



Guidelines for Outing Participants

The following guidelines govern outings activities of The Wilderness Canoe Association Inc. (WCA). The most recent version of these guidelines can be found on the WCA website.

I. General Guidelines for WCA Outings

Canoeing is an activity that imposes a diverse and varied set of risks. All participants in club activities should be aware that they, and they alone, are responsible for their own safety and comfort as appropriate to the particular activity. It is important that participants in WCA outings have adequate skills and be physically and mentally capable of handling the outings they register for. In most cases inadequate suitability results in the individual having to be supported by the organizer and other participants reducing the participants enjoyment of the trip and causing negative feelings about their WCA experience. However, in some situations, especially on remote or difficult whitewater trips, the inclusion of an unsuitable person can create risks of injury or even death to themselves and those trying to help them.

1. The WCA publishes a schedule of trips and related events, organized by members of the WCA. This list is managed by the WCA's Outings Committee.
2. Participants should ensure that they possess the necessary skills, fitness, risk tolerance, and equipment to participate on a specific trip. The WCA's Trip Rating framework, found on the website, is a useful reference for a member considering participation in an outing. It is also useful for a member to consult with the organizer of an outing to confirm their suitability.
3. Participants are responsible for their own safety at all times and must sign a "waiver of liability/ assumption of risk" form. When aspiring participants register for a trip, the automated sign-up process requires them to acknowledge that they have read and understand the applicable guidelines and agree to abide by them. The WCA waiver also includes the wording that "It is my responsibility to be familiar with the Association's Guidelines for Outing Participants, and to comply with these guidelines as a condition for my participation in the Activities." If a participant fails to follow the Outing Participant Guidelines, they may lose future outing participation privileges.
4. Trip participants under the age of 18 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian who will sign the release on their behalf.



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5. Participants should inform the organizer promptly if they cannot attend the trip.
 6. Non-member guests may participate in a limit of 2 WCA Outings. Members may, at the organizer's discretion, bring a friend or family member to paddle with them on a club outing. If they wish to continue enjoying the benefits of the club, they are expected to become members. Guests will be required to sign a waiver of liability form prior to the trip.
 7. Food, transportation, appropriate boats, camping equipment, partners, etc. are the responsibility of each participant. Organizers may assist in these areas.
 8. All trips should have a minimum impact on the environment. To accomplish this, trip organizers may:
 - a. limit the number of boats (or participants) permitted on a trip, and
 - b. advise on the camping techniques and equipment used.
 9. Organizers have the discretion to:
 - a. exclude any participants due to inadequate skills or equipment for the trip,
 - b. exclude any boat deemed unsafe or inappropriate, and
 - c. make any arrangements necessary to promote the safety of the group.
 10. If on a trip organized by the WCA a serious personal injury occurs, the trip organizer must as soon as possible inform the Outings Committee Chair, or another Outings Committee member or the WCA Chair if the Outings Committee Chair cannot be reached.
 11. Canoeing is a physically active sport. Some trips can involve sustained strenuous exertion. Participants should have a level of physical fitness appropriate to the trip. As a courtesy, we request any participants with significant medical issues or needs for crucial medication, or with disabilities/limitations to inform the organizer for their own safety and for the wellbeing of the group as appropriate for the nature of the outing. The WCA is an inclusive organization and will do its best to accommodate people with special needs.
 12. The outing organizer may compile a list of contact information for trip participants, emergency numbers, etc.; that will be left with to be left with a designated person to be used in the event of emergency.
 13. We expect all members and guests on our outings to exhibit positive, helpful behaviour to other group members and to treat everyone with respect and dignity. It is WCA policy that disrespectful or abusive behaviour or language will not be tolerated on our outings. Persons engaging in such behaviour will have their memberships revoked, and, in extreme situations, legal authorities could be involved.



II. Canoeing Safety Equipment & Procedures

The applicability of outings safety rules and equipment will vary with the time of year and the type of trip, except for the Coast Guard required equipment in section B below, which are obligatory. Decisions as to what specific safety rules, equipment, and boat outfitting are appropriate for outings rest with the trip organizer, who will advise participants accordingly.

