The Lower Colorado River Guide
**Water Conservation**

All throughout the reaches of the lower Colorado River, people depend on the river as their primary water source. A growing population, booming economy and hot, dry climate mean water is in greater demand than ever. It’s up to us to do right by the river and use its limited water supply wisely, so we can make it last for the future.

Landscape irrigation can account for more than 30 percent of all the water used during the summer in Texas. Unfortunately, about half of this water is wasted due to over-watering. You can receive a form so that you can audit your lawn irrigation system by emailing LCRA at waterconservation@lcra.org

Texas Water Development Board - www.twdb.state.tx.us
Water I.Q. - www.wateriq.org
Lower Colorado River Authority – www.lcra.org/water/save
Texas River Protection Association – www.txrivers.org

**Boater Safety**

Wearing a life jacket is the single greatest thing boaters can do to ensure their personal safety. There are many resources online that give you tips on how to have a safe time on the water. Being prepared means carrying the right equipment, water, nutrition and information with you. There are also introductory classes available through REI and the American Canoe Association that will prepare a beginner for the sport of paddling.

American Canoe Association – www.americancanoe.org
Nobody’s Waterproof – www.nobodyswaterproof.com

**Boat Racing**

Canoe and kayak racing in Texas is a great way to blend a love for the river with a fun and challenging activity. The boat racing community is alive and well in Central Texas and always encourages new entrants into the many well-known races held in this state each year.

100-mile boat race on the Colorado – www.coloradoriver100.com
Texas Canoe Racing – www.tckra.org
260-mile boat race on the San Marcos – www.texaswatersafari.org
Boat Rental & Sales

**Austin area**

Austin Canoe & Kayak (sales)
(512) 719-4386
www.austinkayak.com

Cooks Canoes (rentals & shuttles)
(512) 276-7767
www.cookscanoes.com

TG Canoe Livery (sales)
(512) 473-2644
www.tgcanoe.com

REI Austin Store (sales, rental)
North (512) 343-5550
www.rei.com

**Bastrop Area**

McKinney Roughs Nature Park (guides)
(512) 303-5073

Rising Phoenix Adventures (sales, rental, guides)
(512) 677-2305
www.risingphoenixadventures.com

**Columbus Area**

Howell’s Canoe Livery (rental & shuttles)
(979) 732-3816
www.howellcanoe.com

**Matagorda Area**

Matagorda Bay Nature Park (rental)
1-800-776-5272, Ext. 4740
www.lcra.org/matagorda

Matagorda Bay Nature Park (guides)
(979) 863-2603
Planning A River Trip

• Talk to someone who has previously run the river.
• Weather conditions on the river can change rapidly, particularly in the spring when floods can occur quickly. If you have a weather radio, the National Weather Service broadcasts continuous weather information on the following frequencies – Austin to Bastrop 162.400, Bastrop to Eagle Lake 162.500, and Eagle Lake to the Gulf 162.425.
• The U.S. Geological Survey has issued topographical maps and aerial photos that may be purchased.
• For recorded lake and river information, call LCRA at (512) 473-3333, Ext. 3333.
• Get familiar with your take-out location. Walk down to the river and take mental notes of the signs and other landmarks. Know how they will look as you approach from upstream at the end of your trip.
• Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return.

What to Bring

Making good choices in your equipment will help ensure a safe, enjoyable trip. All your equipment should be sealed in dry bags or dry boxes. Tie down all your equipment into the boat so you are never caught unprepared to dump your boat.

Mandatory
• Life jacket for each person on board

Suggested
• Plenty of Clean Drinking Water
• Sunscreen
• First Aid Kit
• Insect Repellant
• Spare Paddle
• Repair Kit
• River Guide
• Cell Phone
• GPS Unit
• Signaling Device (Whistle)

State law requires each person on the river to have a Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devise within reach. Children under 13 must wear a life jacket at all times.
Private Property

Respect private property by not trespassing or littering and keeping noise levels down. This river is classified as navigable, which permits public use of the streambed and, if necessary, the banks to portage any hazard. Any other use of private river banks without permission of the landowner can be considered trespassing. Under Texas Penal Code, criminal trespass occurs when one enters property after receiving notice not to enter. Notice includes verbal notice, a fence, sign(s), purple paint on posts or trees, or the visible presence of crops grown for human consumption.

