

Background

The Missouri River is strikingly beautiful and many recreational boaters use the river every day. However, the modern Missouri River presents some significant challenges for the unwary boater. The water is swift and, with a big rain, can swell ten feet in elevation overnight. A tied boat should be checked often if the water is rising.

Boat fuel is very limited. There are two fuel dealers that operate on the lower Missouri River, one based near Easley, Mo nearly half way across the State and the other at St. Joseph. Trip planning is critical to the success of a boating adventure. The goal of our organization is to work with all federal, state and local agencies to provide fuel, mooring, potable water, sanitary sewer, trash, medical, communication, rescue and other basic services for boaters. Boaters who wish to register at moriver.org will receive updated boating information.

Boating and Barges

It is not necessary to get off the river because a barge is approaching. You should move toward the off channel shore (the inside of a bend) and be alert for rock dikes which are located there. Move as far away from the barge as possible and position the bow of your boat perpendicular to the wake. Never turn your boat broadside to the wake created by barges and tugs, they can easily swamp a small boat. Remember, barges have the right-of-way.

Pilots of towboats have a blind spot in front of their vessels and it could take a barge and tow up to a 1½ mile to stop. These barges also create extreme turbulence up to ½ mile behind the tow. The strong wake may lift your boat onto the rocks, dikes or other hazards. Wakes generated by barges can suck under objects including smaller craft so it's best to give them a wide berth. Playing games with this kind of vessel can result in serious injury or even death.

Permits are required for regattas and special events on the river. The U.S. Coast Guard or Missouri Water Patrol should be contacted to obtain these permits.

River Hazards

The Missouri River is deep in some areas, but other locations may have rock dikes, sandbars and shallow spots. Snags and floating debris also present hazards that may be difficult to see until you are right on top of them. Varying river levels can expose or submerge hazards within a short period of time.

As you travel the river, look for water areas with a slight ripple. This indicates sandbars, dikes or possible hazards close to the surface. Maps and charts may not necessarily show the location of sandbars because they shift with the flow of the river. At locations where the river narrows, or where there are obstacles in the river, tongues of relative glassy water form 'V's downstream of the obstruction.

Rock dikes are numerous below Sioux City, Iowa . There is a possibility of submerged dikes during periods of high water that create a hazard for boaters. The location of these dikes is indicated on river navigation charts, which are available from the Corps of Engineers. Mile markers (blue with silver numbers) make it easy to track your location; these are placed on the bank you should be favoring. Navigation Markers are not generously provided but you will find them whenever the channel crosses from one side to another. A rule of thumb is to stay toward the outside of every bend and the dikes should give you no trouble.

Navigation Aids

The Missouri River has been channelized from St. Louis, Missouri to Sioux City, Iowa. This channel is maintained at a minimum width and depth for navigational traffic. You will encounter many of the buoys listed below on this stretch. You will also see blue and white mile markers at one-mile intervals along

the shoreline. Navigate within these buoys to insure your safety.

Navigation buoys, looking downstream Green "can" buoys mark the right side of the navigation channel and pointed red "nun" buoys mark the left side of the navigation channel. Always remember that buoys may be carried off or out of position by swift current or an accumulation of driftwood.

Never attempt to moor to stationary objects such as dikes and moored barges and never approach these objects from upstream. Swift water flowing over, under and around these objects creates very strong turbulence and undertow currents that may overturn your boat and pull you under.

Mooring and Anchoring

When stopping, make every attempt to turn your boat upstream *into the current* and cut the throttle to an idle. The throttle setting will vary with the speed of the current. This will hold your boat steady in the water without drifting into obstacles. If you do anchor in the river, pick your anchorage carefully out of the channel and the current. Remember to use a bowline and keep your bow into the wind or current. This will minimize the risk of being swamped by water coming over the transom or back of the boat. A danforth anchor is recommended for river use since it will bite and hold in the sand river bed. The anchor line should be . about 200 feet in length. Never set an anchor in the fast flowing river channel. The current can pull you under and debris (e.g. logs) floating under the surface can hook your line and draw you under in an instant. It can also be difficult to unhook the anchor from submerged obstacles that you can't see. Be sure you can quickly cut or detach the anchor line on your boat if you need to.

Always land your boat facing upstream and pull in parallel to the riverbank. If you try to land facing downstream or perpendicular to the bank, the current will pivot the boat to position the bow upstream and parallel to the bank. A two-point tie off should be used

to keep the prop out of the rock and prevent its contact with the bank.

You always have more control of your boat heading into the current than with the current.

Swimming

Swimming and tubing on the Missouri is extremely dangerous and is strongly discouraged. A river current normally 3-4 mph can quickly exhaust even the strongest swimmer. Inner tubes should never be used on the river. There's no way to control them in the current and they pose problems with boats and tugs especially on holidays and weekends when recreational traffic peaks.

