

# North Saskatchewan River

This guide offers contacts and information about river access routes, boat launches, parking areas, sport-fishing opportunities, fish species identification, river safety guidelines, and environmental considerations for recreational users of the North Saskatchewan River.

The North Saskatchewan River is a major tributary to the Saskatchewan-Nelson River system. From its source, the Saskatchewan Glacier in the Rocky Mountains, the river flows eastward where it joins the South Saskatchewan River near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan to form the Saskatchewan River. Eventually the Saskatchewan River drains into Hudson's Bay through the Nelson River in Manitoba.

Historically, the North Saskatchewan River was an important transportation and communication route. Many settlements were established along its banks. These settlements have grown into urban centres that rely on the river as a source of water for agriculture, industry and domestic use.

The river valley is the focus of many outdoor recreational activities including angling and pleasure boating. The City of Edmonton parks system, with its maintained trails and parking areas, offers extensive access to the river. Boats can be launched at several locations in and around the city. A wide variety of fish species inhabit the North Saskatchewan River, providing the urban angler with excellent sport-fishing opportunities.



## Water Quality

As recreational users of the North Saskatchewan River, we should be concerned about water quality as well as the overall environment.

Natural variations in river water quality occur seasonally. Things like temperature, dissolved oxygen and the presence of suspended solids can affect the quality of the water at any given time. The North Saskatchewan River has steep muddy banks, which, along with erosion, causes its natural muddy appearance. Except for immediately following major rainstorms, the North Saskatchewan River water quality in the Edmonton area meets recreational use guidelines.

We should be careful not to confuse river water quality with the quality of our drinking water. Drinking water is treated and tested before it comes out of our taps. The drinking water treatment process includes clarification of colour and turbidity removal, filtration, ultraviolet light disinfection of microbes, and chloramination.

## River Boating Code of Conduct

We are all responsible for river conservation and for ensuring a positive and safe recreational experience for everyone.

- Keep powered vessels clear of non-powered craft.
- Leave a wide space when overtaking vessels and make it clear which side you are passing on.
- Alter your course to the right when approaching a vessel head on.
- In urban centres keep motor noise to a minimum.
- Move vehicles away from boat launches and park in designated areas
- Keep campfires in fire pits within city limits.
- Please do not litter on the water.
- Avoid spilling gas and oil.



## Know the Law

Changes to Federal Acts, Regulations and Codes governing the operation of small craft came into effect in 1999.

Following are some of the laws that recreational boaters should be aware of:

The Competency of Operators of Pleasure Craft Regulations require operators of pleasure craft fitted with a motor and used for recreational purposes to have proof of competency on board at all times. These requirements are being phased in over 10 years.

Age — horsepower restrictions prohibit operators under the age of 16 years from operating craft above specified horsepower limits. This applies to the operation of a pleasure craft fitted with a motor and used for recreational purposes. If an operator is accompanied by and directly supervised in the pleasure craft by a person 16 years and older, the age-horsepower restrictions do not apply. These regulations prohibit persons under 16 years from operating personal watercraft regardless of whether they are accompanied by an adult.

The Small Vessel Regulations outline the minimum mandatory safety equipment required to be carried on a boat, safety precautions to follow before and while boating, and construction standards for building a recreational boat. All required safety equipment on board must be in good working order to satisfy the regulations.

For further information refer to the Transport Canada – Marine Office of Boating Safety Safe Boating Guide.

For a list of organizations that have accredited boating safety courses and tests in your area, visit the Transport Canada – Marine Office of Boating Safety Web site at [www.boatingsafety.gc.ca](http://www.boatingsafety.gc.ca) or call the Boating Safety Information Line at 1-800-267-6687.

# Safe River Travel

Always use caution on or near a river. Lifesaving Society research finds that more than one quarter (28%) of Alberta drownings occur in streams and rivers. From 1993 to 2002, 98 Albertans drowned in moving water bodies.

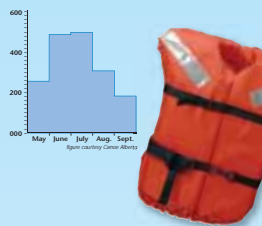
Know your limitations, make sure you have boating skills and carry safety equipment. Tell someone your trip plans – your destination, companions and scheduled return. If you do not return as expected someone will know to contact emergency services to start a search.

