



# PORTAGE RIVER WATER TRAIL

Map & Guide





## COMMON HAZARDS

### Foot Entrapments

Do not attempt to stand or walk in swift-moving water. Feet can become entrapped between submerged rocks, risking drowning if a strong current holds one's body under water.

Always keep feet up and pointed downstream.

Swim to shore or calm water before standing.

### Lowhead Dams

Know the location of lowhead dams. Portage (carry your boat) around the hazard and launch at a safe distance downstream.

NEVER attempt to boat over a dam. Small dams are very dangerous because of the hydraulic turbulence at the base of the dam that can trap boats and people.

### Boating Laws

PFDs (personal flotation device) are required, one PFD per individual.

Operating Under the Influence is illegal. Penalties for this crime include up to one-year jail time and a \$1,000 fine.

Canoes and kayaks must be registered in the state of Ohio, but a boater license is not required if using a hand-powered vessel. Registered boats must have a valid, up-to-date sticker indicating active registration.

If paddling at night, a white light must be used. Must be bright enough to see with sufficient time to prevent collision.

Make sure you know the "rules of the road" regarding boat traffic.

Learn more at [Ohiodnr.gov](http://Ohiodnr.gov)

### Strainers

Avoid all strainers, or river obstructions such as overhanging branches, downed trees, log jams, and flooded islands, especially in swift water.

Portage around any section of water about which you feel uncertain.

### Cold Water Immersion and Hypothermia

Sudden immersion in cold water can be deadly. The longer you are immersed in cold water, the harder it is to control your body. Manual dexterity and coordination deteriorate rapidly, and within 30 minutes, hypothermia (cooling of the body's core temperature) can begin. Loss of consciousness and death with or without drowning can result.

You don't have to be submerged to succumb to hypothermia – wind chill, rain, and perspiration can contribute to the condition.

Keep your life jacket securely fastened to help keep your head above water and prolong survival time if you fall overboard.

Dress appropriately: wear layers that are moisture resistant and retain heat, such as silk, polypropylene, fleece, and wool.

Bring an extra change of clothes in a waterproof bag. Neoprene shoes or tennis shoes with woolen socks are recommended footwear.

Be able to recognize and know how to treat hypothermia. Early symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, slurred speech, and lack of coordination.

### Floods and Swift Rivers

Know the water conditions before you go. Water levels and flood information are monitored throughout the state: [waterdata.usgs.gov](http://waterdata.usgs.gov)

Never boat on flooded rivers. High water increases risk and severity of all hazards.

## OUTDOOR ETHIC

**Dispose of waste properly** – leave no trace – pack it all out!

**Travel on durable surfaces** – rock, gravel, and sand. Use existing, improved access sites. When using a natural riverbank to launch your boat, stay clear of vegetation or mud.

**Stay on the trail while portaging** (carrying your boat)

**Leave what you find.** Appreciate artifacts and natural objects but leave them undisturbed.

**Prevent spreading of invasive species,** including live bait, by completely cleaning and drying equipment between trips. Do not bring any standing water or water from another lake or river – it may contain live plants or animals.

**Respect wildlife** – observe from a distance; don't feed, follow or approach wildlife. Control pets or leave them at home.

**Be considerate of other visitors.** Avoid boisterous behavior. Let nature's sounds prevail.

**Respect the privacy and rights of landowners.** Access sites shown in this publication are public property, all other lands should be considered private property.



The Portage River Water Trail provides opportunities to explore the shoreline throughout Wood, Sandusky, and Ottawa counties. Enjoy paddling through the peaceful towns and world-renowned wetlands that make northwest Ohio a premier place to live, work, and play. We hope you use this guide, which was made possible through a partnership between many organizations, to stay safe and have fun. Let us know about your adventures by sharing on social media with #OhioFindItHere.

– Governor Mike DeWine and  
First Lady Fran DeWine.

Over  
36 Miles of  
River Trails

## SAFETY TIPS

**Boat with a buddy** – someone that has experience to mitigate risks.

**Wear a lifejacket at all times,** particularly in moving water. By law, children under 10 must wear life jackets of an appropriate size.

**File a "float plan" with a reliable person,** indicating where you are going and when you plan to return. Remember to contact the person once you have returned safely.

**Know where you are along the trail at all times.** Know how to get to roads if you must walk out.

**Do not overload or unevenly load your boat.** Keep the weight in the boat low and centered to maintain stability.

**Be prepared to swim.** If the water looks too hazardous to swim, then don't boat on it!

**Be aware of motorized boats,** stay close to shore unless crossing, wear bright colors for visibility, always point your boat into the wake to avoid capsizing.

