

Kennedy Park to Harbor Town

The 8.5 mile Kennedy Park to Harbor Town section of the Wolf River is its most visibly urbanized, passing beneath 13 major roads and highways. Because waters may be deep and swift, this section should be attempted only by experienced paddlers.



This section of the Wolf River was completely channelized in the 1960's, resulting in down-cutting of the riverbed, eroded banks, and multiple large sandbars caused by the increased velocity of water. Despite the dramatic alteration of the channel and the many signs of abuse and neglect, the Wolf River still retains much of its beauty, and wildlife such as birds, deer, turtles, and fish can be seen. One is struck by the urban river's potential to be restored and appreciated as the treasure that it is.

The put-in for this section is the boat ramp at Kennedy Park at 4575 Raleigh-LaGrange Rd. Follow the entrance road all the way back past the ball fields to the remnants of a picnic and playground area. There is ample parking here, but the entrance gate is frequently locked, requiring a portage of about 100 yards from the ball fields. Expect the boat ramp to be muddy and slippery; there is likely to be broken glass and other debris in the area as well.

From the put-in, the channel is straight and wide. In low water conditions, there may be obstructions such as sand bars and occasional downed timber. Several sand bars, such as the one near Jackson Ave. and the Old Austin Peay Highway bridge, afford beach-like conditions and are good places to disembark for a while. Close to the Thomas Street bridge, the river channel becomes much wider and deeper and the current picks up speed. Roughly 8 miles from the put-in, the 2nd Street bridge is the last of 13 major roads and interstates which cross this stretch of the river. The mouth of the Wolf and its confluence with the Mississippi River can be seen from here, about a half-mile downstream. Until 1960, the Wolf flowed past Memphis along the east side of Mud Island, entering the Mississippi at the south end. The Wolf was dredged and dammed in 1960 to alter its course so that it entered the Mississippi at the north end of Mud Island instead.



The take-out point is to the left, about 100 feet from the Mississippi, at the Mississippi Greenbelt Park on the north end of Mud Island. Access is primitive, over riprap. There is a paved parking lot at the top of the hill. To reach the Mississippi Greenbelt Park by car, take A.W. Willis Ave. west to Island Dr., turn right and drive to the north end of Mud Island and the park, or take 2nd St. north to N. Mud Island Dr., turn left and drive to the end. Another take-out point can be found on the Mississippi River, around the corner from the mouth of the Wolf along the west side of Greenbelt Park. If continuing onto the Mississippi River, be VERY cautious of strong currents, eddies, barges and other boats.



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