

## INTRODUCTION

French Creek is one of the most attractive and diverse waterways in Pennsylvania. Canoeing or kayaking the stream is relatively easy, even for those without great experience. Among its attributes are its notable historical background and its rich biological diversity. French Creek was an important waterway for the indigenous Haudenosaunee tribe and also for early American settlers. It was named in 1753 by George Washington, who visited the watershed in an effort to remove the French from this area. The French Creek watershed covers approximately 1,270 square miles, providing habitat for an abundance of birds, over 80 species of fish, 27 species of freshwater mussels, and many other types of wildlife.

This guide describes official access points along French Creek and its tributaries, as well as paddling opportunities in our watershed's lakes. The information within this guide will help you to have the most comfortable and enjoyable experience on French Creek.



## ANATOMY OF A KAYAK & ESSENTIALS



## STOP INVASIVE SPECIES SPREAD

In order to have a healthy, balanced ecosystem to paddle in, it is essential to not carry aquatic invasive species from one water body to another. Even bodies of water that are within the same watershed can have vastly different ecosystems. To avoid this, **Clean, Drain, and Dry** your paddling equipment before going from one waterway to another. This will protect the French Creek watershed from invasive species, such as hydrilla, zebra mussels, and round gobies.

### Clean.

Remove all visible weeds and mud from boats and gear.

### Drain.

Remove drain plugs and allow all water to drain from your boat.

### Dry.

Allow everything, boats, paddles, and gear, to completely dry for at least 5 days or hand dry using a towel, OR use hot, high-pressurized water.



Hydrilla



Round Goby



Zebra Mussel



**STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!™**

Be A Good Steward.  
Clean. Drain. Dry.  
[StopAquaticHitchhikers.org](http://StopAquaticHitchhikers.org)

## SAFE PADDLING WEATHER

**Water °F + Air °F > 120 °F  
to be safe to paddle!**



\*From Nov. 1 through Apr. 30, boaters must wear a life jacket on any canoe, kayak, paddleboard, or boat less than 16 feet in length.

Although the air temperature might make it feel warm enough for safe paddling, the water temperature is what matters most.

According to the National Center for Cold Water Safety, any water temperature below 70°F (21°C) should be treated with caution. Paddling is not recommended at all if the water temperature is below 50°F.

A simple rule of thumb is: Air Temp + Water Temp < 120 = STAY OUT OF THE WATER! When you fall into cold water, your first reaction is to gasp... Cold water kills!

### SAFETY TIPS

- **Always wear a life jacket and carry a whistle.** It is the law to always have a life jacket and a whistle. Approximately 85% 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. Also, having a bailer will help you remove water that enters your boat.
- **Be prepared to swim.** If the water looks too hazardous to swim in, don't go paddling.
- **Scout ahead whenever possible.** Know the river, avoid surprises, and know the conditions of the waterway to be paddled.
- **PFBC launches require a launch permit.** Launch permits can be purchased through the PFBC website at [www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com) or at the NW regional office.
- **Check the water level before beginning your trip.** Check the USGS stream gages around the section that you will be paddling. Anything under 2 feet could be too shallow, and anything above 5 feet is too high.
- **Know the upcoming weather forecast.** Get a forecast before you go. Sudden winds and rains 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.** As water travels over the dam, it pulls everything towards the dam. This can pull you and your boat under the water.
- **Portage** (carry) your boat around any section of water that you feel uncertain about passing.
- **Never boat alone.** Boating safety increases with numbers.
- **Never tie a rope to yourself or your boat.** If you must have a rope that you need to hold on to, put the rope on your seat and sit on top of it. If you need to quickly release the rope, all you have to do is push up on your kayak, and the rope can be pulled right out from under you.
- **If you collide with an obstruction, lean towards it.** This will prevent you from capsizing or flooding the boat.
- **Make sure you have and know how to use all necessary equipment.** This includes how to properly put on a lifejacket, get in and out of your boat, etc.
- **Let someone know where you are going and approximately when you will be back.** Share your paddle plan with someone. Remember to contact the person when you have returned safely.
- **Use good judgment and common sense.** You are your first line of defense against accidents, so stay alert and know your limits.

