

# Kiski-Conemaugh River Water Trail

## Map & Guide

Water trails are recreational waterways on a lake, river, or ocean between specific points, containing access points and day-use and/or camping sites for the boating public. Water trails emphasize low-impact use and promote stewardship of the resources. Explore this unique Pennsylvania water trail.

### For your safety and enjoyment:

- **Always wear a life jacket.**
- **Obtain proper instruction in boating skills.**
- **Know fishing and boating regulations.**
- **Be prepared for river hazards.**
- **Carry proper equipment.**

## FLOATING THE RIVER

The Kiski-Conemaugh is a good novice and family canoe and kayak river. Float speed is approximately 2 to 3 miles per hour with leisurely paddling. Remember to boat only at water levels appropriate for your capabilities and never when the river is high or flooded. Contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for Conemaugh Dam/Loyalhanna Outflow information for the lower Conemaugh and Kiskiminetas rivers. Inexperienced and novice canoeists should take precautions on the Johnstown-to-Seward section due in part to its length and the rapids at Findley Run, which can be portaged. All access points are indicated on the map (reverse side). Some of these access points are "primitive," which means they are more suitable for canoes and car-top boats to be carried to the water from a parking area and are primarily a carry-in and parking area. The map highlights available amenities associated with the access points.

## FISHING THE KISKI-CONEMAUGH RIVER BASIN

The entire Kiski-Conemaugh River basin is recovering from years of post-industrial pollution. There are fair numbers of smallmouth bass, yellow perch and sunfish. Anglers are encouraged to practice catch and release so that the fishery can continue to rebound. The lower stretches (from Apollo downstream) are producing walleyes, sauger, and a wider variety of fish. Anglers will also find local pockets of trout where clean streams (stocked) meet the main stem. Water levels affect the fishing quality; lower water levels create higher acidity levels than higher water will. During higher water levels, fish will be found in a greater area of the river. Spinners, flies and bait are all suitable means of angling for the species in the Kiski-Conemaugh.

## ALONG THE WAY (NATURAL RESOURCES)

### *Topography/Geology*

The headwaters of the Conemaugh originate at around 3,000 feet above sea level and the course of the river drops to 957 feet above sea level at the mouth of the Kiski toward the Allegheny River. This drop has carved out canyons and gaps along the way. Two of them are along the water trail. Mineral resources abound along the trail, which had a large role in America's industrialization. Coal is the best known resource, but gas and limestone are also products derived from the basin's geology.

### *Conemaugh Gorge and Packsaddle Gap*

These are two of the most prominent features along the trail. Conemaugh Gorge, located just west of Johnstown, is 1,650 deep. Though the railroad and routes 56 & 403 parallel the river, the paddling is serene. Packsaddle Gap is the scenic route the Conemaugh has taken through Laurel Ridge. Though not as deep as the gorge, Packsaddle offers a pleasant and scenic paddle with only the occasional train whistle to interrupt the paddler's day.

### *The Forest Along the Way*

A majority of the Kiski-Conemaugh River trail is forested. The recovery of the waterway is also reflected in the riparian area. Once heavily logged, the paddlers will find a mosaic of eastern hardwoods lining the river; black cherry, oak, maples, hemlock, sycamore along with mountain laurel, rhododendron, are prevalent. Black bears, deer, wild turkeys, muskrats, blue herons, grouse, wood ducks, mallards, and Canada geese all make their home along the way, and are regularly seen by boaters. Just as AMD (Acid Mine Drainage) is a problem in the water, Japanese knotweed, an invasive species, has taken over large tracts of the riparian area. Efforts are underway to halt its domination and re-introduce native species.

