Lehigh River Water Trail – Southern Section

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.

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.

A PENNSYLVANIA SCENIC RIVER

In 1982, a 32-mile section in the upper section Lehigh River corridor was designated a Pennsylvania Scenic River. This special designation is intended to help preserve the primitive qualities, as well as the natural and aesthetic values, of our rivers and adjacent land environment. Rivers so designated shall be free-flowing and capable of supporting both aquatic life, as well as water-based recreation.

THE LEHIGH RIVER WATER TRAIL

The Lehigh River Water Trail is 72-miles long, starting at White Haven and ending in the city of Easton at the Lehigh River’s confluence with the Delaware River. There the traveler can continue down the Delaware towards Philadelphia and beyond to Delaware Bay.

Northern Section

This 41-mile segment of the Lehigh River Water Trail begins at White Haven at an access to the Lehigh Gorge State Park and ends at the Lehigh Gap at Blue Mountain at the Carbon-Lehigh-Northampton county line. Deep gorges and fast-moving water characterize this section of the Water Trail. Substantial canoeing or kayaking experience is required to maneuver most sections this reach of the river. It contains several access points and traverses 26 miles of the Lehigh Gorge State Park.

Southern Section

This 31-mile segment of the Water Trail begins at the Lehigh Gap at Blue Mountain at the Carbon-Lehigh-Northampton county line and ends at the confluence of the Lehigh River with the Delaware River in the city of Easton. This reach of the Water Trail widens out and tends to become more leisurely than the northern section. The land around the river is characterized by rolling hills and forested riparian corridors. The river contains numerous access points and passes through the urban centers of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton.

RESPECT THE PRIVACY & RIGHTS OF LANDOWNERS

Please respect the privacy and rights of landowners along the Juniata River Water 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. Some of the landowners enjoy the peace and solitude overlooking the river from their back yards. Use the same courtesy that you would want. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is always welcome.

THE LEHIGH RIVER

Located in northeastern Pennsylvania, the Lehigh River originates in a series of glacial bogs and marshes in the area of Pocono Peak Lake in the Gouldsboro area about 15 miles southeast of Scranton. The elevation at the Lehigh River headwaters is approximately 2,200 feet above sea level, and drops nearly 1,000 feet during its 103-mile journey to its confluence with the Delaware River in Easton. The Lehigh’s watershed is approximately 1,345 square-miles in area and consists of approximately 2,000 miles of streamways. It is a significant sub-basin within the Delaware River watershed.

The Lehigh River forms the geopolitical boundary between many of the ten counties within its watershed. The river flows through Wayne, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Carbon, Lehigh, and Northampton counties. The largest cities – Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton – are found on the banks of the Lehigh in the river’s lower reaches. There are many smaller historic hamlets and villages sprinkled from top to bottom. The river is impounded in several places by dams the most significant of which is the Francis E. Walter Dam in Luzerne and Carbon counties.

At White Haven, the Lehigh River and its banks become part of Lehigh Gorge State Park. Over the next 32 miles, the river flows through a wilderness area and official Pennsylvania Scenic River section that is a mecca for whitewater boaters and mountain bikers. Near the town of Jim Thorpe and on into Bowmanstown, the river is characterized by calmer water and is widely enjoyed by kayakers, rafters, and canoists.

At the Carbon-Lehigh-Northampton county line, the river makes a dramatic cut through the Blue Mountain. Called Lehigh Gap, it separates the upper portion of the watershed from the two-county “Lehigh Valley,” as Lehigh and Northampton counties are called. The Lehigh River continues south past the historic towns of Walnutport, Slatington, Catasauqua, and Allentown where South Mountain deflects the Lehigh River’s southward flow sharply to the east towards Bethlehem. At Bethlehem, the Lehigh River’s speed continues to slow until it merges with the Delaware River after the dam in Easton.

FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

The Lehigh River supports a diverse fishery that includes trout, smallmouth bass, muskellunge, catfish, and American shad. The river is stocked with trout from White Haven to Jim Thorpe by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and by several local sport-fishing groups from Jim Thorpe to Allentown. Check the current fishing regulations and seasons before fishing the river. Review this year’s fishing summary online at: www.fish.state.pa.us.

STEWARDSHIP

Help care for the land, water and cultural resources along the Juniata River by respecting wildlife, nature and other recreationists. It is important to wash footwear, boats, and vehicles to minimize the spread of invasive species from one place to another. “Leave No Trace,” a national outdoor ethics program, provides some guidelines to minimize your impact. For more information about “Leave No Trace” outdoor ethics, visit www.Lnt.org.

Leave no trace for camping and day use:
1. Plan and prepare.
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
3. Dispose of waste properly.
4. Leave what you find.
5. Minimize campfires.
6. Respect wildlife.
7. Be considerate of other visitors.
**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 on to 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.

**PENNSYLVANIA BOATING REGULATIONS**

- All motorboats are required to carry a sound-producing mechanical device audible for a half-mile. Athletic whistles meet this requirement.
- All motorboats must be registered, regardless of where they launch.
- Unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, rafts) using Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission access areas must either be registered OR display a valid launch permit. Launch permits can be purchased on the web at [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us). Click the “Outdoor Shop” icon.
- Operating watercraft, including canoes, kayaks, and rafts, under the influence of alcohol or drugs is illegal. The law is strongly enforced for user safety. For further information on boating regulations, contact the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission at [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us).

