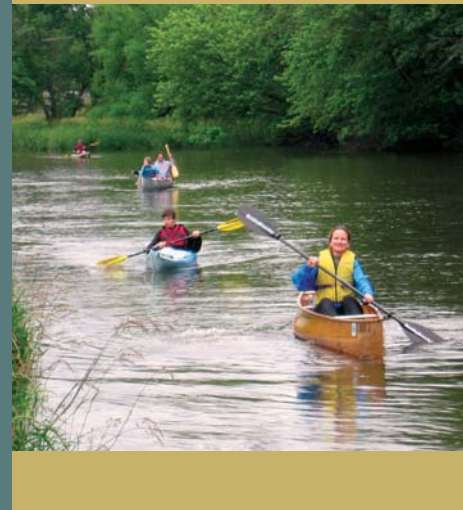


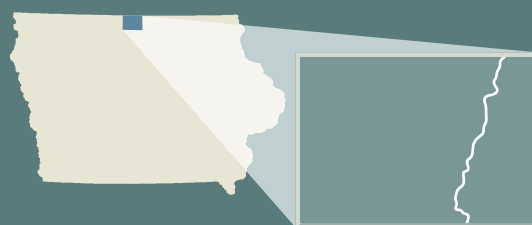
WINNEBAGO RIVER WATER TRAIL



WINNEBAGO WATER TRAIL INFORMATION

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 six counties. The Winnebago River is a navigable “non-meandered” stream in Iowa. That means that the State of Iowa owns the water flowing through it, but not the land adjacent to it or under it. Except at access sites and public areas marked on the map, the land adjacent to and underneath the river is private. Please respect it and don't trespass.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY



PADDLER RESPONSIBILITIES

Avoid fallen or low-hanging trees (strainers) that can capsize boats and trap people under water.

WARNING! Low-head dams can trap and drown boaters. These dams can be difficult to see from upstream. Carry around all dams!

- In case of emergency call 911
- Most of the land along the banks is private.
- Please respect private property.
- Always check the weather before starting your trip.
- Water levels change. Never launch when the river is rising quickly or is at or near flood stage.



For more information, contact:
Winnebago County
Conservation Board
34496 110th Ave.
Forest City, IA 50436
Phone: 888.841.8580
www.winnebagoccb.com



CLUES TO THE UPPER WINNEBAGO RIVER HISTORY

As you drive to and from the river – watch for evidence that a glacier was here! You can see a flattened landscape with many little dips in fields that are often wet, and that prior to underground drainage were wetlands with waterfowl and muskrats. You may also see piles of rocks farmers have placed in field corners after the glacier pushed them here from Canada.



