

# Olentangy River Water Trail



## An 8.94-Mile Water Trail: Class I - II

The Olentangy Water Trail runs through the heart of Columbus, from the Broad Meadows pedestrian bridge downstream to the confluence with the Scioto River. The trail provides access to several Columbus parks and flows through historic neighborhoods and The Ohio State University campus. Proximity to the Olentangy Greenways Trail allows for a combination of paddling and cycling opportunities.

This publication is the result of cooperative efforts by:



# FLOW

Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed

George C. Anderson, photographer

The information in this guide is believed to be accurate. The City of Columbus is not responsible for any inaccuracies. Interpretation and use of the map and its contents are the responsibility of the user.



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# Water Trail Narrative

**1 Hazard:** Broad Meadows Dam  
*Lat. 40.07464 Long. -83.03495*  
To avoid the potentially dangerous low head dam north of the bridge, do not paddle upstream from the Broad Meadows Pedestrian Bridge.

**2 Access Site:** Broad Meadows Pedestrian Bridge  
*Lat. 40.07405 Long. -83.03478*  
This site is located along the Olentangy Greenways Trail on the east bank of the Olentangy River at the end of Broad Meadows Boulevard. Park on the street and access the water trail from the southeast side of the pedestrian bridge.  
*East bank. Start of water trail. Informational kiosk. Parking. Bike path trail head*

**3 Point of Interest:** Kenney Park  
*Lat. 40.064956 Long. -83.028263*  
Footpaths wind their way through this forested parkland on the east bank of the Olentangy. Grace-land Shopping Center is just east of Kenney Park.  
*East bank. Future access site, no current improvements. Parking.*

**4 Point of Interest:** Whetstone Park and Prairie  
*Lat. 40.043312 Long. -83.027426*  
On the east bank is one of Columbus' most popular parks. Home to the Park of Roses and Whetstone Prairie, this park offers something for everyone: picnic areas, playgrounds, wooded paths, gazebos, and ball fields. 5.1 acres of restored prairie and vernal pools serve as an educational demonstration on native flora and fauna.

**5 Access Site:** Northmoor Park  
*Lat. 40.03404 Long. -83.02649*  
Situated along the east bank of the Olentangy River, access to the park is off of Northmoor Place and Olentangy Boulevard. Park in the lot and access the water trail from the nearby limestone steps. The park features picnic tables and access to the Olentangy Greenways Trail.  
*East bank. Parking. Informational kiosk. Bike path trail head. Picnic tables.*

**6 Hazard:** North Broadway Dam  
*Lat. 40.02945 Long. -83.02409*  
Portage just downstream from the North Broadway bridge on the west bank to avoid lowhead dam.  
*West bank. Portage around dam.*

**7 Point of Interest:** Clinton-Como Park  
*Lat. 40.026957 Long. -83.023467*  
Picnic areas, ball fields, and playgrounds make this park enjoyable for the entire family. The pedestrian bridge at the south end of the park offers access to OSU's Olentangy Wetland Research Park.

**8 Point of Interest:** Union Cemetery  
*Lat. 40.020253 Long. -83.022137*  
On the west bank of the Olentangy, this cemetery first became a burial site in 1806 when Northwest Territory pioneer and Revolutionary War veteran Balser Hess was buried here, the site of his family farm. In 1847 Union Cemetery was formally established and has since grown to 125 acres. It is the final resting place for approximately 70,000 people.

**9 Hazard:** Union Cemetery Dam  
*Lat. 40.02205 Long. -83.01962*  
To avoid this lowhead dam, take out on the east bank, at the north end of the pedestrian bridge. Use the bridge to cross the river and put in at the access site on the west bank downstream of the dam.  
*East bank, cross to west bank. Portage around dam.*

**10 Point of Interest:** OSU Wetland  
*Lat. 40.02068 Long. -83.017073*  
This wetland is located on the west bank of the river, just south of Union Cemetery. It is an internationally recognized research facility, open to the public for wildlife viewing and tours. 160 species of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles have been sighted.

