

A Perfect Place to Wet a Line

Great Fishing in Winona, Minnesota



Forget the 10,000 lakes. The river country around Winona offers plenty of great fishing. The Mississippi River is one of the hottest **walleye** waters around, and the clear, spring-fed streams host some of the best **trout** fishing in the nation. Whether you just want to take the kids out and catch some **sunnies** or are looking for some serious **largemouth bass** action, you'll find it in Winona.

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IN SOUTHEASTERN MINNESOTA

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PHOTOS BY RON REIMER
CREATED BY RIVERWISE, INC.

Mississippi River Fishing

Always wear your life jacket!

Many fish species migrate up and down rivers and streams. Dams stop or slow down migrating fish, so they are usually a good place to fish.

The area right below the dam gets scoured out by the rushing waters, creating deep holes that many fish seem to like. One story that you'll often hear on the river tells of a scuba diver working below the dam coming face to face with a gigantic catfish. The story may or may not be true, but anglers have hauled in monster catfish weighing more than 70 pounds from below the dams.

Commercial fishing floats operate below Lock & Dams 4 and 5A. For a small fee, you can fish over deep water and buy refreshments, bait and tackle. When the weather turns cold, walleyes, saugers and other fish head for the deep water below the dams. That's when you see many fishing boats bobbing downstream from the giant dam gates.

The outside wall of a dam's lock chamber is often a popular public fishing spot. At some lock and dams the Army Corps of Engineers has added a public fishing pier near the lock wall.

Most dams have a spillway, usually on the opposite side of the river. The spillway also attracts fish trying to migrate upriver.

Access to lock walls and shorelines near dams may be restricted because of construction or security concerns.

👁️ **Lock & Dam 4, Alma, Wis. (float, boat)**

Fishing below this dam is popular even in cold weather months because the water usually remains open. The commercial fishing float across the channel offers tackle and refreshments for anglers. You'll need to signal the float to get a boat ride across the channel. There is no access to the spillway or lock wall here.

👁️ **Lock & Dam 5, near Minneiska, Minn. (shore, boat)**

L&D 5, often called the Whitman Dam, is one of the longest dams on the upper river. The lock wall and nearby fishing dock are popular with anglers.

👁️ **Lock & Dam 5A, Winona (shore, boat, float)**

The L&D 5A spillway, adjoining a Winona city park on Prairie Island, is a popular fishing spot. Across the river in Wisconsin, anglers park in a public lot and fish below the dam or head for the Dam Saloon, which also serves as a fishing float.

👁️ **Lock & Dam 6, Trempealeau, Wis. (shore, boat)**

This is one of the shortest dams on the river. The lock wall and the shore near the lock are popular fishing spots. The spillway on the Minnesota side is



also a popular spot, but it's a little difficult to find. Look for a couple of pickups or cars parked on the shoulder of Highway 61 where the dike meets the railroad berm, across the highway from a laundromat sign. Be very careful near railroad tracks.

👁️ **Lock & Dam 7, Dresbach, Minn. (shore, boat, ice)**

The lock wall, a fishing dock and the nearby shoreline are popular fishing spots. The L&D 7 spillway and shoreline just below it, across the river near downtown Onalaska, Wis., is another popular fishing spot. Lake Onalaska, upriver from the spillway, provides good fishing year around.

Wing Dams

The Army Corps of Engineers built many wing dams along the Main Channel of the Mississippi River to help the river scour out the shipping channel. The dams are long piles of submerged rocks perpendicular to the shore. As the water warms up in the summer, some fish — notably walleyes, saugers and smallmouth bass — move to the wing dams, where they remain until the water starts to cool in the fall. Walleyes like willow cats or other minnows. Smallmouth bass will hit crank baits. Use worms to catch catfish or sheepshead.

During low water, crossing a wing dam can damage a boat or motor.

👁️ **Homer "L" Wing Dam, Homer, Minn. (boat)**

Fish for walleyes in the elbow of this L-shaped wing dam across the channel from Homer Beach.

👁️ **Pellowski's Wing Dams, Winona, Minn. (boat)**

There's good walleye fishing among the small wing dams on the upstream end of Pellowski's Island.

👁️ **Bartender's Wing Dam (boat)**

This wing dam stretches from the Wisconsin shore most of the way across the river just below Latsch Island. Fish at the end of it for walleyes. Keep out of the way of tows.

Backwater Bonanza

Merrick State Park, Fountain City, Wis.

(shore, boat)

There's good fishing from the shore, or you can launch a canoe or motorboat to explore the extensive backwaters here.

