



THE *Bluewater Trails* SERIES FLOATING FLOYDS FORK

New public access opens 9 more miles of creek
Story by Lee McClellan • Photos by Obie Williams

WHEN GROWING DEVELOPMENT licked at the last rural sections of southeastern Jefferson County, a group of visionaries formed the Future Fund to buy land along Floyds Fork Creek. They envisioned a park threading along the creek that would preserve its unique character while providing public access so everyone could enjoy this treasure.

From this vision arose The Parklands of Floyds Fork, a nearly 4,000-acre linear park made reality through a partnership between the Future Fund, Louisville Metro Government and 21st Century Parks.

The final downstream section of this new park system opened in April 2016. It added approximately 9 miles of paddling water; anglers now have some 20 miles to paddle from the upper to the lower access points. Paddlers and anglers will discover state-of-the-art facilities along this surprisingly pastoral edge of greater Louisville.



"The strength of the park, its size, really starts to hit home now that it is complete," said Scott Martin, park director for the Parklands of Floyds Fork. "Only 20 minutes from downtown, the park grants a great venue for relaxation and recreation in a natural setting. Nearly 1.2 million people live within a 20-minute drive of the park."

This tributary of the Salt River holds 40 species of fish, including a healthy population of smallmouth bass, rock bass, longear sunfish, along with a stable population of mussels and improving water quality.

"The diversity of life in the creek surprises people," Martin said.

David Baker, Central Fisheries District biologist for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, got a first-hand look while sampling fish populations in the creek over the past couple years.

Markers provide trip mileage.

"We saw a lot of quality smallmouth bass in Floyds Fork during population sampling this past spring, some of them up to 18 inches," he said. "They are fat and in excellent body condition. We saw good numbers of all sizes which provides good fishing for the future."

Those fishing Floyds Fork within the park may keep no more than one largemouth and one smallmouth bass a day. There is a 15-inch minimum size limit on both species. The stream has catch-and-release regulations for rainbow trout from Oct. 1 through March 31. Statewide limits apply for all other species of fish.

Anglers targeting smallmouth bass should focus on the deeper flowing shoals and pot holes. "The bigger smallmouth bass seem to really prefer that habitat on Floyds Fork," Baker said. "In the slower, deeper holes, you will see spotted and largemouth bass and big rock bass around root wads."

Three floats highlight this newly opened lower section of the park, which paddlers may combine to fit their time schedule. Before taking the trip, visit The Parklands' website at www.theparklands.org for alerts and current water levels.

CANE RUN TO SEATON VALLEY FLOAT

This 3-mile float holds textbook smallmouth bass habitat with many deep, boulder-strewn runs, pocket water, shoals and deep holes. Most of this float lies within the boundaries of The Strand, one of the five parks that make up The Parklands of Floyds Fork.

The put-in for this float is the Cane Run Primitive Access at 6500 Echo Trail. After crossing the creek on Seatonville Road (KY 1819), turn onto Echo Trail. Look carefully for a green, blue and white sign denoting the site. The carry down is somewhat lengthy and a bit strenuous.

This access is located on a ford of Cane Run, a tributary creek. During summer, paddlers may need to drag their boats to reach the main creek. Once on Floyds Fork, the creek opens into some excellent pocket water that holds smallmouth bass.

Approximately 600 yards into the float, just below the new pedestrian/bicycle bridge for the Louisville Loop, is a good hole for smallmouths, rock bass and longear sunfish. Probe this area with an in-line spinner or small silver and black crankbait. These lures imitate the abundant striped shiners found

in Floyds Fork.

Downstream of the bridge, fish the long hole and the root wads on river left for smallmouth bass.

If you've brought night crawlers, be sure to fish the flowing seam water from the midpoint to the tail of this hole. "You would not believe the channel catfish we saw in the lower part of that hole," Baker said. "It is full of them."

A nice touch for paddlers on Floyds Fork is the number of blue, white and green



signs attached to trees along the route. These denote river miles, upcoming landings and access spots. The landing at the end of this long hole makes an excellent place to picnic or take a break from paddling.

Past the landing, Floyds Fork bends left and drops. The deeper seam water just after the drop provides good smallmouth bass habitat. At the low water of summer, a 3-inch soft plastic jerkbait in the Albino Shad color hooked through the nose with a size 1/0 wide gap finesse hook works well.