Choosing a trip distance

Spring-Summer-Fall (avg. 800-1,500 cubic feet per second (cfs))
- From mid-March through mid-October water may be released from the Highland Lakes and river levels may be higher than in the winter months. During this time of year, canoes and kayaks could average 3 to 4 miles per hour.

Winter (avg. 300-500 cfs)
- From mid-October through mid-March the river levels drop. The water becomes very clear as the sediment settles to the river bottom. This is a great time of year to see the Colorado River. During this time of year, canoes and kayaks can average 2 to 3 mph.

Cubic Feet Per Second

A cubic foot is like a box of water measuring one foot by one foot by one foot. The USGS defines cubic foot per second (cfs) as “the flow rate or discharge equal to one cubic foot of water per second or about 7.5 gallons per second.”

Suggested range of flow rates on the Colorado River: 300 – 3,000 cfs

Current cfs data at: www.lcra.org/water/conditions

Trip recommendations at: www.southwestpaddler.com/docs/colorado.html
GENERAL CHARACTER

Near Austin, the river is flanked by development, then just above Webberville the scenery changes to rural, with abundant wildlife and vegetation. This stretch has long pools of slow-moving water and short stretches of narrow, faster water in between. There are several islands along this stretch of river.
Optimum range of flow: 300 cfs – 3,000 cfs

RIVER ACCESS POINTS

1. Mile 288 US 183 Bridge Access GPS N30°14’46.1” W97°41’26.2”
   This is the first public access point downstream of Longhorn Dam in Austin. This access, maintained by TxDOT, is on the left as you paddle downstream. The stretch from here to FM 973 requires a river left portage around a low-head dam.

2. Mile 279 FM 973/Del Valle Bridge Access GPS N30°12’31.7” W97°38’16.9”
   Visitors can find this site, maintained by TxDOT, just downstream of Austin on the north side of FM 973, on the left as you paddle downstream. There is limited parking alongside the bridge and boat launching requires a carry over uneven ground.

3. Mile 267 Little Webberville Park Access GPS N30°13’47.2” W97°31’7.8”
   This park, operated by Travis County (512) 854-7275, is off of FM 969 on the west side of the town of Webberville. This access is on the left as you paddle downstream. Park is open 24 hours a day.

4. Mile 262 Big Webberville Park Access GPS N30°12’33.1” W97°29’58.7”
   This park, operated by Travis County (512) 854-7275, is on Park Lane, just off Webberville Drive west of FM 969. Park is open 8 a.m until dark each day and is located on the left as you paddle downstream.

5. Mile 248 FM 969/Utley Bridge Access GPS N30°10’4.5” W97°24’12.4”
   River users will find this site just north of the FM 1209 and FM 969 intersection. The access point, maintained by TxDOT, is on the left as you paddle downstream.

HAZARDS

In general, this stretch is wide and slow-moving. A low-water dam lies just downstream from Walnut Creek. Exercise caution. Portage is on the right above the dam is recommended, but a portage on the left is possible during low water.

MAPS

Travis and Bastrop County highway department maps and USGS topographic maps of Bastrop, Austin East and Montopolis quadrangles cover the area.
Map 1
Longhorn Dam to FM 969
GENERAL CHARACTER

Beginning at the FM 969 bridge crossing, this river segment passes through Bastrop and ends at Vernon L. Richards Riverbend Park in Smithville. The river is generally similar to upstream, with slow-moving water, wooded banks and a sand and gravel riverbed with numerous islands and gravel bars. River banks steepen as you move downriver. Optimum range of flow: 300 cfs – 3,000 cfs

RIVER ACCESS POINTS

5. **Mile 248 FM 969/Bridge Access GPS N30°10’4.5” W97°24’12.4”**
   River users will find this site just north of the FM 1209 and FM 969 intersection. The access point, maintained by TxDOT, is on the left as you paddle downstream.

6. **Mile 235 Bob Bryant Park Access GPS N30°07’18.8” W97°20’17.5”**
   This park, operated by the City of Bastrop (512) 321-3957, is open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week. It is located at the corner of Charles Boulevard and Hasler Shores (behind Bastrop Intermediate School). A concrete boat ramp enters the water on the right as you paddle downstream.