### LIFE JACKETS

There are many types of life jackets, styles, and brands. For paddling, a type III life jacket is recommended. This type of life jacket is comfortable and allows for a good range of motion.

When fitting a life jacket, it is important to make sure the life jacket is not too small or too big. A life jacket should not be so tight that you cannot buckle or zip close the jacket. You should be able to take a deep breath and remain comfortable in your life jacket. All straps, zippers, and buckles should be in good working condition. Always start at the bottom and work your way up when buckling or zipping your life jacket.

Once the life jacket is on, try pulling up on the shoulder straps. Does the life jacket lift up to your ears? If so, your life jacket is too large! You need to tighten the straps or try a smaller size.



## French Creek Paddling Guide

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>76. UNION CITY DAM</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> Army Corps of Engineers</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> From PA Rt. 8 in Union City, follow Rt. 97 N 2.5 miles. Turn right onto Middleton road, go one mile, turn left at the dam. Drive across the dam to the parking lot. Steep gravel service road to water's edge.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Water levels vary depending on water release from the dam. Beautiful, remote stretch. Approximately 3/4 miles to Rt. 97 bridge and 12 miles to Rt. 19 access.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>57. JOHN ANSELMO</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> FCVC</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> From Cambridge Springs North, turn right onto Miller Station Road, follow for 3.5 miles to bridge. Parking lot available. *Please respect the farmer's fields.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Mostly slow, flat water, some deep, along very curvy oxbow rich landscape through farmland, cottages and woods. Approximately 7 miles to the PA Fish and Boat access north of Cambridge Springs.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>50. CAMBRIDGE SPRINGS</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> PA Fish &amp; Boat Com.</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> From Cambridge Springs take Rt. 19 North, turn right onto Miller Station Road, follow for 0.3 miles and turn right into access area. Gravel parking lot and paved access.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Slow flat, deep water with lots of oxbows with a few cottages and the northern part of Cambridge Springs. May encounter motor boats. Approximately 1 mile to Cambridge Landing and 2 miles to Conneauttee Creek.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>49. CAMBRIDGE LANDING</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> FCVC</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> In Cambridge Springs, turn onto Poplar St. and follow to Hicks Ave. Turn into Fireman's Park pavilion parking area, paved launch is straight ahead. Parking available, picnic tables, and restrooms.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Mostly flat water, some deep, some shallow. Approximately 1 mile to Conneauttee Creek access, 5 miles to Karl Gerdon Park, and 11 to Saegertown, which is more tactical.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>48. CONNEAUTTEE CREEK</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> PENNDOT</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> From the intersection of 6/19 in Cambridge Springs, follow McClellan St. 1.3 miles west. Access point is located at the confluence of Conneauttee Creek/French Creek (just before bridge). Parking available.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Mostly flat, shallow water, a few riffles, some deep spots. Strainers at Broadford Bridge. Possible portage. Approx. 4 miles to Karl Gerdon Park and 9 miles to Bertram Park.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>44. KARL GERDON PARK</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> Venango Borough</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> From Saegertown, take South St. towards the Venango Township Fire Dept. Park at Karl Gerdon Park and walk your boat down the hill to the metal launch.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Nice section to Bertram Park with some riffles. Approximately 5 miles to Bertram Park. Caution: Two foot dam right after the Bertram Park launch. Stay left. Possible portage. Approximately 6 miles to Saegertown launch.</p>	<p><b>Before paddling, always check to make sure the water levels are high enough to support your trip, but not too high that it's unsafe. The website <a href="https://canoedraft.shaw-weil.com/gauge/">https://canoedraft.shaw-weil.com/gauge/</a> gives real-time information on water levels and rates sections of NW PA streams as "too low", "too high", or "canoeable". The time required to float/paddle any section of the creek ★ depends on several factors such as water levels and flow rates, as well as your personal paddling speed and abilities.</b></p>			<p style="text-align: center;"><b>39. BERTRAM PARK</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> Hayfield Township</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> Access Bertram Park near Saegertown Bridge on Rt. 198. follow the drive past the pavilion to the launch. Park.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Caution: Two foot dam right after the launch. Stay left. Possible portage. Lovely section with mostly flat water, some riffles, and several islands. Approximately 7 miles to Joe Cat Launch on the right. Some industry as you approach Meadville. 