Schneider's Lake/Sandy Hook, Minnesota City, Minn.

(ice)

This popular ice fishing spot is a bit tricky to find, and the ice is late to freeze. Be very careful near the railroad tracks and on the ice. Watch for cars parked on Highway 61 just upstream from Minnesota City, where the slough comes close to the highway. Follow the footprints across the slough and across the island to the lakes.

Sam Gordie's Slough & Swift Creek, Winona

(boat, ice)

This slough, across the river from Winona, is a favorite spot for largemouth bass in the summer and for ice fishing in the winter. It's tricky to find the first time. From downtown Winona, follow the Main Channel downstream past the first power line that crosses the river. Continue to the east side of town, where another power line crosses. Turn left (north) at the upstream end of the island with the power line tower on it. Stay close to the upstream end of the island (There's a wing dam just upstream.). Continue across the secondary channel veering to your right. Look for the opening on the opposite bank. Enter the small channel and turn left, then follow the channel (staying to the right) back to the railroad tracks.

If, when you first enter the small channel, you turn right instead of turning left, you will be in Swift Creek. Follow the channel along the railroad tracks to the rock pile. Fish along the track side for walleyes or the opposite side of the channel for smallmouth bass.



Mud Lake, Winona

(shore)

This popular crappie fishing spot is just east of Winona, on the north side of Highway 61, across from Bundy Blvd.

Homer Trestle, Homer, Minn.

(shore)

In the late spring and during high water, sunfish keep anglers busy below this railroad trestle on the upstream side of Homer. Use caution near the railroad tracks.

Trempealeau Lakes, Trempealeau, Wis.

(boat, ice)

A series of lakes connected to the Mississippi downriver from Trempealeau offer good bass and sunfish action in the summer and good ice fishing in the winter, especially Round Lake and Third Lake.

Take the road leading to the marina and lock and dam, but keep to the left after crossing the railroad tracks. The first or second left will take you to Second Lake and Third Lake. Going straight will take you to the Long Lake landing then to Round Lake.

In Town Angling

Lake Winona (shore, boat, ice)

Both East and West Lake Winona offer anglers a broad spectrum of fishing fun. Fishing docks on both lakes (see map) provide easy access and are popular with kids. The shorelines also offer many good fishing spots. The lake contains thousands of feisty sunfish for the new angler, and northerns, wall-eye and largemouth bass for serious anglers. Try fishing near the east end of the pipe connecting the lakes, beneath Huff St., right after a rain.

A boat ramp on each lake invites boaters. Motors are limited to 10 horsepower. Lake Winona is also a popular ice fishing spot.

Levee Park (shore)

There is good fishing at the west end of Levee Park, near the foot of Johnson Street. When the water is low, you might catch just about anything here.

Prairie Island Causeway & Spillway (shore)

Anglers catch a variety of fish on the downstream end of the culvert under the causeway to Prairie Island, especially in the spring and during high water.

The far west end of Prairie Island park adjoins the L&D 5A spillway. The spillway is a popular place to fish from shore.

Bartlet Lake (shore, boat, ice)

This quiet backwater lake is inside the Winona dike, near the airport. It's a good place to fish in the warm months and a great ice fishing spot.

Mertes Harbor & Slough (shore, boat, ice)

