

Errol & Lake Umbagog Paddling Guide

Canoeing & Kayaking from an Errol, New Hampshire home base

Magalloway River • Lake Umbagog • Androscoggin River • Wildlife paddles • Shuttle trips • Rafting

STAY IN ERROL

Choose a different paddling experience each day and return to the same room each evening.

MATCH THE DAY

Wind, water level and weather matter. Use the guide to choose the best water for that day's conditions.

BRING YOUR BOAT, OR RENT

Local outfitters and state parks provide rental, shuttle and guided options.

Presented by Errol Motel

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Paddle somewhere different. Come back to Errol.

Why Errol Works as a Paddling Home Base

Errol sits at the meeting point of [Lake Umbagog](#) and the Magalloway and Androscoggin Rivers, giving canoeists and kayakers several distinctly different day-trip choices within a small area. A multi-day stay can include quiet backwaters, wildlife-rich river channels, open-lake scenery, a shuttle-assisted river trip and a guided rafting day, without packing up camp or changing lodging.

CHOOSE BY CONDITIONS, NOT BY CALENDAR

The suggested days are interchangeable. Check wind, weather, water levels and any dam-release information each morning, then choose the paddle that best fits the conditions and your group's ability.

About This Guide

This visitor guide combines Errol Motel's local knowledge with current information from the [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#), [New Hampshire State Parks](#), the [Northern Forest Canoe Trail](#), state boating and fishing resources, and established local outfitters. It is intended as a practical starting point for day paddles from Errol, not as a substitute for current maps, weather, water-flow information, posted access rules or professional instruction.

LAKE UMBAGOG WIND MATTERS

[Umbagog](#) is a large, shallow lake. The [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#) warns that it can become very challenging in moderate to high winds. Avoid committing to exposed open-water crossings when conditions are questionable or deteriorating.

Build a 3- or 4-Day Paddling Stay

DAY	PADDLE	CHARACTER	BEST FOR
1	Magalloway Refuge Canoe Launch	Easy / flexible 3–8 miles	First day, wildlife, changing plans
2	Harper's Meadow & Sweat Meadows	Protected wildlife paddle, 4–8 miles	Birding, photography, calmer-water day
3	Umbagog: Big Island & Thurston Cove	More exposed, 7–9 miles	Capable paddlers on a low-wind day
4	Magalloway one-way to Steamer Diamond	Longer / shuttle-assisted	Full-day feel without an overnight

These are suggestions, not a rigid itinerary. A windy lake day can become a protected river day; a tired group can substitute a short out-and-back; and guests who prefer guided adventure can swap in rafting.

Day 1 — Magalloway River: Refuge Canoe Launch

Start with the most forgiving option in the guide. The [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#) identifies its canoe launch on Route 16 as an easy paddle through Magalloway River oxbows and backwaters. The trip can be shortened or extended to roughly 3–8 miles.

Access

The [Refuge](#) canoe launch is approximately 8.3 miles north of Errol on Route 16. Look for the [Refuge](#) kiosk and designated parking. A gravel access path leads to the dock; current [Northern Forest Canoe Trail](#) accessibility information also identifies designated parking and an accessible privy.

How to Paddle It

Launch into the old oxbow and note the sign that helps identify the return entrance before heading to the main river. From there, explore upriver or downriver according to time, weather and comfort. Because this is an out-and-back, it is easy to turn around early if the group has had enough.

WHY IT WORKS ON ARRIVAL DAY

No shuttle is required, the distance is flexible, and the protected river setting lets guests learn their boat and the local water before attempting a longer or more exposed trip.

Wildlife Courtesy

During the April–July nesting and breeding period, the [Refuge](#) asks paddlers to stay toward the center of river channels, avoid the backs of coves, retreat if birds show signs of disturbance, and stay out of signed nesting areas. At any time of year, increase your distance if wildlife changes its behavior because of your presence.

Day 2 — Harper's Meadow & Sweat Meadows

For a wildlife-focused day, use the Androscoggin above Errol Dam to reach Harper's Meadow and Sweat Meadows. The [Refuge's](#) published day-trip material describes this as a 4–8 mile outing, depending on the launch and how much of the backwaters you explore.

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Launch Choices

Steamer Diamond Boat Launch is approximately 1.5 miles north of Errol on Route 16 and shortens the paddle compared with the public launch reached from the Route 26/North Mountain Pond Road side. Paddle upriver toward the meadow system.

Why This Is a Good Wind Alternative

The [Refuge](#) describes Sweat Meadows as sheltered in most wind conditions. That does not make every approach wind-proof: a strong northwest wind can still make the return to the launch strenuous. Check conditions before committing.

