



COSUMNES River Preserve

Paddling Guide



Enjoy your Paddle!

Welcome to the Cosumnes River Preserve. The lower Cosumnes River offers excellent flat water canoeing and kayaking opportunities during most of the year. The Cosumnes is the last free-flowing river from the mighty Sierra Nevada Mountains into the Great Central Valley. Paddlers can enjoy a scenic glide through the river's sloughs and main channel, cruising along riparian forest, oak woodland and through wetlands teeming with wildlife.

Improved access to boat launch and renovation of launch site was made possible through a grant from the Department of Boating and Waterways in 2006.



Launching and Parking

Paddlers can launch their craft from the launch site just south of the Visitor Parking lot. This is the only allowed and legal public access point on the lower Cosumnes River. The launch is located about 200 yards south of the Visitor Parking lot, accessed by paved trail off the upper lot. Due to distance, paddlers are encouraged to use wheel straps, which are available for lending at the Visitor Center. Driving is not permitted to the launch site.

Paddlers should park in the upper parking lot and also use this area to offload their watercraft and gear. Please be aware that the Preserve and parking area is open from sunrise to sunset ONLY, please make sure that you plan your trip accordingly and schedule enough time for your return.

What to Bring

Non-motorized canoes or kayaks
Paddles
Drinking water
Binoculars

Personal Floatation Devices (PFD)
Layered Clothing
Sunscreen & Insect Repellent
Mobile Phone



Safety and Rules of Access

Canoeing and kayaking are inherently risky. The Cosumnes River and its associated waterways present a variety of risks, including high flows in winter, high winds throughout the year and underwater hazards.

Paddlers use the Preserve's access points and the river at their own risk. Paddlers are expected to have sufficient experience to ensure a safe outing and to be familiar with the waterway so as not to get lost. For safety, paddlers should always wear PFDs.

Once on the water, be aware of several rules designed to protect sensitive habitat along the waterway. There are only three allowed landings or pull-out locations on the Preserve. These landings are at "The Point", the "Tall Forest", and of course the "Put In." These landings are marked by a ⊗ on the waterway map. The *Where to Paddle* section details these permitted landings and offers a narrated, recommended route. There are also private properties along the river. Do not trespass.

Please be sensitive to the habitat and wildlife that lives here. Pets are not permitted. Do not approach any nest or den sites or wildlife with young. Be aware also that there are no restrooms or garbage cans along the route. Please do not litter, and make sure to pack out all that you bring in. **Hunting and camping are not allowed on the Preserve and fishing is allowed only from a boat.**



Where to Paddle

Once on the water, the Preserve recommends the following paddling route. This route takes approximately three hours to complete when paddling at a leisurely pace.

From the launch south of the Visitor Parking lot, head southward a short way to enter the main body of Middle Slough, then eastward and again southerly, away from Franklin Boulevard.

Once in Middle Slough, make sure you turn around and make a mental note of where the launch site is, then head left or eastward. If you go right, the waterway dead ends just past the bridge due to thick vegetation. This westward route under the bridge is not recommended due to hazardous conditions.

The launch route takes you southward on Middle Slough toward the Cosumnes River. Watch for wood duck, green and black-crowned night heron, a variety of warblers, mallard and scrub jay in the button bush and arroyo willows lining the waterway.

Heading left, Middle Slough opens up into a tule marsh. At twilight during the summer, this is a great location to watch the large bat colony that inhabits the Preserve emerge for their nightly insect-hunting jaunts. On the left levee is the River Walk Trail.

Further on the left and in many places on the waterway, you will see what appear to be trails from the water. These are not human access points. They are made by river otter and beaver, who use the muddy slopes as play slides and to travel to and from their dens and foraging areas. About 1/2 mile south of the Visitor Center, Middle Slough joins the Cosumnes River. If you turn right, the Cosumnes River, in about one-quarter mile, merges with the Mokelumne River. Instead, head left and paddle upstream on the Cosumnes toward the railroad bridge.

Notice the nest boxes hanging on trees on the left bank, again paralleling the River Walk Trail. These boxes are used primarily by wood duck, which are cavity nesters. Ideally, the forest's trees would be of varying ages, including old dead trees, or snags, filled with cavities. Today these snags are in short supply, so boxes are needed to ensure cavity-nesting birds' long-term survival. Some other cavity nesters include American kestrel, tree swallow, some flycatchers, western bluebird, some owls and woodpeckers.