## Know Your River

The River Gradient or Slope  
It varies from 0.3 to 0.9 m/km within the City of Edmonton.

River Level  
River flow normally fluctuates from 100m<sup>3</sup>/s (cubic metres per second) to 700m<sup>3</sup>/s depending on the season. The highest water levels usually occur in June and July; however floods can create flows of nearly 3000m<sup>3</sup>/s. Such an increase in speed and power increases the difficulty of the river. Debris and logjams make the North Saskatchewan very hazardous in high water conditions.

River Speed  
River speed varies with water flow – velocity varies from 2km/hr at 100m<sup>3</sup>/s to 8 km/hr at 2000m<sup>3</sup>/s. Rapid increases of water flow are a result of upstream storms or water releases from dams. For river flow forecast visit [www.gov.ab.ca/env/water/basins/basinform/cfm](http://www.gov.ab.ca/env/water/basins/basinform/cfm)



Operating a boat under the influence of alcohol or drugs is an offence under the Criminal Code and carries the same penalties as those for operating a motor vehicle. Lifesaving Society research finds that alcohol and/or drugs contribute to more than half of Alberta boating fatalities.

## Safety Equipment

Wear a Personal Flotation Device (PFD) at all times. Lifesaving Society research finds 8 out of 10 victims of drowning in boating incidents are not wearing PFDs. It won't work if you don't wear it.

Carry the required equipment for the size and type of boat you operate. Small Vessel Regulations say canoes, kayaks, and rowing shells six metres or less must carry:

- ✓ a PFD of appropriate size for each person in the boat;
- ✓ a buoyant heaving line 15m in length;
- ✓ a paddle or an anchor with 15m of cable, rope or chain;
- ✓ a bailer or manual pump;
- ✓ a sound-signalling device like a whistle or air horn;
- ✓ and a flashlight if operating after dark, before sunrise or in periods of restricted visibility.

Be prepared and carry a first aid kit, flashlight, matches, whistle, rope, knife, high-energy food, warm clothes and a cell phone in a waterproof container.

## Hazards

Water intakes, bridge pilings, large rocks, driftpiles and trees leaning out from the bank are a hazard if your boat turns sideways against such an obstruction. Boats in such a situation may flip, collapse or wrap around the object. Try to face your boat downstream to avoid tipping over. There are a number of gravel bars on the river and their location may shift annually. As a result of this the use of propeller-driven boats is not advised on the river.

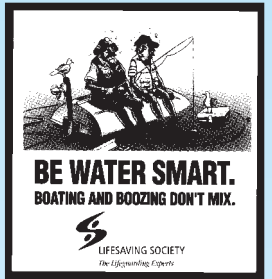


Weather  
Forecasts are available from your local weather office. Adjust your plans to weather changes. If you see lightning, get off the river immediately. Lifesaving Society research finds dangerous weather a factor in one third of boating deaths.

Hypothermia  
Wearing a PDF is your best protection from cold water. A sudden immersion in cold water such as falling out of a boat causes a shock response — even skilled swimmers can drown. Prolonged exposure to cold causes a drop in body temperature that reduces swimming and self-rescue skills and can lead to unconsciousness and death. To treat hypothermia get the victim dry, warm and sheltered. If they experience confusion or unconsciousness, warm them up slowly and seek professional medical attention.

## Alcohol and Drugs

Operating a boat under the influence of alcohol or drugs is an offence under the Criminal Code and carries the same penalties as those for operating a motor vehicle. Lifesaving Society research finds that alcohol and/or drugs contribute to more than half of Alberta boating fatalities.



## Edmonton Queen

The Edmonton Queen paddlewheeler operates between the Walterdale and Dawson bridges and is based at Rafter's Landing. Be cautious of the Edmonton Queen in small craft as she cannot steer to avoid you and throws a large wake.



# Fish Species of the North Saskatchewan River

(In the Edmonton area)

Sizes and weights of fish are noted for comparison and educational purposes. The descriptions below list the heaviest fish caught in Alberta although these weight records are often not the longest fish of that species ever measured in Alberta. Information was gathered from "The Fishes of Alberta" by Dr. Joe Nelson & Dr. Martin Paetz.

