

Experience the Elkhart River

BY GENE LIGHTNER

The Elkhart River flows north and west through Noble County, presenting paddlers, birders and folks who enjoy the outdoors an opportunity to spend a few hours, or a day of solitude along its waterway. The south and north branches of the river present a contrast of river habitats with the south branch mostly flowing slowly through large open wetland areas in York Township. The tree-lined north branch, downstream of Waldron Lake, flows clear over a predominately gravel bottom in Elkhart Township.

An easy family paddle to sample the south branch is the Mallard Roost Wildlife Area, where a leisurely round trip of two hours can be made by putting in at the access where County Road 600 N crosses the river and then paddling south or up river. Keep an eye and ear alert for sandhill cranes which have frequently been spotted along this stretch. Noisy and active in March and April and again in late summer, they tend to be quieter when raising their young, confining their distinctive calling to early morning or evening. Also along this section can be seen a variety of turtles, marsh wrens, ducks, muskrats, deer and the elusive massasaugua out sunning itself, especially in the spring and fall.

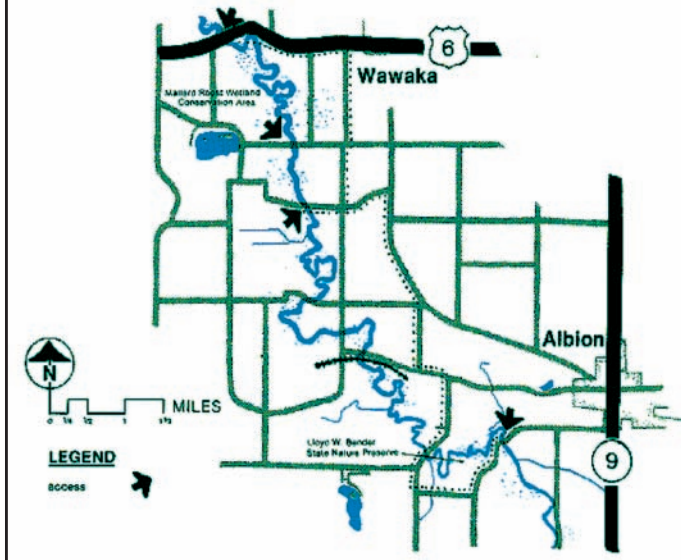
A short out and back on the north branch begins at the IDNR access where the river flows under the County Road 125 W. bridge, known locally as Duke's Bridge. An upriver trip of a long mile takes you

along the shoreline of the ACRES Land Trust holding, and some great springtime birding, toward Waldron Lake. A down river trip of a mile brings you to another wetland full of birds and wildlife throughout all the warmer months. Be aware that on the downstream trip a three foot dam is put in place across the river to maintain the water level of the upstream lakes for the summer. You can pull over this structure on either the left or right sides, but plan for wet feet. If the river is up, you will paddle in calm water over the dam.

If you are prepared for a one way, down river trip, one of about two hours or so begins at Woodlawn Park in Ligonier (off Lincolnway West, just past Bridge Street). Turn right and drive between the stone posts and down to the river. The park has ample parking. This trip can end at the county line where the bridge is missing at County Road 1175 W. There is some parking area on the south, now closed bridge approach.

ELKHART RIVER

SOUTH BRANCH



Several groups have been actively working to improve the quality of the Elkhart River watershed by sponsoring cleanup events, water quality monitoring, educational opportunities and river related projects such as the planned new Riverwalk in the town of Ligonier. The following web sites are good places to begin looking for more information: elkhartriveralliance.org, futureligonier.org, and elkhartriver.org. We invite you to take time to enjoy this tranquil and underutilized part of Noble County, and consider getting involved in its restoration and preservation.

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