Just before you reach the railroad bridge, on your right is a small slough. If you head into this slough, almost immediately on the right, is a huge beaver lodge. Beavers are mostly nocturnal, but can sometimes be spotted during the day, feeding and shoring up their lodges. Watch for them cruising through the waterway and listen for their tail slapping on the water. This is the beaver's way to warn other beavers of a potential danger. This area is always a good place to see red-shouldered hawk and American crow.

The main waterway continues east. You will paddle under the railroad bridge. Observe the trees along the banks. They reveal the river's past flooding. When the river floods it carries rich sediment, along with downed trees, limbs and other vegetation, from upstream. The mud rings on the trees as well as the vegetation trapped in the limbs show the river's high water level.

Shortly on your left, you will see wooden benches. This is "The Point," a portion of the River Walk Trail and an allowed pull-out or rest stop for paddlers. Please be careful taking out and be considerate of other visitors.

Back in the water, you are soon upon a fork in the waterway. If you head straight you'll be continuing up the Cosumnes River. If you turn left, you will enter the calm water of a slough, Tihuechemne Slough, which dead ends in about one-half mile at a pumping station used for the Preserve's agricultural operations. It is a great place to spot wildlife. If you turn into the slough, watch for roosting great-horned owls, red-tailed hawk, white-tailed kite and river otter. Please do not pull out at any location on this slough. When you reach the dead end, paddle back to the main river body.

Heading eastward from the fork upstream, you're back on the Cosumnes. Just ahead, the river channel narrows and bends to the right, then to the left. Use caution here, since the current can be swift, dangerous and difficult to negotiate. Once through the bend, notice the California wild grape hanging from the valley oaks and Fremont cottonwoods. This dense jungle-like riparian forest characterized much of the Central Valley prior to the Gold Rush. Watch also for great blue heron, mallard, Swainson's hawk, great egret, double-crested cormorant, western pond turtle and raccoon.

Once the river straightens out, lands of the Preserve are on your left and private property is on your right. This is a good place to notice the difference between a levee maintained privately to prevent flooding on the agricultural land and no levee, which allows over-bank flooding and seasonal wetlands. Most of the lower Cosumnes River has privately maintained levees.

All year, a great variety of raptors and songbirds, especially scrub jay and rufous-sided towhees, use this area. In the winter, Sandhill cranes are often seen here flying overhead and landing on the farm fields and grasslands to forage.

A bit further on your left the forest opens up. This is the "Tall Forest" landing and an allowed pull-out or rest stop location. Be aware that there are poison oak and seasonally ticks inhabiting this area. This is the terminus for the Preserve's guided boat tours and the recommended destination for your tour.

Above this point on the river, navigability is often limited by fallen trees, log jams, submerged hazards and tidal conditions. Those wishing to proceed upstream should be expert paddlers.

At the Tall Forest landing, please stay in the clearing area adjacent to the river. ***This forest surrounding the clearing is a highly sensitive wildlife and habitat area and not open to the public.*** Please enjoy the forest from the clearing.

To return to the Visitor Center, head downstream back to the launch site, turning northward on Middle Slough after crossing under the railroad bridge.

We hope you enjoy your paddle!



River Conditions

The river is calm most of the year, especially in the summer. However, paddlers should use caution in the winter and spring due to varying, and at times, hazardous water conditions. Flows may take hours or days to develop after a storm.

Additionally, due to the Preserve's proximity to the Delta, there is a tidal influence on the river and its associated sloughs. Water depths can vary from a few inches at low tide in the dry season to 18 feet at high tide in the wet season. During the summer months, paddlers should check the tide table prior to excursions.

Guided Boat Tours

Beginning paddlers are encouraged to join one of the Preserve's free guided boat tours. For the Preserve's guided boat tours, paddlers must provide their own equipment.

For more information on Preserve programs, call the recorded information line at (916)684-2816; log on to www.cosumnes.org; or stop by the Visitor Center - 13501 Franklin Blvd., Galt.

