

Levels on water bodies fluctuate constantly. Nebraska boaters should be aware that rising and falling levels can create hazards.

Many water bodies are flood-control structures where levels rise during heavy rains and wash potential hazards into new areas. Other bodies are used for irrigation and experience draw-downs during the summer, creating and exposing additional hazards.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission offers boaters the following tips:

- Plan an upstream trip when navigating a river. If there are problems, such as engine failure, use the current to drift back to the starting point.
- Never assume there are no hazards. Operators always must be looking for submerged obstacles.
- Operate at a speed that gives maximum control of a vessel.
- Be alert and avoid distractions.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or riding on the bow.
- Always use caution, especially on unfamiliar waters.
- Be sure to have all the required safety equipment on board (read the 2013 Boating Guide at <http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/boating/pdfs/boatguide.pdf>)

Recent heavy rains have swollen the Missouri River, submerging jetties, breakwaters and wing dikes and creating hazards to boaters. These obstacles may not be marked by buoys.

“Striking these submerged obstacles not only can severely damage a boat, but also could cause a boat to become swamped and dump operators and passengers into the river,” said Herb Angell, Nebraska’s boating law administrator.

Angell suggests boaters take a Nebraska boating safety course. Visit BoatSafeNebraska.org for more information.