The whitish color of the bait emulates the shiner species that call Floyds Fork home. Fish this lure under root wads or along the seams where fast current and slow water meet. Simply jerk the lure, let it settle, then repeat. This presentation imitates a struggling shiner, a biological trigger for predators to attack.

Continuing downstream, a bit more than a half mile from the bridge, Floyds Fork splits around an island and makes a long bend to the left. The hole just above the island is one of the best spots on this stretch for smallmouth bass. The main flow of the creek goes right at this spot and tumbles into

Left: Smallmouth bass provide plenty of action. Below: This pedestrian bridge in The Strand is part of a walking path that parallels the creek.





a small, boulder-lined gorge. Over time, the water carved a rockhouse from the cliff face; as you approach from upstream it appears the creek disappears into a cave.

This stretch holds pocket holes ideal for plopping a cork popper cast on fly fishing equipment.

The creek comes back together at the tail of the island to form a deep hole. The boulders on river right are good places to fish for smallmouth bass. Anglers, however, should work the entire hole with a black 4-inch finesse worm rigged on a $\frac{1}{8}$ -ounce lead-head jig.

After a series of mid-depth pools, Floyds Fork flows under another pedestrian/bike bridge, bends right and deepens significantly. Bluffs appear on river left, the highest in this stretch of the stream. Locals call this area Blue Bluff; it's remained a popular swimming hole for generations. The exposed rock in this stretch came from ancient sea beds laid down more than 400

Paddlers may encounter fallen trees that form strainers. It's best to portage around these obstructions.

million years ago.

Maps produced by The Parklands of Floyds Fork denote this stretch as The Palisades.

Floyds Fork then flows over a series of shallow and mid-depth holes. The creek also braids into flowing chutes above and below stream drops at normal summer flows. This area is called Mussel Bend for the numerous mussel beds found here.

Some of the holes grow deeper as the creek begins a gentle turn to the right. These holes are perfect spots to work a shad-colored, 3-inch soft plastic jerkbait in the current. Be sure to slowly probe the undercut banks for smallmouth bass.

Look for hand-laid limestone slabs along the stream bank in this stretch. Early residents installed these to prevent valuable

cropland from washing out during floods. Paddlers may see similar rock walls along streams in the Outer Bluegrass Region of Kentucky; some mark remnants of pioneer grist mills.

The Seatonville Road Bridge soon comes into view. Look for the large, tan-colored stone steps of the take-out just past the bridge on the left. These hefty stones are built to stay put during floods.

SEATON VALLEY TO BROAD RUN VALLEY FLOAT

This 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile section is excellent for a relaxed, all-day fishing float, or a half-day paddle for those who just want to enjoy the scenery.

On the way to the access site, travelers will see low, ancient walls when they turn from Seatonville Road onto Turkey Run Parkway. These walls border the historic Seaton Cemetery, with graves dating to the early 1800s.



Above: The high rock bank of The Palisades.

The first stretch of this float holds some deep water. In summer, it's a good section to work a floating/diving minnow on the surface in the early morning or late evening. Paddlers soon see a tall, high dirt bank. This is the beginning of Mary's Island, named in honor of donor Mary Bingham, and is formed by the convergence of Chenoweth Run and Floyds Fork.

Paddlers may notice a layer of gravel near the bottom of the island's bank. This was the course of the creek thousands of years ago.

The confluence of Chenoweth Run and Floyds Fork was the site of Funk's Mill, a major economic anchor for the long vanished community of Seatonville. The mill operated until 1876.

Paddlers should veer left at Mary's Island, being mindful that either side of the



Above: Park Director Scott Martin drifts past an ancient rock layer visible on the bank near Chenoweth Run. **Left:** Feisty longear sunfish are plentiful.



island holds the potential for strainers, or downed trees in the water. It's nearly a mile-long paddle around the island. Fishing here is marginal. It's better to keep paddling until reaching the better water downstream of the island.