8 mile paddle to Bicentennial access — stay left.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>38. SAEGERTOWN</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> PA Fish &amp; Boat Com.</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> Access 1/4 mile South of Saegertown, directly off Rt 6N/19, (on the right just before the bridge). Parking available.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Lovely section with mostly flat water, some riffles, and several islands. Approximately 6 miles to Joe Cat Launch on the right. Approximately 7 miles to Bicentennial Park (left after Mead Ave. Bridge). Some industry as you approach Meadville. Stay left under the first two bridges near Meadville.</p>				<p style="text-align: center;"><b>32. JOE CAT LAUNCH</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> FCVC</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> From Rogers Ferry Road, turn right onto Wadsworth Ave. The Launch is on the left. Unload boats &amp; carry in/out on path to the ramp. Parking is available at the Wadsworth Church or Lincoln Ave. Ball Complex.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Short paddle to Bicentennial — left after the Mead Avenue bridge (1 mile). Some cityscape, then rural areas. Approximately 6 miles to Wilson Chutes.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>C1. CUSSEWAGO</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> PA Fish &amp; Boat Com.</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> Cussewago Road 1.5 miles north of Meadville, then turn right at PFBC sign. Parking available.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Not the easiest paddle. Cussewago Creek drains into French Creek. Check water levels. Watch for logs, strainers and dam. Less than 1/2 mile to Bicentennial Park. *Cussewago Creek is often at a slow enough flow to paddle upstream to the take out.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>31. BICENTENNIAL PARK</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> City of Meadville</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> From Rt 6/19 (the bypass) turn right onto Mead Ave., then turn left just before the bridge. (Look for the log cabin) Parking, restrooms, picnic tables available.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Through the city to rural wooded landscape. Some riffles and bridges. Usually navigable even in low water conditions. Approximately 5 miles to Wilson Chutes access.</p>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>26. WILSON CHUTES</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> PA Fish &amp; Boat Com.</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> Follow 322 South out of Meadville 2.3 miles, turn right onto Wilson Chute Road, then left into the parking lot just before the bridge.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Fairly straight, deep, slow stretch, often with a head wind. Watch for swift water and a strainer/gravel bar on the right after launching. Lovely rural landscapes, forested banks and some farmland. Approximately 4 miles to Shaw's Landing access.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>22. SHAW'S LANDING</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> PA Fish &amp; Boat Com.</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> Follow 322 south 6.1 miles out of Meadville, turn right onto SR 2005, then left after the bridge onto Dutch Hill Road for 1/2 mile. Entrance is on the left. Located near Conneaut Outlet. Parking available.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Mostly flat, slow water often facing wind with one fast narrow riffle near Sugar Creek. Several cottages and beautiful rural scenes. Approximately 4 miles to Cochranon Borough.</p>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>18. COCHRANTON BORO</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> Cochranon Borough</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> From the traffic light in Cochranon, follow PA Rt. 173 South 1/2 mile. Just past the railroad tracks and before the bridge, turn right into Cochranon Borough Park. Limited parking and picnic tables available. Restrooms nearby at Cochranon Fair Grounds.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Mostly flat slow water, with several islands, some cottages and beautiful rural scenes. Approximately 8 miles to Utica. Take out on the left, just before the Utica bridge.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>10. UTICA ACCESS</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> Western PA Conservancy</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> Approx. 7.5 miles west of Franklin on 322, turn left onto Foster Road toward Utica. Go 2.4 miles. After steep hill, entrance is on the right immediately after the railroad tracks and before the bridge. Limited parking available.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> Beautiful, peaceful forested views with a few cottages, lush islands and several riffles. Watch for Polly's rapids — stay left. Some industry entering Franklin. 10 miles to the Franklin PFBC takeout on the Allegheny River.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>A123. FRANKLIN</b></p> <p><b>Owner:</b> PA Fish &amp; Boat Com.</p> <p><b>Directions:</b> Located in Franklin; Take US Rt. 322/Liberty St. East and turn left onto 8th street (Continuing on 322). Turn right onto Elk St. PFBC Access is on your left between 3rd &amp; 4th streets. Parking lot available.</p> <p><b>Paddle:</b> French Creek ends as it meets the Allegheny River at Riverfront Park in Franklin. From the confluence, you will travel approximately another mile to the Franklin PFBC on the Allegheny River. Take out is on the right.</p>		



