# Acknowledgements: Northeast Louisiana: Outdoor Series is a project of the agritourism program at the LSU AgCenter. www.lsuagcenter.com/agritourism Trail narrative by John Ruskey, Quapaw Canoe Co. Northeast Louisiana: Outdoor Series www.explorelouisiananorth.org/

Imagine paddling down long hallways of tall, serene cypress trees, with spanish moss swaying in the breeze. Imagine canoeing or kayaking through a maze of flooded cypress forests and around groups of solemn cypress knees. Where is this watery magic kingdom for paddlers? Along the Mississippi River in northeastern Louisiana!

The lake country of north Louisiana provides a delightful alternative to its rivers and bayous. While paddling the streams is dependent on water levels, the lakes are always good for canoeing, kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding. When the river water is too low or too high, paddlers can always get on the lakes. While the rivers present snags, strainers, deep muddy banks, occasional trash and infrequent blockages, the lakes are always wide open and full of sparkling clean water. Water clarity and quality varies from lake to lake, but in general, the lakes of north Louisiana are deep, clear and clean.

If this sounds too perfect to be true, here's the drawback: The lakes are surrounded by houses and during the summer months are filled with boaters. Paddlers have to share the water with water skiers, jet boats, party boats, bass boats and johnboats. Regardless of traffic, the lakes are full of wildlife, and paddlers can always find places that no one else can get to. Naturalists of all sorts will enjoy the birds, the fish and the unique solitude of paddling through flooded cypress forests. These Louisiana lake trails have been chosen for the best scenery, quietest places and the most wildlife.

Spring and fall generally are the best times of year for outdoor activity in the south, but these lakes are open yearround and can be enjoyed on almost any day of any season.

It is advised to stay off the lakes during stormy weather and high winds. Check the weather forecast before embarking on any adventure. Severe thunderstorms sweep through this region with dangerous ferocity. Beginners should only paddle on calm days. Moderate and advanced paddlers can try it if the wind is 15 mph or above - but be ready for strenuous paddling and waves. All paddlers should stay off the lakes if the wind is gusting to 25 mph or above. Cold weather paddlers should dress in wetsuits or drysuits and also be able to self-rescue in case of capsize. Hypothermia is always a danger between November and April. In the event of strong winds, choose a route with protection from the wind, like a line of trees along one shore or the other.

The paddling trails are daytrips only, and arrangements for lodging will need to be made at any number of nearby campgrounds (like Lake Bruin State Park), lakeside hotels (like Lake Bruin Lodge or Spokane Resort) and cabins (like Netterville cabins). Visit the website for complete details.





to the Missi saip pi River. Often full of fish, bir ds and amp hibia ns. Enjoy this half-mile round trip paddle into an old creek bed

(1/2 Mile Round Trip)

http://www.lakebru in louis ian a.com/r est aur ant groceries, refreshments and sundries. eclectic va neties of south Louisiana dishes, as well as lodging Loca ted near the south aide of Lake Bruin, Hah Tale Guilloffers

2214 Highway 604, Lake Bruin, LA 71366, 318-766-0075 and Country Store Fish Tale Grill/Lake Bruin Lodge

You will find two private cana is at the end of the lake, leading into a small neighboth ood and the Lake Bruin Lodge/Hsh Tail Grill.

51.946048, 91.206203 End of Lake/Entrance to Canals

and waders of all sorts are often discovere d in the trees and along and invertebrates are often seen in the waters, while migratory birds of paddlers and nature lovers! Gators, turtles and other amphibians remained the wildest side of the entire lake - much to the delight any development from occur in ng, and as a result, this are a has the Mississippi River in the 1940s. The soft sandy soils have kept along the southeastem shore of lake Bruin from work done on The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers left piles of dredge material

