



Upper French Creek Water Trail

A Community Treasure

Map & Guide

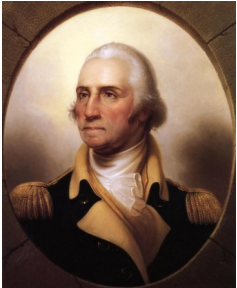
Water trails are recreational waterways on a lake, river, or ocean between specific points, containing access points and day-use and/or camping sites for the boating public. Water trails emphasize low-impact use and promote stewardship of the resources. Explore this unique Pennsylvania water trail.



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." From the point where it enters Pennsylvania, French Creek flows for 117 miles through Erie, Crawford, Mercer, and Venango counties before joining the Allegheny River at Franklin.

The French Creek Watershed covers approximately 1270 square miles, providing 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, pools and intact riparian zones. The French Creek drainage also has a good supply of alkaline groundwater resources that provide a buffer against the effects of acid deposition. French Creek was given its name in 1753 by George Washington who traveled along and on 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.



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. "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.

Leave No Trace for camping and day use:

1. Plan and prepare for route, weather, emergencies, etc.
2. Utilize established trails and campsites.
3. Dispose of waste properly—pack it in then pack it out.
4. Leave what you find including rocks, plants, natural objects.
5. Minimize campfire impacts and extinguish fires completely.
6. Respect wildlife—do not feed, follow or approach wildlife.
7. Be considerate of other visitors.

It is important to wash footwear, boats and vehicles to minimize the spread of invasive species from one place to another. Some aquatic invasive species such as **Zebra Mussel** larva can attach to boats and other hard surfaces, while others such as **Eurasian water milfoil** or **Fanwort** can become tangled on propellers, anchor lines, or boat trailers. Many species such as **Round Goby** fish can survive in bilge water and ballast tanks. Some invasive species may hide in dirt or sand that clings to nets, buckets, anchors, and waders. Fortunately, completing simple steps can prevent the transport of aquatic invasive species. **Remember to Clean, Drain, Dry in between every waterbody—every time!** DISPOSE of unwanted bait, worms, and fish parts in the trash. When keeping live bait, drain bait container and replace with spring or dechlorinated tap water. Never dump live fish or other organisms from one water body into another. For more information check out: stopaquaticinvasive.org/



STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!
Be A Good Steward.
Clean. Drain. Dry.
StopAquaticHitchhikers.org

RESPECT 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

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 creek, along with its tributaries, is responsible for draining 72 municipalities in four Northwestern Pennsylvania counties. French Creek is outstanding for fishing, paddling, and provides water for communities and agricultural activities. Thanks to its outstanding water quality, rich biodiversity, and notable history, French Creek is considered to be one of the most important streams of its size in the Northeastern United States.

PENNSYLVANIA BOATING REGULATIONS

- A U.S. Coast Guard-approved wearable personal flotation device (PFD or life jacket) is required for each person on board.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 (
- 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.



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 onto 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

These towns along French Creek hold a great history and importance to the region as well as offering valuable community opportunities.

Union City Once known as Miles Mills, Union City was originally settled in 1789 by William Miles. Abundant with timber and raw natural resources, Union city once boasted four chair factories and was known as the chair capital of the world. Union City is currently home to several cafes and restaurants, two golf courses, the Union City Dam, nearby Canadohta Lake, campsites, and many other recreational activities and festivals including the annual "Gathering at French Creek" festival each July.

Cambridge Springs The town of Cambridge Springs was settled in 1822 and was named Cambridgeboro after the town of Cambridge, Massachusetts. The town became Cambridge Springs in 1897 due to the various mineral springs discovered in the area. The town became a bustling tourist destination with many hotels centered around the healing properties of the spring water. Today, Cambridge Springs offers various full dining options, a golf course, a brewery, local boutiques and antique shops, festivals, a boat launch and other recreational activities.

