

The Cacapon River Water Trail



Welcome to the Cacapon River Water Trail!

Stretching approximately 65 miles to the Cacapon River's confluence with the Potomac, the Cacapon River Water Trail offers paddlers a rich and varied paddling experience. Along the way you will see abundant wildlife, bucolic farmland, and breathtaking cliffs and rock formations. The Water Trail passes through the most biodiverse watershed of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay tributaries, giving paddlers a rare glimpse into large intact forest blocks all but lost in many other places. Bring your binoculars to view a large variety of birds and mammals, and your fly rod to fish one of the best bass fisheries in the state.

Natural Resources



The Cacapon River Watershed, located in the Central Appalachian mountains, is a diverse and wondrous place, still dominated over large areas by functional and largely intact natural ecosystems. The watershed's forests are part of the great "lungs" of the East, providing oxygen, regulating the water cycle, sequestering greenhouse gases, and moderating climate.

The variety of geology, landforms, and elevation in the Central and Southern Appalachians is much greater than in most of eastern North America. They combine in many different ways, creating an array of environmental settings, which in turn can support myriad plants and animals. Because the Pleistocene glaciers 13,000 years ago never reached farther south than central Pennsylvania, life here

Rare Habitat

SHALE BARRENS - which occur in small numbers throughout the valleys of the Cacapon, Lost, and North Rivers - are very dry environments on steep, south-facing slopes of shale. Because of extremely droughty conditions, they support only a few stunted and gnarled trees and even herbs and grass might be scarce. Naturalists prize shale barrens because of the plants that are known only from these dry barrens. Among these endemics, the shale barren evening-primrose, Greene's

hawkweed, shale barren goldenrod, mountain pimpernel, shale barren ragwort and the very unusual Kates Mountain clover are all found in the Cacapon River Watershed.

(Source: Rodney Bartgis, State Director WV Chapter The Nature Conservancy)

Water Trail Overview

Water Trails are routes on a stream, river or lake that provide boaters a recreational, scenic, historical or educational opportunity. **The Cacapon River Water Trail flows through private property where riverbanks are not open to public use. We ask that you please respect the rights of these private landowners by not coming on shore without permission.**

Points to Remember

- Kayaks and non-aluminum canoes are the recommended vehicles for exploring.
- There are no public restroom facilities located along the River Trail or at the Public Access points. Human waste and toilet paper should be disposed of in a container with a tight fitting lid and taken to flush toilets.
- There is no public camping along the Water Trail. However, numerous public and private campgrounds are located throughout the watershed. Please see the map for locations.
- Hypothermia is a life-threatening condition in which your body loses heat faster than it can produce it. Avoid wearing cotton and always bring a dry bag with a change of clothes. Plan on getting wet. If the air and water temperature combined is less than 100 degrees, it is not safe to paddle. Emergency treatment for hypothermia: get into dry clothes, start a fire, and drink warm beverages. Get off the river

as quickly as possible, if you are cold and don't have dry clothing.

- Cacapon River is seasonal and is best run in spring or fall. Please check the water level before beginning your trip.

CAPON LAKE TO CAPON BRIDGE

Distance: 15 miles
Access Point: There are two DNR access points between Capon Lake and Capon Bridge

The long section of the Cacapon River from Capon Lake to Capon Bridge is flat water with occasional riffles during medium flows. There are nice pools for swimming and cliffs for viewing. Look for bald eagles and river otters. In low water this section can be challenging to paddle and slow going. Bass fishing is great at the base of rapids, in the eddies below the large rocks, and in the slow pool areas.

CAPON BRIDGE – ROUTE 127

Distance: 11.5 miles
Paddling Time: 4-5 hours
Skill Level: Class 1-3

The most popular section of the river, this section qualified for Wild and Scenic Designation in the late 1980's. It contains exquisite scenery and challenging whitewater for the intermediate paddler. The trip begins with flat water and a few riffles flowing

through open farmland. After a few miles the river heads left passing high rocky cliffs. After this there are three river-wide ledges that require skill and possible scouting. Toward the end of the run, the Caudy's Castle rock formation is seen high on the left. From there to the Route 127 bridge is mostly flat water.

- 1st ledge – located at the end of a right hand turn with a cliff on the left can be run on the left to center, but is best run on the far right in low water.
- 2nd ledge – is at the end of a spectacular rock formation called Chapel Rock. It is best run on the left.
- 3rd ledge – largest – intermediate paddlers should scout first best passage is on the right.