### *Pittsburgh-to-Harrisburg Mainline Canal Greenway*

The Allegheny Ridge State Heritage Park has an effort underway to create a Greenway that retraces the Mainline Canal corridor. The water trail is a strong component of this overall effort: to protect natural, cultural and scenic resources. Pennsylvania's "Millennium Legacy Trail" is a network of individual initiatives managed by local partners throughout the corridor. The network includes not only trails, but also public river access, historic downtown revitalization, heritage preservation and environmental stewardship projects. This community driven project will help interpret the region's unique cultural and natural heritage, while providing linkages between the towns of the region and the natural resources. The Greenway is creating "New connections between old neighbors." For more information: [www.alleghenyridge.org](http://www.alleghenyridge.org).

## ALONG THE WAY (TRANSPORTATION)

### Canal

From 1834-1857 the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal operated as an economic engine for the state. It had three main portions to it, the Western Division, the Juniata Division and the Allegheny Portage Railroad. The Allegheny Portage Railroad section of the trail was considered an engineering marvel of its time. The Kiski-Conemaugh River Water Trail travels along the canal remnants from mile 102 in Johnstown to mile 29 at the mouth of the Kiskiminetas. This is the Western Division. Many of the remnants around Johnstown have been decimated by the development of the city of Johnstown. However, there are elements of the canal along the entire length of the water trail. Some are visible only at low water. Some of the better known remnants are highlighted below:

**Dam #2, Western Division Section 1** (along the Roaring Run Trail) dam remnants are visible at low water.

**Saltsburg** has a canal park and the West Penn Trail has a prism on the eastern end.

**Conemaugh Dam** and just downstream from the dam is an interpretive area with a prism.

**Just east of Blairsville in Packsaddle Gap** Lock #5 Western Division section 2 and revetment wall.

**Dam #4, Western Division Section** in the Conemaugh Gorge Dam has remnants visible at low water.

### Railroad

With the demise of the canal and the rise of the railroad, western Pennsylvania boomed during the industrial age. The Kiski-Conemaugh corridor played an important role in transporting coal, steel and other goods to markets across the country and around the world.

A number of bridges cross the trail and paddling under them gives the visitor a new perspective. Some of the bridges along the way are listed in greater detail below:

**Conemaugh River Bridge (built 1887)**-Located just north of the confluence of the Little Conemaugh and Stonycreek rivers at the "point" in Johnstown. This bridge played a grisly role in the disastrous flood of 1889. This bridge survived the wall of water and backed up a mountain of debris. The debris caught fire and burned for days.

Length: 490'

Number of spans: 7

Length of main span: 70'

**Robinson Railroad Bridge (built 1904-08)**-The six-span steel deck girder bridge crosses the Conemaugh between Bolivar and Robinson.

Width: 30'

Length: 360'

**Conemaugh Lake Section (1883-1907 Grade)**-Four bridges cross the Conemaugh Lake. These bridges were part of the PRR re-alignment (1907). The rail line is currently part of the Conemaugh Valley Conservancy's West Penn Trail system. On the western end of the lake the rail line cut through Bow Ridge. This tunnel was cut in 1883, but it's submerged by Conemaugh Lake.

**Tunnelton**- Just below the Conemaugh Dam a number of transportation eras are evident in one area. The West Tunnel Viaduct is a five-arch stone bridge built in 1907; there is also a 880 foot high trestle deck Girder Bridge. Just downstream are an interpretive area and a canal prism.

## KISKI-CONEMAUGH RIVER SYSTEM - "A RIVER REVIVAL"

This river system was once just a transport corridor and served as an industrial gutter. Sewer systems and regulations have assisted the once neglected waterways. In the past 25 years, various grassroots groups have sprung up and have reclaimed and are reclaiming this beautiful resource. From acid mine drainage reclamation to trail development and river access, the citizens of the Kiski-Conemaugh are proud of this once degraded river basin. Paddlers on the river and land trail users along its banks are witness to a river revival. The Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance is a collection of groups that have spearheaded a river basin comprehensive plan and meet quarterly to share information and provide updates, and mutual assistance to one another.

**Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance**

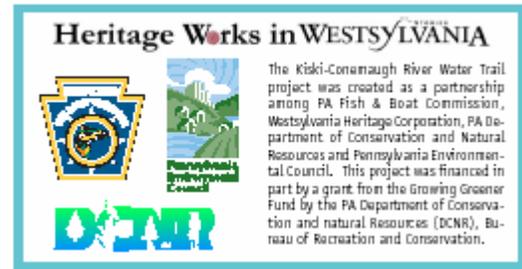
[www.westsylvania.org/kc](http://www.westsylvania.org/kc)

## PENNSYLVANIA BOATING REGULATIONS

- One wearable, Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD or life jacket) in serviceable condition and of the appropriate size is required for each person in your boat. If your boat is 16 feet or longer, one throwable device (seat cushion or ring buoy) is required. Canoes and kayaks, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device.
- Life jackets must be worn by all children 12 years old and younger on all boats 20 feet or less in length while under way, and on all canoes and kayaks. Others are strongly encouraged to wear a PFD at all times on the water.
- All boats must display an anchor light (a white light visible 360 degrees) when at anchor between sunset and sunrise. Boats can use a lantern or clip-on battery-powered unit to meet this requirement.
- All powered boats must show running lights between sunset and sunrise. Between sunset and sunrise, unpowered boats must carry a white light (visible 360 degrees), installed or portable, ready to be displayed in time to avoid a collision.
- All motorboats are required to carry a sound-producing mechanical device audible for a half-mile. Athletic whistles meet this requirement.
- All motorboats must be registered, regardless of where they launch.
- Unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, rafts) using Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission access areas must either be registered OR display a valid launch permit. Launch permits can be purchased on the web at [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us). Click the "Outdoor Shop" icon.
- Operating watercraft, including canoes, kayaks, and rafts, under the influence of alcohol or drugs is illegal. The law is strongly enforced for user safety. For further information on boating regulations, contact the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission at [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us).

## PADDLING SAFETY TIPS

- **Wear your life jacket.** Some 80 percent of all recreational boating fatalities happen to people who are not wearing a life jacket.
- **Expect to get wet.** Even the best paddlers sometimes capsize or swamp their boats. Bring extra clothing in a waterproof bag.
- **Be prepared to swim.** If the water looks too hazardous to swim in, don't go paddling.
- **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.
- **Scout ahead whenever possible.** Know the river. Avoid surprises.
- **Be prepared for the weather.** Get a forecast before you go. Sudden winds and rain are common and can turn a pleasant trip into a risky, unpleasant venture.
- **Wear wading shoes** or tennis shoes with wool, polypropylene, pile or neoprene socks.
- **Never take your boat over a low-head dam.**
- **Portage** (carry) your boat around any section of water about which you feel uncertain.
- **Never boat alone.** Boating safety increases with numbers.
- **Keep painter lines** (ropes tied to the bow) and any other ropes coiled and secured.
- **Never tie a rope to yourself** or to another paddler, especially a child.
- **Kneel to increase your stability** before entering rougher water, like a rapid.
- **If you collide with an obstruction, lean toward it.** This will usually prevent your capsizing or flooding the boat.
- **File a float plan** with a reliable person, indicating where you are going and when you will return. Remember to contact the person when you have returned safely.





-  Public River Access
-  USGS Gauge Station Internet Accessible
-  Potential Hazard
-  Class II-III (Portage Available River Right)
-  River Dam (Portage River Left)
-  River Dam (Portage Unavailable at this time)
-  Rail-Type Trail
-  County Boundary
-  River Mile Marker (Number Increases Upstream)
-  State Park
-  County and Local Park
-  State Forest
-  Game Land
-  Cities and Boroughs

 Riverside Park  
     

 Conemaugh Dam  
    



-  Camping
-  Parking
-  Restrooms
-  Picnic Tables
-  Drinking Water
-  Canoe Livery

