

# EAU CLAIRE RIVER (EC1) (Marathon County)

**Put-in** Bear Lake Road Bridge  
**Take-out** County N Bridge  
**Distance** 14.2 miles  
**Approximate Time** 6-8 hours  
**Most Difficult Rapids** Class 2-3 (4)

**Elevation Drop** 168 feet  
**Average Gradient** 12.0 feet per mile  
**Minimum Suggested Flow** 500 cfs (cubic feet per second)  
 USGS gage @ County SS Bridge  
**Water Level Info / Phone** No Phone Contact

## Paddler's Notes

**Suggested River Levels for Paddling:** *Water levels on the Eau Claire River can rise and fall rapidly during the warm-weather seasons, sometimes by more than a foot in gage height in just a few hours. In addition, the river gauge is 11 miles downstream from the end of this segment. So the readings can sometimes be misleading. Pay attention to how the gauge is trending (rising or falling) and plan accordingly. Particularly during the summer, watch the weather reports and the radar. If a big weather system rolls through then the river will maintain consistent levels for several days and the gauge readings will be fairly accurate. If a smaller system passes through, then the levels will spike more dramatically and the gauge readings will be less accurate. Levels in the 3 Dells sections can be off by as much as 500 cfs in comparative readings depending on circumstances.*

### National Weather Service flood stage occurs @ 4000 cfs

**Below 300 cfs** Paddling not recommended

**300 cfs to 600 cfs**  
**Novice Paddlers:** Scenic, low-hazard whitewater river trip. Rapids below the Dells will be bony in this range, you may have to step out and push in places.  
**Advanced Paddlers (Eau Claire Dells):** The 'Left Main' drop at Eau Claire Dells is runnable (class 3), but not overly exciting.

**600 cfs to 1000 cfs**  
**Novice Paddlers:** Low runnable flow, scenic whitewater river trip. All rapids below the Eau Claire Dells should be runnable in this range, including the left fork of the Upper Island Dells. Portage the Eau Claire Dells.  
**Advanced Paddlers (Eau Claire Dells):** The Ledges are a wavy class 2. The 'Left Main' drop at Eau Claire Dells is likely a boofing drop in this range with a sticky release.

**1000 cfs to 1500 cfs**  
**Novice Paddlers:** Medium runnable flow, excellent and challenging whitewater river trip, Upper Island Dells & Lower Island Dells are wavy, solid class 2. Portage the Eau Claire Dells.  
**Intermediate/Advanced Paddlers:** The Ledges are class 2 wave-trains. The 'Left Main' drop at Eau Claire Dells may still be boofing in this range. 'Middle Chute' is starting to form. Pushy current in tight confines, sticky holes and eddies.

**1500cfs to 2000 cfs**  
**Novice Paddlers:** High runnable flow for novice-whitewater paddlers, challenging whitewater river trip, Upper Island Dells are class 2+, Lower Island Dells are approaching class 3. Occasional, pushy waves over 2 feet high may scare or flip less-experienced paddlers. Fast current, watch for 'stealth-boulders'. Portage the Eau Claire Dells.  
**Intermediate/Advanced Paddlers:** The Ledges are wavy class 3. Eau Claire Dells are class 4. The 'Left Main' drop at Eau Claire Dells has powerful hydraulics in tight confines. 'Middle Chute' is opening nicely at high end of this range! 'Right Sneak' should be starting to form.

**2000 cfs to 2800 cfs**  
**Novice Paddlers:** Avoid the river. Powerful hydraulics will overpower less-experienced paddlers.  
**Intermediate Paddlers:** Should be a challenging class 3+ run from the base of the Eau Claire Dells to Badger Road. Lower Island Dells are approaching class 4 at high end of this range.  
**Advanced/Expert Paddlers:** Spring melt-off conditions, The Ledges are class 3+. Eau Claire Dells are approaching class 5 at high end of this range - the current is very fast and powerful in the rapids. 'Middle Chute' and 'Right Sneak' should be runnable by 2000(?) cfs.

**2800 cfs to 3400 cfs**  
**Novice & Intermediate Paddlers:** Avoid the river.  
**Advanced/Expert Paddlers:** Overall the river-hydraulics are big and powerful. Very sticky class 4 holes in The Ledges - 'heavy' and ponderous water. The Eau Claire Dells are running full blast, bank-to-bank, a class 5 powerhouse. Upper Island Dells are class 3+, Lower Island Dells are class 4+ with low margin for error. You could easily raft all three Dells sections in this range.

**Above 3400 cfs**  
**Experts only!** The Ledges and Lower Island Dells are class 4+, Eau Claire Dells are class 5. Downed trees and debris pileups in Lower Island Dells are very hazardous when present.