Once past Mary's Island, the stream flows into a hard left-hand bend where paddlers will notice more pioneer stone work. This stretch of Floyds Fork often flows with a bit more color, making a 4-inch skirted double-tailed grub, commonly called a hula grub, an excellent choice. Motor oil is a good color to use. Rig these on $\frac{1}{16}$ - to $\frac{3}{16}$ -ounce leadheads to imitate crayfish crawling along

the bottom.

Floyds Fork next flows over long stretches of flat bedrock comprised of Grants Lake formation limestone. Small rapids dot this section; any pockets with flow and depth should be probed with shadow-colored soft plastic jerkbait.

The stream then begins a long, gentle bend to the right at Squire Boone Bottoms and tightens before flowing into a deep hole. This begins the best stretch of smallmouth bass water on this float.

A Rapala X-Rap in the glass ghost or silver blue color is an excellent choice here for bass. The good water continues until past the mouth of Turkey Run, which enters Floyds Fork on river left.

A yellow in-line spinner may draw strikes from smallmouth, but also attracts the chunky rock bass that live in this stretch. Anglers throwing this lure will also catch the colorful longear sunfish, one of the most gorgeous freshwater fish in North America.

The next section features massive sycamores lining the creek. Early pioneers sometimes camped in the hollows of these trees, which can reach 15 feet in diameter.



Paddlers soon arrive at a small community known as Munch-kinville, a group of fish camp cabins built after World War II.

Broad Run Road Bridge comes into view next. Broad Run, a tributary, flows into Floyds Fork on river left. The high dirt banks on river right show Broad Run's impact on Floyds Fork during floods.

Paddlers should also note another layer of ancient river gravel deposited at the bottom of bank. Park workers extracted two logs from this layer and had them tested. Testing showed one log was 1,500 years old.

The take-out is on the left, approximately a half mile downstream of the Broad Run Road Bridge. Look for the Parklands signs in the trees just above the take-out. A powerline also crosses the creek at this point.

BROAD RUN VALLEY TO CLIFFSIDE

This 2½-mile float makes a great paddle for those with only a few hours to spare. This stretch, which can be paddled straight through in an hour and 15 minutes, lies entirely in Broad Run Park.

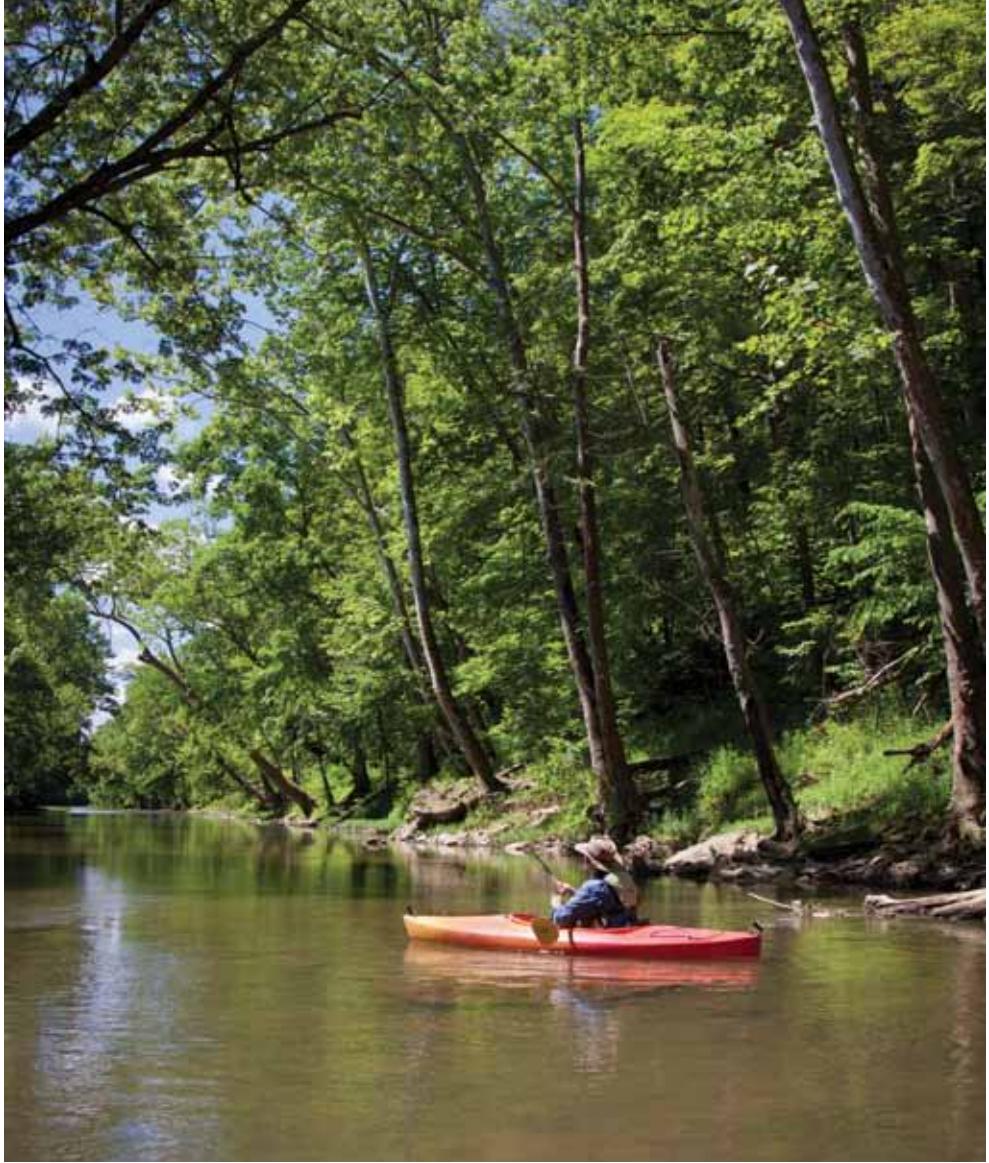
This Broad Run Valley Paddling Access is reached via Broad Run Parkway and Vista Valley Road, also known as Fairmount Road on many maps.

