

# Friends of the Pecatonica River Foundation

# THE CURRENT

January 2025

The Pecatonica River is a designated "Water Trail." It has received recognition for that designation from Stephenson County, the federal government, and the State of Illinois. The designation is because the river was used commercially in the early development of Stephenson County. Boats transported cattle, lumber, and people to Freeport. A steamboat was built in Winslow and plied the mighty Pecatonica. Clam harvesting was an industry near Winslow at one time. A dam was constructed at Freeport to operate a mill, introducing manufacturing to Freeport. This site would light up the world with Burgess Batteries and later shut off electrical things with Micro Switches. Former Burgess employees started Micro Switch in the Wagner Printing building, expanded into the Henny Buggy factory, and later in the Kraft Cheese faculty, located downstream from Burgess and across the Pecatonica River.

Because of the effort of a relatively small group, the Pecatonica River is a local attraction for canoeing and kayaking, fishing, and motor boating. The major factor in this is the remediation of land, formerly the Burgess Battery site, which provided a Freeport base for river access.

A boat launch at Winslow and one at Freeport do not constitute a water trail. Working with the Illinois Paddling Council, FPRF developed a plan for locating launch sites for paddlers traveling from Wisconsin to the Rock River. Winnebago County has launch sites in various park settings. All we needed to do was add sites in Stephenson County!

At this point we have a group of creative and dedicated people. A site for development was observed when a site next to the Pecatonica was being cleaned up due to a change in ownership. Through the effort of the Lena Community Park District and a BAAD Grant from the IDNR, McNeil's Damascus Landing was designed and built!

How many of you know that the McConnell launch site was formally a dump? That was long ago. Stephenson County has ownership of the site. When FPRF expressed interest in acquiring the site for use as a canoe/kayak launch site, they made us an offer we couldn't refuse. The "pond" next to McConnell was part of the original riverway. In the 1930s, they rerouted as part of a flood mitigation plan. A motorboat launch at the end of the "dike" was built by volunteers, and it broke off years ago. It provided an unofficial launch site. McConnell is a potential site for a motorboat launch. At some point, I would expect someone to ask, "Why are you doing all this?" I would answer, "In part because the Pecatonica River is a great place to paddle! Canoes, kayaks, and boating are great additions to the Jane Addams Trail and the Pecatonica Prairie Trail as recreational attractions for residents and tourism!

If you are boating on the Pecatonica River in Stephenson County, you might notice a small sign on each side of every bridge over the Pecatonica River. That sign is a "river mile marker" that tells the number of miles on the river to the mouth of the river, which would be where it joins the Rock River.

You can easily recognize the site of the former Brown's Mill Dam and the dam at Pecatonica. The wide spot in the river above the walking path bridge at Tutty's Crossing is the only visual indication of the original dam. I've only found one picture of the millrace for Manufacture's Island.

The Pecatonica River wasn't just an obstruction to travel westward! It was a power source for creating lumber, milling grain, and generating electricity. The industries that started with water power were key to developing manufacturing by providing skilled trades necessary for future development. Tourism is today's focus for our river. Can you help?

Joe Ginger

## MEETINGS & EVENTS

Everyone is invited. Bring your ideas!

Dec. 12	RAFTERS 6:30 P.M.
Jan.. 9	Next meeting.
Feb. 13 Mar. 13	FPRF meetings are the second Thursday of the month. See "ALL IN. Stephenson County" for area events.
	<a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/d/il-freeport/events/">https://www.eventbrite.com/d/il-freeport/events/</a>

## Other Events & Activities

Freeport/Stephenson County

<https://greaterfreeport.com>



Watch Tom Lindblade's  
"Illinois' Friendliest Paddle"  
<http://bit.ly/paddlethepec>



815-990-2307 / 815-275-2064

Freeport Park District  
1122 S. Burchard Ave.  
Freeport, IL 61032  
1-815-235-6114

Lena Community Park District  
609 N. Schuler St.  
Lena, IL 61048  
1-815-369-5351  
[www.lenaparks.org](http://www.lenaparks.org)