## EAU CLAIRE RIVER (EC1) (Marathon County)

- 31.6 Mile Bear Lake Road Bridge Landing** **River:** The river winds through wooded lowlands and farmland. The current is usually slow in the initial stretch until the approach to Master Ledges. **Shuttle:** From Highway 52, turn north onto County Highway Y, turn east onto Bear Lake Road. There are landings off both ends of the bridge. Hand carry access, roadside parking.
- 30.1 Mile Boulder Garden (Class 1), Spring Brook** The river widens and slows as it passes through an easy but often scrappy boulder garden. Spring Brook enters from river left.
- 30.0 Mile Master Ledges (Class 2)** A low hazard boulder garden in a s-turn precedes Master Ledges. The Ledges begin with the river plunging over several submerged ledges that extend into the river from both banks. A challenging boulder garden follows as the river splits around a large rock shelf with another drop about 150 yards downstream from the first. Riffles and boulders continue all the way down to 3 Rows Falls. The whitewater lasts for 0.7 mile and the difficulty of this stretch varies with water levels.
- 29.4 Mile Three Rows Falls (Class 2)** The rapids begin where the river plunges over a wide ledge that extends out from the right bank. More rapids and another drop quickly follow downstream. The rapids have two drops over 3 feet so be sure to scout and plan your route. After 3 Rows Falls the river calms and flows around several islands until Skulen Creek.
- 28.4 Mile Skulen Creek** The wide mouth of Skulen Creek is on river right in a sharp left bend.
- 28.1 Mile Hogarty, Highway 52 Bridge Access** **River:** The river flows past a varied landscape of hardwood forest, meadows and farms. **Shuttle:** On Highway 52 in Hogarty, the river access is west of the bridge, downstream side. Hand carry access, roadside parking.
- 26.8 Mile Rapids (Class 1), Unnamed Creek** A long stretch of shallow riffles, rapids and boulder gardens run through several bends with trees canopying the river. The creek enters from river left.
- 24.0 Mile Dells of the Eau Claire County Park, Dam** **PORTAGE** The river widens and slows as you approach the The Dells of the Eau Claire Dam. The park's swimming beach and picnic area is on river-right above the dam. Land on the lower end of the beach or along the grassy bank between the beach and the dam to scout or portage. The portage trail is on the right bank and is nearly 400 yards long as it bypasses both the dam and the Eau Claire Dells Rapids. Even if you plan on running the The Ledges and the the Eau Claire Dells you must land here to scout the rapids and falls ahead.
- Novice paddlers must takeout before the dam!**
- For advanced-level kayakers, the put-in for the short-run of The Ledges and the Eau Claire Dells is easiest from the beach above the dam (*when the gates are open and river levels are adequate*). Otherwise, you can put-in about 70 yards below the dam on river-right in an eddy. The second put-in will allow you to paddle the lower section of The Ledges and the Dells.
- The County Park is one of the most scenic in Wisconsin, featuring numerous overlooks of the Dells, a large shaded picnic area, and several hiking trails including a segment of the Ice Age Trail.
- Camping** A campground is located inside the County Park. There is easy river access for campers making this an excellent overnight trip.
- 23.8 Mile The Ledges (Class 2-3)** The Ledges start at the dam and continue to below the Highway Y Bridge, where the Eau Claire Dells begins. Two gates on the right side of the dam are often runnable when they're open. The outflow from the left gate (*best line*) forms a high-speed tongue that leads directly into a nice wavetrain in medium-runnable levels. At high river levels a standing wave forms with a big 'backside' vertical drop into an odd-shaped 'depression' with powerful lateral waves. Typically, the standing wave will be fully formed when Right Sneak (*Eau Claire Dells*) is running and will provide a nice adrenaline rush to start your day. Scout from the right bank and the walkway on the dam. Be careful of the rocky outcroppings on river-right. Head clearance may be an issue when paddling through the left gate.

## EAU CLAIRE RIVER (EC1) (Marathon County)

**23.8 Mile    The Ledges (Class 2-3)...**    A short wavetrain follows downstream. The river calms for a while, and then rushes over a 130 yard-long pitch of ledges, waves, holes and eddies as the river approaches the County Y Bridge. For most of the summer these rapids rate class 2. During the the spring melt-off and after periods of sustained rainfall in the summer, the rapids create fun class 3 to class 4 waves and holes, and several playspots open up.

**Eau Claire Dells (Class 4)**    At the Eau Claire Dells, the river cascades past scenic rock formations (rhyolite schist) and steep wooded slopes. Pine, hemlock and maple trees canopy dense undergrowth. The Dells features a challenging class 4 rapids which begin just below the Highway Y Bridge and cascade over several ledges and narrow chutes. This stretch is recommended for advanced level kayakers only and scouting is a must.

Water levels change the character of the Dells Rapids dramatically. In low to medium flows the river will run through a single, runnable chute (*Left Main*) with a sticky drop. In high flows, three named routes open up over the primary drop just below the bridge. They are called (*from river-left to river-right*): 'Left Main', 'Middle Chute' and 'Right Sneak'. Follow the outflow from Middle Chute to run the narrow '2nd Drop Squeeze'. When the river is running extremely high, such as the spring melt-off, the Dells *can* run bank-to-bank with powerfull hydraulics, pushy waves and very sticky holes. The EC Dells will rate class 5 in flows over 2800 cfs!

