

## Checklist for Canoe and Kayak Safety

Canoeing and kayaking are enjoyable sports with inherent dangers. Whether you are a new or seasoned paddler, there are a few items of etiquette and rules of navigation to be aware of before venturing out on the water. Use this list to plan a trip and perform adequately. Remember that no list can keep you safe: **You must be familiar with and practice safety and rescue techniques. Instructors, guides, and clubs can provide this training.**

### Before you leave the house

- Plan a route appropriate for the experience level of your group; use navigational charts; identify possible danger zones and emergency evacuation options.
- Find out what land, if any, is open to the public.
- In cold-water climates, dress for water temperature rather than air temperature; consider wearing a wet suit or dry suit.
- Know your group's medical needs, abilities, and expectations.
- Agree on your group's method for making decisions.
- Write down emergency phone numbers and VHF radio channels.
- Coast Guard emergency information: VHF Channel 16.
- Listen to the local marine forecast and paddling conditions such as water temperature, wind, tide range and currents.
- Review paddlers etiquette
- Complete a float plan.

### Before you leave the launch

- **All group members should gather near the launch site and review these questions together (avoid tying up the ramp!)**
- **Basic paddling:** Does every participant know strokes, braces, and rescue techniques?
- **Course planning:** Does everybody know the intended route, break locations, emergency bailouts, campsites, distances to be covered, contingency plans, and safe landing options?
- **Leadership and decision-making:** Is someone in charge in case of danger? Who will make decisions about course changes?
- **Safety:** Does everyone know about staying together, how to communicate with others on the water, what to do if someone cap-sizes?
- **Procedures:** Do trip members know how to avoid getting lost or separated from the group, and what to do if someone else gets lost or separated?
- **Outfitting:** Is each canoe and kayak equipped with standard safety gear?
- **Tides:** Is everyone familiar with the local tides and how they will affect conditions?
- **Launching:** Is all gear packed and are kayaks and canoes ready to be launched promptly?

### Once on the water

- **Visibility:** Assume that other boaters cannot see you. Stay out of well traveled areas, keep your group tight. Use brightly colored boats and life jackets, and wave your paddle in the air to increase visibility.
- **Communication:** Use visual communications, a VHF marine radio, a fog horn, and/or a whistle to communicate with other vessels.
- **Navigation:** Use a chart, compass, and other navigation tools to predict danger areas and keep track of your course.
- **Group ability:** Paddle only to the ability of your slowest member. If necessary, change your course.
- **Weather:** Because weather can change quickly, watch for incoming storms, changes in weather patterns, and cloud formations.
- **Ocean conditions:** Keep track of wind-driven waves, rebounding and/or refracting waves, tidal currents, and the effects of sea bottom on the surface.
- **Hydration:** To avoid dehydration, drink enough fluids; plan on at least three quarts for a full-day trip.
- **The elements:** Protect yourself from the sun, the cold, and the water.
- **Medical needs:** Remain attentive to any medical issues that might arise on the water (sea sickness, hypothermia, blisters, sunburn, heat exhaustion, and so on).
- **Shoreside:** Most land on the coast is private. Land only on public property or where you have permission.
- **Leave No Trace:** Always.

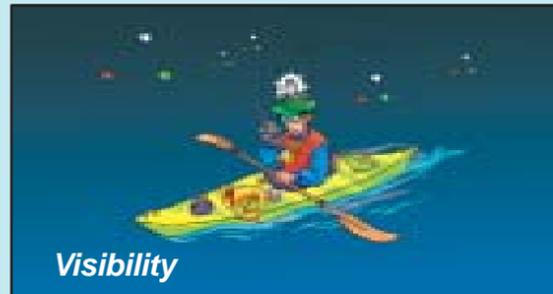


Illustration by Warren Markey

### Respect wildlife

- Enjoy wildlife from a distance; give wide berth to nesting seabirds, eagles, ospreys, rafting eiders, and seals.
- Please leave pets at home.



Illustration by Warren Markey

### Plan ahead and prepare

- Know the regulations and guidelines for the area you plan to visit (including capacity limits) and land only where you have permission.
- Consider shoreside campgrounds or bed & breakfasts as overnight options.
- Keep your group size as small as possible; six or fewer is ideal.

### Travel and camp on durable surfaces

- Travel on sand, stone, resilient grass, and established trails.
- Locate kitchens on the beach, on granite, or in the intertidal zone.
- Camp only in established campsites. If the campsites are in use, squeeze into an existing site or bivouac on smooth granite, sand, or gravel.
- Limit your stay to two nights. Naturalize the site when you leave.
- Do not cut or clear vegetation, dead or alive, for any purpose.

