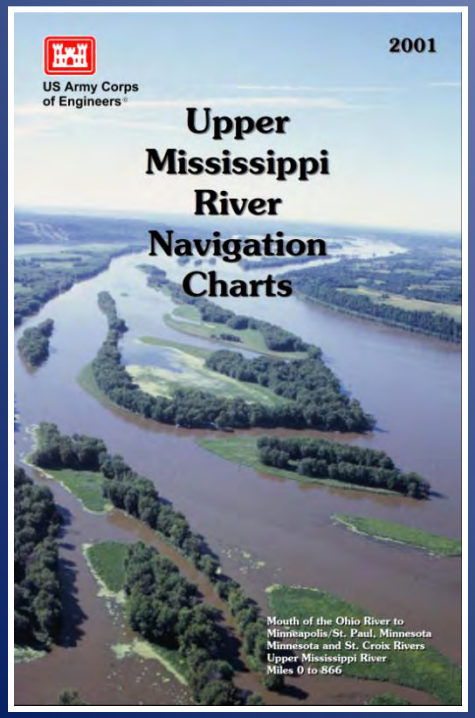
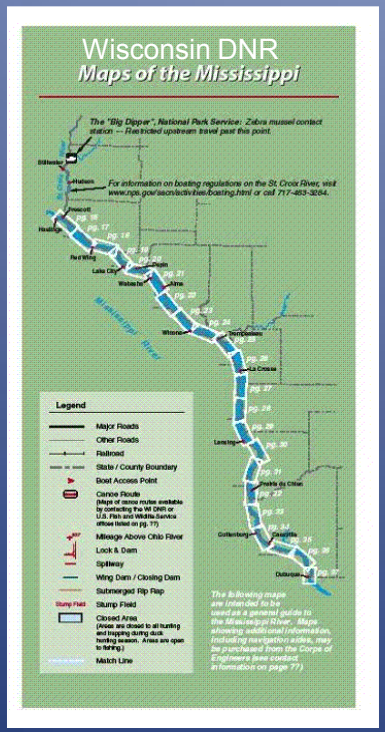
Upper Mississippi River Basics…

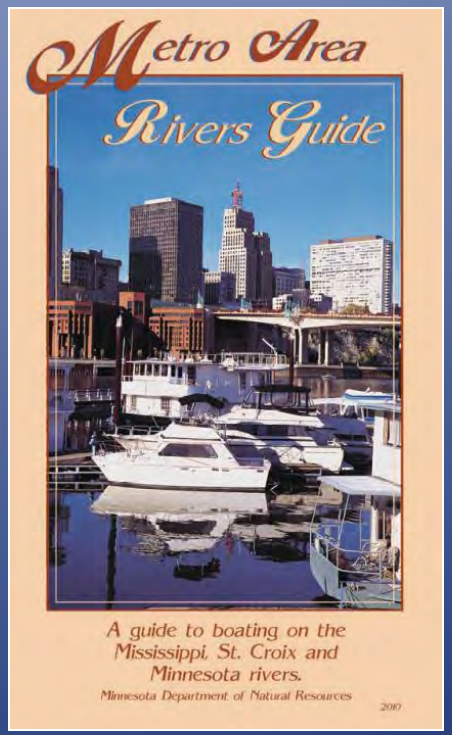
Know where you want to go!

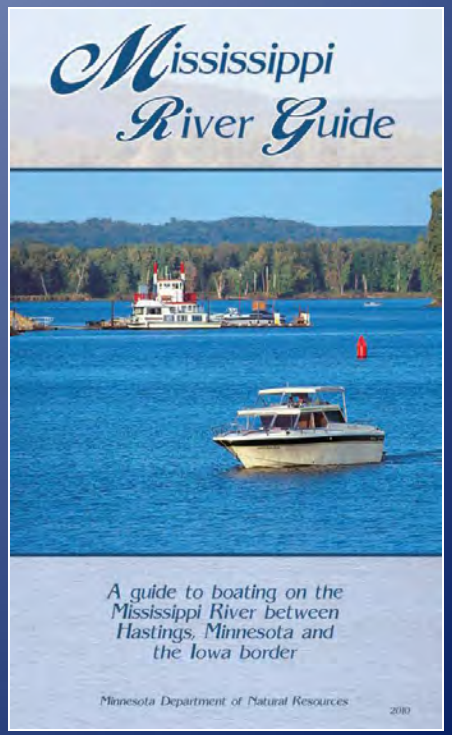
There are good references available to help you navigate the river, find nearby access points, identify rules to follow, and where to fish or find beaches.