7. **Mile 234 Bastrop Fisherman’s Park Access GPS N30°06’43.3” W97°19’30.5”**
   This landmark, operated by the City of Bastrop, (512) 321-3957, may be found near downtown Bastrop at the end of Farm Street. Open 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., the boat ramp is on your left as you paddle downstream.

8. **Mile 228 Lost Pines Nature Trails Park Access GPS N30°4’24.5” W97°18’36.2”**
   The Lost Pines Nature Trails site is adjacent to the Pines & Prairies Land Trust’s Colorado River Refuge (From Hwy 71, South on Tahitian Drive, right on Riverside Drive turning unpaved, park on left). This 30-acre park, open 24 hours a day, is on the left as you paddle downstream.

9. **Mile 209 Loop 230 Bridge Access GPS N30°00’46.9” W97°09’42.2”**
   This site is maintained by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, (512) 389-4800. The boat ramp is on your left as you paddle downstream.

10. **Mile 208 Vernon L. Richards Riverbend Park Access GPS N30°01’05.2” W97°08’39.6”**
    This park, operated by the City of Smithville, (512) 237-3282, is open 24 hours a day. River access is on your left, downstream of a wooden pier, as you paddle downstream.

MAPS

Bastrop County highway department maps and USGS topographic maps of Bastrop and Smithville quadrangles cover the area.
Key River Navigation Features

- Boat Ramp
- Other River Access
- Island
- Transmission Line
- Pipeline Signs
- Railroad Bridge
- River Miles to Gulf

Map 2
FM 969 to SH 71
GENERAL CHARACTER

For scenery, this stretch ranks high. There are bluffs along the river as you get close to La Grange and several old railroad bridges that cross overhead. Plum Park offers overnight camping for boaters along this stretch, but without access to water or electricity.

RIVER ACCESS POINTS

9. Mile 209 Loop 230 Bridge Access GPS N30°00’46.9” W97°09’42.2”
   This site is maintained by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, (512) 389-4800. The boat ramp is on your left as you paddle downstream.

10. Mile 208 Vernon L. Richards Riverbend Park Access GPS N30°01’05.2” W97°08’39.6”
    This park, operated by the City of Smithville, (512) 237-3282, is open 24 hours a day. There is a second access point beneath the State Hwy 71 Bridge in the highway right of way. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream. There is a second access point beneath the Hwy 71 bridge in the highway right of way, but access is difficult.

11. Mile 191 Plum Park Access GPS N29°57’57” W 97°00’14.9”
    This park is a day-use only area operated by LCRA (1-800-776-5272, Ext. 3366). From Austin, travel east on Hwy 71 for 12 miles past Smithville and turn left on Prarie Valley Road (CR 448). Camping is permitted for those arriving by river or by prior arrangement with LCRA. River access is on your right as you paddle downstream.

12. Mile 173 Buffalo Trail Park Access GPS N29° 54’01.9” W96°53’11.7”
    This park, maintained by the City of La Grange, (979) 968-5805, is on the south side of Hwy 71 and open 24 hours a day. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream.

13. Mile 171 White Rock Park Access GPS N29° 53’54.9” W96°51’33.9”
    This day-use park was developed by LCRA and is operated by the City of La Grange, (979) 968-5805. From Business 71 in La Grange, turn south on E. Elbin, then turn left on Mode Lane and the park entrance will be on the right. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream. (Watch for the concrete steps on your left.)

MAPS

Bastrop County and Fayette County highway department maps and USGS topographic maps of Smithville and La Grange West quadrangles cover the area.
Key River Navigation Features

- **Boat Ramp**
- **Other River Access**
- **Island**
- **Transmission Line**
- **Pipeline**
- **Railroad Bridge**

Number Indicates River Mileage from Gulf

Map 3
Loop 230 to White Rock Park
A detailed 17x12.25 waterproof map of the lower Colorado River can be purchased at LCRA’s McKinney Roughs Nature Park, (512) 303-5073.
GENERAL CHARACTER

This is the longest stretch of river between public access points on the Colorado River. Without prior arrangements with a local landowner, camping is limited to islands in the streambed, so plan carefully to gauge your trip length. Rock cliffs and earthen banks lined with pecan, willow, oak, cottonwood and elm trees loom over the river.

RIVER ACCESS POINTS

12. Mile 173 Buffalo Trail Park Access GPS N29° 54’01.9” W96°53’11.7”
   This park, maintained by the City of La Grange, (979) 968-5805, is on the south side of Hwy 71 and open 24 hours a day. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream, about a mile past the US 77 bridge in La Grange.