## Burbot

Burbot is easily identified by its dark body and white belly. Its most notable feature however, is the single barbel or whisker hanging from its lower jaw. The Alberta angling record is 5.9 kg. The maximum weight is 8.6 kg and the longest specimen measured was 100 cm in Alberta.



## Goldeye/ Mooneye

Both Gudgeye and Mooneye are deep, laterally compressed fish with silvery scales. The Gudgeye, as the name indicates, has a bright yellow or golden eye. In contrast, only the upper half of the Mooneye's iris is yellow in color. The Alberta angling records for Gudgeye and Mooneye are 1.9 kg and 0.5 kg respectively. Reliable length data for Gudgeye is lacking but 50 cm fish have been caught in Alberta. The maximum fork length for Alberta Mooneye is reported at 35.3 cm.



## Lake Sturgeon

Lake Sturgeon is the largest and longest living fish in the river. There is no mistaking a sturgeon with its long whiskers or barbels and the five rows of bony plates along its body called "scutes." These plates are sharp on young fish but become smooth with age. The Alberta angling record is 47.7 kg and the maximum fork length for Alberta Sturgeon is 170 cm. Sturgeon do not reproduce until they reach about twenty years, and then only every five years.

## Mountain Whitefish

Mountain Whitefish often move in groups or schools from one pool to another. Occasionally, you can see them just downstream of the north end of the Quesnell Bridge. The Alberta angling record is 2.6 kg with a maximum length for Alberta of 58.5 cm.



## Northern Pike

Pike is a predatory fish at the top of the food chain and can be found in calm deep water like lakes and creek mouths. Spawning occurs in the spring on flooded vegetation. The current Alberta angling record is 17.2 kg and the maximum weight for Alberta is 19.5 kg.

## Sauger

Sauger and Walleye are very similar in appearance, but Sauger have characteristic black spots on their spiny dorsal fin. The Alberta angling record is 2.8 kg and the maximum length for Alberta is 59.6 cm.



## Suckers

There are five species of Sucker that can be caught in the river: Silver Redhorse, Shorthead Redhorse, Quillback, White Sucker and Longnose Sucker. The Mountain Sucker is also occasionally caught in the Edmonton area. They are all easily identified as suckers by their thick downward pointing lips that they use to suck food from the river bottom. Suckers have been caught in the North Saskatchewan River with weights up to 3.7 kg.



## Walleye

Walleye is the largest member of the Perch family. Walleye get their name from the glossy appearance of their large eyes. Walleye can be distinguished from the Sauger by the white spots on the Walleye's tail. The Alberta angling record is 7.05 kg with a maximum length for Alberta of 94.4 cm.

# Get Hooked on Fishing

## Sportfishing Regulations

Before you begin fishing, please consult the current Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations for the appropriate information regarding:

- Licence requirements
- General angling regulations
- Season closures
- Catch limits
- Size limits
- Bait bans

The Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations is available free of charge where you purchase your Alberta Sportfishing licence or from any Alberta Sustainable Resource Development office. Licences must be carried at all times while sportfishing and must be presented immediately to a Conservation Officer upon request. For more information on fisheries management issues or information on where to purchase your Alberta Sportfishing License contact:

Information Centre:  
(780) 944-0313 or toll free at 310-0000 anywhere in Alberta

Edmonton District Sustainable Resource Development Office (780) 427-3574

Website:  
[www.gov.ab.ca/env](http://www.gov.ab.ca/env)

Follow links to "Fish & Wildlife" and then "Fishing in Alberta"

Educational Organizations  
Edmonton Conservation Centre for Excellence  
Alberta's Hunter Education Instructors Association  
#88, 4003 – 98 Street  
Edmonton, AB T6E 6M8  
780- 466-6682 or toll free at 1-866-282-4342  
[edmontoninfo@aheia.com](mailto:edmontoninfo@aheia.com)

For Club Information contact:  
The Alberta Fish and Game Association  
6924 – 104 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T6H 2L7

Phone: 437-2342  
[www.afga.org](http://www.afga.org)



## Stocked Ponds

The City of Edmonton and the Province of Alberta stock Hermitage Lake at 127 Avenue – 36 Street annually with rainbow trout through a joint initiative. Follow all the applicable provincial fishing regulations. Everyone is welcome to fish the lake. Daily limit: five fish/person/day.

