

Central Illinois

River Experiences

Illinois has over 120,000 miles of rivers and streams.

Get outside and enjoy our natural treasures.

Big River State Forest

RIVER: Mississippi River

Mercer County

WHAT TO DO: Fishing, boating, camping, hiking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, and wildlife viewing

RR 1 Box 118
Keithsburg, IL 61442
309/374-2496

WEBSITE: dnr.state.il.us/lands/Landmgt/PARKS/R1/BIGRIVER.HTM

The Big River State Forest offers recreation in addition to serving as a demonstrative laboratory for sustainable forestry practices. Located near Keithsburg, along the Mississippi, there are 50 miles of horse and foot trails for outdoor enthusiasts. Four campsites, Class B/S and C are available for camping, while three boat launches offer access to the Mississippi and its tributaries. Bank fishing is allowed along the Mississippi and Spring Slough, or by boat. The area hosts 15 miles of scenic roadways as well, and offers ice fishing and snowmobiling during the winter. Sheltered picnic areas are found throughout the park. Visitors should inquire about the schedule of controlled burns before visiting, as access is denied unavailable during these times.

Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge

RIVER: Illinois River, Lake Chautauqua

Mason County

WHAT TO DO: Fishing, boating, hiking, picnicking, and wildlife viewing

19031 E. County Road 110N
Havana, IL 62644
chautauqua@fws.gov
309/535-2290

WEBSITE: www.fws.gov/refuges/profiles/index.cfm?id=33650

Chautauqua is a large wildlife refuge located in the heart of northern Illinois. The area is dedicated to the preservation of the key Illinois waterfowl migration corridor, which once spanned the length of the Illinois River, but has been drastically reduced by development. Primarily characterized by floodplains, the Lake Chautauqua Refuge also contains marsh and forest land, painting a complete picture of the varying habitats that once characterized the Illinois River basin. It hosts a vast array of species, including its signature migrating waterfowl and over 50 species of fish. Offering a wheelchair-accessible interpretive trail, the area offers a stunning snapshot of the wild side of Illinois, where nature comes first. Restrictions apply on recreation to allow proper wildlife management, call before visiting to clarify available opportunities.

Donnelley/DePue State Fish and Wildlife Area

RIVER: Illinois River, DePue Lake, and Spring Lake

Bureau County

WHAT TO DO: Boating, fishing, hiking, picnicking, and wildlife viewing

1001 W. 4th St.
P.O. Box 52
DePue, IL 61322
817/447-2353

WEBSITE: www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/parks/r1/don.htm

Dominated by water and accessible via boat ramp in the adjoining village of Depue, Donnelley/DePue Wildlife Area comprises a key part of the North American waterfowl migration corridor running through the State of Illinois. Consequently, the area offers some of the best waterfowl and wildlife viewing in the state, with turkey vultures and bald eagles occasionally making their way over and into the park, but be sure to bring your boat! Wildlife viewing is best done on the water. The area offers fishing and boating along a long stretch of the Illinois River and on DePue Lake, with limited access during migration periods. Trails are open all year, with foot and equestrian access to bluffs and scenic views. There is a city-run, family-friendly open area attached to the park as well, with a playground and picnic grounds.

Bear Creek Public Use Area

RIVER: Access to Mississippi River

Adams County

WHAT TO DO: Boating, camping, canoeing, fishing, hiking, nature interpretation, and wildlife viewing

PO Box 447
Pittsfield, IL
217/285-2221

Quincy office: 217/228-08907,
US Army Corps
309/794-4200



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1902 Fox Drive, Suite G,
Champaign, IL 61820,

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217/344-2371



Adjacent to the conservation oriented Clarence Cannon National Wildlife Refuge and Great River National Wildlife Refuge, the Army Corps of Engineers manage the Bear Creek Public Use Area. The area contains a mid-size boat launch and offers camping opportunities as well, housing approximately 40 free primitive campsites with potable water. Limited hiking is allowed in Clarence Cannon, and nature interpretation can be arranged beforehand through the Quincy Lock 21 office of the USACE.

Mississippi River State Fish and Wildlife Area

RIVER: Access to Mississippi River, Jersey County tributaries, ponds, and sloughs

WHAT TO DO: Boating, canoeing, fishing, hiking, picnicking, scenic drives, and wildlife viewing

WEBSITE: <http://www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/parks/r4/miss.htm>

Over 24,000 acres, the Mississippi River State Fish and Wildlife Area is made up of a number of wildlife and conservation locations which snake along the east bank of the Mississippi. In the bottomlands, floodplains, and sloughs, are unique bird species like herons, eagles, and a diverse array of aquatic mammals and fish. The area houses several boat launches, ramps, and slips for easy access to 75 miles of the Mississippi and its countless offshoots. Though camping is not allowed, the MRSFWA is interspersed with pockets of civilization for those seeking a longer stay.

