

Excluding road bridges in incorporated cities and villages, the river is crossed 25 times on the mainstream. There are eight railroad bridges crossing the mainstream.

EXISTING USES AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

A. Land Use

The Flat River watershed is situated in the rural areas of Ionia, Montcalm and Kent counties. Based on available information from these counties, the major land use of the area is agriculture which utilizes 780,700 acres (57%) of the available 1,386,240 acres. Of the total acreage in agriculture, 63.8% is harvestable crops, the remaining acreage is utilized for pasture or lies idle.

The second largest land use is forestland which accounts for 325,800 acres or 23% of the land area. Although much of the forestland is in small woodlots, considerable acreage lies within the boundaries of the state game areas in the watershed. Timber harvest is not a major industry in the watershed, but figures show that 99% of the small woodlots are commercially harvested.

Based strictly on county figures, recreational uses make up only about 3% of the land area. However, this figure would be considerably higher when one considers the recreational use derived from forested areas and the allowed hunting on agricultural acreage.

B. Private Recreation Facilities

There are 21 private campgrounds within the Flat River watershed which provide 1,194 sites to the camping enthusiast. Most of these are located on the western edge of the watershed, in eastern Kent County. There presently exists only two canoe liveries which offer 25 canoes for rent on the Flat River.

The Flat River Historical Society has developed the Flat River Museum in the Old Ridley Warehouse site in the City of Greenville. The museum is open to the public and includes displays on the lumbering era, the geography and geology of the watershed, farming tools and household goods, businesses of the watershed, and archives including newspapers, photographs and genealogical files.

The Lowell Showboat is docked near the Lowell Dam, and annually presents some of the most famous entertainers in the nation. Both the Girl Scouts of America and the Young Marines own and operate recreational camps for young people along the Flat River. Other recreational activities provided by private sources include golf courses, horseback riding, snowmobile and off-road vehicle racetracks, both Alpine and cross-country skiing, and rental cottages.

C. Public Recreation Facilities

Although not located in the watershed, there are six state parks and two state recreation areas located in adjacent counties, easily within an hour drive of the Flat River. These parks provide a full range of recreational opportunities, as shown in the list on the following page.

There are 34 county, township or municipal parks in the three county area. However, only six are located within the watershed. These parks provide a great deal of recreation for day use type activities.

In addition to the parks and recreation areas, there are nine state game areas in the three county area encompassing the watershed. Four of the game areas are located along the Flat River or its tributaries.

STATE FACILITIES

Park Name	Acres	Recreation Facilities and Opportunities
White Cloud	89	80 campsites, picnicking, playground, hiking, fishing, boat launch.
Newaygo	257	99 campsites, boat launch, fishing.
Ionia	3817	picnicking, hiking, fishing, boat launch, cross-county skiing and snowmobiling.
Muskegon	1125	346 campsites, swimming, boat launch, picnicking, playground, fishing, hiking.
Hoffmaster	1030	333 campsites, swimming, boat launch, picnicking, playground, fishing, hiking.
Grand Haven	48	172 campsites, swimming, picnicking, playground, fishing.
Holland	142	342 campsites, picnicking, playground, swimming, fishing.
Yankee Springs Recreation Area	4972	368 campsites, swimming, picnicking, boat launch, playground, hiking, bridle path.
TOTALS	<u>11,480</u>	<u>1,740</u>

Although the primary function of the game areas is to provide a managed wildlife habitat which offers the public a place to hunt, it also provides areas for other recreational pursuits such as hiking, cross-county skiing and in some areas snowmobiling. Below is a list of these areas and the approximate acreage open to the public:

* Flat River State Game Area	10,415 acres
* Langston State Game Area	2,982 acres
* Edmore State Game Area	2,438 acres
* Lowell State Game Area	1,837 acres
Vestaburg State Game Area	1,986 acres
Stanton State Game Area	4,303 acres
Portland State Game Area	2,108 acres
Rogue River State Game Area	5,465 acres
Cannonsburg State Game Area	<u>1,336 acres</u>
TOTAL	32,670 acres

* Game areas in the Flat River Watershed.

Although there are 36 access sites in the three county area, only five provide access to the Flat River.

D. Fishing

The Flat River, especially below Greenville, is of sufficient size to allow float-type fishing, yet, in most areas, is shallow enough to allow wading fishermen a chance to apply their skills.