### Dispose of waste properly

- Carry out all solid human waste and toilet paper to the mainland and for proper disposal. (See [www.ct.gov/dep/cva](http://www.ct.gov/dep/cva) for carry off techniques and pumpout stations.)
- Carry out all trash-your own and any that you find.

### Leave what you find

- Preserve archaeological sites.
- Avoid campsite alterations.
- Leave flowers, plants and other natural objects where you found them.

### Minimize campfire impacts-kindle no fires

- Use cookstoves below the high tide line.
- If you must build a fire, use a fire pan below the high tide to prevent fire scars. Burn only driftwood and keep fires small and safe.

### Be considerate of others

- Help protect the experience of all visitors by developing an ethic of sharing. Preserve peace and tranquility.

## Canoe and Kayak Float Plan

Copy and complete this float plan and give a copy to a trustworthy individual. Place a second copy on the dashboard of the vehicle you leave at the launch site. File a plan for every trip, no matter the length.

What happens if you don't return from a day trip or overnight within a reasonable period? Nothing, unless you let someone know the details of your trip and tell that person how to secure help.

**Name, age, paddling experience (beginner, intermediate, advanced), type and color of kayak, color of life jacket, and pertinent medical information for each person in your group:**

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**Emergency contacts:**

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**Launch time and location:**

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**Take out time and location with latest expected return date:**

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**Intended route:**

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**Safety equipment you have with you (include tent color and style):**

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**Plan of action if not back by latest expected return date:**

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**Vehicle type:** \_\_\_\_\_

**License plate:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Illustration by Warren Markey

## Paddlers Etiquette

There are many boaters on our waterways and we as paddlers are increasing in numbers and are competing for space in limited access points and crowded waterways. Consider yourself a guest. Be courteous and avoid creating bottlenecks and overcrowding. Kayaks and canoes do not need to use boat ramps. We can launch from just about anywhere there is permitted access. Use cartop-only launch sites or other legal access, especially during the busy boating season or on weekends whenever you can.

## Boat Ramps, Parking and Courtesy

- Keep your vehicle off ramps designed for trailer boats.
- Unload and load kayaks and canoes from a parking spot or an area away from traffic lanes to the ramp. Keep your kayak or canoe and all gear off the ramp.
- If possible, launch away from the ramp or to the side. Learn to fasten your spray skirt on the water so you don't tie up the area during multiple kayak launches.

## On the Water, Channels, Marinas & Docks

- Stay out of marked channels at all times except to cross over. Kayaks and canoes can operate in less than one foot of water. Paddlers have all the rest of the river or ocean to use freely. Red and green buoys or special markers on piers or posts mark channels. When paddling along side a channel stay outside. Enter only to cross over to a destination point. Be patient and wait for the channel to be clear. Cross at the markers where you are more visible and the channel is often narrower. If with a group, cross in a "pod" or in a line abreast. Cross quickly to the other side.
- Stay away from marinas and dock areas as much as possible.
- Be visible and stay alert. Keep a respectful distance from swimmers and fisherman.

## Gear List

A life jacket should be worn at all times. Once you are in the water, it is almost impossible to put it on! If you do not know how to use any of the following equipment, get instruction before you set out.

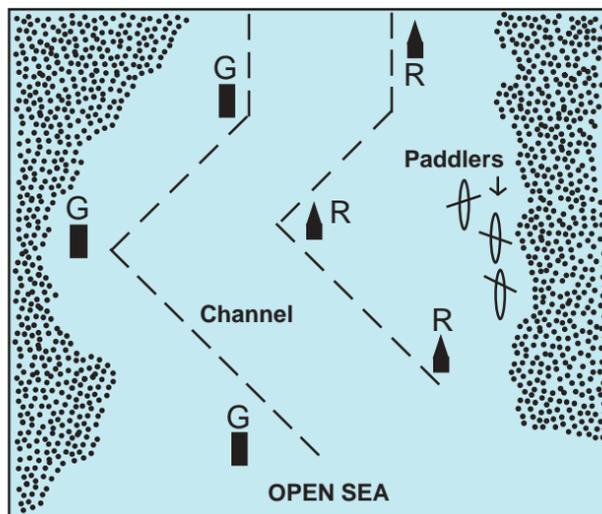
- Kayak & canoe appropriate for conditions, with flotation bags or bulkheads
- Clothing appropriate for conditions with extra layers
- Life jacket/Personal flotation device (PFD) with whistle, emergency strobe light and signal mirror attached
- Sunglasses and safety strap
- Sun hat
- Sunscreen
- Spray skirt
- Bilge pump or bailer
- Paddle
- Spare paddle
- Paddle float
- Food and water
- Rain gear and hat
- Dry bags
- Flares
- Fog horn
- VHF marine radio
- Weather radio
- First aid kit
- Flashlight/headlamp
- Kayak and canoe repair kit
- Multipurpose repair tool
- Local charts
- Deck compass
- Tide chart
- Opt: Vacuum bottle (hot drink)

