

WAPSIPINICON RIVER WATER TRAIL



BUCHANAN

THE WAPSIPINICON RIVER - WILD AND ALIVE

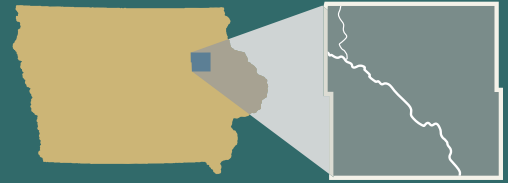
The Wapsipinicon is a river pulsing with life. The lifeblood of the river is its backwater wetlands and forests that give the river the space it needs and provide habitat to support a diversity of wildlife. While traveling downriver, you will notice a varied landscape of broad floodplain forest, scenic bluffs, and changing colors through the seasons. Nature is abundant, with nearly all nearby farm activity separated by forest, and cabins popping up close to towns. It is a river to explore – by boat, with rod and reel, on sandbars, and by accessing land in adjacent parks.



Jerusalem artichoke
Photo Tina Gray Carstensen

A river that still retains its natural backwater wetlands and woodlands is a rare treasure worthy of protection. It is why the Wapsi has been designated a Protected Water Area – one of only five in the State of Iowa.

The Wapsipinicon River is a navigable “non-meandered” stream in Iowa. That means that the State of Iowa owns the water flowing through it,



BUCHANAN COUNTY

but not the land adjacent to it or under it. Except at access sites and public areas marked on the map, the land adjacent to and underneath the river is private. Please respect it and do not trespass.

A river connected with its floodplain

Unlike most Iowa rivers, the Wapsipinicon River corridor retains much of its natural backwater wetlands and woodland habitat – a vast, connected corridor. Adjacent wetlands and woodlands allow floodwaters space to expand out of, rather than chew through, riverbanks.

Fish and wildlife in the Wapsi largely owe their existence to river connections. Many species require backwater wetlands for spawning, laying eggs, or rearing young. Forested wetlands provide a barrier that protects the river from some sediment and pollutants.



The naming of the Wapsipinicon River is sometimes relayed as Native American folklore. One story features a young maiden named Wapsi and the son of a tribal chief named Pinicon canoeing on the river on the eve of their wedding day. The jealous Fleet Foot sneaks along the shoreline and shoots Pinicon through the heart. As Wapsi jumps to the aid of Pinicon, the canoe overturns. The two lovers drown in the swift current.

Although the story is appealing, the literal translation of “Wapsipinicon” is White Potato River or Swan Apple River - referring to Jerusalem artichoke plants that grow along the riverbank. The river is affectionately referred to as the “Wapsi(e)”.



Limestone outcrop on the Wapsi

The Wapsi River valley was formed during glacial periods before the most recent glaciation. Exposed limestone outcrops are “islands” of old limestone (390 million years old) that were partially eroded before glacial till and sand were later deposited. While most limestone formations along the Wapsi only rise 10 to 20 feet above the river, some reach 80 feet.