**11 Hazard:** Dodridge Street Dam  
*Lat. 40.01744 Long. -83.01602*  
Portage on the west bank of the river to avoid this lowhead dam.  
*West bank. Portage around dam.*

**12 Access Site:** Tuttle Park  
*Lat. 40.0042 Long. -83.0100*  
Located at 240 W. Oakland Ave. on the east bank of the river. Park on the north side of the recreation center near the playground and access the river via the Olentangy Greenways Trail. The park features picnic tables, rest rooms, a recreation center and ball fields.  
*East bank. Parking. Restroom. Recreation Center and swimming pool. Bike path access. Picnic tables.*

**13 Point of Interest:** The Ohio State University Campus and Ohio Stadium  
*Lat. 40.001517 Long. -83.019733*  
On the east bank of the Olentangy, paddlers will see Ohio Stadium, known as the "Horseshoe," home to the Ohio State University Buckeyes football team.

**14 Access Site:** Lower Olentangy Boat Launch  
*Lat. 39.96702 Long. -83.01930*  
Take out on east bank of the river. The boat launch is located at the end of Nationwide Blvd. The site has ample parking and a concrete ramp.  
*East bank. Parking. Access to Scioto Greenways trail*

End of Water Trail.

# Olentangy River Water Trail

8.94 miles / Class I - II

**Start Water Trail**  
0.00 Miles

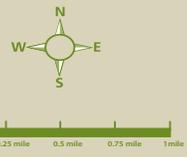
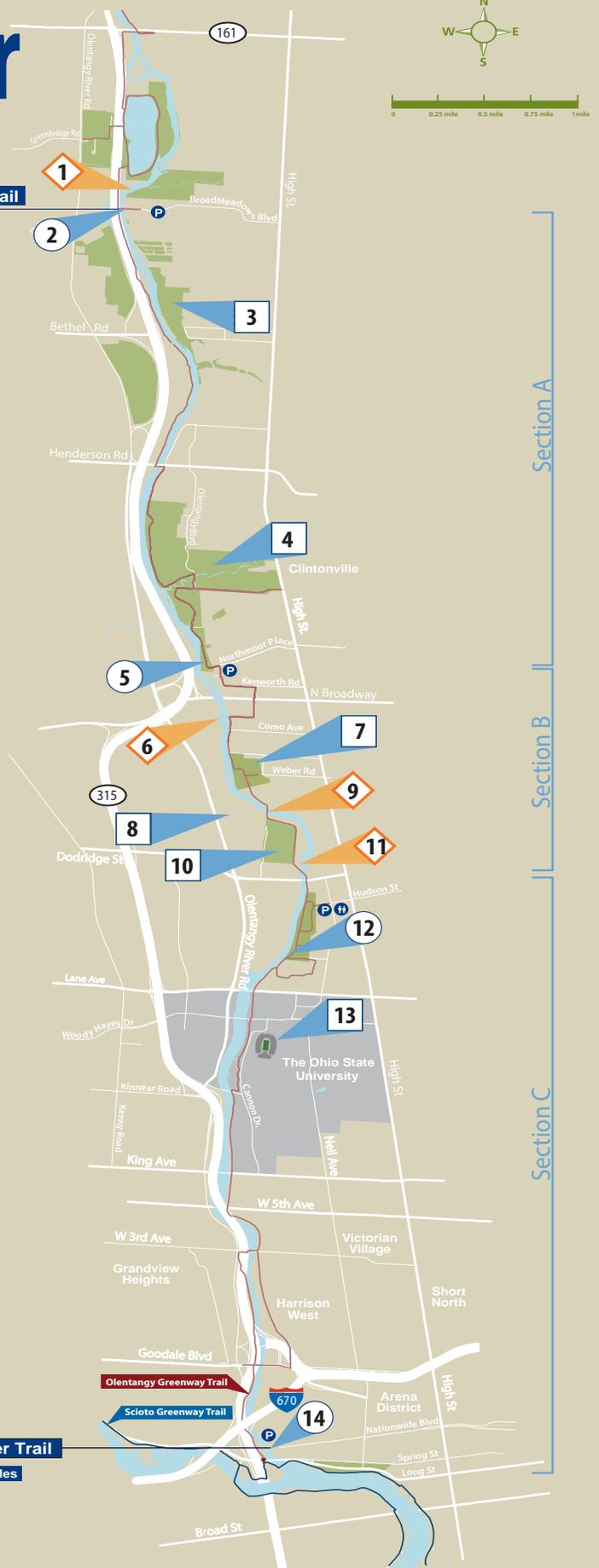
**End Water Trail**  
8.94 Miles

