Welcome to Cossatot River State Park-Natural Area. Arkansas’s premier whitewater experience in southwest Arkansas south of Mena. This National Wild and Scenic River is a watershed basin with flow levels dependent on rainfall. When the water is up, the paddlers are here. Through vision, persistence, opportunity, and cooperation, this unique 12-mile river corridor is protected forever as Cossatot River State Park-Natural Area. This information is provided as a guide to flow levels on the state park-natural area segment of the Cossatot River. The gauge readings in feet correspond to the flow measurement instructions at the U.S. Geological benchmark station at the Highway 246 river access. Physical landmarks are described here to assist paddlers in measuring downstream river levels.

On the gauge reading chart, “F.S. 31 bridge” refers to the U.S. Forest Service Road 31 bridge across the upper Cossatot. The “246 bridge” refers to the Highway 246 bridge on the north end of the park-natural area. This chart of gauge readings is a tool to assist floaters in assessing the river for paddling, however, unpredictable conditions and circumstances may require flexibility and alternate procedures. It is suggested that floaters follow the safety code format recommended by the American Whitewater Affiliation.

Paddlers should always review river levels, know their paddling abilities, possess proper safety equipment on this stream. Not all canoes and rafts are suitable for the Cossatot’s whitewater. Use of improper equipment, or lack of equipment, within rapids is extremely hazardous and life threatening.

The Five classes of rapids found on the Cossatot are described below.

CLASS I: Easy. Moving water with ripples and small waves. Few obstructions, all obvious and easily missed with little training. Risk to swimmers is slight; self-rescue is easy.

CLASS II: Novice. Straighforward rapids with wide, clear channels which are evident without scouting. Occasional maneuvering may be required, but rocks and medium-sized waves are easily missed by trained paddlers. Swimmers are seldom injured and group assistance, while helpful, is seldom needed.

CLASS III: Intermediate. Rapids with moderate, irregular waves which may be difficult to avoid and can swamp an open canoe. Complex maneuvers in fast current and good boat control in tight passages or around ledges are often required; large waves or strainers may be present but are easily avoided. Strong eddies and powerful current effects can be found, particularly on large volume rivers. Scouting is advisable for inexperienced parties. Injuries while swimming are rare; self-rescue is usually easy but group assistance may be required to avoid long swims.

CLASS IV: Advanced. Intense, powerful but predictable rapids requiring precise boat handling in turbulent water. Depending on the character of the river, it may feature large, unavoidable waves and holes or constricted passages demanding fast maneuvers under pressure. A fast, reliable eddy turn may be needed to initiate maneuvers, scout rapids, or rest. Rapids may require ‘must’ moves above dangerous hazards. Scouting is necessary the first time down. Risk of injury to swimmers is moderate to high, and water conditions may make self-rescue difficult. Group assistance for rescue is often essential but requires practiced skills. A strong eskimo roll is highly recommended.

CLASS V: Expert. Extremely long, obstructed, or very violent rapids which expose a paddler to above average endangerment. Drops may contain large, unavoidable waves and holes or steep, congested chutes with complex, demanding routes. Rapids may continue for long distances between pools, demanding a high level of fitness. What eddies exist may be small, turbulent, or difficult to reach. At the high end of the scale, several of these factors may be combined. Scouting is mandatory but often difficult. Swims are dangerous, and rescue is difficult, even for experts. A very reliable eskimo roll, proper equipment, extensive experience, and practiced rescue skills are essential for survival.

Two rapids located within Cossatot River State Park-Natural Area offer specific hazards to paddlers. Extreme caution or avoidance should be practiced.

1. COSSATOT FALLS: a series of rocky ledges comprising 6 rapids (Class II-IV to V at high levels.) The 4th rapid midway down, commonly referred to as the “washing machine”, is Class IV. It is probably the most dangerous rapid on the river including a strong hydraulic area and a gradient of 12 feet in 15 yards.