ROUTE 127 BRIDGE – POTOMAC RIVER

Distance: 38.3 miles
Access Point: There are five DNR access points between 127 and Potomac River.

This section has very little gradient and is a great float-fishing stream, passing through some of the best bass fishing in the state. It transcribes huge loops through the mountains and ridges with beautiful scenery, very few rapids, and many long, flat pools. **Obstacle: Dam located about 4 miles above Great Cacapon – portage on the left.**

OTHER SPECIES YOU MAY SEE



From Top Left, clockwise:
Interrupted Fern (*Osmunda claytoniana*)
Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)
Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*)
Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Images	Wood Duck: George Gentry/USFWS
Cinnamon Fern: Barbara Rodgers	Wood Turtle: Ray Culter
Eastern Red Columbine: Kelly Watkinson	Northern River Otter: Jim Leopold/USFWS
PawPaw: www.public-domain-image.com	Great Blue Heron: Robert Burton/USFWS
Interrupted Fern: Kurt Stueber	Bald Eagle: George Gentry/USFWS
Eastern Brook Trout: Eric Engbreton/USFWS	Black Bear: Waverly Traylor/USFWS
Smallmouth Bass: Eric Engbreton/USFWS	

Eagle, Osprey or Vulture?

- Eagle**
flat wing profile
- Osprey**
gull-like crook in its wing
- Turkey Vulture**
wings appear as a wide sloping V-shape

WOOD TURTLE (*Glyptemys insculpta*) is a turtle only found in North America and a species of special concern in West Virginia. The top shell is rough, and each large scute supports an irregular pyramid formed by a series of concentric growth ridges. Wood turtles are semi-aquatic, and prefer streamside habitats, marshes, wet meadows, and forest edges. Wood turtles are dependent on good stream health and excellent water quality. When waterways harboring turtles become degraded, wood turtles lose their over wintering habitat, foraging grounds, and preferred breeding habitat.

NORTHERN RIVER OTTER (*Lutra canadensis*) the largest member of the weasel family, is a thickset mammal with short legs, a neck no smaller than its head and webbed hind feet. River otters were extirpated in the state by the 1950's due to pollution and unregulated trapping. In the 1980's, West Virginia began one of the first successful river otter reintroduction programs. River otters are often blamed for the depletion of game fish, but this is not true. Food-habit studies have all indicated that the bulk of the Northern River Otter diet consists of nongame fish species. In many circumstances river otters, are beneficial to game fish populations because they remove nongame fish that would otherwise compete for food.

Mileage & GPS Information (WVDNR sites)

From	To	Miles
Capon Lake Lat: 39.1582; Long: -78.5347	Yellow Spring Lat: 39.1828; Long: -78.5060	2.5
Yellow Spring Lat: 39.1828; Long: -78.5060	Yellow Spring North Lat: 39.2339; Long: -78.4651	5
Yellow Spring North Lat: 39.2339; Long: -78.4651	Cacapon Bridge Lat: 39.2981; Long: -78.4351	7.5
Cacapon Bridge Lat: 39.2981; Long: -78.4351	Rt. 127 Bridge Lat: 39.4032; Long: -78.4174	11.5
Rt. 127 Bridge Lat: 39.4032; Long: -78.4174	Cacapon Crossing Lat: 39.4520; Long: -78.4248	9
Cacapon Crossing Lat: 39.4520; Long: -78.4248	Rt. 9 Bridge Lat: 39.5282; Long: -78.3486	18
Rt. 9 Bridge Lat: 39.5282; Long: -78.3486	CR7 Bridge Lat: 39.5817; Long: -78.3088	5.5
CR7 Bridge* Lat: 39.5817; Long: -78.3088	Cacapon Power Plant Lat: 39.6055; Long: -78.2827	3
Cacapon Power Plant Lat: 39.6055; Long: -78.2827	Great Cacapon Lat: 39.6186; Long: -78.2823	2.8

* contains dam to be portaged on the left

Stocked Trout Streams - Fishing License Required

West Virginia Trout anglers are indebted to local landowners. Without local landowner consent and generosity, Trout fishing would be restricted to state and federal lands. The opportunity for continued stocking and use of private property is largely dependent upon appropriate angler attitudes and conduct. Most stocked stream closures are the result of disrespect for private property. For more detailed information on stocking dates and individual access sites go to: www.wvdnr.gov/fishing/public_access.asp.

