



# Upper French Creek Water Trail

## A Community Treasure

### Map & Guide

Water trails are recreational waterways on a lake, river, or ocean between specific points, containing access points and day-use and/or camping sites for the boating public. Water trails emphasize low-impact use and promote stewardship of the resources. Explore this unique Pennsylvania water trail.



### HISTORY OF FRENCH CREEK

French Creek is arguably one of the most ecologically significant waterways in Pennsylvania and has been called one of Pennsylvania's foremost aquatic treasures. French Creek originates in Chautauqua County, New York, and flows 117 miles through Erie, Crawford, Mercer, and Venango counties before joining the Allegheny River.

The French Creek watershed covers approximately 1,270 square miles, providing a habitat for many types of wildlife and birds, as well as over 80 species of fish and 27 species of freshwater mussels. Scientists attribute French Creek's outstanding biodiversity to the fact that it is part of the rich Ohio River watershed and has maintained its high quality habitat, including sand and gravel substrates, riffles, runs, and pools. The French Creek drainage also has a good supply of alkaline groundwater resources that provides a buffer against the effects of acid deposition.

French Creek was given its name in the early 1750s by George Washington who visited the Creek in an effort to dislodge the French from the area. During this period of colonization and westward expansion, the Creek served as an important waterway for the French Army and the early American settlers.



### FRENCH CREEK WATER TRAIL

Originating in Chautauqua County in western New York, the French Creek water trail flows southerly through Erie, Mercer, Crawford, and Venango counties, ultimately joining the Allegheny River in Franklin, PA. The main branch of the Creek is over 117 miles long and the watershed encompasses 1,235 square miles of land. The Creek, along with its tributaries, is responsible for draining 72 municipalities in four Northwestern Pennsylvania counties. French Creek is outstanding for fishing and canoeing, and provides water for communities and agricultural activities. Thanks to its high water quality, rich biodiversity, and notable history, French Creek is considered to be one of the most important streams of its size in the Northeast United States.

### STEWARDSHIP

Protecting French Creek from environmental degradation is a shared mission. Help care for the land, water and cultural resources along the French Creek water trail by respecting wildlife, nature and other recreationists. It is important to wash footwear, boats and vehicles to minimize the spread of invasive species from one place to another. "Leave No Trace," a national outdoor ethics program, provides some guidelines to minimize your impact. For more information about "Leave No Trace," visit [www.Lnt.org](http://www.Lnt.org).

- Leave no trace for camping and day use:**
1. Plan and prepare campfires to limit forest fires.
  2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
  3. Dispose of waste properly
  4. Leave what you find
  5. Minimize campfire impacts
  6. Respect wildlife
  7. Be considerate of other visitors



### RESPECT THE PRIVACY & RIGHTS OF LANDOWNERS

Please respect the privacy and rights of landowners along this trail by obtaining permission before entering any privately owned land. Unless you are otherwise certain, assume the land is private property. In any case, avoid loud noises and boisterous behavior. Remember that sound carries across water much more clearly than on land. Use the same courtesy that you would want. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is always welcome.



### For your safety and enjoyment:

- Always wear a life jacket
- Obtain proper instruction in boating skills
- Know fishing and boating regulations
- Be prepared for river hazards
- Carry proper equipment