## Trail At A Glance

Site	River Access	Distance to next site
1	Broad Meadows Dam	0.08 miles
2	Broad Meadows Pedestrian Bridge	.65 miles
3	Kenney Park	1.68 miles
4	Whetstone Park & Prairie	0.60 miles
5	Northmoor Park	0.47 miles
6	North Broadway Dam	0.22 miles
7	Clinton-Como Park	0.39 miles
8	Union Cemetery	0.29 miles
9	Union Cemetery Dam	0.01 miles
10	OSU Wetland	0.46 miles
11	Dodridge Street Dam	0.45 miles
12	Tuttle Park	0.69 miles
13	OSU Campus and Stadium	2.95 miles
14	Lower Olentangy Boat Launch	end of trail
<b>TOTAL DISTANCE:</b>		<b>8.94 miles</b>

## Legend

	Bodies of Water
	Boating Hazard
	Water Trail Access
	Point of Interest
	Olentangy Greenway Trail
	Scioto Greenway Trail
	Parking
	Public Restrooms
	Park Land
	The Ohio State University



# Water Trail Sections

Section A: Those who seek a quieter more natural experience will enjoy this section of the water trail, which flows mainly through wooded parkland. There are no lowhead dams in this section of the river, making it ideal for uninterrupted paddling.

Section B: Although this section of the water trail boasts some interesting scenery (Union Cemetery and the OSU

Wetlands), it also contains a series of three lowhead dams that must be portaged for safety. If you choose to utilize this part of the trail, be prepared to carry your canoe or kayak for several hundred yards at a time.

Section C: In this urban section of the trail, paddlers can view the OSU Campus and Ohio Stadium and catch views of downtown Columbus.

## Resources

### EMERGENCY NUMBER

### 911

City of Columbus Services	614-645-3111	311.columbus.gov
Columbus Recreation and Parks Department	614-645-3300	parks.columbus.gov
Columbus Department of Public Utilities	614-645-8276	utilities.columbus.gov
Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed (FLOW)	614-267-3386	olentangywatershed.org
Experience Columbus	614-221-6623	experiencecolumbus.com
Metro Parks	614-891-0700	metroparks.net
Mid Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC)	614-228-2663	morpc.org
ODNR Division of Watercraft	877-4BOATER	watercraft.ohiodnr.gov
ODNR Division of Wildlife	1-800-WILDLIFE	wildlife.ohiodnr.gov
US Geological Survey (water flow conditions)	site number 03226800	waterdata.usgs.gov
Ohio Water Trails Program	614-265-6484	watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/watertrails
American Canoe Association	540-907-4460	americancanoe.org



## More About the Paddle/Pedal Option

Combine a paddling trip on the Olentangy River Water Trail with bicycling to create a unique outdoor adventure.

Sites ②, ⑤ and ⑫ are located at or very near the Olentangy Greenway Trail (a paved path). Placing a bike at one of these trail intersections provides a nice alternative to needing a second vehicle to get back to the launch site. More information on all of the Central Ohio Greenways trails can be found at [centralohiogreenways.com](http://centralohiogreenways.com).

## Common Hazards

To have a safe trip, boaters must be aware of the various types of hazards encountered on any stream. Learn to recognize these hazards and manage your risk appropriately.



### Lowhead Dams and Waterfalls

Never attempt to boat over a dam or waterfall. Small dams can look harmless, particularly in swollen streams, but they are very dangerous because of the turbulence at the base of the dam.

Boats or people may become trapped in a hydraulic. Know the location of lowhead dams and carry your boat around the hazard. Launch at a safe distance downstream. Scout a river or stream in advance of any boating trip and avoid these hazards.

### Foot Entrapments



Do not attempt to stand or walk in swift-moving water. You may slip and pin a foot between submerged rocks. Once pinned, the force of the current can push your body under water and hold it there. If your boat capsizes, keep your feet up,

pointed downstream, and swim to calm water before standing.