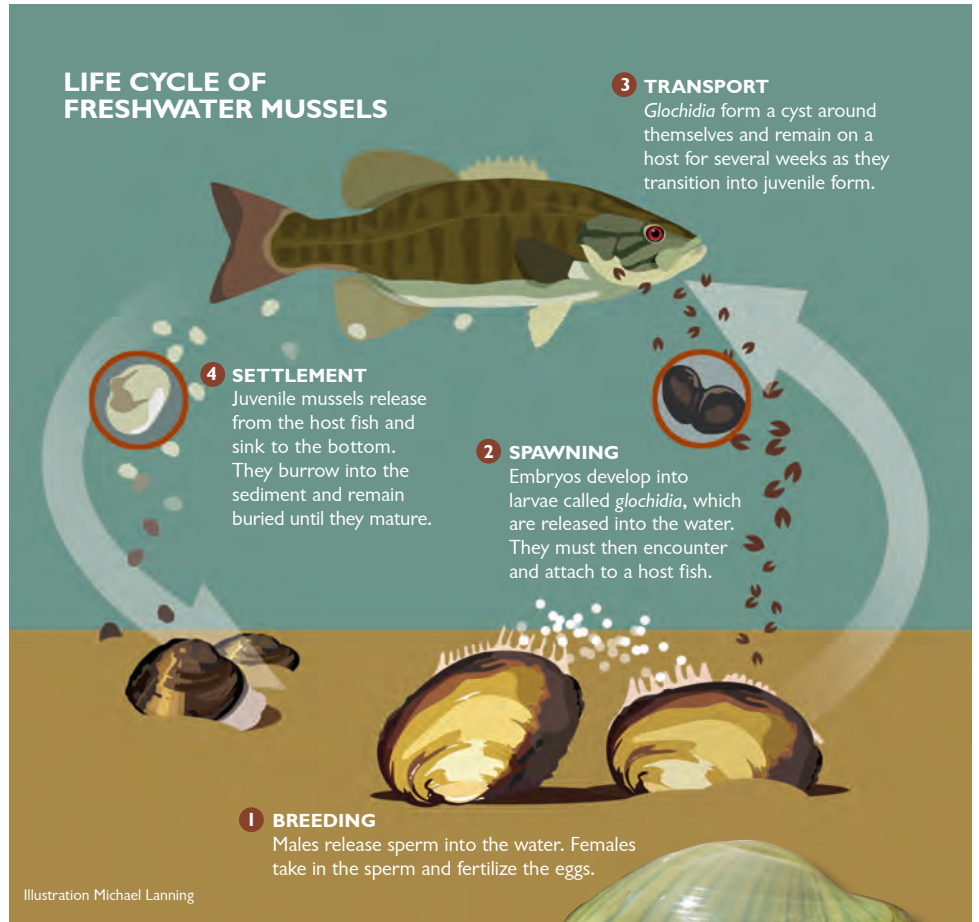


Hen wood duck in nest box

Wood ducks nest in tree cavities, and feed in backwater wetlands. Their bodies are well suited for life in woods and water. Short wings and a broad tail allow the birds to maneuver quickly through the trees. Male wood ducks have colorful plumage but hens blend in. Human-made wood duck nest boxes mounted on trees or posts often are visible along the river.

On nearly every sandbar on the Wapsi River below the Littleton Dam, you will find shells of dead and living mussels (often referred to as “clams”). Fifteen species are known to exist in the Wapsipinicon River. These creatures live in the sediments of the river bottom, and their presence is an indicator of a healthy, free-flowing river.

Mussels depend on fish to transport larval mussels in their gills. For some mussel species, a specific fish species is required. When a dam impedes the ability of fish to migrate upstream, mussel populations dwindle or disappear.



Plain Pocket Book Mussel



A paddler approaches the historic boathouse

Between Independence and Quasqueton, two historic structures can be seen along the river. Paddlers will float by the 1872 bowstring arch bridge at Iron Bridge Access and the brick boathouse at Cedar Rock State Park. The boathouse is part of the Walter Residence designed by the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

Tours are available at Cedar Rock, located north of Quasqueton. For more information, visit www.friendsofcedarrock.org.

WAPSIPINICON RIVER WATER TRAIL

KEY

-  Beginner Level
-  Intermediate Level
-  Advanced Level
-  City/Town
-  Public Land
-  Paved Roadways
-  Gravel Roadways
-  Portage Trail
-  Carry Down Access
-  Motorized Boat Access
-  Restrooms
-  Water
-  Shelter
-  Camping
-  Fishing
-  Rapids/Rock Dam
-  Dam
-  Area Prone to Log Jams





Fly fisherman on the Wapsi

You will want to visit the Wapsi with rod and reel. This is one of only a few rivers with a self-sustaining northern pike population. Seasonally connected backwaters, sloughs, and oxbows provide the spawning and nursery habitat where pike reproduce. Other Wapsi game fish include smallmouth bass, walleye, channel catfish, and crappie.

Stream Reach: Wapsi Bluff Access to Cutshall Access to Robert “Chic” McGlaughlin Access

The put-in at Wapsi Bluff is at the end of a long, narrow lane. When water is high, there could be some difficulty driving to the river. Parking space is limited.

From Wapsi Bluff to the Robert “Chic” McGlaughlin Access, the river is shallower and the landscape is flatter than on the rest of the Water Trail. Downed trees are common and at times may present obstacles. During normal water flow, this stretch of river provides a good experience for people of varied paddling skill levels.

A shortened trip option is available by starting from, or ending at, the Cutshall Access, which also provides more space to leave vehicles than at Wapsi Bluff. When taking out at the McGlaughlin Access, carefully watch for the portage sign on the left bank, just past the Highway D47 Bridge, to avoid getting too close to the Littleton Dam.

Stream Reach: Robert “Chic” McGlaughlin Access to Bathing Beach Park Access

The Put-in at Robert “Chic” McGlaughlin Access is just below the Littleton Dam. Paddlers will need to carry boats and gear a short distance down the riverbank to the safe put-in past the riffles.

