



The Winnebago River Water Trail

Welcome to the Winnebago River! The river enters Winnebago County after originating at Bear Lake in southern Minnesota and meanders 27 miles southeasterly through the county, eventually flowing into the Shell Rock River near Rockford, Iowa, in Floyd County. In its travels, it flows through parts of two states and six counties.

As you float down the river, you will encounter Iowa at its finest! You will leisurely travel through some of the state's richest farmland, as well as some very scenic wooded areas. Much of the land along the river is part of the Winnebago River Greenbelt, a series of park, recreation, and wildlife areas owned by the Winnebago County Conservation Board. Although few of these areas provide amenities for the canoeist, they do help to protect the river's watershed and provide wonderful scenery along the way.

Two parks along the way, though, do provide camping and other outdoor recreational opportunities. Dahle Park, managed by the Winnebago County Conservation Board, has a small campground with electricity, as well as water, a pit toilet, and a shelterhouse. Pammel Park, managed by the Forest City Parks and Recreation Department, also provides electrical camping sites, as well as a showerhouse with restrooms, playground equipment, and a disc golf course. Other parks are also within easy walking distance of Pammel. In addition, the towns of Leland and Forest City, both located right along the river, provide other amenities, such as restaurants and convenience stores.

We hope you enjoy your journey along the scenic Winnebago River and that you will return again to enjoy the beauty and hospitality of Winnebago County!

Winnebago County Conservation Board, www.winnebagoccb.com, 888-841-8580, 641-565-3390

Canoeing Guidelines

Canoeing down a river can be a very enjoyable and relaxing activity. But, it can also be hazardous if you embark on a trip unprepared. So, please follow these simple safety rules when canoeing.

- Don't overload your canoe and keep as much equipment as possible in waterproof bags.
- Always check the river's water level and current before you take off. Also be aware of the weather forecast and keep an eye on the weather throughout your trip.
- If you are traveling solo, make sure someone knows where you plan to put in and take out and when to expect you back.
- Always wear an approved personal flotation device that fits correctly.
- Rivers are notorious for overhanging trees, logjams, and other obstacles. Never try to paddle through such areas. If paddling around them is not possible, get out and portage around them. Also, never grab onto tree branches as you're canoeing; doing so can easily cause your canoe to capsize.
- Always portage around lowhead dams. Even though they often look easy to run, their undercurrent can be strong enough to pin and hold your canoe.
- If you capsize, stay with your canoe; unless it is caught in an undercurrent, it will remain floating. As you float with the canoe, try to remain on the upstream side of the canoe to prevent from being pinned against something. And, if the water is cold, do not try to save your gear; just get out as soon as you can to prevent hypothermia.

By following these basic rules, and using a little caution, you should have a safe and enjoyable trip down the Winnebago River!