# French Creek Paddling Guide

## DISTANCE BETWEEN SITES

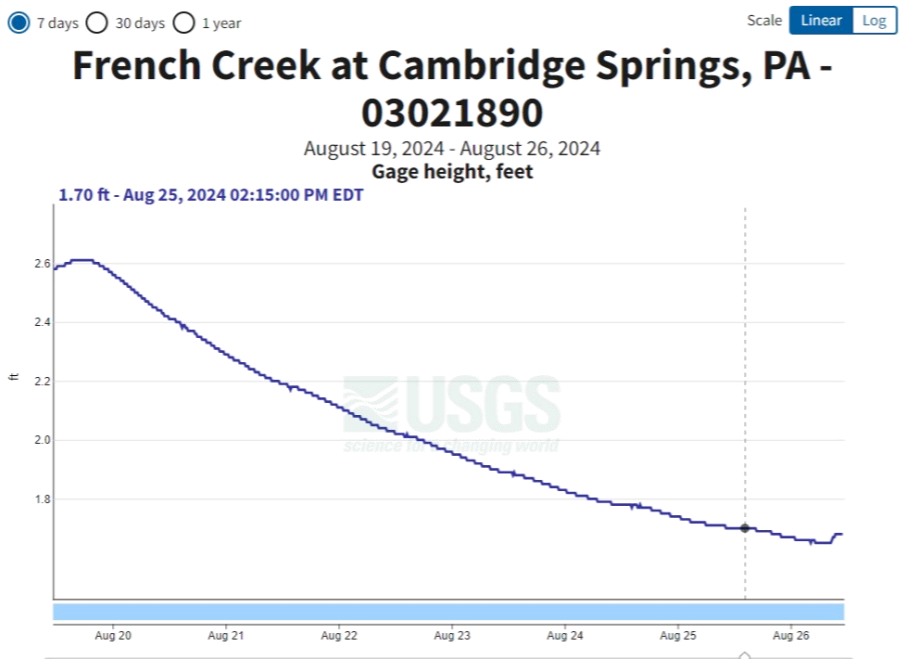
TAKE OUT POINT	Union City Dam	Rt. 6N & 19	John Anselmo	Cambridge Springs	Cambridge Landing	Conneautee Creek	Karl Gerdon Park	Bertram Park	Saegertown	Joe Cat Launch	Cussewago Creek	Bicentennial Park	Wilson Chutes	Shaw's Landing	Cochranton Boro	Utica Access	Franklin
PUT IN POINT																	
Union City Dam		12	19	26	27	28	32	37	38	44	47	45	50	54	58	66	77
Rt. 6N & 19			7	14	15	16	20	25	26	32	35	33	38	42	46	54	65
John Anselmo				7	8	9	13	18	19	25	28	26	31	35	39	47	58
Cambridge Springs					1	2	6	11	12	18	21	19	24	28	32	40	51
Cambridge Landing						1	5	10	11	17	20	18	23	27	31	39	50
Conneautee Creek							4	9	10	16	19	17	22	26	30	38	49
Karl Gerdon Park								5	6	12	15	13	18	22	26	34	45
Bertram Park									1	7	10	8	13	17	21	29	40
Saegertown										6	9	7	12	16	20	28	39
Joe Cat Launch											3	1	6	10	14	22	33
Cussewago Creek												2	7	11	15	23	34
Bicentennial Park													5	9	13	21	32
Wilson Chutes														4	8	16	27
Shaw's Landing															4	12	23
Cochranton Boro																8	19
Utica Access																	11
Franklin																	

All distances noted are approximate. See inside for directions and conditions between access points. French Creek Valley Conservancy serves as the manager of the French Creek Water Trail. Please note that occasionally launches are closed for maintenance, etc.

Check our website for up-to-date water trail information: [www.frenchcreekconservancy.org](http://www.frenchcreekconservancy.org).