Click on Images to connect to Web Links





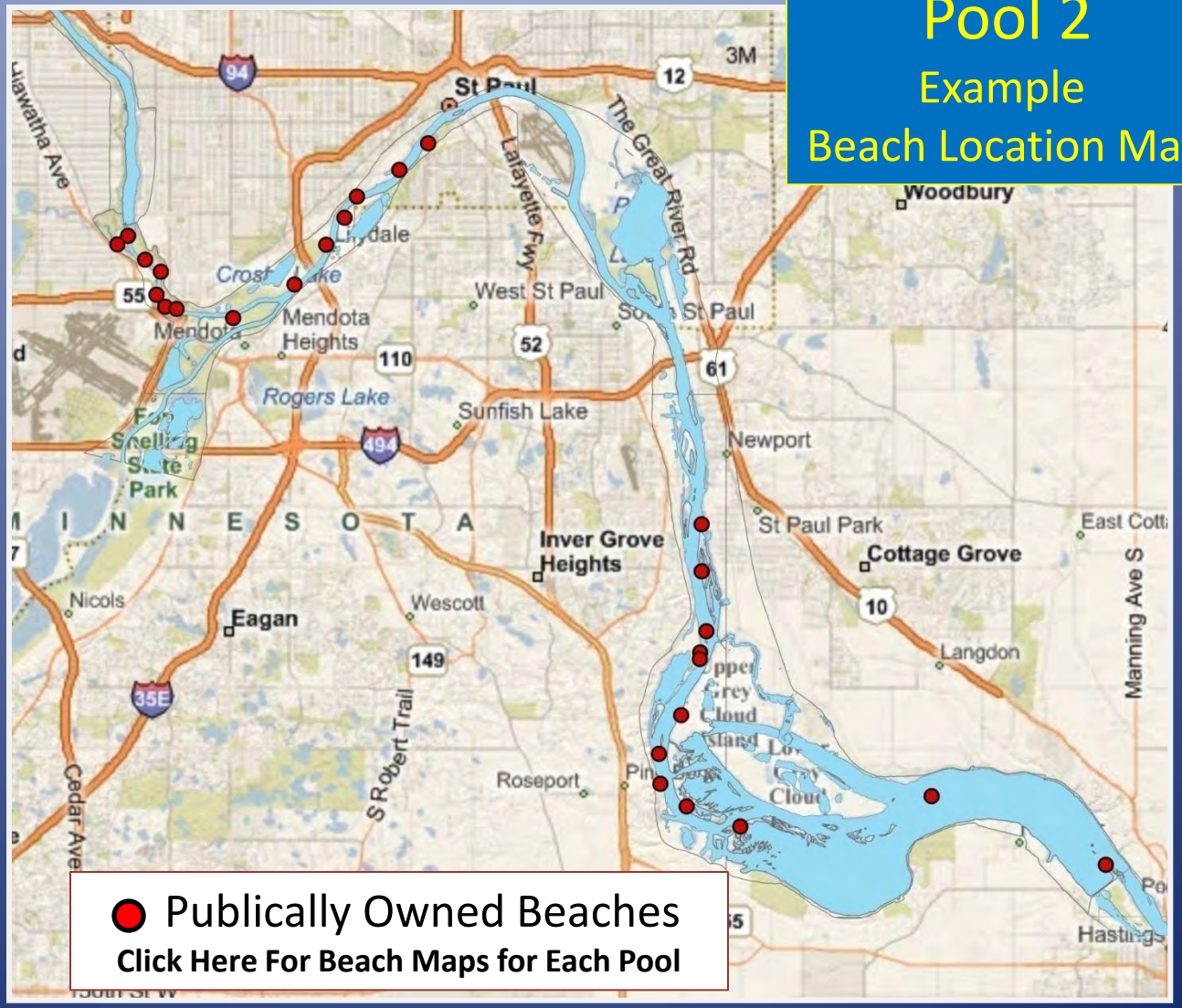




Upper Mississippi River –Corps of Engineers St. Paul District

There are beach maps available for each pool in the St. Paul District.

Pool 2
Example
Beach Location Map



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Be a River Friendly Boater

There are many different ways to enjoy the river, but not all activities are totally compatible with other users or good for the health of the river. But there are ways you can you can help!

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Upper Mississippi River

Leave No Trace Principles

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel / Camp on Appropriate Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors

leave no trace
CENTER FOR OUTDOOR ETHICS

Click to learn more

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Visiting a State Park is a great way to enjoy the River

Click on the Map to connect to Web Links

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Publicly held lands in and along the River are there for you to use.

Use them in such a way that other folks can enjoy them as well.

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Take Only Pictures
Leave Only Footprints

Pool 4 Lake Pepin
Frontenac State Park Overlook

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For more information, click our logo