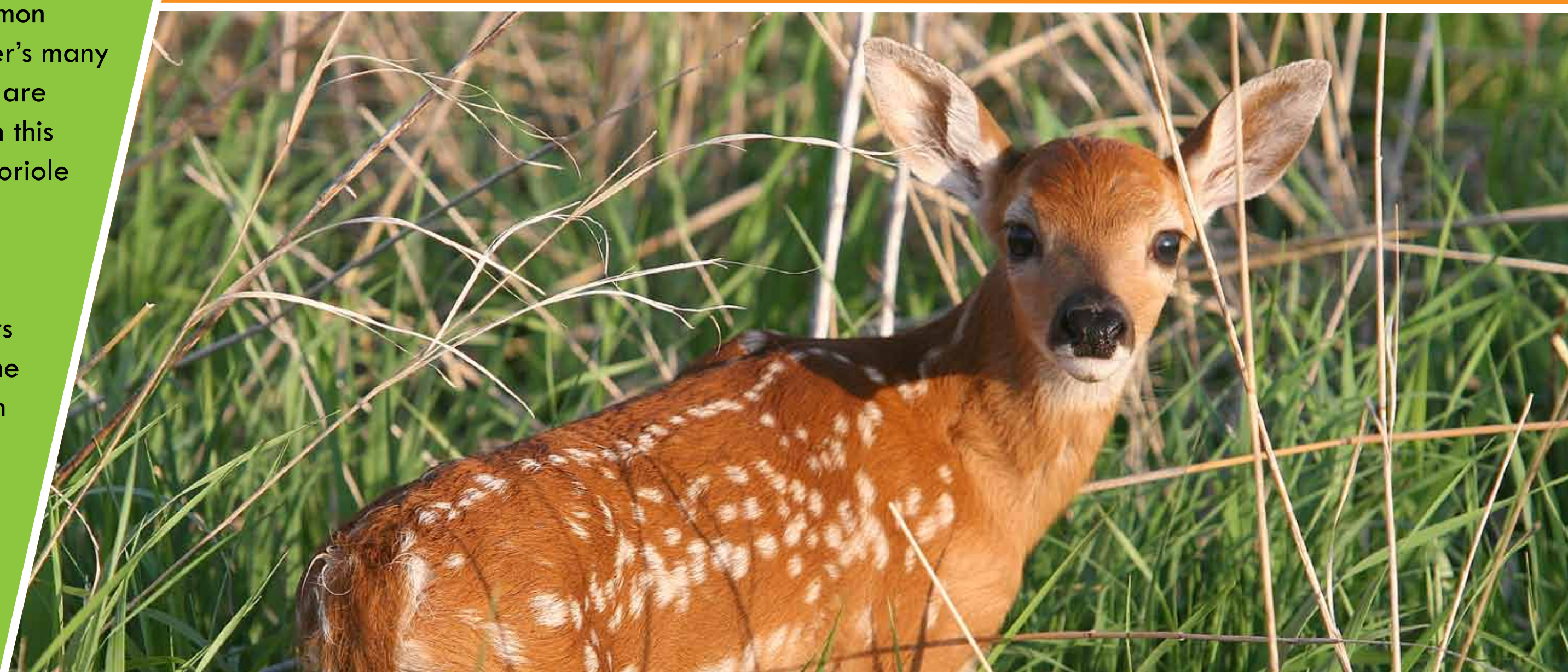
Winnebago River Wildlife

As you float down the Winnebago River, you will not be alone. Countless birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects, make their homes in and along the river. As a result, a quiet river trip can provide you with some excellent opportunities to see north Iowa's wildlife in its natural habitat.

The birds are probably what you will notice first. Herons abound along the river, often standing perfectly still along the shoreline until your canoe approaches. Bald eagles are not uncommon along the river, either, and ospreys can sometimes be seen searching for fish along the river's many bends. Wood ducks can often be observed flying through the woods and, of course, there are songbirds aplenty throughout the trees and fields that border the river. Other birds seen in this area include the barred owl, belted kingfisher, sandhill crane, trumpeter swans, baltimore oriole and eastern bluebird.

If you are lucky, you may also spot an occasional mink, beaver, or muskrat making its way through the water or along the shoreline, as well as a deer or two in the surrounding woods. And be on the lookout for the humorous antics of river otters along the shore. Otters completely disappeared from Iowa in the 1800s, but were reintroduced into the state in the 1980s. In 1990, 23 river otters were released along the Winnebago River north of Mason City, and their descendants now inhabit most of the river.

And finally, if you are observant enough, you may see a turtle or two slip into the water or a frog hop off a log. Even the beautiful dragonflies can add a quiet delight to your journey. So, make sure you take the time to enjoy all the life that there is to see and hear along the river.