**If you capsize,** hold onto your boat unless it presents a life-threatening situation. Position yourself on the upstream side of the capsized boat, floating on your back with legs up until you can safely reach shore or reenter your boat. Always keep feet up and pointed downstream until you can swim to shore or calm water before standing.

**Carry plenty of drinking water.**

**In case of emergency call 911.** Know where you are along the trail in case you need to request emergency assistance.

**Stay updated on changing weather and water conditions.** They can change and become more hazardous throughout the day.

Learn more at [Ohiodnr.gov](http://Ohiodnr.gov)

### Community Information

**Bowling Green Chamber of Commerce**  
[www.bgchamber.net](http://www.bgchamber.net)  
419.353.7945

**Village of Elmore**  
[www.village.elmore.oh.us](http://www.village.elmore.oh.us)  
419.862.3362

**Oak Harbor Area Chamber of Commerce**  
[www.oakharborohio.net](http://www.oakharborohio.net)  
419.898.0479

**ODNR**  
[www.ohiodnr.gov](http://www.ohiodnr.gov)

**Ottawa County**  
[co.ottawa.oh.us](http://co.ottawa.oh.us)  
[www.shoresandislands.com](http://www.shoresandislands.com)  
419.625.2984

**Ottawa County Fairgrounds**  
[www.ottawacountyfair.org](http://www.ottawacountyfair.org)  
419.898.1595

**Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge**  
[www.fws.gov/refuge/ottawa](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/ottawa)  
419.898.0014

**Village of Pemberville**  
[www.pemberville.org](http://www.pemberville.org)  
419.287.3832

**Port Clinton Area Chamber of Commerce**  
[www.portclintonchamber.com](http://www.portclintonchamber.com)  
419.734.5503

**City of Port Clinton**  
[www.portclinton.com](http://www.portclinton.com)  
419.734.5522

**Sandusky County Resources**  
[www.scchamber.org](http://www.scchamber.org)  
419.332.1591

**TMACOG**  
<https://tmacog.org/>  
419.241.9155

**Wood County**  
<https://www.co.wood.oh.us/>  
<https://www.wcparks.org/>

**Village of Woodville**  
[www.villageofwoodville.com](http://www.villageofwoodville.com)  
419.849.2731



## PORTAGE RIVER INFORMATION

### Historical

<http://www.historicperrysburg.org/blackswamp.htm>

The Portage river routes all the way from Wood County to Port Clinton flowing northeast and drains into Lake Erie.

The Portage river gets its name from a French military engineer who named it "R. du Portage" from having to "portage" or carry their boats around the shallow areas of the river frequently.

The river is around 41.5 miles long.

Most of the streams and ditches that flow into the Portage River are man-made.

Native American nations took advantage of the fertile wildlife of the Great Black Swamp by using this area as hunting and fishing grounds. Following Ohio's Indian Removal in the early 19th century, settlers drained the swamp so that the land could be farmed productively.

In 1850, legislature was passed to support draining the Great Black Swamp with ditches emptying the Maumee and Portage Rivers into Lake Erie.

The mouth of the river has changed locations at least 2 times in the past 300 years. It first drained into Lake Erie near West Harbor. In 1754 maps show the mouth of the river near what is now the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

### Environmental

<http://coastal.ohiodnr.gov/>

The Portage River Watershed consists of mostly cropland, some urban areas, and very little forest and wetland areas.

The river between Oak Harbor and Port Clinton, and the mouth of the river, are considered an estuary because Lake Erie's waters influence this area. Compared to other tributaries of Lake Erie, this lower portion of the Portage River is considered extremely wide, with some locations near 3,000 feet in width.

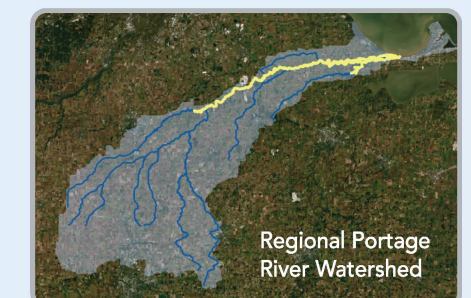
The Portage River drains over 600 square miles of land and has 7 major branches.

The majority (90%) of streams and waterways in the Portage River basin provide habitats that support robust populations of fish and other aquatic life.

### Cultural

With the Portage River's large width in areas, it is a popular location for community festivals and recreational activities including; kayaking, boating, canoeing, and fishing.

There are numerous parks and wildlife areas along the river including; Little Portage Wildlife Area, Darby Marsh, and Meadowbrook Nature Preserve.



Regional Portage  
River Watershed