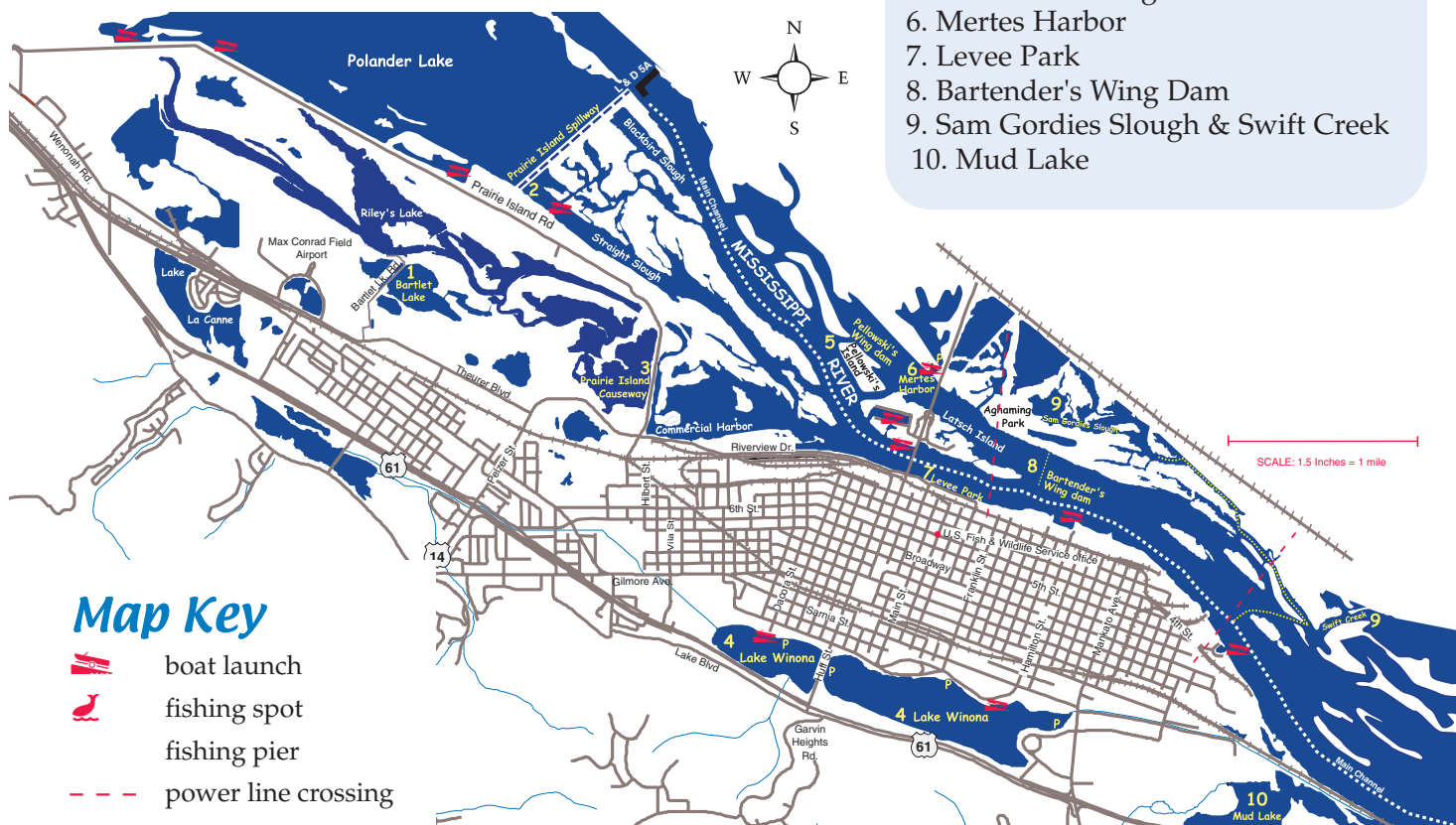
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently spruced up access to Mertes Harbor and Mertes Slough, enlarging the parking lot, rebuilding the boat ramp and adding benches and a fishing dock to the popular fishing spot. You might hook just about anything in the harbor, which is on the river side of the parking lot.

The boat ramp provides access to the slough, which is cut off from the river except during floods. Anglers fish for bass, northerns and panfish in the slough. If you're fishing from the shore, watch out for poison ivy. This is also a popular ice fishing area.

Driving from Winona to Wisconsin, find Mertes by turning left after crossing the second bridge.

In Town Angling

1. Bartlet Lake
2. Prairie Island Spillway
3. Prairie Island Causeway
4. Lake Winona
5. Pellowski's Wing Dam
6. Mertes Harbor
7. Levee Park
8. Bartender's Wing Dam
9. Sam Gordies Slough & Swift Creek
10. Mud Lake



Trout Fishing Treasures

Southeastern Minnesota offers some of the best and most beautiful trout streams in the world, from small brushy creeks with brookies to boulder-strewn rivers with big browns. Winona County alone boasts 38 trout streams.

John Ross' America's 100 Best Trout Streams, lists three Southeastern Minnesota streams: the South Branch of the Root River; the Whitewater River; and Trout Run Creek.

Beaver Creek, near Caledonia, Minn.

The East Branch begins in Beaver Creek State Park, then flows through state land north of the park. The stream offers excellent fishing among limestone bluffs and rocky stream beds. The stream has been enhanced with many bank cuts, where the big ones can hide. Open to catch-and-release winter fishing.

The West and Middle Branch also hold trout, for a total of 15.7 miles of trout stream for all three branches. (brook & brown)

Rush Creek & Pine Creek, Rushford, Minn.

These two streams provide a total of 30 miles of excellent trout fishing, much of it with stream-side easements. Large trout (over five pounds) are taken from these streams each season. (brook [Pine] & brown)

Whitewater River, Elba & Altura, Minn.

