



# Nisqually River Water Trail

## McKenna Park to Nisqually Park at Yelm Powerhouse



**Length:** 9 Miles

**Time:** 2-6 Hours (Note: Check the American Whitewater website for up-to-date information about water flows, skills required and suitable water craft).

**Description:** Boaters can access the river at McKenna Park boat launch (river right) and follow it for 9 miles of beautiful scenery to the Yelm Powerhouse. The boat launch is located downstream of the powerhouse, river left. This section of the Nisqually Water Trail contains several class II and III rapids, boulder gardens, and fast-moving flat water. Make sure to prepare for a long journey, as there are no public areas to stop and get out of your watercraft between McKenna Park and the Yelm Powerhouse. This stretch of river passes through stunning protected forest lands, agricultural landscapes, and small residential areas. It flows through the towns of McKenna and Yelm, and passes through Military Joint Base Lewis-McChord's mature forests on both sides of the river. Wildlife, including a wide variety of birds, can be seen along this section of the river.

### Safety Information:



**This reach contains hazards** including a fish wheel, piers, boulders, bridge supports, wood and unpredictable debris.



**Intermediate paddling skills recommended.** This reach contains rapids and other hazards that may be difficult for beginners.



Always wear a life jacket and helmet and **bring all proper gear** for weather conditions. Always bring a first aid kit for emergencies.



**Check flow conditions**, as seasonal rapids appear depending on water flow.



The river is very cold. If exposed to the water, **hypothermia** can set in within minutes. Keep extra clothing on hand to ensure that in the case of capsizing that you can get warm quickly.



### leave no trace

Leave No Trace is built on seven core principles that are used to communicate the best available minimum impact guidance for enjoying the outdoors responsibly:

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimize campfire impacts
- Respect wildlife
- Be considerate of other visitors

1.



Photo credit: Steph Stroud, National Park Service

**McKenna Park**  
35621 Washington 507,  
McKenna, WA 98580

Operated by Centralia  
Light and Power:  
Phone: 360-458-3901  
360-888-2617  
(after hours)

Hours: 7:00am-8:00pm  
(gate opens from inside)

4.



Photo credit: Thomas O'Keefe, American Whitewater

**Fish Wheel/WDFW  
Screw Trap**

Operated by the  
Washington State  
Department of Fish and  
Wildlife (WDFW).

Used to sample  
juvenile fish.

2.



Photo credit: Thomas O'Keefe, American Whitewater

**Big Kahuna Rapid**

Class III boulder  
garden.

5.



Photo credit: Thomas O'Keefe, American Whitewater

**Nisqually Park at  
Yelm Powerhouse**  
14024 Yelm Hwy SE  
Yelm, WA 98597

Operated by Centralia  
Light and Power:  
Phone: 360-458-3901  
360-888-2617  
(after hours)

Hours: 7:00am-8:00pm  
(gate opens from inside)

3.



Photo credit: Thomas O'Keefe, American Whitewater

**Little Kahuna Rapid**

Class II boulder garden,  
depending on flow  
conditions.

**Beware of metal debris  
located in the rapid.**

**Risk Disclaimer:** The Nisqually River is dynamic and river conditions and hazards can change at any time. Please use at your own risk. This river can be technical and under many conditions may be dangerous to float and may involve the risk of property damage, serious injury, and possible death. It is your personal responsibility to be prepared with the right equipment and training and to not paddle above your technical ability level, use common sense, and obey all rules.

Flow and up-to-date information from **American Whitewater:**  
<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/state-summary/state/WA/>

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