> 31.950233, 91.202213 Dred ge Field



a pavi lion and a fishing pier. nominal fee. There are bathrooms with showers, a swimming beach, Op en daily, 6 a m. to 7 pm. Beautiful lakes ide camping availa blefor State Park, 201 State Park Road, St. Joseph, IA 71366, 318-766-3530. padd lers. There is a charge for parking and boat launch. Lake Bruin There is a good concrete boat in mp with pier providing easy access for

and binoculars for spectacular views of wildlife! and the wind is calm. Wear your sunscreen and bring your camera magnificent osprey. Take a different route back, if the weather is good turtles, birds, fish, crawfish and insects. Watch for bald eagles and the water le vel allows, but watch for snakes and gators – as well as lots of south to the lake's end. Dip in and out of the cypress week as the Leaving the state park boat ramp, follow the cypress-studded shoreline



boat Hamp at Lake Brum short loop around its southeastern ends at the state park and makes a

recommended trail begins and suggested to get full flavor The like going, but 2 to 3 miles is ca noe or kayak as far as you fe el 50 teet deep in places. You can The lake extends to more than enjoyment, it is i deal for pad dlers. water awaiting exploration and ago. With 3,000 acres of open the Mississippi River centuries water oxbow lake cut off from Lake Bruin is a beautiful clear-ДП19/s detu/18-008 //:dn ц

Google Map of Trail:

(2-3 Miles Round Trip) Lake Bruin Paddling Trail





deciduous trees are sometimes loaded with birds. There are frequent Bridge and up Clark Bayou for (up to) 3-mile round trip. Overhanging Alternate route up and down Clark Bayou. Paddle under High way 605

axoi d blockages caused by clumps of water his cinth.

turtle and gator sign tings are possible. Adjust route as necessary to trip with fresh wild lifes ightings. Watch for eagles and osprey. Frequent side wildlife. After a mile or two, turn around and cross lake for return shoreline, do dging in and out of the trees for close- up views of bank-(depending on pre vailing wind) cross lake (1,000 feet). Follow cypress Approximately 35 miles round thip. Put in at private landing and







for ested sections of the lake. shallow waters. It is a 1 mile paddle to reach most interesting and Highway 887 in Ne wellton. A short concrete ramp leads into A public boat launch is found at comer of Louisiana Highway 605

### Public Boat Launch

parking or camping. Clean up after yourself. need to park in grass. Respect private property. No overnight Highway 605, is less than a mile south of New ellton. You will The private landing, off the grassy slope at side of Louisiana

Private Landing

weather and clumps of water hyacinth. to the route might have to be made because of issues with wind, stands of cypress and into tubutary Clark Bayou. Adjustments and stand-up paddleboards are the bestway to skirt through the any number of for ays a round its lively per imeter. Cano es, kay aks with invasive water hyacinth. Even still, paddlers willenjoy making tion and is becoming shallower, murid er and in places ove rgrown Unfor tu nately, this ancient oxbow also is experiencing sed imenta-

remains as a reflection of Louisiana's antebellum cotton culture. standing during the Union scourge of the South that to day is found "Winter Quarters," the only plants from (out of 15) left which was conducted by the LaSalle expedition. A long its bank along the lake. It is the site of Louisiana's first Christian mass, was important to the Mississippia ns who populate differences will ages and later to the Tensas peoplewho lived in numerous villages along the lower Mississippi. It also is one of the most storied: It Lake 9. Joseph is thought to be one of the oldest oxbow lakes

Google Map of Trait http://goo.gl/maps/Jkl AT





# Explore Lake Country: North Louisiana Lake and River Trails



Lake St. John **Paddling Trail** (3-5 Miles Round Trip)

Google Map of Trail: http://goo.gl/maps/z80Pe

Lake St. John is an old Mississippi River oxbow and is lined with houses and fields on all but its northeastern extremity. So the best paddling and most plentiful wildlife is found as far north as you can venture. In 2013, the only reliable public access was located at the Spokane Fishing Resort, which is close to north end. There are plans for another public access, which will use an old primitive ramp located on the northeast end of the lake.

### Private Boat Ramp -Spokane Fishing Resort

31.699767, 91.45936 568 There is a good concrete boat ramp and lots of parking at the Spokane

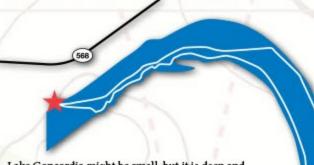
Fishing Resort, 4269 Highway 568, 5 miles northeast of Ferriday, La. 318-757-4303. \$8 ramp use fee. They offer cabins for rent. There is a seasonal restaurant and convenience store.

# Lake St. John Paddling Trail

You will travel approximately 10 miles round trip to reach the best part of the lake. It is a long paddle, but the effort is well worth it. The north end of Lake St. John teems with wildlife among extensive stands of large cypress trees. Paddlers can easily slide through tree trunks, where vibrant vaulted canopies loom. The largest trees of any northeast Louisiana oxbow lake will be seen. There are thickly vegetated shorelines, which are full of shrubs, flowering bushes and tall grasses, as well as pockets of water hyacinth. Evidence of beavers, raccoons, crawfish and mussels can be found. During migration season, you will see plenty of waterfowl and songbirds.