Most kayakers who run the Dells, only run the Dells. There are easy access points above and below the rapids with plenty of trails and parking nearby. The Dells are very easy to scout from the right bank.

Most paddlers who run the full segment will portage the Dells Rapids and enjoy the views from the scenic overlooks in the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park. The park is a great place to take a break and eat lunch. Bring along a camera and be sure to take some photos.

**23.4 Mile    Footbridge, Rapids (Class 1-2)**    A footbridge crosses over the river about a half mile below the County Y Bridge. A long stretch of bouldery rapids begins as you approach the footbridge. During low flows these rapids tend to be very scratchy. However, as the flow increases, the waves just keep getting bigger and bigger instead of 'washing out'. These rapids lead into Sandberg Island Rapids.

In moderate flows (800 cfs to 1800 cfs), many 'whitewater novices' may find the roughly four miles of rapids and boulder gardens below the Dells to be some of the best low-hazard whitewater paddling in Wisconsin. In addition, the stretch between County Y and County Z is very scenic as the river flows past numerous islands, rock formations and beautiful high, wooded banks.

**23.1 Mile    Upper Island Dells (Sandberg Island) (Class 2-3)**    Sandberg Island is the first of two large wooded islands below the Eau Claire Dells (*The 2nd is at Lower Island Dells, see below*). At Sandberg, the main channel goes river right and flows through a long stretch of rapids that rate class 2 in medium flows. The river bed is tightly packed boulders, some very large, that will produce 'splashy' wave patterns. Some maneuvering skills are required. The rapids will approach class 3 above 2000 cfs with big, pushy waves developing. The right fork ends in a short series of ledges and big boulders in a left bend. You will be confronted with multiple routes here, follow the widest channel. Both sides of the river feature beautiful rock formations beneath a canopy of cedars, pines and hardwoods arching over the riverbanks.

Though the best whitewater is in the right fork, the more narrow, left fork offers a beautiful, intimate run past cedar-covered banks and scenic rock walls in a dells/gorge setting. The left fork will likely be too shallow to navigate below 600 cfs.

**21.7 Mile    County Z Bridge Landing    River:** The landing is on the left bank below the bridge. Downstream, the river flows past numerous islands, grassy banks, wooded lowlands, and a few houses and farms.  
**Shuttle:** From Highway 52, west of Hogarty, turn south onto County Q, then turn east onto County Z. The landing is east of the bridge, on the downstream side. Hand carry access, parking.

## EAU CLAIRE RIVER (EC1) (Marathon County)

**21.1 Mile Lower Island Dells (*Barnard Rapids*) (Class 2-3)** The Lower Dells are the second most challenging and scenic rapids on the river after the Eau Claire Dells. At Barnard, the river forks around another large island into a pair of long narrow forks featuring fun class 2 wave action during medium flows. The left channel offers a better - and more scenic - experience for paddlers. Run the left fork right down the middle to experience an awesome wave-train in a narrow channel as you zip past scenic rock formations in a dells setting. Class 1-2 rapids continue for more than 300 yards down-river after the forks converge.

The Lower Dells Rapids should not be attempted by novices during higher flows, when the waves will reach class 3 levels. However, more experienced whitewater paddlers will find a thrilling, wavy challenge when the river is over 1900 cfs. *The Lower Island Dells will likely be class 4 by 2500 cfs.*

**19.3 Mile Badger Road Bridge** The river is mostly quietwater as you approach the County N Bridge. You will begin to see more homes and farms along the river.

**17.4 Mile County N Bridge Landing** **River:** As you approach the bridge, the landscape becomes more open with fewer trees. The Eau Claire River Road is on the right bank and the take-out is on river right above the bridge. **Shuttle:** From Highway 52, west of Hogarty, turn south onto County Q, turn east onto County N. The landing is west of the bridge, on the upstream side. Hand carry access, parking.

### Driving Directions (Google Maps)



**Bear Lake Rd Bridge Landing**



**Hogarty, Hwy 52 Landing**



**Eau Claire Dells**



**County Z Bridge Landing**



**Eau Claire River Road Access**

### GPS - NAD83 / WGS84

Bear Lake Rd Bridge Landing	45.05860,-89.27024
Spring Brook	45.05048,-89.26635
Master Ledges	45.04359,-89.27814
3 Rows Falls	45.03949,-89.28773
Skulen Creek	45.03410,-89.30224
Hogarty, Hwy 52 Access	45.02977,-89.30296
Eau Claire Dells Dam	45.00345,-89.33478
Eau Claire Dells	45.00451,-89.33812
Footbridge & Rapids	45.00488,-89.34554
Sandberg Island Rapids	45.00269,-89.34920
County Z Bridge Landing	44.98657,-89.36180
Barnard Rapids	44.98137,-89.36837
Jody Creek	44.96733,-89.39494
Eau Claire River Road Access	44.94419,-89.41916