During normal water flow, this stretch of river provides a good experience for people of at least intermediate paddling skill levels. The main hazards are fallen logs and potential logjams, which might require short portages. A shortened trip option is available by starting from, or ending at, the Otterville Bridge Access, which has a concrete boat ramp. There is ample parking at all three put-in and takeout accesses.

This stretch of river meanders through lowland forest, dominated by silver maple. From the McGlaughlin Access to the Otterville Bridge Access about halfway downriver, most of the surrounding forest is managed for public use. Between Otterville Bridge and the take-out at Bathing Beach Park, the surrounding forest is mostly private property. There are numerous fallen trees and logs in some places, and paddlers should especially be aware of a logjam that tends to form about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile downstream of the Otterville Access.

Below Otterville Bridge, the river receives a lot of use from local residents of Independence and cabin owners along the river. In addition to kayaks, canoes, and tubes, expect to encounter pontoons and motorized fishing boats. Paddlers will notice an increasing number of cabins and motor boats as they approach the town of Independence.


















Stream Reach: Independence accesses to Veteran’s Memorial Park Access

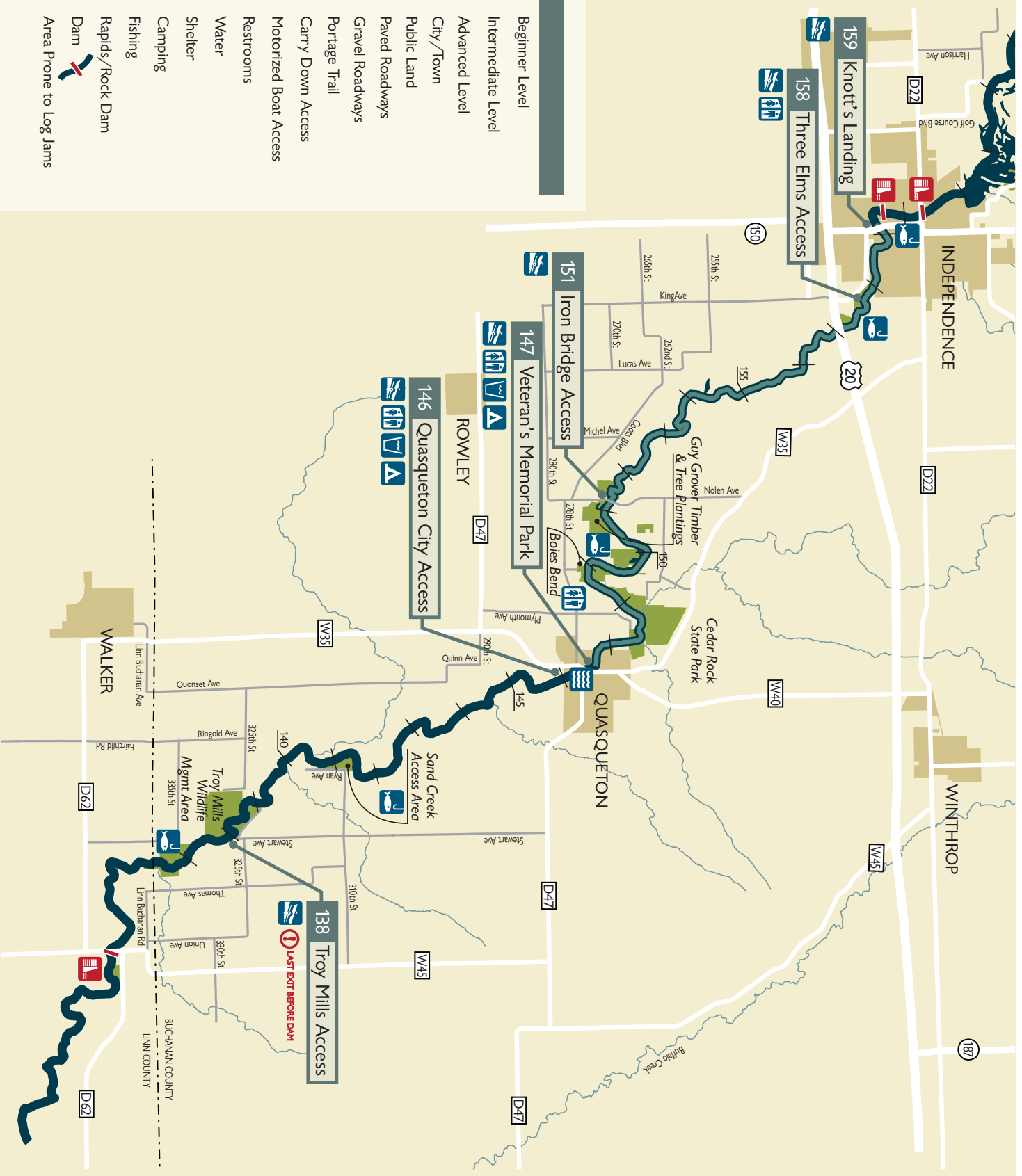
Paddlers have two options for put-in below Independence. Knott’s Landing is just west of the Highway 150 bridge, and Three Elms area is a mile east downriver. Both provide ample parking and concrete boat ramps. Paddlers also have options for longer or shorter trips. The shortened trip option is available by starting from, or ending at, the Iron Bridge Access, which also has parking and a concrete boat ramp. Between Iron Bridge Access and Veteran’s Park Access, is the Boies Bend Area. Look for a sign for this area, ahead of a rock landing and stairway. The stairway leads to trails and a picnic area with a pit latrine.