2. DEVIL’S HOLLOW FALLS: a 6 foot diagonal ledge across the river. Uplifted craggy rocks below create a very hazardous situation for floaters. This rapid has caused numerous foot and other injuries.
**HWY 246 Gauge Readings for Cossatot River (AR)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE IN FEET</th>
<th>ED BANKS BRIDGE</th>
<th>SAND BAR BRIDGE</th>
<th>COSSATOT FALLS</th>
<th>HWY 278 CONCRETE SLAB</th>
<th>EXPERIENCED/SKILL LEVEL NEEDED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Feet</td>
<td>Top of gauge. River is very high, dangerous, and unpredictable.</td>
<td>Fully covered</td>
<td>Very high; first rapid is pushy. #2 - 6 form one rapid. Alternate routes river right</td>
<td>Fully covered; a curler wave forms.</td>
<td>Experts; all precautions. Rescue is difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8 - 6.0</td>
<td>Fully covered</td>
<td>Fully covered</td>
<td>Slightly over slab; May be air space 4.9</td>
<td>Covered; curler is more pronounced</td>
<td>Experienced; all precautions. Good raft level for strong team w/support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 - 5.6</td>
<td>Fully covered</td>
<td>Covered; can see concrete slab.</td>
<td>Covered; curler is more pronounced</td>
<td>The canyon (Esses) may cause open boats to swamp. Portage on river right.</td>
<td>Experienced; absolute eddy turn and ferrying skill. Still good rafting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>The canyon (Esses) has violent holes, waves, and boiling eddies.</td>
<td>Can see clearly</td>
<td>Slightly over slab; May be air space 4.9</td>
<td>Covered; curler is more pronounced</td>
<td>Experienced; all precautions. Good raft level for strong team w/support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 - 5.3</td>
<td>Barely visible; may float over</td>
<td>Still; over the top; at 4.9 marginal over the top.</td>
<td>Slightly over slab; May be air space 4.9</td>
<td>The canyon (Esses) may cause open boats to swamp. Portage on river right.</td>
<td>Experienced; all precautions. Good raft level for strong team w/support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 - 4.8</td>
<td>Still covered</td>
<td>First two regular run; #4 (Machine) right, left, or maybe over the top.</td>
<td>About 0” to 4” air space</td>
<td>Strong intermediates in company of those who know river.</td>
<td>Experienced with strong braces and turns. Remains suitable for rafting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6” to 8” over slab</td>
<td>#3 pedestal rock visible 12” to 14”; Machine right slot.</td>
<td>7” to 8” air space</td>
<td>Now technical for rafts; strong tandem canoe team.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Technical for rafts, especially in falls. Devil’s Hollow Rapid shows rocks that can damage rafts and boats. Can go right of island into Cow Creek to bypass.</td>
<td>Devil’s Hollow Falls is dangerous at this level and will crunch boats. It may be portaged on river right.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Slightly covered</td>
<td>Normal, plus routes in all six rapids.</td>
<td>About 15” air space</td>
<td>Experienced with strong braces and turns. Remains suitable for rafting.</td>
<td>Exciting tandem canoe run and intermediate kayak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0 - 3.8</td>
<td>Traditional normal levels for all rapids.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 - 3.3</td>
<td>Lower river levels. Cossatot Falls will have more water than the remainder of river. Above Sand Bar Bridge water is low.</td>
<td>Don’t rely on these gauge readings alone. Three major tributaries (Flat Creek at Ed Banks, Pryor Creek at Sandbar, Cow Creek at Devil’s Hollow) contribute to flow and may cause the level and difficulty downstream of 246 to fluctuate. Depend on physical evidence and learn the river levels from experience.</td>
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**KNOW BEFORE YOU GO**

Call (870) 387-3141 for the river stage in feet at Hwy 246 Bridge per the U.S. Geological Survey. Recording will say the current river level in feet. Stage in feet corresponds to difficulty.

- The website for river stage information at Hwy 246 bridge is: http://water-data.usgs.gov/uvis/uv/07340300

**EXERCISE SAFETY STANDARDS**

Proper equipment/skill and good judgement are keys to safety. Wear a PFD at all times. Take safety ropes, whistle, knife, drinking water, snacks, and first aid supplies. Outfit boats with floatation and attach painters at each end for rescue capability. Carry a spare paddle, rescue gear, and duct tape.

The Cossatot belongs to everyone; let’s keep it clean and safe.

No glass on or within 50 feet of the river.

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**FLOAT CHOICES (DEPENDING UPON SKILL LEVEL)**

- **4.9 feet and up** - The E.S. 31 Bridge to Hwy 246 Bridge is class II - II + and very pristine. Less experienced paddlers will enjoy, and decked boats will find “play spots.” Hwy 246 to Ed Banks - class II to III waves and turns.
- **4.9 feet and under** - Ed Banks to “Falls” - intermediates with support. Canyon (Esses) may be portaged on right.

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**DR. WALT**

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