Paddlers should note the historic Mills-Wheeler farmstead to the left on Vista Valley Road. Broad Run Valley Paddling Access is the site of Wheeler's Ford, an important crossing of the creek for many years.

"It makes an awesome after work float," Martin explained. "We have lockable structures at each access where someone could use a vehicle and bike to self-shuttle and enjoy this float with one vehicle."

The first section of this float holds some deeper pockets lined with downed trees. The trees make good spots to work a soft plastic jerkbait for bass.

"There are some good spotted bass in decent numbers in this section of Floyds Fork," explained Baker, the fisheries biologist. "If you only saw Floyds Fork from I-64,



you won't believe how much different and cooler it is in this section. It is surprisingly rural."

About 600 yards into the float, Floyds Fork takes a hard bend to the right, scouring out one of the deepest holes on this stretch. The flowing water in the head and tail of this bend should be worked by crawling the bottom with a double-tailed skirted grub. Use motor oil or green pumpkin grubs to catch smallmouth bass.

Work a glass ghost color Rapala X-Rap near the abundant woody cover in the deeper part of this section for largemouth and spotted bass.

The creek then flows through a section of mid-depth water before reaching two extensive braided areas. These braids, approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ mile into the float, begin where the Big Run tributary meets Floyds Fork on the right. Run the first braided area on the right, but the second will likely require some dragging at normal summer flows.

Floyds Fork now grows deeper and more riverine. Probe the fallen trees in this stretch with a soft plastic jerkbait for spotted and largemouth bass. Rock bass also hold in the root wads.

The creek begins returning to the city in this section; paddlers will hear the rumble of traffic moving on nearby Bardstown Road. The stream then braids into channels with small riffles under a power line. The flowing water downstream of the riffle complex holds smallmouth bass.

Soon, one of "Leaping Deer" bridges of the Parklands comes into view. The take-out at Cliffside is just downstream of this bridge on river left.

The areas around the bridge and take-out are good spots to park the boat and wade fish for smallmouths. A black topwater chugger worked along current seams in this hole at dusk in summer will get crushed.

The hills just south of the Creekside Paddling Access saw some intense skirmishing between Union and Confederate forces in early October 1862 in actions that would culminate in the Battle of Perryville on Oct. 7, 1862.

"The Parklands puts Louisville and the state of Kentucky on the leading edge of urban conservation," Martin said. "I've worked across the nation and this gives Louisville national recognition for something innovative the entire state should be proud of and enjoy." ■