



WISCONSIN SEA GRANT

# Enjoy the St. Louis River Estuary Safely



Between the Fond du Lac Dam and Minnesota and Wisconsin points, the St. Louis River Estuary is a destination for many types of water recreation. The river is cleaner than it has been in decades because of pollution controls and habitat restoration. Whether you swim, paddle, duck hunt, fish, sail or pleasure cruise on the river, here are some tips for appropriate precautions.

## TIPS FOR ALL WATER RECREATION



### **Wear a life jacket**

No matter what your age or skill level, buy or borrow and wear a life jacket that fits properly.

### **Don't go alone**

Invite a friend!

### **Avoid alcohol and drugs**

Don't drink when recreating in or near the water.

### **Share your plan**

Tell a reliable friend or family member (someone who isn't going with you) where you are going, when you expect to return and what to do if you don't check in on time.

### **Check the weather**

Know the forecast before leaving home and check while on the water – wind, waves and air temperature change rapidly ([bit.ly/4c8euHe](https://bit.ly/4c8euHe)). Get off the water immediately if you hear thunder or see lightning.

### **Do the math**

If the air temperature + water temperature = less than 120°F, do not recreate without wearing a wet suit or dry suit.

### **Be aware of currents**

Water can look calm on the surface but hide strong currents under water. Water can flow both directions in the river.

### **Be aware of water depths**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's electronic navigational chart ([bit.ly/3TpWllb](https://bit.ly/3TpWllb)) shows water depths and the location of the navigation channel within the estuary. As with all rivers, the locations of channels, shoals, sandbars and drop-offs can change over time.

### **Beware of dark water**

Upstream coniferous forests and bogs can turn estuary water dark brown. This isn't water pollution but can make it difficult to see if the bottom is rocky or mucky and if there are any underwater obstructions like old dock pilings, vegetation and floating debris.

### **Wear water shoes**

Keep your feet protected and get a grip on wet, slippery surfaces.

### **Avoid construction areas**

Check in-water and near-water construction projects via the "anticipated field work" button on the St. Louis River Alliance's website ([bit.ly/48Q44Jr](https://bit.ly/48Q44Jr)).

### **Leave no trace**

Dispose of waste properly, leave what you find, protect aquatic vegetation (especially wild rice), respect wildlife and be considerate of other visitors.

Above: Trolling for musky in the St. Louis River Estuary. Image by Todd Furo

## TIPS FOR SWIMMERS

### Common swimming locations (No lifeguards)

- Barker's Island Inner Beach in Superior, Wisconsin
- Munger Landing in West Duluth, Minnesota
- Minnesota Point 15th Street Harbor Side in Duluth, Minnesota
- Minnesota Point Harbor Side Sky Harbor in Duluth, Minnesota

### Bacteria advisories

Check your Minnesota or Wisconsin destination beach before you go: [mnbeaches.org](https://mnbeaches.org) or [bit.ly/4cg4fkf](https://bit.ly/4cg4fkf). Even if your beach has no bacteria advisory, conditions can change quickly, so avoid swallowing water and rinse and towel dry after swimming.

### Pollution

Check your destination at Minnesota's Impaired Waters Viewer or Wisconsin's Impaired Waters List ([bit.ly/3lxiBiL](https://bit.ly/3lxiBiL) or [bit.ly/3PkoGTs](https://bit.ly/3PkoGTs)). Stay away from storm sewer outfalls and areas where creeks empty into the river. Pollution washes into the river after rain events.

### Hypothermia

Water temperature fluctuates, especially when winds off Lake Superior push colder water upriver. Hypothermia happens rapidly – in 50°F water you will be unconscious within an hour ([bit.ly/3IAIa2I](https://bit.ly/3IAIa2I)).

### Harmful algae

Blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) can make water look like pea soup or a spill of green paint. Some types of algae can produce toxins that can make people and animals sick. Cyanobacteria blooms typically occur in summer or early fall, especially after storms. You can't tell if an algae bloom is toxic just by looking at it. When in doubt, stay out! ([bit.ly/3v9iEOY](https://bit.ly/3v9iEOY))

## TIPS FOR PADDLERS AND OTHER BOATERS

### Access points

Use designated access points. Minnesota Sea Grant's [PaddleSafeTwinPorts.org](https://PaddleSafeTwinPorts.org) site has a where-to-launch map and launch site details.

### Vessel condition

Ensure that your vessel is in good condition and is the appropriate type for the water locations where you plan to be. Many areas in the estuary are too shallow for deep draft boats.

### Vessel Identification

Ensure your vessel has an identification sticker that includes your name, email and phone number. If someone observes your boat without anyone aboard, the information sticker could provide a way to begin searching for you.

### Big-ship traffic

Avoid and stay at least 100 yards away from large vessels, freighters, ships' wakes and harbor docks. Check [PaddleSafeTwinPorts.org](https://PaddleSafeTwinPorts.org) shipping traffic map.

### Fish

If you plan to fish, check Minnesota and Wisconsin statewide and waterbody-specific safe eating guidelines for fish for general population or sensitive populations ([bit.ly/49Ljjoq](https://bit.ly/49Ljjoq) or [bit.ly/48R528A](https://bit.ly/48R528A)).

For more detailed information, visit [go.wisc.edu/y004mg](https://go.wisc.edu/y004mg). For more information about this fact sheet, please contact: Kelsey Prihoda, Minnesota Sea Grant, at [priho011@d.umn.edu](mailto:priho011@d.umn.edu) or (218) 726-6195.