13. Mile 171 White Rock Park Access GPS N29° 53’54.9” W96°51’33.9”
   This day-use park was developed by LCRA and operated by the City of La Grange, (979) 968-5805. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream, approximately one mile past the US 77 Bridge in La Grange.

14. Mile 137 Texas 71 Business Bridge Access GPS N29°42’49” W96°32’50.7”
   This site is maintained by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, (512) 389-4800. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream.

15. Mile 131 Beason’s Park Access GPS N29° 42’19.7” W96°32’10.4”
   This park features a day-use area operated by Colorado County (979) 732-2604. The access point is in Columbus just off of US 90. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream.

MAPS

Fayette County and Colorado County highway department maps and USGS topographic maps of La Grange West, La Grange East, Ammannsville, Ellinger, Borden and Columbus quadrangles cover the area.
GENERAL CHARACTER

This stretch of the river has more evenly distributed public access points than those reaches directly to the north and south. Even so, a float of approximately 20 miles is required from Columbus to the boat ramp near Altair. From there, Garwood is 12 miles more. No camping facilities are available -- only natural sites on gravel bars and islands.

RIVER ACCESS POINTS

14. Mile 137 Texas 71 Business Bridge Access GPS N 29°42’49” W 96°32’50.7”

This site is maintained by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, (512) 389-4800. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream.

15. Mile 131 Beason’s Park Access GPS N 29° 42’19.7” W 96°32’10.4”

This park features a day-use area operated by Colorado County (979) 732-2604. The access point is in Columbus just off of US 90. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream.

16. Mile 111 Altair Boat Ramp Bridge Access GPS N 29°34’50.4 W 096°25’00.5”

A boat ramp is located three miles east of Altair on the south side of US 90A. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream.

Mile 105 Garwood Dam Portage GPS N 29°30’53.97” W 96°24’31.97”

Located on the left, this portage is approximately midway between the Altair Boat Ramp and the FM 950 crossing just east of Garwood. This portage lease was acquired by LCRA to provide safe and legal portage around the Garwood Irrigation District’s low-water dam. The site is accessible only by water. Camping or picnicking here are not allowed.

17. Mile 99 FM 950 Bridge Access GPS N 29°27’13.1 W 096°23’46.0”

This site, maintained by TxDOT, provides pedestrian access to the river from the FM 950 right of way. A dirt path leads to the river’s steep banks. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream.

HAZARDS

A low-water dam, approximately six miles upstream of Garwood, crosses the river. Use the designated portage area to the left.

MAPS

Colorado County highway department maps and USGS topographic maps of Columbus, Alleyton, Altair and Garwood quadrangles cover the area.
GENERAL CHARACTER

High-quality beaches and gravel bars characterize this stretch of river. Local terrain is flatter, and vegetation less dense than river segments upstream. Access points are few and far between. No developed camping facilities area available. Fewer natural campsites are available due to the reduced number of gravel bars and islands. A float of 25 miles is required to get from Garwood to Glen Flora.

RIVER ACCESS POINTS

17. **Mile 99 FM 950 Bridge Access GPS N 29°27'13.1” W 096°23’46.0”**
   This site, maintained by TxDOT, provides pedestrian access to the river from the FM 950 right of way. A dirt path leads to the river’s steep banks. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream.

18. **Mile 74 FM 960 Bridge Access GPS N 29°20'08.2” W 096°11’52.4”**
   This access point, maintained by TxDOT, features an unimproved dirt path leading from FM 960 to the river’s steep edge. River access is downstream right.

**Mile 55 Lane City Dam Portage GPS N29° 11’ 24” W96° 04’ 12”**
Easement is located on the west bank (downstream right) of the Colorado approximately two miles upstream of the Hollywood Bottom Park river access point. This area was acquired by LCRA to permit safe and legal portage around the Lane City Dam, but it can only be used to portage. Camping and picnicking are not allowed.

MAPS

Colorado County and Wharton County highway department maps and USGS topographic maps of Garwood, Bonus, New Taiton, Glen Flora and Wharton quadrangles cover the area.
GENERAL CHARACTER
This section of the Colorado River typifies the slow-moving coastal river in its journey to the Gulf. Large, flat beaches and sandbars are excellent in this area. No developed camping facilities are available on this stretch. Fewer natural campsites are available due to the reduced number of gravel bars and islands. The low-water dam near Lane City is a major hazard (see Hazards below).