Field stones

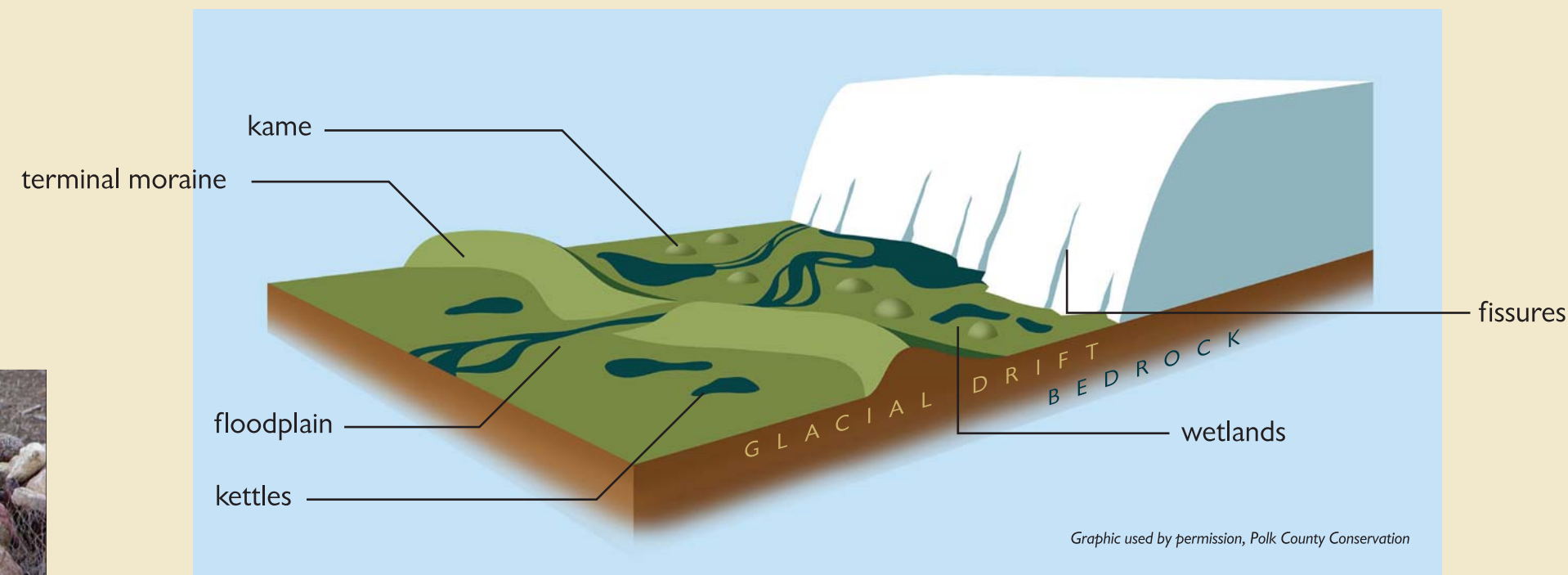


Sioux village by George Catlin

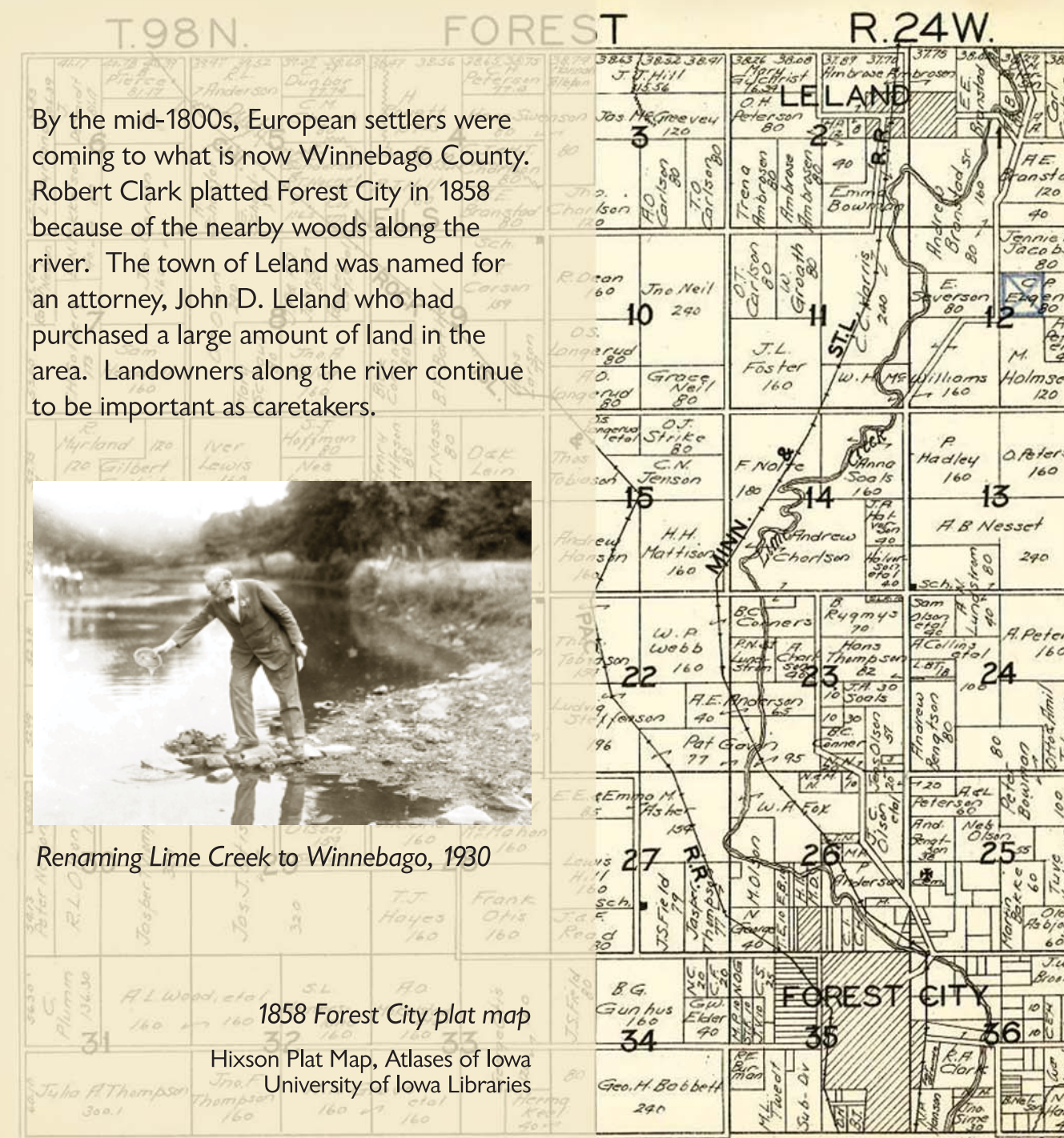
Although Winnebago County was named for the Winnebago Indians, the Dakota Sioux, as well as the Oto and loway tribes, inhabited most of the area for a much longer period. The Winnebago River was originally called Lime Creek, after the extensive limestone deposits in the lower portion of the river. It was renamed in 1930.

The majority of the county's deep and productive soils were created after the glaciers receded and the land became covered with thousands of acres of native prairie uplands and flourishing wetlands. To enhance agriculture in the early 1900's, underground tile was installed draining those wetlands. With the introduction of the steel plow, the prairies were converted to row crops. Today, only remnants of those prairies and restored wetlands exist on both public and private lands, providing wildlife habitat, reducing soil erosion, and improving water quality.