### PENNSYLVANIA BOATING REGULATIONS

- A U.S. Coast Guard-approved wearable personal flotation device (PFD or life jacket) is required for each person on board. In addition, one throwable device (seat cushion or ring buoy) is required on boats 16 feet in length or longer. Canoes and kayaks, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device.
- From November 1 through April 30, boaters must wear a life jacket on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe or kayak during these cold weather months.
- Life jackets must be the appropriate size for the person intended and must be in good, serviceable condition.
- Life jackets must be worn by all children 12 years old and younger on all boats 20 feet or less in length while under way, and on all canoes and kayaks. Others are strongly encouraged to wear a PFD at all times on the water.
- All boats must display an anchor light (a white light visible 360 degrees) when at anchor between sunset and sunrise. Boats can use a lantern or clip-on battery-powered unit to meet this requirement.
- Unpowered boats must carry a white light, either hand-held or installed, to be displayed in time to avoid a collision between sunset and sunrise and during restricted visibility.
- All powered boats must show running lights between sunset and sunrise. All boats are required to carry a sound-producing device. Motorboats less than 40 feet in length must carry some mechanical means of making a sound signal. This device may be hand-, mouth- or power-operated. An athletic coach's whistle is an acceptable device. Operators of unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboards) are required to carry a device capable of sounding a prolonged blast for 4-6 seconds that can be heard by another boat operator in time to avoid a collision. An athletic coach's whistle is acceptable.
- All motorboats must be registered, regardless of where they launch.
- Unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats) using Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission or State Park or Forest access areas must either be registered OR display a valid launch permit. Launch permits can be purchased through the Commission's website at [www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com) (Click the "Outdoor Shop" icon.) or at many state park offices
- Operating watercraft, including canoes and kayaks, under the influence of alcohol or drugs is illegal. This law is strongly enforced for user safety. For further information on boating regulations, contact the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission at [www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com)



### PADDLING SAFETY TIPS

- **Wear your life jacket.** Some 80 percent of all recreational boating fatalities happen to people who are not wearing a life jacket.
- **Expect to get wet.** Even the best paddlers sometimes capsize or swamp their boats. Bring extra clothing in a waterproof bag.
- **Be prepared to swim.** If the water looks too hazardous to swim in, don't go paddling.
- **If you capsize,** hold on to your boat, unless it presents a life-threatening situation. If floating in current, position yourself on the upstream side of the capsized boat.
- **Scout ahead whenever possible.** Know the river. Avoid surprises.
- **Be prepared for the weather.** Get a forecast before you go. Sudden winds and rain are common and can turn a pleasant trip into a risky, unpleasant venture.
- **Wear wading shoes** or tennis shoes with wool, polypropylene, pile, or neoprene socks.
- **Never take your boat over a low-head dam.**
- **Portage** (carry) your boat around any section of water about which you feel uncertain.
- **Never boat alone.** Boating safety increases with numbers.
- **Keep painter lines** (ropes tied to the bow) and any other ropes coiled and secured.
- **Never tie a rope to yourself** or to another paddler, especially a child.
- **Kneel to increase your stability** before entering rougher water, like a rapid.
- **If you collide with an obstruction, lean toward it.** This will usually prevent your capsizing or flooding the boat.
- **File a float plan** with a reliable person indicating where you are going and when you will return. Remember to contact the person when you have returned safely.



### TOWNS AND TOURISM

The Creek Town program is a unique collaborative partnership between local municipalities and the French Creek Valley Conservancy that seeks to create positive, sustainable economic growth based around the incredible value of French Creek. Along French Creek, these towns host many valuable community treasures that hold great history and importance to the region.

**Union City:** Once known as Miles Mills, Union City was originally settled in 1789 by William Miles. Abundant with timber and raw natural resources, it was also once known as the chair capital of the world. Union City is home to small bed and breakfasts, inns, and campsites. A golf course is available as well as many other recreational activities, including an annual "Gathering at French Creek" festival each July.



**Cambridge Springs:** The town of Cambridge Springs was settled in 1822 and was named after the town of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Originally established as a health resort destination because of the various mineral springs discovered in the area, tourists came from near and far to experience the healing properties of the water. Today, Cambridge Springs offers full dining options, a historic inn, local boutiques, and many other recreational activities.

**Venango:** Situated on the banks of French Creek and the Route 6 corridor, Venango is a small residential borough of approximately 300 residents. It is home to two eighteen-hole golf courses with full dining options, two taverns, local produce stands, and a popular micro-brewery.

**Saegertown:** Originally settled by Patrick McGill in 1802, Saegertown was established in 1824 and was originally known as McGill's Settlement. The current population is 1,007 and the community hosts a local grocery store, hardware store, and a tavern with dining options. Saegertown is also in close proximity to the Woodcock Creek Dam recreational area.