**FLOATING THE RIVER**

The size of the Lehigh River and the releases from the Francis E. Walter Dam make the river navigable in some way most days of the year. There are exceptions, however, particularly in the northern section of the Water Trail (above the Lehigh Gap), which should be monitored carefully in conditions of high flow. The northern section of the Water Trail where it passes through the Lehigh Gorge State Park contains Class II and III rapids requiring considerable expertise.

There are several river outfitters and river guides in the Lehigh River valley, mostly in the northern section. Contact the regional tourist promotion agencies for a current list of outfitters. Many of these operators can also provide helpful information on current river conditions. All access points are indicated on the map, some of which are “primitive,” which means they are more suitable for canoes and other car-top boats. In addition, Wildlands Conservancy (a non-profit conservation organization) operates its Bike & Boat education/recreation program for groups of all sizes and ages. Contact them at [www.wildlandspa.org](http://www.wildlandspa.org) or 610/965.4397 x36.

There is truly something for everyone here – the expert looking for adventure and the novice paddling family looking for a gentle ride. Paddling when air temperatures are below 55°F Fahrenheit is unsafe. PFDs should be worn by all occupants at all times. If someone else gets in trouble and you do not have your PFD on, you might both drown. **Just wear it!**
WILDLIFE ALONG THE RIVER

One of the most significant raptor-migration routes in North America crosses the Lehigh River at Lehigh Gap. The physical aspects of Blue Mountain funnel every species of birds of prey (hawks, eagles) through the Lehigh River valley every year in the spring, but most abundantly in the autumn. Because the birds don’t remain just on the ridge top as they move through, one can also see these impressive creatures in the valleys and riparian corridors. During the paddling season, one can see osprey, great blue heron, little green heron, merganser, wood duck, belted kingfisher, warbler of every stripe, and more. Black bear and rattlesnakes can be found in the upper reaches of the river; beaver, deer, fox, river otter, and muskrat can be found in many places along its entire length.

DELWARE & LEHIGH NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR AND HERITAGE STATE PARK

Also known as "The D & L Corridor," this nationally significant area comprises five counties (Luzerne, Carbon, Lehigh, Northampton, and Bucks), part of two rivers (Delaware and Lehigh), and covers 150 miles between Wilkes-Barre and Bridgeton (which is just north of Philadelphia). Highlighting 400 years of settlement and the rise of America's Industrial Revolution, the D & L Corridor is a reservoir of natural, cultural, historic, recreational, and economic resources that comprise our heritage. More information about the D & L Corridor can be found at www.nps.gov/delc.
ALONG THE WAY—SOUTHERN SECTION—BELOW THE LEHIGH GAP

WALKING PURCHASE PARK – Located in Salisbury Township, this 400-acre wilderness park is located on river right, adjacent to the Sterners Island group in the Lehigh River. It is located in an area dubbed a “metro-wilderness” because of the wild nature of its surroundings in one of the most populated metropolitan areas in the state – the Lehigh Valley. The name Walking Purchase Park derives from the fact that, Solomon Jennings, one of the three participants of the infamous Walking Purchase, stopped his “run” and settled on this site in 1737.

BETHLEHEM HISTORIC DISTRICT / SAND ISLAND – The city of Bethlehem is a remarkable city – history, culture, art, recreation (including a world-class trout stream – the Monocacy – cutting through the middle of town), an accessible historic district (featuring Moravian architecture), a charming downtown, and many festival events, including Musikfest and Celtic Fest – are all within walking distance of the river.

FREEMANSBURG – Freemansburg is an authentic canal town. Lock #44 was located here and a reconstructed mule barn occupies the same site as it did when the Lehigh Navigation was in full operation from 1829 to 1932. The remains of a grist mill (which pre-dates the navigation system) and the original locktender’s house are also located at this site. Not encumbered by tourist trappings, it retains a flavor of what it must have looked like in the canal era.

HUGH MOORE PARK – One of the city of Easton’s principal river parks, Hugh Moore Park (named for the inventor of the Dixie Cup) straddles the space between the Lehigh Navigation canal and the river. There is a rich industrial history associated with the area before it was given to the city to be developed into a park by Hugh Moore. Here one finds one of the few remaining locktender’s houses and the only operating lock (among the 78 locks built) on the entire Lehigh Navigation system. Josiah White II canal-boat rides are offered, for a fee, throughout the warm season, and other events are scheduled throughout the year.

EASTON/TWO RIVERS LANDING – A remarkable success story. Two Rivers Landing contains the National Canal Museum – a day’s visit all by itself – and the popular Crayola Factory where the manufacture of crayons is explained to over 300,000 visitors a year. The presence of these two world-class attractions has helped to foster the economic resurgence of Easton’s downtown. Easton’s history at “the forks of the Delaware” was pivotal in the development of America’s Industrial Revolution. The view of the confluence of the Lehigh and Delaware rivers helps to explain why Easton was nicknamed “Canal Town America.”

Go interactive and online with the Lehigh River Water Trail: www.wildlandspa.org
Look for this sign for access to the trail.