NESTING CLOSURE

Sweat Meadows may be signed and buoyed closed when bald eagles are actively nesting. Do not enter a closed area. Wildlife can still be observed from the main river channel.

Day 3 — Lake Umbagog: Big Island & Thurston Cove

Save the open-lake day for favorable weather. The [Refuge's](#) suggested Big Island/Thurston Cove route begins at the public boat launch on Route 26 at the south end of the lake and is approximately 7–9 miles, depending on the line paddled and optional exploration.

What Makes It Different

This is the day for broader lake views, islands, coves and a very different feel from the Magalloway backwaters. It is also the day that requires the most respect for wind. Parts of the route are exposed, and some options require a substantial open-water crossing.

DO NOT FORCE THE LAKE DAY

If the forecast or actual wind is unfavorable, move this paddle to another day. Choose the [Refuge](#) Canoe Launch, Harper's/Sweat Meadows or a guided activity instead. A multi-day stay at Errol Motel makes that flexibility easy.

Umbagog Lake State Park Option

[Umbagog Lake State Park](#) has a boat launch and rents canoes and kayaks on a first-come, first-served basis during its operating season. This can be useful for guests who did not bring a boat. Check current park hours, fees and rental availability before driving out.

Day 4 — Longer Magalloway Shuttle Paddle

For a longer day without an overnight, arrange a one-way Magalloway trip ending at Steamer Diamond. This is where a local shuttle service adds real value.

Two Sensible Starting Points

A [Refuge](#)-area start produces a manageable full-day-feeling trip through the Magalloway, Leonard Pond/[Lake Umbagog](#) area and into the Androscoggin toward Steamer Diamond. [Northern Waters Outfitters](#) publishes an approximately 8+ mile [Refuge](#)-to-Steamer option and a 12+ mile Mt. Dustin-to-Steamer option.

The [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#) separately describes an 8–12 mile Magalloway-to-Leonard Pond exploration from the [Refuge](#)-headquarters area, confirming the scale and character of this river/lake corridor even though individual routes vary with exploration.

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SHUTTLE BEFORE LAUNCH

For any one-way trip, arrange the shuttle and confirm the take-out before putting on the water. Do not assume a vehicle can be left all day at an informal access point. Use established public/[Refuge](#) launches or the access specified by the shuttle provider.

Long Option: Wilsons Mills

Experienced, fit paddlers can research the much longer Wilsons Mills-to-Steamer Diamond route. [Northern Waters](#) lists it at 20+ miles. The [Northern Forest Canoe Trail](#) also identifies Wilsons Mills as the appropriate start for paddlers who want to avoid the Class III release-water section immediately below Aziscohos Dam.

Twenty miles is a substantial day, and the group should confirm water conditions, shuttle logistics, daylight and its own pace before attempting it.

Androscoggin River — Choose the Section Carefully

The Androscoggin south of Errol offers excellent paddling, but it should not be described as one uniform beginner float. [New Hampshire State Parks](#) says the river around [Mollidgewock](#) offers opportunities for both novice and expert paddlers, while local outfitter information notes that downstream stretches can mix flat water with Class II water.

Mollidgewock & Thirteen Mile Woods

[Mollidgewock State Park](#), approximately three miles south of Errol, sits directly on the Androscoggin in Thirteen Mile Woods and rents canoes and kayaks during the operating season. Nearby [Androscoggin Wayside Park](#) is an unstaffed riverside recreation area that [New Hampshire State Parks](#) describes as a favorite for canoeing.

Because current, publication-quality information does not establish one universal novice route between these access points under all flows, this guide does not prescribe a fixed one-way itinerary. Ask the park or a local outfitter about current water level, hazards and an appropriate put-in/take-out for your group's skill level.

Errol Rapids & Moving Water

Dam releases and river flow can change difficulty and consequences. Use a qualified local guide or have the training, equipment and current flow information appropriate for moving water.

CHECK DAM AND FLOW INFORMATION

[Brookfield Renewable's Safe Waters](#) service publishes current Aziscohos flow and release information and warns that release schedules can change without notice. Conditions near dams can change quickly; obey all posted warnings.

Want Whitewater Without Paddling It Yourself?

A guided rafting trip is an easy way to add a different water day while keeping Errol Motel as your lodging base. [Northern Waters Outfitters](#) operates locally in Errol and provides paddling and rafting services. [North Woods Rafting](#) and [Mahoosuc Outdoors](#) offer guided Androscoggin rafting along with flat-water canoe/kayak options, rentals and shuttles.