**Meadville:** Founded on May 12, 1788 by David Mead, the location was ideal for a settlement due to its position at the confluence of Cussewago Creek and French Creek. Today, Meadville is the largest city in Crawford County with 13,685 residents and serves as the county seat. It is home to the historic Allegheny College,

the oldest college operating under the same name west of the Appalachian Mountains, and the Meadville Market House, built in 1870 and the oldest market structure in continuous use in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Amenities include commercial hotels, restaurants and taverns and recreational activities.

### POINTS OF INTEREST



**The Union City Dam** was completed in 1970 by the Army Corps of Engineers as a method of controlling the frequent flooding of French Creek. It is a rolled earth, dry-bed reservoir that stands 88 feet above the stream bed and has a 1,420 foot top length. The diverse habitat and ecosystems that can be found here provide hikers, bird watchers, and the novice naturalist with a diversity of flora and fauna to discover and enjoy.



**The Riverside Inn** was constructed during the rise of tourism to Cambridge Springs. The Inn is a Victorian-style building dating from 1885 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The inn is three stories high, has 74 guest rooms, a restaurant, a dinner theater, and numerous other rooms for entertainment and social functions. It is open from April through mid-December.



**The Patrick McGill House** is one of the oldest standing houses in Crawford County. Built in 1802 by Patrick McGill, the log house is one of the few surviving homes in the French Creek Valley. McGill was a farmer, settler of Saegertown, organized the first school, and served in the war of 1812.

**Historic Bemustown** was constructed in 1830, two miles above Meadville. Its founder, Dr. Daniel Bemus, erected an extensive saw and gristmill which was powered by a dam that used the waters of French Creek. Large quantities of lumber, mostly pine, were sawed and dried in Bemustown, then were floated down to Pittsburgh in boats that were also constructed here. When the feeder to the Beaver & Erie Canal was constructed it was fed from French Creek through the Bemus dam, which subsequently became public property. Bemustown was at one time quite a little settlement, containing a store and six to eight dwellings.

**Baldwin-Reynolds House Museum** was constructed between 1842 and 1844 to be the home of Supreme Court Justice Henry Baldwin. Today, the Museum is owned and managed by the Crawford County Historical Society and is listed in the "National Register of Historical Places." The Museum is open for tours mid-May through August.



### FRENCH CREEK CREATURES

More types of fish and mollusks are found in French Creek than any other stream in Pennsylvania. The watershed is home to 27 species of mussels, 15 species of darters, and four important bird areas (IBA). Many species that thrive in French Creek have been extirpated from their natural ranges due to habitat loss and degradation of water quality. Nevertheless French Creek remains relatively healthy, leading The Nature Conservancy to include the French Creek watershed in its listing of national "hot spots" with ten or more at-risk fish and mussel species, and citing it as a critical watershed to conserve these species.

Mussels were once common throughout the eastern United States but have decreased in numbers due to their sensitivity to pollution and destruction of habitat. French Creek is home to four federally endangered mussel species. These species have lost 95% of their historic range but fortunately healthy populations can still be found in French Creek.

Colorful darters thrive in French Creek, which hosts 15 different species. Many of these species are rare or endangered.

French Creek is also home to Pennsylvania's largest salamander, the eastern hellbender. This salamander can reach up to 29 inches long and can weigh up to five pounds, making it one of the largest salamanders in North America.

Bald eagles and osprey are commonly seen in the watershed. Crawford County is one of the best places in Pennsylvania to see bald eagles.



### POPULAR ACCESS POINTS

**Union City Dam:** From Route 6/19 follow 97S for 5.2 miles, then turn left onto Middletown road. From Route 8 in Union City, follow 97N for 2.5 miles then turn right onto Middletown Road. *Parking, restrooms, and picnic area available.*

**Cambridge Springs Access:** Follow US Routes 6E/19N 0.2 miles from the French Creek bridge in Cambridge Springs then turn right onto Miller Station Rd, follow for 0.3 miles and turn right to access area.