A. General

1. It is the responsibility of each individual to determine if his or her fitness and skill level is appropriate for a particular outing.
2. All participants in an outing are responsible for complying with WCA guidelines applicable to the activity.
3. In the Outings posting for each trip, the organizer will clearly explain any specific risks and hazards that could be encountered on the trip, along with the skills, qualifications, physical abilities, and training necessarily to safely participate in the trip.
4. Each participant should frankly assess their suitability for the outing before registering, and during the trip should assess the risks and hazards encountered in the activity on an ongoing basis. The participant should withdraw from any elements of an activity if the risks or hazards are felt to be excessive relative to that person's skills and experience
5. It is the responsibility of the organizer to ensure that the group has delegated one or more individuals from the outing group to exercise a lead role in the following areas:
 - (a) decisions relating to water conditions
 - (b) on-water rescue procedures
 - (c) campsite safety
 - (d) first aid
 - (e) emergencies
 - (f) navigation
6. As any on-water activity carries a risk of drowning, the ability to swim and feel comfortable in the water is important. Non-swimmers and children of family members may attend flatwater outings on the condition that they always wear a properly fitting DOT Canada-approved PFD when in and around the



water, including when in a canoe or bathing. Basic swimming competence is a requirement for all WCA whitewater outings, and PFDs and helmets must be worn while paddling whitewater.

7. In general, PFDs shall be always worn in the canoe, other than in situations where in view of the group and organizer they provide minimal incremental risk mitigation such as warm calm water close to shore. Wearing of PFDs is mandatory in moving water, cold weather/water, rough water, large lakes, exposure due to extended distance from shore, or in the presence of similar hazards.
8. The outing organizer and other participants should consider how they will respond to emergencies such as acute medical problems, serious accidents, or significant equipment failures. The group should be aware of options to summon medical assistance, to evacuate one or all trip participants, or to adjust the trip schedule and route to address the situation. Plans should consider actions to address acute problems while safeguarding the wellbeing of all participants in the outing.

B. Equipment

1. All paddlers must have:
 - (a) a Canadian approved personal flotation device of appropriate size,
 - (b) a whistle for signaling purposes, and
 - (c) a boat of suitable design and outfitting for the trip. The boat must be equipped with a bailer, a buoyant heaving line of not less than 15m, and a spare paddle.
2. Paddlers should bring:
 - (a) spare clothing, well waterproofed,
 - (b) extra food and water,
 - (c) fire-lighting device, in a waterproof container, as appropriate,
 - (d) ropes suitable for lining and rescue,
 - (e) first aid, safety and rescue equipment, and
 - (f) materials to repair the boat and other equipment.

On whitewater trips with an overall river rating of **Class 2 or higher**, a paddle sports helmet and supplementary canoe flotation are required. For trips with camping gear, boats require at least end bags. For day trips, a centre bag is required as well. A drysuit or full wetsuit is required on trips before June 1st, or if the water temperature is below 15 degrees Celsius, or the combined air and water temperature are below 30 degrees Celsius. Reference: [ACA Cold Water Survival Brochure](#).

3. Communication devices: At least one member of the group should have an appropriate means of summoning aid in the event of an emergency. In areas of cellular phone service, the group should



have a cell phone to summon emergency assistance. In more remote areas, a satellite-based communications device should be carried.

4. All outing participants are responsible for reviewing, and for agreeing to and complying with proposed lists for individual and group equipment.

C. Procedures

1. On WCA river trips before starting the organizer will review, as appropriate to the trip, any hand, paddle, and whistle signals; as well as any specific river running procedures that will be used.
2. When running a section of river with rapids:
 - (a) Participants may be asked to maintain a definite order.
 - (b) Each participant is responsible for the participant behind.
 - (c) Signals should be used when necessary to direct others and manage the group safety.
 - (d) Rescuers should be positioned at strategic points along difficult or potentially dangerous rapids.
3. Organizers may exclude outing participants due to inadequate fitness, skills, or equipment for the trip. Prospective outing participants should take into account the competencies of the other prospective participants in deciding whether to join an outing.
4. While all participants must ultimately assume responsibility for their own wellbeing, the organizer's wishes around running rapids and other paddling or camping activities should always be respected as coming from an experienced person who wants all participants to have a safe and enjoyable experience.
5. Arrangements should be made to distribute trip itinerary and emergency contact information to the emergency contacts of all outing participants and to a designated WCA contact (typically an Outings Committee member.) Assigning a designated emergency contact as "guardian angel" is recommended, to coordinate a response to issues that might arise during a trip (e.g., a change in the trip schedule and related travel plans).

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III. Guidelines Relating to Infectious Disease Risks

These are safety recommendations for WCA-sponsored canoe trips to help minimize the risk of infection/transmission of infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

Participants in any WCA outing should fully comply with applicable public health guidance, and this protocol does not explicitly state any specific measures that may currently be incorporated in public health guidance relevant to a particular WCA outing.

The WCA expects activity participants to carefully review and comply with current guidance pertaining to the jurisdiction in which any activities will take place, including, for example, the Province of Ontario, Ontario local health units and local townships, counties, municipalities, etc., Ontario Parks, and Parks Canada.

The WCA will consider requiring specific outing protocols for all outings in situations where this is needed in connection with particular public health circumstances.

-- Revised and approved by WCA Board, and in effect from 31 March 2026