Sanganois State Fish and Wildlife Area

RIVER: Access to the Sangamon and Illinois Rivers Cass County

WHAT TO DO: Boating, canoeing, and wildlife viewing

WEBSITE: <http://dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/parks/r4/sangill.htm>

One of the largest and last truly-wild wetlands in Illinois, the Sanganois State Fish and Wildlife area offers a glimpse at Illinois' ecological past. It is easy to lose oneself in the twisting waterways and timbered lakes of the Sanganois. A variety of unique species, particularly of waterfowl, that once dominated the Illinois River Valley are still visible today. Dedicated to conservation, the area is not open for camping and houses no trails, but is a canoeist's dream and offers beautiful views and an authentic river experience.

Franklin Creek State Natural Area (Franklin Grove)

RIVER: Franklin Creek Lee County

WHAT TO DO: Fishing, hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and wildlife viewing

WEBSITE: dnr.state.il.us/lands/Landmgt/PARKS/R1/FRANKLIN.HTM

A mellow setting along a slow moving creek, Franklin Creek State Natural Area is a prime spot for relaxation, as well as for getting in touch with nature. Balancing recreation with biological protection, the site houses a 70 acre nature preserve, but still honors its settler past with a reconstructed grist mill. The natural area also offers creek fishing, equestrian and footpaths, and winter recreation trails for snowmobiles or cross-country skiing.

Gebhard Woods State Park

RIVER: Nettle Creek and Illinois and Michigan Canal Grundy County

WHAT TO DO: Biking, boating, camping, fishing, hiking, picnicking, wildlife viewing, and winter sports

WEBSITE: [//dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/PARKS/i&m/east/gebhard/park.htm](http://dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/PARKS/i&m/east/gebhard/park.htm)

Featuring approximately 15 miles of canal, stocked with fish from catfish to bass, and lined with trails, the Gebhard Woods State Park is ideally situated for those seeking a comfortable respite from city life. Located between Chicago and Peoria, the park offers guided tours with an interpreter through its information center, as well as canoe launch sites and pond, creek, and canal fishing. The park also contains limited primitive camping which requires a permit from the on-site information center. The historically significant and naturally beautiful Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail runs adjacent to the park, and can be accessed by foot or bicycle.

Illini State Park (Marseilles)

RIVER: Illinois River Lasalle County

WHAT TO DO: Fishing, hiking, camping, boating, sledding, ice skating

WEBSITE: dnr.state.il.us/lands/Landmgt/PARKS/I&M/EAST/ILLINI/Park.htm

Sporting a boat ramp, picnic shelters, a baseball field, and concessionaire, Illini State Park is a highly developed family-oriented recreation center in northwest Illinois that still offers connection to the great outdoors. Outdoor enthusiasts can immerse themselves in nature along the site's trail network, while people seeking more social settings may use the aforementioned facilities, as well as a large camper/tent campground. Boating is available, though occasionally disrupted by barge traffic, as is boat and bank fishing. There are no restrictions on boat motor size, though those wishing to use the site must bring their own canoes, kayaks, or boats.



Starved Rock State Park

RIVER: Access to the Illinois River Lasalle County

WHAT TO DO: Boating, boat tours, camping, canoeing, fishing, hiking, picnicking, wildlife viewing, and winter sports

WEBSITE: <http://www.starvedrockstatepark.org/>

NEARBY SUPPLIES: Trailheads (store): located on site, 815/220-7360; Applebee's Bait Shop, 815/667-7036

One of Illinois' most prized pieces of natural wonder, Starved Rock State Park stands in sharp contrast to most of Illinois' flattened prairie land. The area encompassing Starved Rock is hilly and variable, covered in woods and teeming with, canyons, streams and small waterfalls. Nature enthusiasts can lose themselves in the area along 13 miles of hiking trails, or by boating along the Illinois from entry points located in the west of the complex. Paddleboats are available for rental on site to get the whole family river-bound. Reservable Class A campgrounds offer outdoor lodging and an on-site hotel offers a more comfortable (if less wild) place to stay. The park offers an extensive range of activities including: eagle viewing, a resort, tours on river and on foot, a megahike, free guided hikes, a free public boat ramp, 18 canyons, glacial rock, an abundance of wildflower species, and much more.