### Safety



Illustration by Warren Markey

Purchase a chart of the area you intend to paddle. Plan a route and note all channels and other obstacles. Take the time to learn the rules of navigation. It will go along way towards fostering good relations with the boating community.



## A Typical Channel Illustration

This is an illustration showing a typical channel and what the markers are showing. When you come in to a channel from the open sea, the red buoys are on the right (Red Right Return) and the green cans are on the left. Between the two is a two-lane highway that boats use. Why? To keep them from running into a rock or a shallow area. The channel is a safe passage area with deep water. Just like a highway, boats coming in from sea travel to the right side of the channel and keep the red buoys to their right, and boats leaving (going to sea) stay to their right side and keep green markers to their right. A large tug and barge may have to use the center of the channel. This channel or highway on the water, is where you want to stay out of - it's meant for boats that need it. We have no rights on the water! Since we have full maneuverability and no real depth concerns, it's our job to stay clear of boats and ultimately out of channels as much as we possibly can.

## Resource List

### Boating safety and/or navigation courses

- Connecticut DEP Boating Division, 860-434-8638, offers basic boating courses, personal watercraft and paddle sport courses. For courses, visit [www.ct.gov/dep/boating](http://www.ct.gov/dep/boating)
- U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, 202-267-1002, offers Boating Skills/Seamanship, Sailing/Seamanship, and Advanced Coastal Navigation classes. For courses, visit [www.cgaux1sr.org/pecourses.htm](http://www.cgaux1sr.org/pecourses.htm)
- U.S. Power Squadrons, 888-376-8777, offers safe boating and navigation courses. For courses, visit [www.usps.org](http://www.usps.org)
- Boat US Foundation, 800-336-BOAT or visit [www.boatus.com/foundation](http://www.boatus.com/foundation)
- Contact your local paddle shop for courses and information.

### Books for Paddlers

- Johnson, Shelley. *The Complete Sea Kayaker's Handbook*. Camden, ME: Ragged Mountain Press, 2002.
- Hutchinson, Derek C. *The Complete Book of Sea Kayaking*. 4th ed. Old Saybrook, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 1994.
- Schumann, Roger, and Jan Shriner. *Sea Kayak Rescue: The Definitive Guide to Modern Reentry and Recovery Techniques*. Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2001.
- *First Roll: Eskimo Roll for Sea Kayakers. Teach Yourself the Eskimo Roll. Feathered and Non-Feathered Paddles and Greenland Style*. Outer Island Kayak, Branford, CT (video by Jay Babina)
- *The Kayak Roll. Learn, Tune, Teach, the Kayak Roll!* Durango, CO: Performance Video and Instruction, Inc. 2002 (video by Kent Ford)
- Gullion, Laurie. *Canoeing*. Outdoor Pursuits Series, Human Kinetics, 1994.
- *The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Boater's Guide* [www.ct.gov/dep/boating](http://www.ct.gov/dep/boating)
- Farmington River Watershed Association, Inc. *The Farmington River Guide*. 1970. Rev. 1999.
- Jacobs, Robert P., and Eileen B. O'Donnell. *A Fisheries Guide to Lakes and Ponds of Connecticut including the Connecticut River and its Coves*. DEP Bulletin 35. Hartford, CT: Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, 2002.
- Burch, David. *Fundamentals of Kayak Navigation*. 3rd ed. Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 1999.

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### Special thanks to the following contributors:



Sea Kayaker's Guide to Safety and Stewardship in Maine - From Shore to Shore

# Canoe



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# Kayak



Illustrations by Warren Markey

## Guide to Safety in Connecticut

The brochure provides tips, checklists, and information about canoe and kayak instruction, courses, and resources that can help you increase your skills and stay safe.

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