

River Ratings

(Updated for 2009)

These ratings should be used by trip leaders to rate their trips and by paddlers to match their skill level with a proposed trip. Members planning to paddle on any river should give these ratings consideration for their trip preparation. ***River ratings and the danger level can change quickly with changes in water level. Consult the trip leader when conditions warrant.***

Beginner:

This rating indicates flat water, that is, almost a lake, may have slow moving water (1–2.5 mph) with no obstructions. Participants should inform the leader in advance of the trip of their experience and skill level.

Advanced Beginner:

This rating requires acquaintance with your boat and equipment and basic flatwater maneuvers. Rivers with this rating will be relatively slow moving water (1–2.5 mph) or unobstructed faster water (2.5–3.5 mph) and be of a type conducive to learning. Mistakes or a capsized boat can be safely handled. Skills include:

1. Maneuver the boat on flatwater (spins, turns, side slips, stops);
2. Recognize and avoid hazardous situations such as deadfall, sharp undercut bends and a drop in the river (such as a dam or ledge);

3. Stop forward motion of the boat and maintain position in normal, slow-moving current;
4. Paddle strokes: Forward and Reverse, J and pry corrections, bow and stern sweeps, draw and push-away (pry);
5. Basic safety: self rescue in the event of a capsized boat; swimming feet first downstream; avoiding standing while in water at or above the knees (foot entrapment).

Examples of Advanced Beginner water trails: Fox River, Rock River, and Des Plaines River from Russell Road to Wadsworth, Kishwaukee River Cherry Valley to Atwood.

Intermediate:

In addition to the Advanced Beginner skills, a paddler of this level needs more experience and skill. Mistakes will be more damaging to equipment and paddler(s). The intermediate paddler will be expected to negotiate grade II water and will have the following skills:

- 1 Forward and back ferry, eddy turns and peel outs;
- 2 Negotiate waves 2–3 feet in height;
- 3 Select and negotiate a course through Class II water with little difficulty.

Examples of Intermediate water trails: Nippersink Creek from Glacial Park to Lyle C Thomas Park, Mazon River, Kishwaukee River Belvidere to Cherry Valley.

Expert:

This rating requires mastery of the boat and its maneuvering. The river will forgive few mistakes. The expert paddler will be expected to negotiate Class III water and will have the following additional skills:

1. Ferry across a jet;
2. Surf;
3. Peel out;
4. Read and successfully negotiate hydraulics;
5. Eddy turns—right and left, forwards and backwards;
6. High brace and low brace;
7. River rescue and self rescue techniques.

Examples of expert rated water trails: North Vermilion River Lowell to Oglesby, Wolf River whitewater sections II & III in Wisconsin.