

Canoe and Kayak Safety

Below is a basic list of do's and don'ts for safe and enjoyable canoeing and kayaking. It is by no means complete nor is it a substitute for experience, training, and solid common sense.

NO ALCOHOL ALLOWED

LIFE JACKETS MUST BE WORN

1. **Enter Low** – The lower your center of gravity, the more stable your canoe or kayak becomes. When you enter, exit or change positions, always stay low and proceed with one hand on each gunwale or cockpit rim.
2. **Caught in a squall** – Again, the lower the center of gravity, the greater the stability. In a squall lie down in the bottom of your canoe.
3. **Personal Flotation Devices (PFD)** – These are not to sit or kneel on. They are to be worn. **Personal Flotation Devices are required to be worn.**
4. **Don't Overload** – Each model has a maximum load capacity rating in pounds for person (s) and gear. Look for the tag on the inside of your canoe, Max load limit for a single person kayak is 300lbs and max load limit for a double kayak is 450lbs. Not overloading your canoe or kayak is a start, but is not the final assurance of safety. For example, two adults and four children may be well within maximum load limit, but they are not safe in a canoe.
5. **Don't Stand Up in Your Canoe or Kayak** – Stay Low!
6. **Should You Capsize or Swap** – In open water such as lakes or very slow moving water, stay with your canoe or kayak. Even full of water it will support you and your crew. However, if you capsize or swamp in fast moving streams get away from your canoe or kayak. Moving canoes or kayaks filled with water can pin or crush paddlers against rocks or trees. Any canoe or kayak can break apart even in the smallest streams if it is filled with water and comes in contact with an immovable object. Float on your back, feet downstream. Don't try to stand. Keep feet up. Rocks or other objects can trap your feet and the force of the water can hold you under.
7. **Float Plan** – Always make out a float plan and leave it with your family or local ranger.
8. **Private Property** – To avoid misunderstanding, always get permission to beach or cross private property at “put-ins”, “take-outs” or just paddling through.
9. **Scout the River** – Even if you have paddled a familiar stretch of the river the week before, the stream continually changes. Check it out, if in doubt.
10. **Dams or Drops** – Regardless of size, causes turbulence or hydraulics at the down-stream side. The hydraulics can hold you and your canoe or kayak under. Stay away from all dams and drops.
11. **Sweepers and Strainers** – They are often low hanging trees, branches or rocks, logs or trees in the water. They are also often floating but held in place – avoid them.
12. **Canoeists and Kayakers Appreciate Their Surroundings** – They are generally individualists who want to protect their sport and the environment in which they paddle. They are not loud and boisterous nor do they leave trash or litter.