**Saegertown Access:** Directly off of Route 6/19 0.25 miles south of Saegertown. *Parking available*

**Bicentennial Park:** From Route 322, turn onto Mead Ave, then turn left just before bridge. *Parking, restrooms, pavilion play ground, and picnic area Available*

**FOR EMERGENCIES CALL 911**  
**NEAREST HOSPITAL: MEADVILLE MEDICAL CENTER**  
751 Liberty Street, Meadville PA 16335  
(814) 333- 5000



### VISITOR OPPORTUNITIES

Outfitters, guides, accommodations and recreational opportunities are abundant in the towns along French Creek's "Creek Towns" Communities. For more specific information regarding attractions and information presented in this guide, we encourage you to access one of the following resources.



**French Creek Valley Conservancy**  
814-337-4321  
[frenchcreekconservancy.org](http://frenchcreekconservancy.org)



**Crawford County Visitors Bureau**  
814-333-1258  
[visitcrawford.org](http://visitcrawford.org)

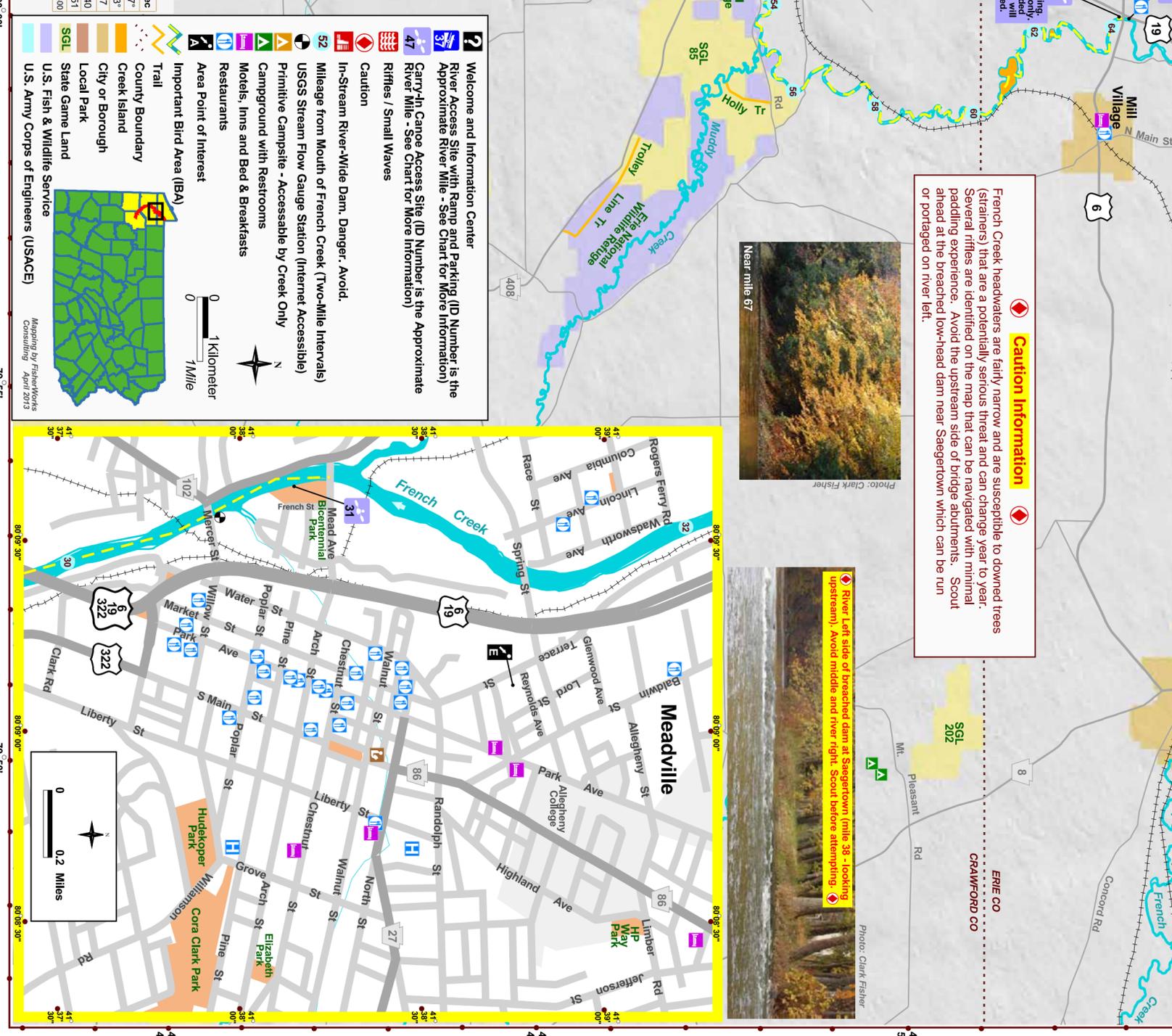
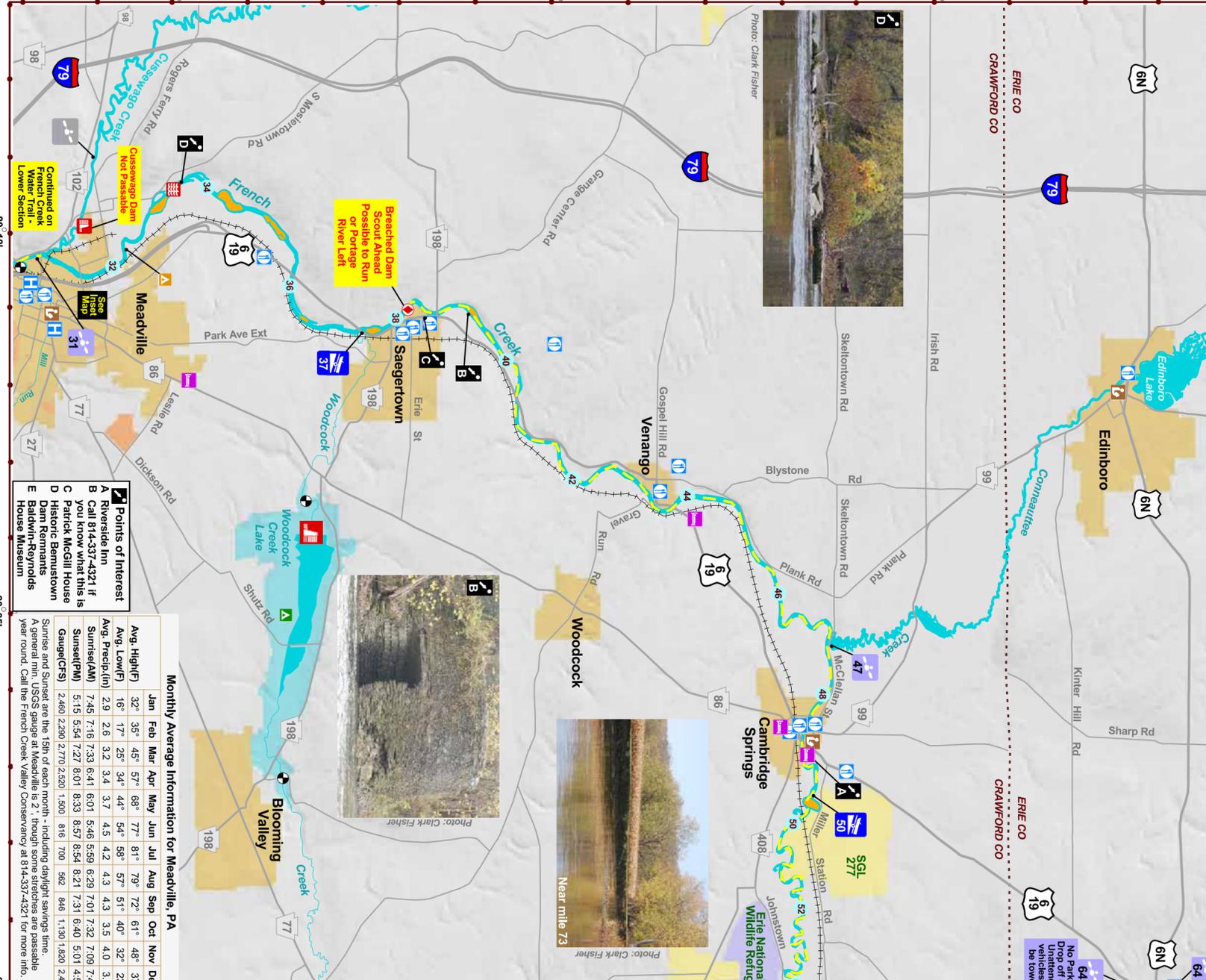
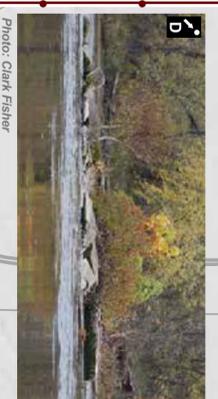
### French Creek Water Trail Upper Section Public Access Sites