Venango Situated on the banks of French Creek and the Route 6 corridor, Venango is a small residential borough which is home to two eighteen-hole golf courses with full dining options, a tavern, a general store, farmers market, 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. Saegertown hosts a grocery store, gas stations, hardware store, a travel trailer retailer, several types of eateries, a tavern, a canoe launch, parks and is also in close proximity of 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 and serves as the County Seat.

It is home to historic Allegheny College, the oldest college with the same continuous name west of the Allegheny Mountains. The Meadville Market House, built in 1870 is the oldest market structure in continuous use in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Amenities include four commercial hotels, a variety of restaurants and taverns, shopping, various recreational activities and festivals including the Thurston Classic hot air balloon event.

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 Fort LeBoeuf Museum and Judson House are located in Waterford on Rt. 19. The Museum is built on the site of the original French fort visited in December of 1753 by George Washington on his mission to deliver a message from the British demanding that the French leave the region. The museum includes numerous exhibits on the Native Americans who lived here, the French and British fur trade, and archeological excavations of the site that were conducted by Edinboro University. The Judson House is furnished in circa 1840 style and is filled with antiques and local historical references. Both attractions are directed by the Fort LeBoeuf Historical Society and are open on the first and third Saturdays and by appointment.

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Erie National Wildlife Refuge consists of two separate divisions—the 5,206 acre Sugar Lake Division located near Guys Mills and the 3,571 acre Seneca Division located several miles east of Cambridge Springs. Named after the Erie Indians, it was established to provide waterfowl and other migratory birds with nesting, feeding, brooding, and resting habitat. The refuge is designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by the National Audubon Society. Refuge Headquarters is located at 11296 Wood Duck Lane, Guys Mills and is open weekdays 8-4:30. Outdoor facilities and trails are open from ½ hour before sunrise to sunset.



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 oldest 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. The McGill House is open for tours May through October on the first Saturday of the month and by appointment.

Baldwin-Reynolds House Museum in Meadville 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, Wednesday through Sunday, 12:00-4:00 p.m.



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 freshwater mussels, over 80 species of fish—including 15 species of darters, and includes four nationally designated Important Bird Areas (IBA). Many species that thrive in the French Creek watershed 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. Out of the 27 species of mussels in French Creek, four are nationally endangered. These species have lost 95% of their historic ranges but fortunately, healthy populations can still be found in French Creek.

Darters are small fish that only reach 3-5 inches, can lay on the bottom of the stream, hover in the water and are sometimes mistaken for minnows. Darters, like mussels, require a high quality of water and are non-migratory. There are 15 species of darters found in French Creek, including the Eastern Sand Darter, which was once thought to be extinct. Three other species are nationally endangered and several are rare or threatened.

The Eastern Hellbender, Pennsylvania's largest salamander, can be found in French Creek as well. Known as a devil dog, mud devil or snot otter, this nocturnal aquatic salamander with its flat head and body and its distinctive wrinkled skin can reach up to 29 inches long and can weigh up to five pounds. Hellbenders thrive in rivers like French Creek with clean water, a rocky substrate and significant current that will provide them adequate oxygen and abundant crayfish, worms, insects and small fish to eat. While Hellbenders are not protected under the federal Endangered Species Act, some states give them protected status. In Pennsylvania they are a "species of special concern".



Birds like Bald Eagles, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, geese, a variety of ducks and even occasionally Osprey are commonly seen while near French Creek. The four Important Bird Areas as well as the abundance of other natural areas in the watershed offer great habitat and a chance to see a multitude of birds, including warblers—especially during spring and fall migration.



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 Route 6/19 to Cambridge Springs. Turn west onto Poplar Street, about 250 yards from bridge, follow to end and turn left at fairgrounds. *Parking, restrooms, and picnic area available*

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

Bicentennial Park: From Route 85, 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

Crawford County has Land, Water and Craft Brewing trails. Events all year-round for family fun! There are thousands of things to see and do- you just need to know where to look! Call for your FREE Visitors Guide and Event Brochure- 800-332-2338



Crawford County Visitors Bureau:
814-333-1258
visitcrawford.org



French Creek Valley Conservancy:
814-337-4321
frenchcreekconservancy.org