Because outfitter schedules, trip sections, minimum ages and water-dependent offerings can change, contact the outfitter directly for the current trip rather than relying on a printed guide.

KEEP THE MOTEL AS HOME BASE

Book the river experience you want, then return to Errol Motel afterward.

Good Paddling Neighbors

Sharing the Water with Anglers

The waters around Errol are popular with both paddlers and anglers. If you approach someone actively fishing, give them as much room as conditions safely allow. Avoid paddling through the water they are casting into when another safe line is available and watch for fly line extending well beyond the angler.

On a narrow stretch, a friendly 'Which side would you like us to pass?' can prevent crossed lines and frustration. Keep unnecessary splashing and noise down as you pass. If an angler has a fish on, give extra room until the fish is landed or moves clear of your path.

SPECIAL FISHING RULES DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY CLOSE THE WATER TO PADDLERS

The Androscoggin from Errol Dam to the markers at the dead water at Bragg Bay is fly-fishing-only for anglers under current New Hampshire fishing rules. Paddlers may still share the river, but this is exactly where extra awareness of casts and fly line is courteous. Anyone fishing from a canoe or kayak must follow the applicable fishing regulations and licensing rules.

Launch-Ramp Courtesy

- Load and unload gear away from the ramp when possible so others can launch.
- Do not leave a vehicle or boat blocking the launch while organizing equipment.
- Use only established access and parking areas; do not create a shoreline access point across private land.
- Carry out everything you bring in.

Wildlife Comes First

Do not crowd wildlife for a photograph. On the [Refuge](#), stay out of signed nesting closures and back away if birds change behavior. Moose are large wild animals; never approach, corner or follow one into shallow water.

Safety, Boats & What to Carry

Wear the PFD

Carry a properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved wearable PFD for every person and wear it while paddling. State rules set minimum carriage and child-wear requirements, but cold water, wind, current and remote shorelines make wearing one the sensible standard for every trip in this guide.

Match the Boat to the Water

A short recreational kayak that feels comfortable in a protected oxbow is not automatically appropriate for a windy open-water crossing or moving water. For [Lake Umbagog](#), favor craft and paddlers capable of handling waves and wind. For rapids, use appropriate whitewater equipment and skills or go with a guide.

Every Day on the Water

- Check the weather and wind, not just the temperature.
- Check water-flow or dam-release information when the route is flow-sensitive.
- Carry a map or offline navigation; do not assume continuous cell service.
- Tell someone your put-in, route, take-out and expected return time.
- Bring drinking water, food, sun protection, insulating layers and rain protection.
- Carry a whistle and keep essential items secured in a waterproof bag.
- Set a turnaround time on out-and-back trips.
- For one-way trips, confirm the shuttle and legal take-out before launching.

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COLD WATER

Spring air can feel warm while northern water remains dangerously cold. Dress for the water temperature and your ability to self-rescue, not just the afternoon forecast.

Protect the Water You Came to Enjoy

Clean, Drain, Dry

A multi-day paddling stay may move the same canoe or kayak among several waters. Inspect and clean boats, paddles, footwear and gear before launching somewhere new; remove plants, mud and animals; drain trapped water; and allow equipment to dry when possible. [Refuge](#) planning documents specifically require inspection and cleaning of boats and trailers before launching from [Refuge](#) sites.

Fishing from Your Canoe or Kayak

If paddling and fishing are both part of your trip, consult current [New Hampshire](#) or [Maine](#) regulations for the water you will fish. [Umbagog](#) is an interstate water with specific license provisions, and sections of nearby rivers have special rules. Errol Motel's separate [Fishing Guide](#) is a useful trip-planning companion, but current state regulations control.

Dogs

Do not assume that every launch, beach, [Refuge](#) area or remote site has the same pet rule. [New Hampshire State Parks](#) permits pets at [Mollidgewock](#) and [Androscoggin Wayside](#) subject to park policy; [Umbagog Lake State Park](#) allows leashed pets in the base campground area but prohibits them in the beachfront day-use area and at specified remote [Refuge](#) campsites. Check the rule for the exact access point before bringing a dog.

Even where permitted, a dog should be under control at the launch and in the boat, should not chase wildlife, and should have an appropriate canine flotation device if conditions warrant.

Local Paddling Resources

These businesses and agencies can make a day trip easier. Services, prices and schedules change, so confirm directly before building the day's plan.

L.L. Cote — Errol

A practical pre-paddle stop for fuel, food, outdoor supplies and last-minute gear.