River Miles are used to identify locations of various sites along the creek. River Miles 0 is at the confluence of French Creek and the Allegheny River. "River Left" and "River Right" are used to indicate which side of the stream a site is on. "Orient Yourself" looking downstream to determine right and left. PFBG (PA Fish & Boat Commission) launches require boat registration (other states accepted) or a launch permit from a state park office or PFBG.

- 74** Union City Dam  
Path - River Right  
From PA Rt. 8 in Union City, follow PA Rt. 97 N 2.5 miles. Turn right onto Middleton Road. Turn left at the dam. Go 0.7 miles to launch (drive across the dam to the parking lot on the far side). Carry canoe at gate down gravel rd hill to water. Int. of US Rts. 6, 19 & 6N just west of Mill Village. Drop boats behind Yesterday's Best Antiques then park ~200 feet north of the int. at south end of Creekside Bar and Grille lot. Unattended vehicles at Yesterday's Best Antiques will be towed.
- 64** Path - River Right  
Paved Ramp-River Right  
Miller Station Rd, follow for 0.3 miles and turn right to access area.
- 50** Conemaugh  
Path - River Right  
From intersection with US Routes 6/19 in Cambridge Springs, follow McClellan St (SR 1006) 1.3 miles west. Access point is located at the confluence of Conemaugh Creek and French Creek.
- 47** Saegertown  
Gravel Ramp - River Left  
PFBG. From the intersection of US Routes 6/19 and PA Rt. 198 at H&H Market in the center of Saegertown, take US Routes 6W/19S approximately 0.4 miles heading south. Access directly off US Routes 6/19.
- 37** Cussewago Creek  
Path - River Right  
PFBG. From the Mead Ave Bridge at Bicentennial Park in Meadville, take PA Rt. 102 (Cussewago Rd) approximately 1.4 miles north, then turn right at the PA Fish and Boating Commission sign.
- 31** Bicentennial Park  
Path - River Left  
From US Routes 6/19 in Meadville, turn West onto Mead Ave (a.k.a. "Bessemer Park"), then left onto French St (just before Mead Avenue Bridge - look for historic log cabin), then right into the park. French Creek access is straight ahead and slightly downstream of Mead Ave. Bridge.

French Creek headwaters are fairly narrow and are susceptible to downed trees (strainers) that are a potentially serious threat and can change year to year. Several riffles are identified on the map that can be navigated with minimal paddling experience. Avoid the upstream side of bridge abutments. Scout ahead at the breached low-head dam near Saegertown which can be run or portaged on river left.

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Mapping by FishWorks Consulting April 2013