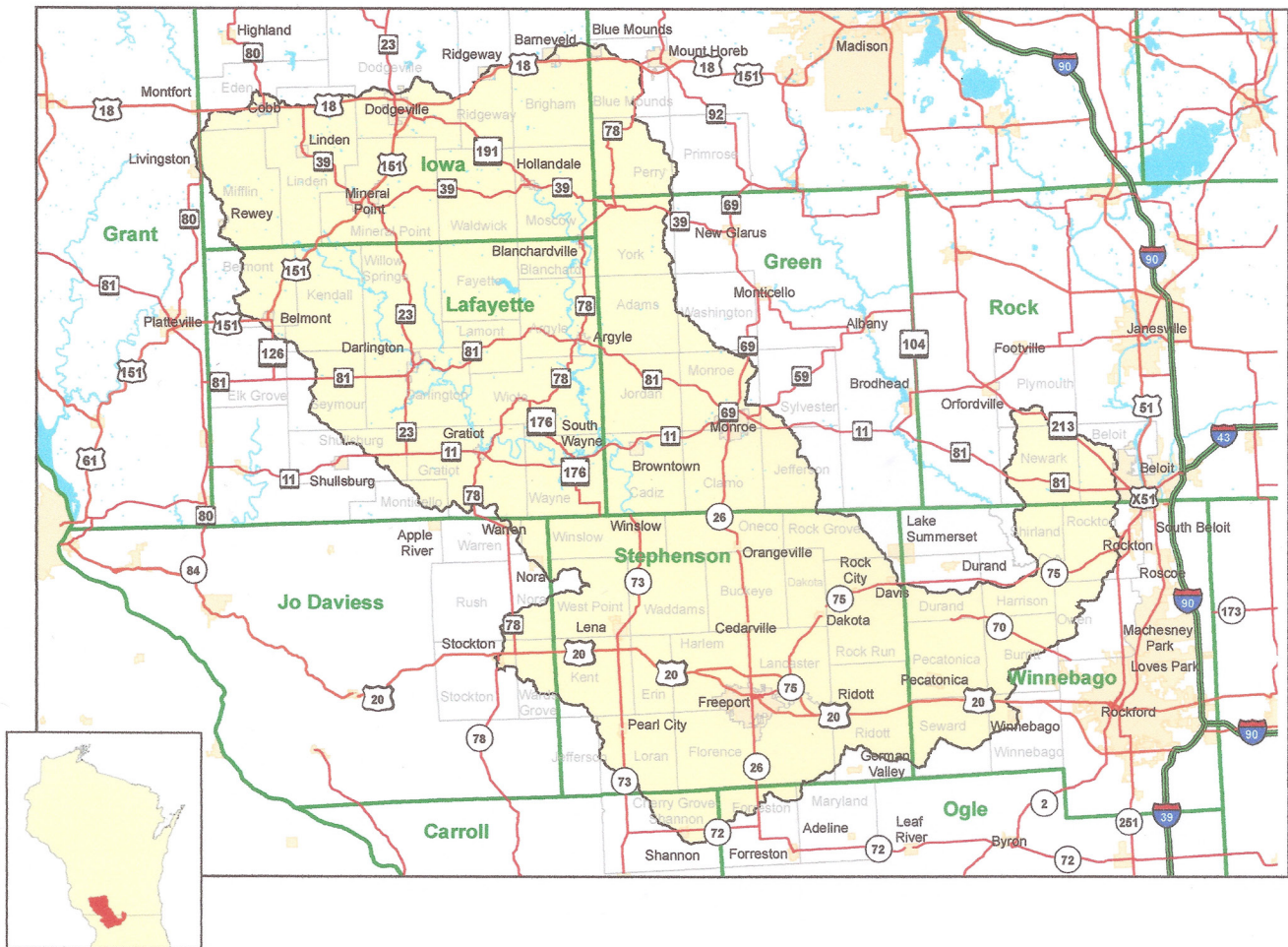


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*A limited number of "Pecatonica River Scenes in Postcard" are available at \$12 + \$3 S&H.*



## Pecatonica River Watershed Map - Wisconsin

If you are interested in improving river stewardship, promoting paddling, organizing river events, the history of the Pecatonica River and communities along the river, check our website and contact us.

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\*We will not share or sell your email address.

Roger Schamberger – President  
Joe Ginger – Vice President  
Lee Butler -- Secretary /Treasurer  
Betty Butler -Membership  
Jake Backus-Safety Chair

Friends of the Pecatonica River Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization.  
Dues are due in February. If you joined in July or later, you are good for 2024.  
All donations are tax deductible and should be made payable to:  
Friends of the Pecatonica River Foundation.

