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NEIWT is paddling full speed ahead into 2026 with exciting new programming designed to get more kids and families out on our rivers!

Next year, we're launching free Learn to Paddle classes led by certified paddling instructors. These fun, hands-on sessions go beyond paddling skills and water safety – they'll connect youth with river ecology, wildlife, hydrology, and even conservation careers.

Our goal? To engage 200 new paddlers with our rivers – and we can't do it without your help!

Proceeds from our [Paddling Forward into 2026 Virtual Auction](#) will directly support these youth programs, ensuring that the next generation learns to love and care for our waterways.

With the holidays right around the corner, it's the perfect time to find a great gift – or treat yourself – while helping us paddle forward into a new year of river adventures!





REMEMBERING MICHAEL WELLMAN



ADVOCATE, VOLUNTEER, FRIEND

IN MEMORY OF MICHAEL WELLMAN

The Northeast Indiana Water Trails community mourns the passing of Michael Wellman, a dedicated advocate, volunteer, and friend whose tireless efforts to engage people with our rivers helped shape and sustain our region's water trails. Michael's passion for conservation and community made him an integral part of the Water Trails' success.

Michael believed that our rivers and streams were more than bodies of water—they were living connections between people, places, and generations. His advocacy helped ensure that these natural treasures remain accessible, safe, and vibrant for all who seek peace, recreation, or adventure along their banks.



Beyond his service, Michael will be remembered for his warmth, humor, and unwavering optimism. His legacy lives on in every paddle stroke across our region's waterways and in the community he helped build.

We extend our deepest condolences to Michael's family, friends, and all who had the privilege of working beside him. His impact will continue to ripple through our waters for years to come.

**Thank you, Michael, for everything you gave to the Northeast Indiana Water Trails.
You will be deeply missed and forever remembered.**



New Wayfinding and Interpretive Signs Installed on the Wabash River in Wells County

Paddlers and outdoor enthusiasts have something new to look forward to along the Wabash River! The Northeast Indiana Water Trails' (NEIWT) team recently completed the installation of four new wayfinding and interpretive signs at public access sites between Vera Cruz and JE Roush Fish and Wildlife area in Wells County.

These new signs are designed to enhance the paddling experience by helping visitors navigate the river safely, learn about local history and ecology, and, connect deeply with the region's natural resources. Each sign provides clear information about access points, mileage between sites, river safety tips, and highlights of the area's unique wildlife and cultural heritage.

This project wouldn't have been possible without the wonderful collaboration and support of our partners. A heartfelt thank you to the Wells County Trails organization for their partnership and enthusiasm, and to the JE Roush Fish and Wildlife Area staff for their hands-on assistance in installing the signage. Their teamwork and dedication helped make this improvement a success for paddlers on the Wabash River.

Come see the new signs and experience the beauty of the Wabash – from the water's edge to the heart of the community in spring 2026 at the Wabash River Challenge! (Details to be announced this winter).





WINTER PADDLING TIPS



Winter Paddling Tips for Northeast Indiana's Rivers

Winter might seem like the off-season for paddling, but for those willing to bundle up, it's one of the most peaceful times to explore Northeast Indiana's waterways. With bare trees, quiet shorelines, and crisp air, rivers offer a whole new kind of beauty this time of year. Before you grab your paddle, here are some tips and tricks to keep your winter adventures safe and enjoyable:

Dress for the water, not the weather

Even on a mild day, water temperatures can be dangerously cold. Wear layers of synthetic or wool fabrics and consider a dry suit or wet suit. Always bring a warm change of clothes in a dry bag.

Paddle with a plan

Let someone know where you're going and when you expect to return. Shorter routes on slow-moving sections are best this time of year – and always check river conditions first.

Keep gear simple and reliable

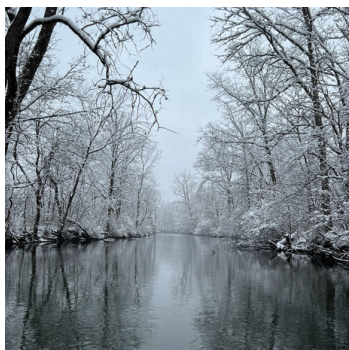
Cold fingers make fine motor skills tricky. Use easy-to-operate clips, zippers, and buckles. A thermos with a warm drink can make a huge difference.

Be mindful of daylight

Winter days are short – start early and plan to finish before dusk. Bring a headlamp or light just in case.

Appreciate the quiet

Wildlife viewing can be excellent this time of year. Keep your movements gentle and enjoy the solitude – it's one of the best parts of winter paddling in our region. Winter paddling requires extra caution, but it's also deeply rewarding. Bundle up, plan ahead, and experience Northeast Indiana's rivers in a whole new light.



PIGEON RIVER





HOW TO WINTERIZE YOUR WATERCRAFT AND GEAR



As the last leaves fall and the water chills across our region's water trails, it's time to start thinking about putting your paddling gear to rest for the season. Whether you're cruising the St. Joe, drifting down the Maumee, or exploring the Salamonie Reservoir, taking a few steps now to winterize your paddle craft will help ensure your boat and gear are ready to hit the water again next spring.

Start with a Good Clean

Before your kayak, canoe, or paddleboard goes into storage:
Rinse thoroughly to remove mud, leaves, and any leftover algae from your last trip.
Use mild soap and water to clean the hull, seats, and hatches.
Dry completely—moisture trapped inside can lead to mildew or even freeze damage.
Think of it as giving your craft a fresh start before its winter nap.

Inspect and Repair

Cold months are a great time to take stock of your equipment:
Check hulls, seams, and hardware for cracks or corrosion.
Tighten or replace rudders, deck lines, and bungees.
Touch up scratches or chips before freezing temps make them worse.
A little TLC now saves you big repairs later.

Store It Right

Indiana winters can be rough on gear, so protection matters:
Store indoors if you can—garages, basements, or sheds work great.
If storing outside, cover it with a breathable tarp and keep it off the ground.
Avoid tight straps that can warp plastic hulls in the cold.

Care for Accessories

Don't forget your paddles and safety gear:
Rinse and dry paddles and apply a light lubricant to metal or ferrule joints.
Wash and air-dry PFDs, spray skirts, and dry bags before storage.
Check electronics and batteries—remove or recharge them before long-term storage.
This is also a great time to replace worn-out items or upgrade your kit.

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WINTERIZING YOUR WATERCRAFT AND GEAR



Refresh Your Safety Supplies

Winter downtime is perfect for a quick safety check:
Inspect first aid kits, flares, and throw ropes for wear or expiration.
Restock anything that's running low.
Being prepared on the water starts with being prepared off it.

Dream About Next Season

Use these cold months to plan your next adventures!
Make a list of rivers you'd like to explore, skills you want to sharpen, or local paddling events you don't want to miss once the thaw arrives. Follow NEIWT on social media to stay up to date on upcoming paddles.

See You on the Water in 2026!

Taking time now to winterize your paddle craft keeps your equipment in great shape and helps you hit the water smoothly when the ice melts. From all of us at Northeast Indiana Water Trails, thank you for another amazing paddling season!

We can't wait to share the waterways with you again next spring!

NORTHEAST INDIANA WATER TRAILS IS A REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP WORKING TO IMPROVE OUR WATER RESOURCES BY INCREASING RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES ON OUR WATERWAYS, PROMOTING BOAT ACCESS, WATER SAFETY AND STEWARDSHIP, AND DEVELOPING REGIONAL WATER TRAILS THAT WILL EMPOWER OUR COMMUNITY TO BECOME MORE ACTIVE AND UNIFIED IN OUR WATER RESOURCES.