Never swim in floodwaters, the main river channel, around structures like wing dikes or around moored barges. Strong hidden currents, drop-offs and hidden obstacles make these areas extremely hazardous to swimmers. Swimmers and waders should always wear a life jacket.

Weather

Monitor the local weather forecast before you begin your journey and throughout your trip. In the Midwest, storms may emerge abruptly. These storms are often accompanied by strong winds that can easily capsize a small craft. Lightning, heavy rain or hail can turn a pleasant trip into disaster. Watch the sky and be aware of your surroundings for signs of inclement weather.

High winds create very hazardous conditions and it is best to exit the river as soon as possible. Facing downstream in a crosswind can be dangerous. Always keep your boat straight into or away from the wind (parallel with the wind) as you head toward the shore.

Carry a portable radio or weather radio and tune it to the National Weather Service for up-to-date forecasts.

Carry foul weather gear for unexpected storms.

Emergencies

File a float plan - let a reliable person know where you are going, when and where you plan on departing and arriving, your route and other pertinent information that will enable someone to find you. We never plan on accidents but they do happen. Filing and adhering to a float plan will help if emergency personnel need to locate you.

Boaters are advised to carry a marine radio and a cell or satellite phone for emergency communication with the local Sheriff's office or other emergency response agencies and be familiar with these phone numbers. Cell coverage may not be 100% in rural areas. Have emergency phone numbers handy. If you are in doubt about who to contact, call the county sheriff's office and they will contact the proper authorities.

Equipment

"Life jackets float ... you don't" is something to remember. Life jackets (also referred to as Personal Floatation Devices or PFD's) do save lives and are the most important piece of safety equipment in your boat. Make sure you follow the boating rules for your state regarding life jackets. Be sure they fit snug to avoid the PFD coming off if you should accidentally fall in the water. Frayed or damaged PFD's should be replaced. Smaller children should wear PFD's made for them. The U.S. Coast Guard label affixed to the PFD will aid in selecting the appropriate size.

Boats must be equipped with appropriate emergency equipment (i.e., first aid kit, oars or paddles, anchor and 200 feet of line or rope).

If your boat capsizes, do not attempt to swim to shore. Stay with the craft until the boat can be safely beached. Remember, hypothermia is a possibility during most of the year. Life jackets help to minimize loss of body heat.

Always carry a change of clothing in a waterproof container. Dry clothes could save your life by preventing hypothermia if the clothes you are wearing become wet. It does not have to be "cold" for hypothermia to strike. Avoid sunburn, wear a wide brimmed hat, long sleeved shirt, long trousers and use sunscreen. Sunscreen alone is not sufficient for long exposure to the sun.

Boating and Alcohol

The combination of boating and alcohol is illegal and can prove to be deadly. Alcohol impairs judgment and reaction time and decreases your body's ability to defend itself from hypothermia. If you reach for something to drink on a hot day, water is best. Alcohol greatly increases the risk of dehydration.

Bring along plenty of drinking water. The rule of thumb is one gallon of water per twenty-four hour period per person.

General

Before launching, check your boat for exotic species (i.e., zebra mussel, Eurasian watermilfoil, etc). Signs at launch ramps will provide further instructions.

Permits are required for regattas and special events on the river. The U.S. Coast Guard (314-539-3091) or Missouri Water Patrol (573-751-3333) should be contacted to obtain these permits.

Never sleep in a drifting boat. If you feel like napping, tie up in a backwater area or nap on the shore.

Camping

Camping at designated camping sites only, is the rule for most public lands. Contact the managing agency for regulations. If you choose to camp elsewhere along the river, you should have permission of the private landowner.

Watch for biting insects, poisonous plants and snakes. They can ruin a trip. Have a first-aid kit on board.

Shoreline ownership varies from State to State. In Nebraska the streambed and all adjacent lands are property of the landowner through which the water flows. In Iowa, public access along the river is limited to the marked high bank. In Missouri, access is limited to the high water mark within the banks of the river

The opportunity and freedom to travel the Missouri River is a privilege. Pay attention and make every effort to protect the wildlife and cultural resources along the river. Destroying the vegetation along the river is unsightly and diminishes wildlife habitat. Litter is unsightly and can damage the environment. Practice "Pack It In...Pack It Out". Show respect for landowners along the river. If everyone practices these simple tips, the river environment will last for years to come and can be enjoyed for many, many generations.

The final version of the map had segments on Weather, & Planning Your Trip

Contact Information Here

MISSOURI RIVER SAFETY TIPS



Adapted from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Guide to Recreation and Visitor Safety

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Committee