### Floods and Swift Water

Novice paddlers should never boat on streams when water is spilling out of the banks. High water causes hazards such as lowhead dams to become even more dangerous. Unseen obstacles such as floating logs or submerged trees may also threaten a boater. Flood levels are monitored throughout the state. Know the water conditions before you go: [waterdata.usgs.gov](http://waterdata.usgs.gov) (site number 03226800).



### Strainers

Obstructions that allow water to flow through but block people and boats are known as strainers. Overhanging branches, downed trees, log jams, and flooded islands all are potential strainers. Strainers should be avoided, especially in swift water.



### Hypothermia

You don't have to be submerged in water for hypothermia; wind chill, rain and perspiration can contribute to the condition.

Sudden immersion in cold water can be deadly. The initial cold shock can cause immediate and involuntary gasping, hyperventilation, panic and vertigo, all of which can result in water inhalation and drowning. The longer you are immersed in cold water, the harder it is to control your body. Hypothermia (cooling of the body's core temperature) can begin within 30 minutes. **Symptoms include:**

- Uncontrollable shivering
- Slurred speech
- Lack of coordination
- Sudden changes in blood pressure, heart rate and heart rhythm that can result in death
- Rapid deterioration of manual dexterity and coordination
- Loss of consciousness and death

#### To prevent hypothermia:

- Dress in layers using silk, polypropylene, fleece or wool materials that wick moisture away and retain heat.
- Take all measures to keep your boat upright
- Keep your life jacket securely fastened to help keep your head above water if you fall overboard



## Outdoor Ethic

### Plan ahead.

- Consult a map. Scout the area before boating it.
- Know current conditions or events that may affect your trip.
- Choose a water trail section (see map) that matches your boating skills.
- Check for river warning and flood information: [waterdata.usgs.gov](https://waterdata.usgs.gov) (site number 03226800).

### Be prepared.

- Know the locations of all dams and hazards and be prepared to carry your boat around them.
- Be prepared for any unknown event.
- Know how to get to roads if you must walk out.
- Know the local emergency phone number.
- Know where you are along the trail at all times.

### Be aware of Ohio laws, local ordinances.

- Be sure you have the required safety equipment onboard including a properly fitted, U.S. Coast Guard-approved, life jacket for each person.

### Travel on durable surfaces.

- Use existing, improved access sites.
- When using a natural river bank to launch your boat, minimize your impact by staying clear of vegetation or mud.
- Stay on the trail while portaging.

### Dispose of waste properly.

- Properly discard cigarette butts, fishing line, bait containers and any other garbage.
- Plastics are especially dangerous to wildlife. Baggies, six-pack rings, and other clear plastics that float on the water are invisible hazards to fish, birds, and other wildlife.

### Leave what you find.

- Leave artifacts and natural objects undisturbed.
- Avoid introducing non-native species, including live bait, by cleaning equipment between trips.

### Respect wildlife.

- Observe from a distance; don't feed, follow or approach wildlife.
- Control pets or leave them at home.

### Respect privacy and rights of landowners.

- Much of the shoreline along the water trail is privately owned. Respect the privacy and rights of landowners by obtaining permission before entering any privately owned land.
- Many landowners enjoy the stream's peace and solitude from their property. Share the same courtesy that you would want. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is usually welcome.
- Avoid boisterous behavior. Let nature's sound prevail.



- Never boat alone.
- NEVER boat over lowhead dams.
- Wear a life jacket. Children under 10 must wear appropriate size life jackets.
- Dress for the water temperature.
- Pack your cell phone and an extra change of clothing in a waterproof bag.
- Neoprene shoes or tennis shoes with woolen socks are recommended footwear.
- File a "float plan" with a reliable person noting where you are going, when you will leave and return. Contact the person upon return.
- Do not overload or unevenly load your boat. Keep weight in the boat centered from side to side and bow to stern. Keep the load low and close to the boat's center line to keep it stable.
- Always maintain three points of contact (for example, two hands and one foot touching the boat) while moving around in the boat.
- Do not attempt to stand or walk in swift water.
- If the water looks too hazardous to swim, don't boat on it!
- Portage any area you feel uncertain about.
- If you capsize, hold on to your boat unless it presents a life-threatening situation. If floating in current, position yourself on the upstream side of the capsized boat.
- Carry plenty of drinking water.
- Avoid overexertion and guard against extreme weather conditions.