Google Map of Trail: http://goo.gl/maps/m64j6



Lake Concordia might be small, but it is deep and sparkles with the clearest water of any oxbow lake in north Louisiana. It also boasts the best birding. Its waters are more than 150 feet deep in places. It is great for swimming, but be wary of gators. It is thickly populated with houses and piers along its southern end - and busy with motorboats during the summer months. Paddlers can find peace and more wildlife at the northern end of the lake among the stands of baldcypress trees and clumps of vegetation. Excellent chances for sneaking up on roseate spoonbills, snowy egrets, green herons, ibis and other spectacular birds. Good paddling for canoes, kayaks or stand-up paddleboards.

### Boat Launch at Wildlife and Fisheries 31.673625, 91.499922

Good concrete boat launch at Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries facility, located on Ater Road, just off Wildlife and Fisheries Road. Parking can be found among the shade trees near top of ramp.

### Lake Concordia Paddler's Trail

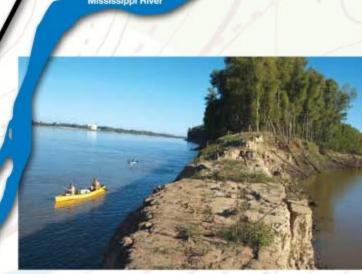
This trail is approximately 4-5 miles round trip into the wildest areas of Lake Concordia. Leaving ramp, cross lake and follow the forested shoreline, as closely as possible, for views of turtles, fish and waders. Paddle in and out of several small coves, and dive through stands of trees, as the water level allows. The lake shallows toward its northwestern end, but adventurous paddlers can continue between clumps of grass, flowering bushes and water hyacinth. Through the isolated cypress trees you will reach the far end of the lake. Follow a different route on the return trip for the best wildlife viewing.











# Spithead Towhead

Good picnicking and camping but primitive with no conveniences.

## Waterproof Landing

Mile 381 • 31.810997, 91.360245 Also known as Goldman Lower Landing, this is a primitive landing located just below Farmer's Grain Elevator at mile 381. Do not leave vehicles overnight! Arrange shuttle.

### Towboat Protocol

Towboats are paddler's most dangerous hazard on the lower Mississippi River. Towboats can't stop easily, and they often can't see you. But the good news is they move slowly (10-14 mph) and their motions usually are predictable. Upstream towboats seek slow water and downstream ones seek fast water. The most dangerous place around any towboat is in front. It is usually safe anywhere behind their route of travel. Never try to outrun a tow, and never paddle across its line of travel. Carry VHF marine radio and monitor Channel 13 for nearby traffic. For more information, go to: http://www. srh.noaa.gov/lmrfc/?n=lmrfc-mississippiandohioriverforecast.

In your vessel, be sure to pack bow and stern lines, rescue rope, bailers and sponges, and at least one extra paddle. Bring VHF marine radio, if you have one. Carry cellphone in waterproof container. Wear clothing appropriate to weather, but also pack rain gear, change of clothes, fleece or woolen tops and bottoms (in waterproof dry bag or dry box). Pack extra food and water. Pack at least a gallon of water per person per day during hot seasons. Bring sunscreen and bug spray. Carry a survival kit. Always be prepared for any and all circumstances. For a complete description of paddling the lower Mississippi River, please go to the Safety Page for the Rivergator at: http://www.srh.noaa.gov/lmrfc/?n=lmrfc-mississippiandohioriverforecast.





Embark on a 15-mile paddle down the big waters of the lower Mississippi River, the largest river in North America. Enjoy stunning views of the Mississippi bluffs and long-distance views of islands, floodplain forests and giant flocks of birds. Along the way, paddle past the jungly mouth of Bayou Pierre and the enchanting entrance to Rodney Lake Chute. At Bruinsburg, 40,000 Union troops successfully crossed the Mississippi in Grant's final attempt to sneak behind Vicksburg in 1863. Good picnicking or camping sites can be found on Bondurant Towhead or Spithead Towhead. The main channel is your fastest route, but many alternate routes are possible during higher water levels.