## WATER LEVEL & TEMPERATURE

Water level is an important factor in what makes a successful day on the water. French Creek water level is ideal when it is between 3-5 feet. You can check 7-day water level, as well as temperature, at Union City, PA (03021518), Cambridge Springs, PA (03021890), Meadville, PA (03023100), and Utica, PA (03024000). Note that temperature is listed in both °C and °F. When using the 120 rule, be sure to use °F. Check multiple USGS stream gages closest to your paddling trip. Checking above your put-in location will let you know what will be coming downstream.



Visit <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/Location#> for water levels and temperatures.

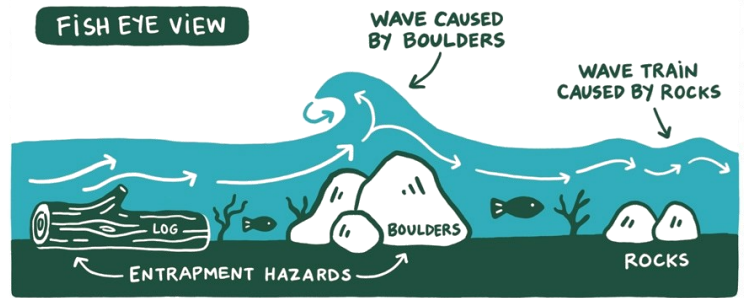
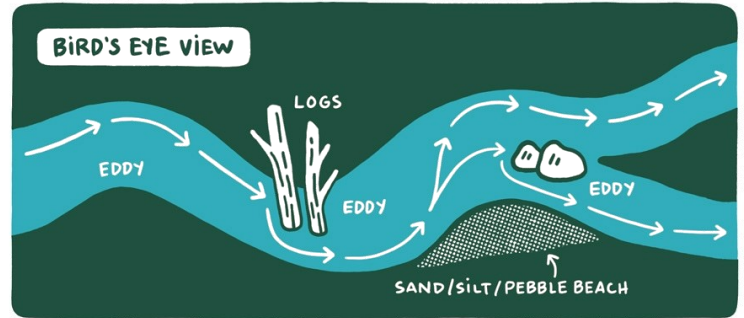
# French Creek Paddling Guide

## READING THE RIVER

There are many obstacles that can be present in the river. Above the water, paddlers can see exposed fallen trees (sweepers) and rocks. Along with the obstruction itself, the water's path has to change to go around the obstacle. This causes "eddies," which are swirling, reverse currents that can pull you back towards the obstruction. Shallow areas where there is sand, silt, or small rocks or gravel can be areas where paddlers will have to exit their boats in order to walk to a deeper section of the river.

Below the surface, submerged logs and branches (strainers) and rocks can create unseen hazards. With very turbid, murky water, these obstacles can easily go unseen. With any obstruction in the water, whether it is under or above the water line, entrapment is possible. Entrapment can happen when you get caught under a rock or log and can lead to a dangerous situation.

Keep the boat aligned with the flow of the river. Essentially, keep the canoe or kayak pointed downstream. Floating sideways significantly increases your chance of hitting a rock or snag (and taking an unexpected swim).



## RIVER TALK: LEARNING THE TERMINOLOGY

Below are a few essential terms to get you oriented with paddling and river navigating.

### Put-In

Location where you start the trip.

### Takeout

Place where the trip ends.

### Shuttle

Running a car down to the takeout so you can return home afterward.

### Forward stroke

This is the technique used to propel yourself forward with the paddle.

### Back Stroke

The technique used by paddlers to paddle backwards.

### River-left/River-right

The left or right side of the river as you look downstream. This orientation is how you should always direct others.