All three branches of the Whitewater offer a total of more than 50 miles of trout fishing among scenic splendor. The Middle Branch flows through Whitewater State Park, where the headquarters includes a trout exhibit opening in 2002. The South Branch winds through a state wildlife management area. Two 13-pound browns caught in the South Branch of the Whitewater are on display at Mauer Brothers Tavern in Elba. Sections are open to catch-

and-release winter fishing. Special regulations apply to some sections. (brown & rainbow)

Trout Run Creek, Saratoga, Minn.

Extensive stream improvements have yielded an excellent trout population. The 13 miles of fishable stream flow through woods and pastures. (brown)

Root River, Lanesboro, Minn.

The South Branch of the Root River from below Lanesboro to above Forestville offers 36 miles of trout water. The Root River Trail follows the South Branch from below Lanesboro to beyond Preston, so you could combine a bike trip with a fishing trip. The South Branch is open to catch-and-release winter fishing. (brook, brown & rainbow)




A half dozen other trout streams flow into the Root River in this area, among them Duschee Creek and Gribben Creek, two gems with brook and brown trout and very effective stream improvement structures.




Beaver Creek, Galesville, Wis.

Upstream from Lake Marinuka (created by a dam on Beaver Creek), the North Branch of Beaver Creek offers fine trout fishing to beyond Franklin. (brown & brook)



Winona Area Trout Streams

-  1. Beaver Creek, Galesville, Wis.
-  2. Whitewater River, Elba & Altura, Minn.
-  3. Rush Creek and Pine Creek, Rushford, Minn.

-  4. Trout Run Creek, Saratoga, Minn.
-  5. Root River, Lanesboro, Minn.
-  6. E. Beaver Creek, Caledonia, Minn.



Plan Ahead

A number of publications come in handy on the rivers, lakes or streams. Make sure you have detailed maps before heading out on the Mississippi River or the country back roads.

Upper Mississippi River Navigation Charts, Army Corps of Engineers. Call the Lock & Dam 15 Visitors' Center to order (309) 794-5338, or call Riverwise at (507) 454-5949.

Pool Maps, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, visit 51 East Fourth St., Winona, or call (507) 454-7351.

Minnesota Fishing Regulations booklet, Minnesota DNR. Get it where fishing licenses are sold, or call 1-888-665-4236.

Wisconsin Fishing Regulations booklet, Wisconsin DNR. Find it where fishing licenses are sold, or call (608) 785-9000.

Trout Fishing Access in Southeastern Minnesota, Minn. DNR. Shows stream maps by county. Call 1-888-646-6367, or visit the web site at www.dnr.state.mn.us/

Wisconsin Trout Streams, Spring Ponds and Lakes. Call the La Crosse DNR Service Center at (608) 785-9000.

Caution:

The Mississippi can be Dangerous!

- Dams and spillways are dangerous. Boats must stay at least 150 feet from the dam gates.
- In a power boat, stay in the Main Channel of the Mississippi River, unless you are familiar with the location of wing dams, closing dams, shoals and channels. Wing dams and closing dams are often just below the surface and can cause a lot of damage to your boat.
- If you are travelling upstream, the red buoys mark the right side of the channel and the green buoys mark the left side. Channel markers are often placed at the end of a wing dam.
- High water conditions on the Mississippi River can be dangerous, especially from deadheads — the trees, logs and other debris that wash into the river

Always wear your life jacket!

Fishing Regulations

- Anglers younger than 16 do not need a license, but they must follow all the fishing regulations.
- Regulation booklets are available where fishing licenses are sold.
- Save money with special licenses for seniors and couples, or short-term licenses if you'll only be fishing in the state for a few days.
- Trout fishing requires a trout stamp, which costs extra.
- A license from Wisconsin or Minnesota allows you to fish anywhere on the Mississippi River between the two states, between the railroad tracks that follow the river.
- On the Mississippi River, the same seasons and limits usually apply for both states. If you are a resident of Minnesota or Wisconsin, you must have a license from your home state to fish on the Mississippi.

Fish Consumption Advisories

- The Mississippi River and southeast Minnesota trout streams are much cleaner than they were ten years ago. Anglers can feel safe about eating most game fish species, as long as you limit your intake to only a few meals a month. Pregnant and nursing mothers are generally warned against eating any fresh water fish. Still, conditions change, so it's a good idea to check the safety of your catch.
- Call the Minnesota Dept. of Health at 1-800-657-3908, or visit the Minnesota DNR website at www.dnr.state.mn.us/
- In Wisconsin, call the La Crosse DNR Service Center at (608) 785-9000, or visit the Wisconsin DNR website at www.dnr.state.wi.us/