

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 equipment, know procedures for river rescue, and above all use good judgement. High water conditions that occasionally prevail can lure the inexperienced and ill-equipped to attempt the river in less than adequate crafts. Note: Fatalities have occurred from the use of single chamber floating devices (e.g., inner tubes and air rafts) and failing to use 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 riffles 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. Straightforward 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.

- 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.
- 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.

FLOATER INFORMATION



**COSSATOT RIVER STATE
PARK-NATURAL AREA**



HWY 246 Gauge Readings for Cossatot River (AR)

STAGE IN FEET <i>(located west side put-in by leaning tree)</i>	ED BANKS BRIDGE <i>(downstream side)</i>	SAND BAR BRIDGE <i>(downstream side)</i>	COSSATOT FALLS <i>(six distinct rapids) (Class III-IV + V)</i>	HWY 278 CONCRETE SLAB <i>(downstream side)</i>	EXPERIENCED/SKILL LEVEL NEEDED <i>(Ed Banks - Hwy 278)</i>
6.7 Feet	Top of gauge. River is very high, dangerous, and unpredictable.				Experts; all precautions. Rescue is difficult.
5.8 - 6.0	Fully covered	Fully covered	Very high; first rapid is pushy. #2 - 6 form one rapid. Alternate routes river right	Fully covered; a curler wave forms.	Experts; experienced. All precautions. Good raft level for strong team w/support.
5.4 - 5.6	Fully covered	Covered; can see concrete slab.	High; "over the top", #2 - 6 form one rapid. Alternate routes river right.	Covered; curler is more pronounced	Experienced; absolute eddy turn and ferrying skill. Still good rafting.
5.4	The canyon (Esses) has violent holes, waves, and boiling eddies.			The canyon (Esses) may cause open boats to swamp. Portage on river right.	
4.9 - 5.3	Barely visible: may float over	Can see clearly	Still; over the top; at 4.9 marginal over the top.	Slightly over slab; May be air space 4.9	Experienced with strong braces and turns. Remains suitable for rafting.
4.5 - 4.8	Still covered	3" to 6" air space	First two regular run; #4 (Machine) right, left, or maybe over the top	About 0" to 4" air space	Strong intermediates in company of those who know river.
4.4	6" to 8" over slab	7" to 8" air space below slab	#3 pedestal rock visible 12" to 14"; Machine right slot.	7" to 8" air space	Now technical for rafts; strong tandem canoe team.
4.3	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.			Devil's Hollow Falls is dangerous at this level and will crunch boats. It may be portaged on river right.	
4.2	Slightly covered	12" to 16" air space	Normal, plus routes in all six rapids.	About 15" air space	Exciting tandem canoe run and intermediate kayak.
4.0 - 3.8	Traditional normal levels for all rapids.				
3.6 - 3.3	Lower river levels. Cossatot Falls will have more water than the remainder of river. Above Sand Bar Bridge water is low.				

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/nwis/uv?07340300>

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.

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.

Be certain of your skill and that of boaters in your party. Know how to rescue yourself and others.

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

No glass on or within 50 feet of the river.

FLOAT CHOICES (DEPENDING UPON SKILL LEVEL)

4.9 feet and up - The F.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.

4.4 feet and under - F.S. to Hwy. 246, water at bridge is getting low for excitement, but still nice.