

Sugar River Canoe and Kayak Trail

The 65-mile Sugar River Canoe and Kayak Trail begins in Belleville, WI, and ends at the Two Rivers Forest Preserve in northern Illinois. Near the midway point, it traverses Decatur Lake and then borders Pearl Island to the west below the dam.

The highly serpentine Sugar River is named for the fine sand that once covered its river bed. For early settlers, it served as a source of travel, commerce, and food. Today, it mainly functions as a source of recreation. Much of the river offers a quiet, rural paddle through woodlands, agricultural fields, and pastures. Dams at Albany and Brodhead have created two shallow lakes as well.

There are 16 public landings by which to directly access the trail. Signs at each of these sites provide a map of the trail and illustrations of local wildlife. Decatur Park offers a landing site on the west bank of the river just above the Decatur Dam. When launching from this site, one can either paddle upstream into the lake, paddle across the lake to access the mill race, or paddle to the opposite shore and portage across the dam to continue downstream on the trail. At Decatur Park, there is parking, a pier, a shelter with picnic tables, and a grill.

There are also three public landings on the Mill Race by which to indirectly access the canoe and kayak trail. The first, and closest, is at Headgates Park off Golf Course Road. The dam portage is a short 0.6 mile paddle up the race. The park offers a shelter with a picnic table, pit toilet, grill, and pier.

A second landing is located at the parking lot off Decatur Road. From here, the dam is a 1.7 mile paddle up the race. In order to reach the dam, one must paddle through the headgates, which have a narrow opening and strong current.

The final landing is at the start of the Mill Race off N 11th St. in Brodhead. Paddlers can either put in above the power house and paddle 2.7 miles up the race to the dam or put in below the power house and paddle down stream to meet up with the Sugar River and the trail. A pier currently exists north of the power house on the Mill Race. This landing lies a couple of blocks from the downtown square where [local businesses](#) provide additional amenities.

FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS: In 2019, a shelter and pit toilet will be installed at the Decatur Road access site. Additional piers were recently installed at Decatur Park and at the dam portage site. Plans to create a nature trail with overlook at Decatur Park are currently in progress.

LOOP OPTION: Portages at the old power house on N 11 St in Brodhead and at the Decatur Lake dam allow paddlers to complete a loop on the Mill Race and Sugar River. When heading downstream on the trail below the dam, watch for the river to split, then bear left (southeast) and bear left again (east) to head back to the Mill Race.