Fishing License information: 304-558-2758

Stream	Trout Stocking Area
Dillions Run	from Rt. 50 bridge upstream 4 miles
Edwards Run	from mouth upstream 3 miles
Lower Cove Run	from National Forest Boundary upstream 1 mile
Waites Run	Rt. 55 bridge Wardensville upstream 6.5 miles
Trout Run	from mouth at Wardensville upstream 7 miles
Lost River	Lost City & Lost River bridges downstream to one mile above Rt. 55 bridge

The Cacapon and Lost River Valleys

The Cacapon and Lost River lies just over 100 miles west of Washington D.C., tucked away in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle. It is one of the area's best kept natural secrets. The 125-mile long Cacapon & Lost River Valley is known for its striking scenery, excellent fishing and hunting, diverse wildlife, and fine canoeing & kayaking. As the third largest tributary of the Potomac River, the Cacapon and Lost River is an American Heritage River.

The River is comprised of three major segments and many smaller streams. Its headwater stream is known as the Lost River. This 30.9-mile-long stretch receives its distinctive name because, during low water, it abruptly terminates into a one-mile underground course starting near the town of McCauley, WV. As the River emerges just west of Wardensville, WV, it takes the name Cacapon. The traditional Native American translation of the word "Cacapon" means Medicine or Healing Waters.

The River and its tributaries are solely within West Virginia and meander through portions of Hardy, Hampshire and Morgan Counties before they join the Potomac River near the town of Great Cacapon. The largest tributary of the Cacapon, equal in size to the Lost River segment, is the North River.

Overall, the 680 square-mile watershed is one of the most pristine of those draining into the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay. Statistics



TIPS FOR GAUGING WATER LEVELS:

- **USGS South Fork of the South Branch Gauge** (Moorefield, WV): Should read between 1.8 ft (barely runnable) and 5 ft (highly runnable).
- **USGS Great Cacapon Gauge:** Should read at least 2 ft.
- **Other Indicators:**
 - The riffle viewed downriver from the US 50 bridge in Capon Bridge should look runnable without scraping.
 - Highest water levels occur in spring and fall.

For the most up to date information on river access and for links to USGS water gauges in Moorefield and Great Cacapon visit us at www.cacaponguide.com.

TRAVEL TIME: Depending on paddling speed and river flow, expect float times from 1 to 3 miles per hour.



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Stocking Period
once in February, once every two weeks March - May
once in February, once every two weeks March - May
once/month: February - May
once in January, twice in February and once/week: March – May
once in January, twice in February and once/week: March – May
once in January, twice in February, once/week: March – May and once/week: Columbus Day week & the next week



produced by the West Virginia Chapter of The Nature Conservancy in 2006 indicated that 86 percent of the 125-mile-long watershed remained forested, leading to its 2007 designation as the most biodiverse of the Potomac River tributary watersheds.

Numerous federal, state, and local parks protect significant public acreage in the watershed, including the George Washington National Forest, Cacapon and Lost River State Parks, as well as Nathaniel Mountain, Short Mountain, and Edwards Run Wildlife Management Areas.

(Source: Cacapon Voices: Listening to the Land. WVU Press)

Cacapon and Lost River Valley Guide:

The Cacapon River Water Trail



Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust

Natural wonders in the Cacapon River watershed - like Ice Mountain and the wetlands on Short Mountain, the sweep of large remote forests around Sugar Knob and Big Schloss, the iconic scenery of Cacapon Mountain, and the recreational opportunities at Trout Pond and Short Mountain - are available as public lands for all to enjoy because somebody took action to conserve these lands. Though the privately protected lands in the watershed are not open to the public, they remain critical in maintaining the quality of your Water Trail experience and the healthy and rural nature of this watershed for generations to come. The Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust has worked with the local community to protect the forests, farms, rural heritage, and water quality of the Cacapon and Lost River Valley since 1994. The primary tool by which this mission is accomplished is through the use of conservation easements. Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements between a landowner and a land trust that protect the land and its conservation values permanently. The Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust, one of the largest land trusts in the state, has helped private landowners protect over 11,000 acres to date.

For more information on conservation easements or to support the work of the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust please visit our website at www.cacapon.org or contact us at (304) 856-1010 or Route 1 Box 328, High View, WV 26808.



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Visit www.cacaponguide.com for more information.