### Portage

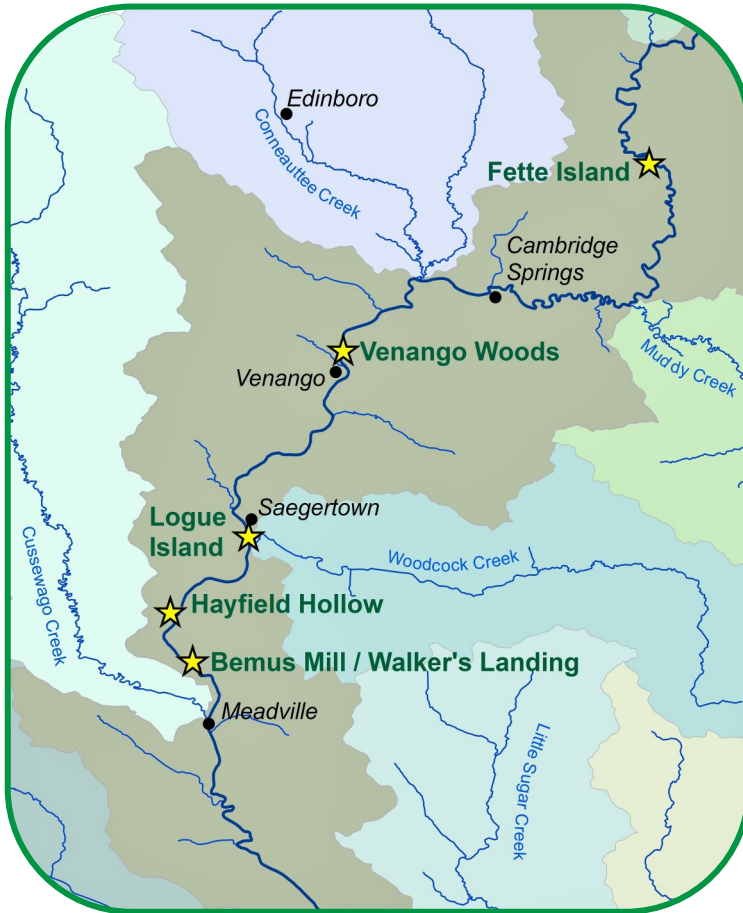
Carrying your kayak over a piece of land, usually to go from one waterway to another or get around an obstacle.

## FRENCH CREEK HAZARDS

Hazard	River Mile	Description
Union City Dam	74	Not passable, marks the beginning of the French Creek Water Trail.
Saegertown Dam	38	Breached dam, scout ahead. Possible to run or portage river left.
Mile 19 Rapids	19	Borderline Class I rapids. Pass through or portage with care.
Polly's Rapids	3	Borderline Class I rapids. Pass through or portage with care.

# French Creek Paddling Guide

## FCVC PROPERTIES ACCESSIBLE BY WATER



Edinboro Lake

### LAKE PADDLING ACCESS:

**Findley Lake — Chautauqua County, NY.** Findley Lake is located near the town of Mina. Public access for launching of kayaks and canoes is provided at the northern tip of the lake on Route 426/430, in the village of Findley Lake. The launch is operated by the NY Dept. of Environmental Conservation.

**Lake Pleasant — Erie County.** Six miles northeast of Waterford, follow Lake Pleasant Road to Valley Road to the western side of the lake to WPC's parking area and canoe/kayak launch. Lake Pleasant Road continues to the eastern side of the lake to a PA Fish and Boat Commission parking area and boat launch.

**LeBoeuf Lake — Erie County.** From Rt. 19, turn onto Water St., turn left onto South Hazel St., and follow to the public launch. Across the lake, you can access LeBoeuf Creek, which will lead you to French Creek. The lake is maintained by the Waterford Borough.

**Edinboro Lake — Erie County.** Two boat launch ramps are both located off of Lakeside Drive. The first is located just past the intersection of Lakeside and Conneauttee Drive, on the right. A gravel drive/parking area is available. The northern launch is located just south of Pat Crawford Beach and across the street from Billings Park, with street parking. The kayak launches attached to docks near the boat ramps are provided by Edinboro Lake Watershed Association.

**Conneaut Lake — Crawford County.** The PA Fish & Boat Commission maintains a launch at the north end of the lake off of Rt. 618, just north of Dollar General's parking lot. Watch for signs.

**Sugar Lake — Crawford County.** Seven miles northeast of Cochranon, the lake is accessible from Lake Creek Road (#2014) east off of PA Route 173. A PA Fish and Boat Commission boat launch with limited parking is on Lakeview Lane.

**Woodcock Creek Lake — Crawford County.** From Rt. 198E, turn right onto Schulz Road, then turn right into Colonel Crawford Park. Turn left onto Boat Launch Drive and follow to the launch. The lake and dam are managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers.



Woodcock Creek Lake

#### Photo Credits

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FRENCH CREEK VALLEY  
CONSERVANCY