



# Know Before You Go



## Safety Tips

- Wear a properly-fitted lifejacket while on the water. Never paddle under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Paddle with a group, not by yourself. Leave a "float plan" for your trip with a friend or relative.
- Dress appropriately for weather and water conditions, including air and water temperature. Avoid conditions for which you are not prepared.
- Learn about and study your route in advance, especially hazards that are beyond your skill level.
- Be able to read the water and effectively steer and propel your boat. Learn how to rescue yourself and others in the event of a capsized.
- Do not stand up in your boat, and avoid weight shifts that may cause capsized. Do not carry more weight or persons than your boat is designed to safely accommodate.
- Know where the dams are!



**Low-head dams are considered "drowning machines"!! Fort Dodge has two dams on the Des Moines River. Lehigh has a dam on the Des Moines River**

- Know and understand your river levels and flows, as well as the weather forecast. Remember, rain that has fallen upstream will be coming downstream!

## Paddlers' Personal Behavior

- Obey local rules and regulations. Use only public lands and access points
- Respect private property. Never trespass to gain access.
- Be considerate to others while on the water. Give anglers a wide berth.
- Be considerate to local residents.
- Give back to the waterway. Participate in a river cleanup, or volunteer for a local watershed organization.
- Avoid introducing non-native species. Clean your boat and gear between trips.

## Leave No Trace

- Dispose of waste properly. Never litter. Always pack out your trash. A good habit to develop is to always take a mesh trash bag so you can pick up around the access points. Always leave it cleaner than you found it.
- Use a portable toilet or other approved method to pack out solid human waste and paper products. Dispose of liquid waste 200' from water and away from camps and trails.
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces whenever possible. Minimize impacts to shore when launching, portaging and scouting.
- Avoid building campfires, except in established fire rings or in emergencies. Building a fire on sandbars is fine as long as you leave no trace of it the following morning.
- Respect wildlife by observing from a safe distance. Leave artifacts and natural features undisturbed.