## Are the Fish Safe to Eat?

Fish caught in the North Saskatchewan River may contain amounts of mercury above the level which is safe for human consumption. Amounts greater than 0.5 parts per million are considered unsafe by Health and Welfare Canada. Studies of the distribution of mercury in Alberta indicate that accumulation of mercury in fish is not due to specific sources of contamination, but a result of natural mercury in the soil. People who eat fish from the North Saskatchewan River should observe the following guidelines:

1. Women of childbearing age and children under the age of 15 should not eat these fish.
2. Others should not eat more than one meal of these fish per week.

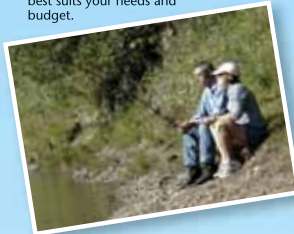
Note: Consult your current Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations for more details. Please note that this warning does not apply to fish caught in stocked ponds in the city.



## Angling Tips

Angling success can vary widely with season and location. Fish like cover and look for areas of the river that provide holding water. Creek mouths, streamwater outflows, rock piles, wingdams, deep holes (often found in sharp bends of the river), back eddies (reverses in the direction of flow) and bridge pilings all attract fish.

Anglers should be aware of the habits of the fish species they are targeting. You don't require expensive equipment to have a successful fishing trip. Baited hooks are often fished on or near the bottom of the river. Artificial lures such as spoons, jigs and crankbaits are also popular tackle. Consult your favorite tackle shop for more information on the type of equipment that best suits your needs and budget.



## Tips on Releasing Fish

- Retrieve your catch quickly.
- Release fish immediately.
- Avoid squeezing fish.
- Keep your fingers out of gills.
- Keep the fish in water as much as possible.
- Remove the hook carefully.
- Leave deeply swallowed hooks in fish; side cutters can be used to cut the hook instead of the line.
- Help revive the fish by holding it in the water for a few moments before release.

Please handle and release fish with care.

## Catch and Release Fishing

In a time when angling pressure is increasing and exceeds the supply of fish, catch and release fishing is an important means of conserving our fish resources. If a fish is handled carefully and gently, its probability of survival is greater. We are all responsible for the future of Alberta's natural resources. Act responsibly and keep fish in our future.



## Emergency Contacts within Edmonton:

Police/Ambulance/Fire Rescue 911

Police Complaint Line 423-4567

Drainage Services  
24 Hour Line - 311  
(Hazardous spills on river)

Park Rangers  
Phone : 311  
E-mail: [parkrangers@edmonton.ca](mailto:parkrangers@edmonton.ca)  
Internet: [www.edmonton.ca/parkrangers](http://www.edmonton.ca/parkrangers)



## Get Connected

Lifesaving Society  
(780) 415-1755

Transport Canada Marine Office of Boating Safety  
1-800-267-6687  
[www.boatingsafety.gc.ca](http://www.boatingsafety.gc.ca)

Environment Canada Weather  
468-4940

Alberta Government  
Sustainable Resource Development  
(Fish & Wildlife) Edmonton Office  
(780) 427-3574

Information Centre  
(780) 944-0313

River Forecast Centre  
Streamflow Line  
310-0000 and then 207-2718  
<http://www.gov.ab.ca/env/water>

Alberta Conservation Association  
P.O. Box 40027 Baker Centre Postal Outlet  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2M4  
Phone: (780) 427-5192  
Fax: (780) 422-6441  
Internet: [www.ab-conservation.com](http://www.ab-conservation.com)

Report A Poacher  
1-800-642-3800  
or #3800 (Tels Mobility)  
[www.reportapoacher.com](http://www.reportapoacher.com)

Riverwatch  
(School environmental programs)  
1-888-933-6300

Edmonton Catholic Schools  
(School outdoor programs) 496-2983

Edmonton Public Schools Bennett Centre  
(School outdoor programs) 468-1439

City of Edmonton Programs  
(Youth, group and adult programs)  
496-2966

City Talk recorded information line