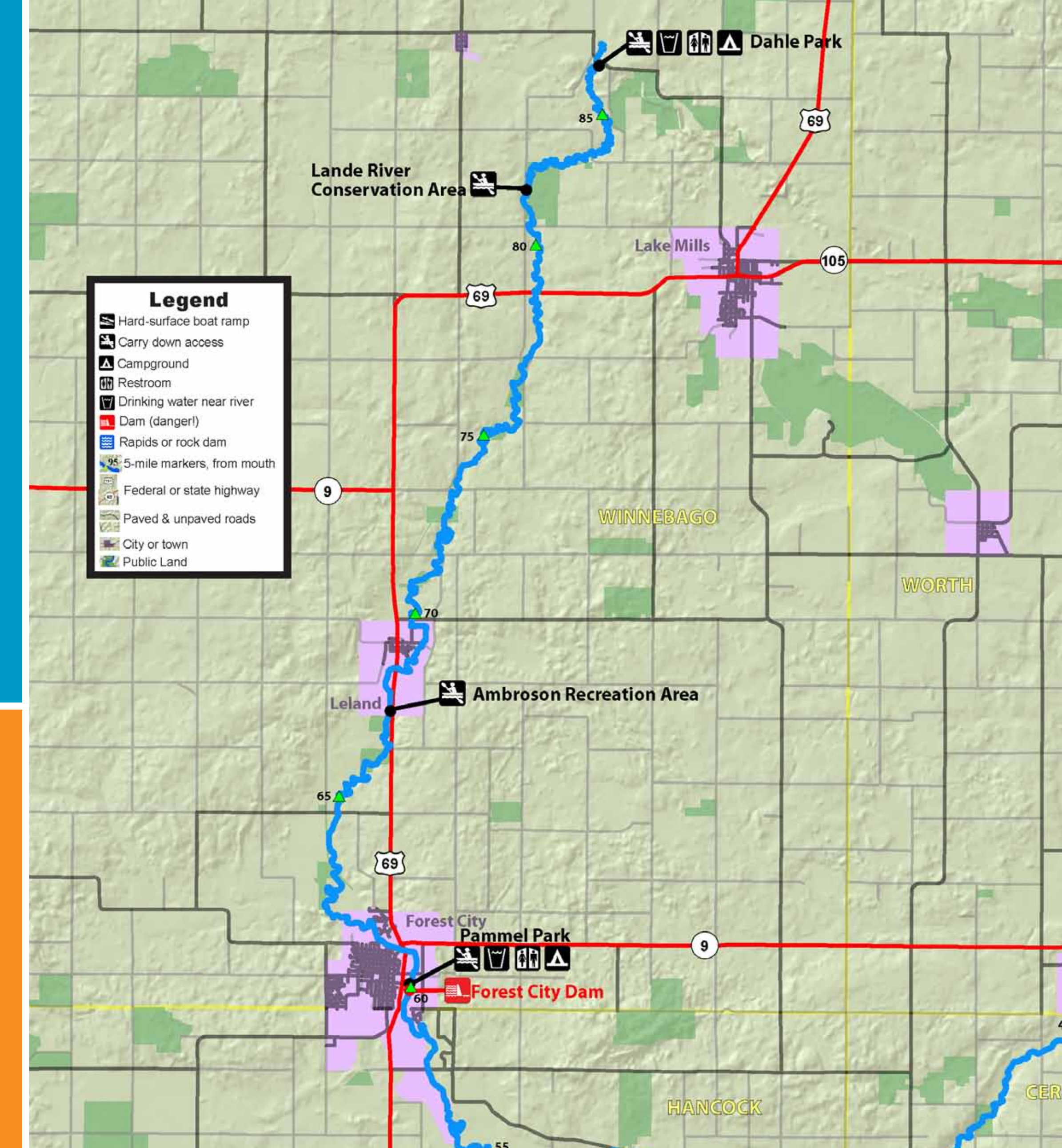
The History of the Upper Winnebago River Region

The landscape of north central Iowa was formed more than 10,000 years ago when the Des Moines Lobe of the Wisconsin Glacier retreated, leaving the region relatively flat, but with many small wetlands. Those wetlands, called "potholes," along with the prairies that sprung up after the glacier's retreat, dominated the land throughout this area for more than 100 centuries. Those prairie wetlands became a home to countless species of wildlife. During that time, various tribes of Native Americans also lived and traveled throughout this region, fishing the streams and hunting the bountiful fields and woods.

By the mid 1800s, people were beginning to settle in Winnebago County. Robert Clark platted Forest City in 1858, with the city's name chosen because of the nearby woods along the river. Farther north along the river, the city of Leland was founded in 1882, named after attorney John D. Leland, who had purchased a large amount of land in the area in 1878.

Although Winnebago County was named after the Winnebago Indians, it was the Dakota Sioux, as well as the Oto and Ioway tribes, who actually inhabited most of this area. Interestingly, the Winnebago River was originally called Lime Creek, after the extensive limestone deposits that characterize the lower portions of the river. In 1930, though, the river was officially renamed in a ceremony near today's Pammel Park in Forest City.

For many years, this river has traversed Winnebago County and northern Iowa, and it has witnessed many changes throughout history. If we are good stewards of the river, it will continue to serve us well into the future.



Photos courtesy Tim Ackarman

Fishing Along the Winnebago River

Despite its small size, the Winnebago River can provide some wonderful fishing opportunities. Although many of the river's fish are minnows, shiners, chubs, and darters, or rough fish such as carp, buffalo, and suckers, anglers do love to cast their line for the river's northern pike and channel catfish. In fact, northerns are regularly stocked in the river, and large fish are often caught. So, grab your fishing pole and try your luck!