Northern Waters Outfitters — Errol

A local source for canoe and kayak rentals, shuttle service and guided water activities. Its published shuttle list includes Wilsons Mills, Mt. Dustin, the [Refuge](#) area, [Mollidgewock](#), [Umbagog State Launch](#), Errol Dam and Steamer Diamond. Use the outfitter to arrange logistics.

Mahoosuc Outdoors / North Woods Rafting

[Mahoosuc Outdoors](#) and [North Woods Rafting](#) offer rafting, canoe/kayak rentals, flat-water trips and shuttles in the Androscoggin region. Use the outfitters to arrange logistics.

New Hampshire State Parks

[Mollidgewock](#) and [Umbagog Lake](#) State Parks both list canoe and kayak rentals. [Umbagog Lake](#) also has a boat launch; [Mollidgewock](#) provides direct Androscoggin access. Rental availability is seasonal and first-come/first-served unless the park states otherwise.

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INTERESTED IN AN OVERNIGHT PADDLE?

Backcountry and remote-site camping exists around [Lake Umbagog](#), but this guide is intentionally built around day trips from Errol Motel. Guests who specifically want an overnight paddling trip should use current [state-park/Refuge](#) information or work with an outfitter for permits, campsite rules and logistics. For a multi-day Errol visit, the easier plan is to paddle a different water each day and return to the motel each evening.

Quick Decision Guide

IF TODAY LOOKS LIKE...	CONSIDER...	WHY
First paddle / uncertain stamina	Refuge Canoe Launch	Flexible out-and-back
Wildlife-focused day	Harper's & Sweat Meadows	Backwaters and sheltered areas
Calm, low-wind lake day	Big Island / Thurston Cove	Open-lake scenery
Want a longer day	Refuge/Mt. Dustin to Steamer Diamond	One-way with shuttle
Windy on Umbagog	Protected river/backwater option	Avoid forcing open water
Want moving-water excitement	Guided rafting	Professional logistics and instruction

Make Errol Motel Your Paddling Base

A paddling trip does not have to mean moving campsites or hauling overnight gear. From Errol Motel, guests can spend several days exploring different sections of the Magalloway, [Lake Umbagog](#) and the Androscoggin, use local rentals or shuttles when helpful, and return to the same room each evening.

- Choose the day's water after checking wind and conditions.
- Keep dry clothes and non-paddling gear at the motel instead of packing everything into the boat.
- Use Errol for fuel, food, supplies and outfitter access.
- Pair paddling with the Errol Motel [Fishing](#), [Birding](#), [Moose & Wildlife](#) or [Fall Foliage](#) guides.
- Stay several nights without repeating the same type of paddle.

ERROL MOTEL	RESERVATIONS
132 Main Street Errol, New Hampshire 03579	603-482-3256 errolmotel@gmail.com errol-motel.com

Reservations are made directly by phone or email.

Different water each day. One comfortable Errol home base.

Primary Sources & Further Information

Use current agency and outfitter information before departure. Weather, water releases, nesting closures, park operations and access conditions can change after this guide is published.

Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge — U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Non-motorized boating guidance, wildlife etiquette, selected day/partial trips and refuge access information.

fws.gov/refuge/umbagog

Northern Forest Canoe Trail

Current trip-planning information for the Magalloway and regional paddling access.

northernforestcanoetrail.org

NH State Parks

Mollidgewock, Androscoggin Wayside and Umbagog Lake State Park access, rentals, fees and pet policies.

nhstateparks.org

NH Fish and Game

Current fishing and boating-related rules for New Hampshire waters.

wildlife.nh.gov

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

Current Maine boating and fishing rules for trips that enter Maine waters.

maine.gov/ifw

Brookfield Renewable — Safe Waters

Current flow and release information for Aziscohos and other managed waters.

safewaters.com

L.L. Cote

Errol fuel, food, outdoor supplies, fishing equipment and kayak department.

llcote.com

Northern Waters Outfitters

Local canoe/kayak rentals, shuttles and guided water activities.

beoutside.com

Mahoosuc Outdoors / North Woods Rafting

Regional rafting, paddling rentals/tours and shuttle information; verify current booking/check-in details directly.

northwoodsrafting.com

mahoosucoutdoors.com

Errol Motel is not affiliated with or endorsed by the agencies, businesses, guides or organizations listed above. Regulations, access, and conditions can change. Current official regulations and posted signs control.

PUBLICATION NOTE

Distances in this guide are used only where published by an authoritative agency or clearly attributed local paddling source. Conditions and access can change; current postings and agency/outfitter guidance take precedence.