RIVER ACCESS POINTS

**Mile 55 Lane City Dam Portage**  GPS N29° 11’ 24” W96° 04’ 12”
Easement is located on the west bank (downstream right) of the Colorado approximately two miles upstream of the Hollywood Bottom Park river access point. This area was acquired by LCRA to permit safe and legal portage around the Lane City Dam, but it can only be used to portage. Camping and picnicking are not allowed.

**Mile 50 Hollywood Bottom Park Access**  GPS N29°09’41.8” W 096°02’34.3”
This park, operated by LCRA (1-800-776-5272, Ext. 3366) is at the end of Wharton County Road 444, four miles east of FM 1162, and open 24 hours a day. Camping permits are not needed for groups of 20 or less. River access is on your right as you paddle downstream.

**Mile 32 Texas 35 Bridge Access**  GPS N 28˚59’03.5” W 096˚00’01.3”
This access point, one mile west of Bay City just off Hwy 35, is maintained by Matagorda County (361) 588-6866. If you plan to travel toward the Gulf, there is no portage around the Bay City Dam. LCRA recommends that you take out at this location due to the proximity of the dangerous Bay City Dam. The next public access to the river is at Riverside Park, just south of Bay City. River access downstream right.

HAZARDS
The Lane City Dam is about nine miles downstream of Wharton. Keep your distance. This dam has a powerful hydraulic current that could pull you under if you get too close. A portage easement to the right has been acquired by LCRA and should be used by all canoeists and river users. See Bay City Dam (next page).

MAPS
Wharton County and Matagorda County highway department maps and USGS topographic maps of Garwood, Bonus, New Taiton, Glen Flora, Wharton, Lane City, Lane City SE, Markham and Bay City quadrangles cover the area.
GENERAL CHARACTER

This lower-most section of the Colorado River has numerous public and private access points. Distances between public access points can easily be covered in less than a day. Natural campsites are limited in number along this stretch. The low-water dam in Bay City must be avoided, as should the Intracoastal Waterway.

RIVER ACCESS POINTS

20. **Mile 32 Texas 35 Bridge Access GPS N 28°59′03.5″ W 096°00′01.3″**
   This access point, one mile west of Bay City just off Hwy 35, is maintained by Matagorda County Pct. 4 (361-588-6866). There is NO PORTAGE around the Bay City Dam and LCRA recommends that you take out at this location to avoid the dam. The next public access to the river is at Riverside Park, just south of Bay City. River access is on your right paddling downstream.

21. **Mile 27 Riverside Park Access GPS N 28°55′18.2″ W 096°00′57.1″**
   The park, operated by Bay City (979-245-0340), is 1 ½ miles off FM 2668 and is open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream.

22. **Mile 16 FM 521 River Park Access GPS N 28°47′14.3″ W 95°59′45.6″**
   This park was developed by LCRA and is operated by Matagorda County Pct. 3 (361) 972-2719 open 24 hours a day. It is four miles west of Wadsworth on FM 521. River access is on your left as you paddle downstream.

23. **Mile 5 River Bend Boat Ramp Access GPS N 28°40′12.9″ W 095°57′53.6″**
   This ramp is one mile downstream of the Intracoastal Waterway. The ramp, maintained by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, (512) 389-4800, provides access to the last six miles of the Colorado River, the Intracoastal Waterway and portions of Matagorda Bay. River access is downstream right.

24. **Mile 0 Matagorda Bay Nature Park GPS N 28°35′55.1″ W 095°58′44.6″**
   Here’s the final access point on the lower Colorado River. The park, owned by LCRA, is at the mouth of the Colorado River, on the Gulf of Mexico. It is at the end of CR 2031.

HAZARDS

Avoid the rapids and rocks near the low-water dam in Bay City. Users should exit at the Hwy 35 road crossing upstream of the Bay City Dam. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers urges river users to avoid the Intracoastal Waterway.

MAPS

Matagorda County highway department maps and USGS topographic maps of Bay City, Markham, Blessing SE, Wadsworth, Matagorda and Matagorda SW quadrangles cover the area.