The Olentangy River flows 88.5 miles from its headwaters in Crawford and Richland counties through Marion, Morow, Delaware and Franklin counties to the confluence with the Scioto River in downtown Columbus. The river has a drainage area of 536 square miles.

A 22 mile section from the Delaware Dam to Wilson Bridge Rd in Worthington was designated as a state Scenic River by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources in 1973.

The Olentangy River is within a half hour drive for over 1.5 million people. Even with concentrated development nearby, the river retains a forest corridor in many areas which includes willow, red and silver maple, sycamore, oak, basswood and green ash trees. Wooded banks protect the river's 63 species of fish and provide habitat for a variety of breeding birds and other animals.

Numerous ravines dissect the banks, cutting through and exposing the underlying rock strata including Ohio black shale, noted for its large "ironstone" concretions.

The Olentangy was named in 1833 by a legislative act to restore Native American names to state rivers. "Olentangy" means "River of Red Face Paint." That name would have been more appropriate for the nearby Big Darby Creek, where the Wyandot tribe utilized the red-tinted earth as face paint.

# Simple Things Can Make a Difference

Paddlers on the Olentangy River can appreciate its natural beauty. The Olentangy corridor boasts

- 188 species of birds,
- at least 14 species of mussels
- 63 varieties of fish, many of which are endangered or threatened.

Because of its natural diversity, the river provides opportunities for hiking, biking, fishing and bird watching.

The Olentangy River truly is a precious resource and each of us can take simple steps to keep the river clean and beautiful for future generations.

Runoff from rainstorms and snow melt is the biggest threat to the Olentangy, especially where extensive pavement and rooftops prevent rainwater from soaking back into the ground. Instead, this water flows directly to our rivers, where it can cause increased flooding, sewer overflows, inadequate recharge of groundwater supplies, and erosion of stream banks. Runoff also carries pollutants like automotive chemicals, fertilizers and pesticides, sediments from construction sites, and bacteria.



## The Good News

Each individual can act to reduce the amount of polluted runoff flowing into the Olentangy. These actions include:

- Disconnect downspouts from sewer lines
- Use a rain barrel to capture water from downspouts and make it available for lawns and gardens
- Create a rain garden with native vegetation to help infiltrate rain water
- Reduce the use of lawn chemicals
- Pick up pet waste
- Properly dispose of chemicals and motor oil
- Promptly fix oil leaks in all vehicles
- Become a GreenSpot at [columbusgreenspot.org](http://columbusgreenspot.org)

Although each of these actions seems small, their cumulative impact is great. For volunteer opportunities, please see [olentangywatershed.org](http://olentangywatershed.org).

## Fishing a Stream



Consider packing a fishing pole for your next float trip. Streams provide some of the best fishing in Ohio — if you know where to look. Fish hang out where they can eat, and where they can eat depends on the current.

Predatory fish (smallmouth bass) feed where the current sweeps prey past them. Some fish seek shelter close to the current; they dart in to the current to feed and out of the current to rest. Other species prefer deeper pools with slower-moving water.

Predatory fish wait in deeper water at the head of the pool or at the tail of the pool for prey to wash past them. Cast upstream, either up into the riffles or near the swifter current at the tail of the pool, and allow the current to deliver the bait to fish waiting below.

Rocks, logs and other obstructions in the pool provide places out of the current for fish to rest while they wait for prey to sweep past. Cast upstream of these rest areas, allowing the current to carry the bait past the fish. Retrieve as close to the obstruction as possible without snagging.

Panfish (sunfish) and bottom feeders (carp) prefer deeper pools where they don't have to fight the current. Target these species by fishing natural bait in the deepest area of pools.

Bottom feeders prefer natural baits that are typical to the habitat. Crayfish, minnows, hellgrammites, and worms work anywhere in Ohio. Predators and sunfish strike natural and artificial bait with equal enthusiasm. Small jigs, in-line spinners and crankbaits that match the color of prey found within the stream are good choices.