The Flat River has the reputation of being one of the best smallmouth bass streams in southern Michigan. The upper Flat from Six Lakes to Greenville contains fair populations of northern pike and rock bass with a few largemouth bass being taken in the area just down from Six Lakes. However, from Greenville down to Lowell, the river contains excellent populations of northern pike and rock bass. Wabasis Creek contains fair populations of smallmouth and northern with a few brown trout being taken.

An occasional spring fed stream in the headwater areas contain a few brook trout. However, Dickerson Creek and West Branch Creek offer the best possibilities for trout. Dickerson Creek is managed by the Department of Natural Resources to provide fair to good brown trout fishing. When rough fish and northern pike populations build up, the stream is chemically treated and restocked with browns. West Branch Creek contains fair populations of brook trout and for the patient, knowledgeable fisherman offers some nice catches.

E. Wildlife Observations and Hunting

Wildlife resources of the Flat River watershed are typical of those found in southern Michigan. They include species of farm game, forest game, waterfowl, furbearing animals and nongame species. Population density depends on the quality of the habitat which varies significantly from area to area throughout the watershed.

The watershed generally contains moderately productive farm game habitat. There is fair ring-necked pheasant and cottontail rabbit populations and good fox squirrel numbers. Quail are found in the basin, but their numbers are limited. Forest game species include primarily white-tailed deer and ruffed grouse. There is excellent ruffed grouse hunting in the upland areas adjacent to the river and tributaries, and a heavy white-tailed deer population throughout the watershed.

Furbearers are distributed throughout the watershed. Aquatic species such as muskrats and mink are restricted to the watercourses and associated marsh areas. Muskrats are abundant and mink are common in the area. A few beaver are beginning to establish themselves in the headwaters of the river system. Raccoons are numerous and red fox common throughout the watershed.

Waterfowl are numerous and generally distributed over all the water courses and wetlands of the basin. Mallards, black ducks, wood ducks and blue-winged teal constitute breeding populations. However, other species may be seen during spring and fall migrations.

In addition to the game and furbearing animals, a large number of nongame species are found in the watershed. These include a large variety of songbirds, shore birds, rodents, birds of prey, reptiles and amphibians.

Nine state game areas in or near the watershed offer numerous opportunities for hunting or wildlife observation.

F. Canoeing and Boating

Although much of the Flat River is canoeable, especially in the spring and early summer, the area from Greenville downstream to Lowell is the best. A moderate current, changing bottom types, vegetative cover, fish and wildlife, and two historic covered bridges makes this an enjoyable stretch to canoe. The river above Greenville to Langston flows slowly through lowland hardwood areas and many dead trees across the river makes it difficult to canoe. The river from Langston to Six Lakes is generally too small and brushy for enjoyable canoeing. The current will be greatly reduced or nil in the five impoundments making canoeing more difficult. Portages will be necessary at Greenville, Belding, Whites Bridge, Burroughs and Lowell dams to complete a trip from Langston to the Grand River. During low flows, canoeists should be extremely cautious at the old Smyrna Dam, which was removed a number of years ago, as the canoe may hit portions of the old structure causing damage to the canoe or possibly overturning it. Inexperienced canoeists would be advised to portage around this structure.

Except on the impoundments or lower river area, the river is not generally suitable for boating as it is quite shallow.

G. Historic and Archaeological Sites

The Flat River and surrounding areas are rich in historic values of state and national significance. In addition to being an important element in both Indian and lumbering history, the river boasts two of the remaining four original wooden covered bridges in Michigan. The oldest, Whites Bridge near Smyrna, was built in 1867. Both Whites Bridge and Fallasburg Bridge are on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. The third covered bridge of historic significance is located a few miles west of the Flat, at Ada, on the Thornapple River. Although only a few historic sites are located within the Flat River watershed, there are over 50 in the surrounding counties.

Archaeological surveys have identified numerous prehistoric sites, such as Indian villages, campsites, mounds and burial sites, along the Grand and Thornapple rivers in the vicinity of the Flat. Since the Flat River was a major route of travel for the Indians, the upriver Flat River Trail from the Grand which was also crossed at Greenville by a major east-west trail, the Saginaw-Pentwater trail, it must be assumed that many additional sites are in this area.

A detailed historical and archaeological sites survey has not been done for the Flat River. However, numerous sites have been identified (see Appendix A). A professional survey of the river area would undoubtedly uncover more sites.

