

Local organizations, clubs offering more programming than last year for river recreation

THURSDAY, MAY 26, 2011 LAST UPDATED: THURSDAY MAY 26, 2011, 1:24 AM

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Looking for a Saturday getaway? Look no further than your local waterway.

With the [Passaic River](#) to the west and the [Hackensack River](#) to the east of South Bergen communities, local residents have plenty of access to recreation opportunities on the water through local organizations and tours. And members of those groups say they are offering more programming and events than they have in years past due to renewed public interest.

[Hackensack River](#)

Water recreation launch points are available up and down the [Hackensack River](#), but locally, one of the most popular is to tour the Meadowlands by pontoon boat.

One organization that leads tours is the [Hackensack Riverkeeper](#) and its eco-tours. Hugh Carola, the program director with the Riverkeeper, said as of last week, the Riverkeeper had planned 39 eco-cruises. Organizations or clubs can also reserve charter trips. Some trips go further up and down the Hackensack, such as to Newark Bay or into Hackensack, while others stay in and around the Meadowlands area. The eco-cruises launch from Laurel Hill County Park in [Secaucus](#).

Carola said during the hot summer months, cruises are usually scheduled later in the day. "That works out on two levels," he said. "Comfort and the views."

The Riverkeeper also offers canoeing and kayaking opportunities. Carola said residents can



PHOTO COURTESY/NJMC

A cruise on the Hackensack River, done by both the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission and the Hackensack Riverkeeper, is one of the premier ways to find out about the wildlife and natural resources of the Hackensack River and the Meadowlands.

get guided tours on canoes and kayaks, or can rent one out for solo exploration of the Meadowlands, the Saw Mill Creek area and up and down the [Hackensack River](#). A spot on an eco-cruise costs \$25 per adult and \$10 per child.

The canoes launch from the paddling center in Laurel Hill County Park. Canoes, per day, cost \$25 per paddler (must have two per boat) and \$10 per passenger, while kayak fees are \$25 per paddler. Another group offering river cruises is the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC), which offers pontoon and canoe tours.

Gabrielle Bennett-Meany, the senior natural resources program specialist with the NJMC, said tour opportunities have increased this year because of increased demand. Tours are open to the public, but also local groups and organizations can arrange private tours as well, she said.

Bennett-Meany said a pontoon tour is a good way to get a broader picture of the [Hackensack River](#) and the Meadowlands. A few interested people will move from the pontoon tour to the canoe tour, as well—being in a canoe offers a closer look at the marshes and mud flats throughout the Meadowlands.

And each tour is a bit different, depending on the time of day and the season, she said. Many shore birds will be in the area during the summer, she said, but will migrate as the seasons change; other migrating birds will take their place in the area, she said.

"A lot of times, if people see one season, they want to see another," Bennett-Meany said.

The NJMC's River Barge Park and Marina in [Carlstadt](#) is scheduled to open in late summer. The park is located on Outwater Lane and has a public boat launch and marina for kayak and canoe launches, according to spokesman Brian Aberback.

The pontoons launch from Laurel Hill County Park, and travel to various marshes and wildlife areas along six miles of the river. Suggested donations for the eco-cruises are \$15, and kayaks cost \$15 to rent as well; pre-registration is required for both cruises.



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A canoe trip on the river will give residents a better way than the cruises to get up close and personal with the Meadowlands. A canoe or kayak gives paddlers a better opportunity to explore the Meadowlands, the Hackensack and the Passaic rivers.

The [Hackensack](#) River Canoe and Kayak Club also has various trips and rowing programs up and down the river. The club organizes trips for members not just on the Hackensack River, but throughout New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania, according to Nancy Passow, the membership chair of the club.

[Passaic](#) River

The [Passaic](#) River doesn't have any tours, but many local organizations offer opportunities for rowing, kayaking and canoeing.

[Rutherford's](#) Nereid Boat Club is also running programs throughout the spring and summer, including advanced, intermediate and introductory programs. The boathouse for the club is located on Riverside Avenue, and membership in the club is required to use Nereid equipment and store private equipment at the boathouse. But many programs, including a Learn to Row Day set for June 4, are free and open to the public, said club secretary Erin Martin.

Martin said there's hardly any traffic on the river—there's no commercial boats, and only a few recreation boats are on the river at any one time. She said many residents in the area aren't aware of the opportunities to get on the river for recreation, including rowing, canoeing and kayaking.

"It's a little patch of heaven right here, and I hope people begin to realize it," she said.

The club also has a public boat launch on 550 Riverside Ave., but may be difficult to find because of the construction on the bridge above it.

Down the river, in [Lyndhurst](#), is the [Passaic](#) River Rowing Association (PRRA). Ben Delisle, the president of the association, said it will offer a number of programs throughout the summer for rowers, including an open house on Learn to Row Day, programs for competitive youth and adults, and for people who want to row recreationally. The PRRA is also looking to increase its programs for high school rowers, but nothing has been finalized yet.

The PRRA has its boathouse in Riverside County Park South. Delisle said the general public can launch from the dock, but only members of the club can store equipment at the boathouse.

The [Passaic](#) Valley Sewerage Commissioners (PVSC) is planning to run its annual Passaic River Paddle Relay in the fall, according to an official from PVSC, but a date is not yet set.

In 2007, the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, a branch of the National Parks Service (NPS), completed a Lower [Passaic](#) Canoe and Kayak Trail action plan for sites along the Passaic River. A water trail can be described as a waterway or series of waterways that is open to recreation and has public access points for recreation. The trail should be supported and managed by organizations along it.

The plan proposes a number of suggestions for local sites such as improved signage, fishing

platforms and bathroom facilities, as well as encouraging local organizations within the community to work together to better incorporate those spots along the river.

Jerry Willis, of the NPS, said the plan is guidance for local communities and organizations. After releasing a plan, the NPS helps local organizations implement suggestions as well. He is the director of the New York City office of the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance.

"It's a work in progress," Willis said. "We help them in planning; we help them identify funding opportunities." A similar plan was done by the NPS for public access locations along the [Hackensack River](#).

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