This is the most popular segment of the Water Trail. During most weekends, expect to see many paddlers and small fishing boats. During normal water flow, this stretch of river provides a good experience for people of all paddling skill levels. This river features a varied and scenic forested corridor, with sandbars interspersed with limestone bluffs. Much of the forest downstream of Iron Bridge Access is managed for public use by the county conservation board or Iowa DNR.

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-  Rapids/Rock Dam
-  Dam
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Upon approaching Veteran’s Memorial Park there is a line of cabins. Look for the takeout on the right in the Campground. Past the takeout is a series of rock arch rapids that were constructed to allow fish passage and improved safety where there previously was a dam. The area is dangerous for paddlers inexperienced with class III or higher rapids.

Stream Reach: Quasqueton City Access to Troy Mills Access

This stretch of river provides great solitude and wildness. There are no midway accesses for shortened trip options, no bridges, and little development. There also are fewer people using the river. Due to the lack of emergency takeout options, this river is appropriate for paddlers with at least an intermediate skill level.

The bluffs that were prominent in the previous section of river give way in the stretch of river to a more gentle landscape with less drop in elevation. The water moves slower, providing a gentle float downriver. Lowland forest borders nearly the entire river stretch, and includes a lot of public land. The takeout is at a concrete boat ramp on the left bank, just past a bend armored with riprap. **Keep a watchful eye** – *there are no other public take-outs prior to the dam in Troy Mills.*

Photography: *All photographs are attributed to Jim Pease unless otherwise noted.*

BE SAFE OUT THERE!

Keep your trip enjoyable by following these safety TIPS:

- Pack only essentials and keep them in waterproof bags.
- Check the river water levels and currents before each trip.
- Know the weather forecast, including areas upstream, and stay aware of the weather on your trip.
- Make sure someone knows your planned entry and exit points and estimated times.
- Always wear a properly-fit life jacket.
- Expect overhanging trees, logjams, and other obstacles, such as bridge abutments or big rocks. If paddling around them is not possible, get out and portage around them. Grabbing onto tree branches may capsize your paddlecraft.
- Always portage around lowhead dams. Surface appearance can be deceiving. Undercurrents can be strong enough for drowning.
- If you capsize, remain on the upstream side of your boat to prevent being pinned.
- Dress appropriately for weather conditions (including air and water temperatures), and avoid weather and water conditions beyond your skill level.

KNOW YOUR SKILL LEVEL!

- **BEGINNER:** Segments are generally less than six miles. Hazards are few and easy to avoid in normally slow-moving currents. Users can easily access these segments from parking areas, and will not need to portage, except to walk a boat around some shallow riffles or to make the going easier around an obstacle.
- **INTERMEDIATE:** Segments are generally less than nine miles. Users should have ability to recognize and avoid hazards in moderate river flow. The need to portage is rare, but users should be able and willing to carry boats and gear a short distance. Access to the river may involve a short portage, and the launch or take-out may be a bit difficult.
- **ADVANCED:** Segments may exceed nine miles. Hazards are likely and often occur in fast-moving water. The need to portage may be frequent or may involve carrying boats and gear a long distance. Access to the river may involve a portage, and the launch or take-out may be from steeper banks or faster moving water.

BEHAVE AS A GUEST!

- Respect private property. Only use public lands and access points.
- Be considerate of others in your group and on the banks.
- Give anglers a wide berth.
- Never change clothes in public view.
- Never litter. Always pack out trash.
- Do not disturb wildlife.

For more information, visit:

www.iowadnr.gov/paddlingsafety

www.buchanancountyparks.com.

www.mycountyparks.com/County/Black-Hawk.aspx

Wapsi Canoe
319-361-4775

Wapsi River Rentals
319-327-4647

Crawdaddy Outdoors
319-352-9129