Put in at St. Joseph and take out at Waterproof. Paddle in the main channel for the quickest route (15.5 miles), or follow alternate routes for visiting islands, back channels and other points of interest. Appropriate for canoes, kayaks or stand-up paddleboards, but only for experienced (and strong) paddlers. You will need to be capable of handling big volume waters, big waves, long crossings over open water, chaotic currents and possible side winds, head winds or tail winds. We suggest you to bring a VHF marine radio and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maps of the lower Mississippi, for navigation. It's advised to stay off the river when wind is gusting above 20 mph.

# Mississippi River Water Levels

Water levels for this section of the Mississippi River can be found by using the Natchez Gage. Low water level is 0-20, with sandbars and back channels that are not passable. Medium water is 20-30, and most back channels are open at these levels. High water is 30-47, and all back channels are open and flowing strong. The river is bank full at 40, and at 45 almost all islands are under water, with the flood stage at 48. http://www.srh.noaa.gov/lmrfc/?n=lmrfcmississippiandohioriverforecast. Paddlers are advised to stay off if river level is over 48.





# Mississippi River Maps and Mileage

For best navigation, use the U.S. Army Coprs of Engineers 2007 Maps of the Lower Mississippi River, which can be downloaded at: http:// www.srh.noaa.gov/lmrfc/?n=lmrfc-mississippiandohioriverforecast. Mileage refers to the number of miles above the Gulf of Mexico. This section of river begins at mile 396.4 and ends at 381.

### River Speed and Trip Duration

The lower Mississippi River averages 3 mph at low water, 5 at medium water and 7 at high water. An average paddler can travel at 2-3 mph. Making adjustments for wind speed, stops along the way and any alternate exploration, you can use these figures to roughly estimate your time of travel. You might lose time due to necessary waits for passing towboats. Never try to outrun a towboat, and never paddle across its

### Expert Paddlers Only!

We encourage only expert paddlers on Mississippi River. You must be very familiar with your canoe or kayak, its abilities and its limitations and be able to self-rescue, if necessary. Your canoe should have high enough sides (recommended minimum of 13 inches) and ends (recommended minimum of 20-22 inches) to handle waves. Please no racing canoes. Kayaks should be made for open water. If your kayak has an open cockpit, you should bring and wear your spray skirt during inclement weather. Sea kayaks are best for the Mississippi, because they are made for the big waters. Shorter kayaks are OK, but playboats generally are not recommended. You should be strong enough to paddle through big waves and strong wind and to make long-distance ferry crossings from one side of the Mississippi River to the other (usually a mile or more). You should be comfortable paddling in the vicinity of 1/2-mile long towboats/barges. You should be able to negotiate big strong boils, powerful eddies, whirlpools and transitions of fast currents. You should also be strong enough to handle long sets of wave trains, sometimes a mile or longer, with waves coming from multiple directions.

### St. Joseph Boat Ramp Mile 396.4 • 31.938682, 91.197715

St. Joseph Boat Ramp (Gladstone Landing) is located at the bottom of Hardscrabble Bend at mile 396.4. There is a concrete ramp that bottoms out into sand around 15 on the Natchez Gage. Ramp and parking lot under water at flood stage 48. Land access is 3 miles north of St. Joseph via Highway 605. Turn on Highway 604 past Lake Bruin Store and follow pavement over levee. It is next to Bunge Grain Elevator. Do not leave vehicles overnight.

### Mouth of Bayou Pierre Mile 395 • 31.920847, 91.190382

Downstream paddlers can easily eddy out into the mouth of Bayou Pierre and paddle upstream for fantastic wildlife viewing, including birds, mammals, amphibians and alligators. Bayou Pierre runs along the loess bluffs into central Mississippi.

### St. Joseph to Waterproof Main Channel

Approximately 15.5 miles. Put in at St. Joseph and cross river and follow strong flow along Mississippi bluffs below Bondurant. Stay left bank through Rodney Cutoff and make crossing back to Louisiana side in Kempe Bend. Look for Farmer's Grain Dock right bank descending at mile 381. Take-out landing is a couple hundred yards downstream of grain elevator. Total paddle time in high water with good weather could be two to three hours and in low water four to five hours.

### Bondurant Towhead

Rodney Chute

Mile 389 • 31.850867, 91.264912 Good picnicking and camping but primitive with no conveniences.

Good picnicking and camping but primitive with no conveniences.