Photo NRCS



Graphic used by permission, Polk County Conservation



By the mid-1800s, European settlers were coming to what is now Winnebago County. Robert Clark platted Forest City in 1858 because of the nearby woods along the river. The town of Leland was named for an attorney, John D. Leland who had purchased a large amount of land in the area. Landowners along the river continue to be important as caretakers.



Renaming Lime Creek to Winnebago, 1930

Once you're floating on the river, look up to see the rich black soil of farmland and scenic woods along the way. You may see pipes with water coming out of the banks – they are evidence of underground drainage for farmland that carries excess rainwater away from fields so they can be productive for agriculture. Many of these were originally installed in the early 1900s although the pipes may have been updated from the original clay tiles.

Much of the land along the river is part of the Winnebago River Greenbelt, a series of parks, recreation and wildlife areas owned by the Winnebago County Conservation Board. The public land serves to improve the river's water quality with natural water filters such as grass cover, wetlands and woodlands. The very scenic public lands provide other amenities for paddlers if you plan ahead where you need to stop. Other land along the river is private property – remember that as you float on Iowa waters you are a guest of the landowners.

WINNEBAGO RIVER WATER TRAIL

BE SAFE OUT THERE!

Keep your trip enjoyable by following these safety TIPS:

- Don't overload your boat and keep as much equipment as possible in waterproof bags.
- Check with someone who knows the river's water levels and current if you're new to the river.
- Watch the weather forecast including the area upstream and keep an eye on the weather during your trip.
- Make sure someone knows where you plan to put in and take out and when to expect you back.
- Always wear a life jacket that fits correctly.
- Expect overhanging trees, logjams, and other obstacles. If paddling around them is not possible, get out and portage around them. Grabbing onto tree branches may capsize your paddlecraft.
- Always portage around lowhead dams. Even though they may look easy to run, their undercurrent can be strong enough to trap and drown you.
- If you capsize, remain on the upstream side of your boat to prevent from being pinned.
- Dress appropriate to weather conditions (including air & water temperatures), and avoid weather and water conditions beyond your skill level.

BEHAVE AS A GUEST!

- Respect private property. Only use public lands and access points.
- Be considerate to others in your group and on the banks.
- Give anglers a wide berth.
- Never change clothes in public view.
- Never litter. Always pack out trash.
- Do not disturb wildlife.

FISHING THE WINNEBAGO RIVER

Despite its small size, the Winnebago River attracts anglers who love to cast a line for northern pike and channel catfish. Northerns are regularly stocked in the river and large fish are often caught. Many of the river's fish are minnows, shiners, chubs and darters that may be seen when the water is clear, making it fun for children to see the tiny fish. Carp, buffalo, and suckers also inhabit the waters of the Winnebago.



Darters



Northern pike
Getty Images/Nikolay Suslov

CAMPING & AMENITIES

Dahle Park at the uppermost end of the water trail has camping with electrical sites, water, a pit toilet and a shelterhouse. For more information contact Winnebago County Conservation Board; info@winnebagoccb.com or (641)565-3390, (888) 841-8580. Pammel Park in Forest City provides electrical camping sites, a showerhouse and restroom, playground equipment, and a disc golf course. For more information contact the Forest City Park and Recreation Dept., email at: fcparcsrec@wctatel.net or (641) 585-4860. Leland and Forest City, both located along the river, have restaurants. Forest City has convenience store services.

KEY

- Recreational level
- Challenge level
- City/Town
- Public Land
- Roadways
- Access
- Dam
- Riffles/Rock dam
- Information
- Water
- Restrooms
- Camping

WINNEBAGO RIVER WILDLIFE

In the 1800s river otters completely disappeared from Iowa but were reintroduced in the 1980's to many rivers. In 1990, 23 river otters were released into the Winnebago River north of Mason City and their descendants now inhabit most of the river. Raccoons, opossums, foxes, and coyotes will leave footprints on wet banks as evidence they've come for a drink or to find food.



River otter



Fox tracks



Bald eagle
Photo USFWS



Dickcissel

As you float quietly down the river you will not be alone! Birds you may hear include belted kingfishers and woodpeckers along the wooded areas. Watch ahead for herons standing perfectly still along the shoreline until your canoe approaches and they fly away. Bald eagles and ospreys can sometimes be seen searching for fish along the river's many bends. It's worth watching carefully for wood ducks, and Baltimore orioles flying through the woods, or a barred owl holding very still on a branch. In grassland or field borders you may see eastern bluebirds, American goldfinches, or dickcissels.

Turtles may slip into the water ahead of you; frogs will jump off a log or branch with a splash. Dragonflies and damselflies may escort you and eat flying insects such as mosquitoes along the way. Damselflies rest with their wings folded like the Ebony jewelwing below.



Belted Kingfisher
Photo USFWS



Twelve spotted dragonfly
Photo Carl Kurtz



Common Green Darter



Ebony jewelwing
Photo Aaron Brees

