



Have Fun, Be Safe, and Paddle Smart

Public engagement in actively paddling on Oregon's waterways has significantly increased in the last decade. Though paddling is an inexpensive introduction to water recreation, it is important to know the boating safety rules, required equipment, and specific skills necessary to safely paddle Oregon.

Always be prepared before going out on the water:

- Know your boat's stability and what to do if it tips over.
- Always check the weather and have a plan for when the weather changes.
- Wear a US Coast Guard -approved life jacket for the activity.
- Carry a sound-producing device (whistle or air horn).
- Never boat alone.
- Download and print a [float plan](#) to leave with family/friends.
- Dress for the water temperature, NOT the air temperature.
- Never operate ANY type of paddle craft under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs.

Training and Experience

- New and inexperienced paddlers should seek out education before heading out on the water. The Marine Board offers a free, [Paddle Sports Safety Course](#), through BoaterExam.com and certified by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA), as does the [American Canoe Association](#) for a nominal fee through Boat-Ed.com.
- Know your limits and practice in safe areas under safe conditions to improve your skill level and learn the capabilities of your boat.
- Do not stand up in a canoe or kayak and avoid weight shifts that might cause the boat to capsize.
- Plan for emergencies: learn how to self-rescue in the event of a capsize.
- Like surf boards, paddleboards have a leash. Use an ankle leash in the surf zone or flatwater. Use a quick release leash on moving water, like rivers, to avoid entrapment.

Visibility & Situational Awareness

- Paddlers should be familiar with the areas where they operate, especially at night and during times of reduced visibility. Paddlers should rely on navigational charts, tide and current charts and aids to navigation, depending on their area of operation. For rivers, know the flow levels and whitewater rapid classifications.
- Wear bright colors and use reflective tape on your paddle craft. In the event of an accident, the paddler and the boat are more visible to rescue personnel.
- If motorized boaters are operating close to you, you are less likely to capsize if you turn your bow into the wake.
- Remain aware of changes in and around your local waterways including changing infrastructure, shipping patterns, shoreline construction, congestion and waterway regulations.

For more information about paddling in Oregon, visit boat.oregon.gov.

Sharing the Waterways

- Knowing what actions to take to avoid a collision is the responsibility of ALL boaters.
- Stay out of navigable channels when possible and avoid being in the path of larger vessels and ships. If you must cross a navigable channel, cross them quickly and at right angles to the channel.
- A large vessel can take a long time to come to a complete stop. Because of their size, a ship captain's blind spots can extend for hundreds of feet in front of them, greatly impairing their ability to see you.
- Paddlers should travel in single file and stay close to the shoreline.
- Larger vessels can cause water turbulence, large wakes, and currents sometimes hundreds of yards behind them. Paddlers can even be pulled toward the ships or capsize from the wake.



Cold Water Safety

- The body loses heat nearly 25 times faster when immersed in water than it does on land.
- Northwest waters are deceptively colder than the air temperature, especially through early spring and summer months. Cold water is defined as temperatures under 70 degrees.
- Paddlers should always wear the proper protective clothing and dress for the water temperature they are paddling in.

Safety Gear

- Paddle craft, to include canoes, kayaks and Stand Up Paddleboards (SUPs) are considered boats and are **required to carry Federal and State-required safety gear** for the size and type of boat, in addition to a Waterway Access Permit if the boat is 10' long or longer:
 - **The exception is SUP:** in 2008, the USCG determined that when operated inside the narrow limits of a swimming, surfing, or bathing area, the device known as a paddleboard (SUP) is NOT a vessel under 46 USC 2101, and therefore NOT subject to applicable regulations. The key to this exempted location is defined as "swimming, surfing, or bathing areas." These areas are typically not visibly obvious to paddlers (on waters or charts) therefore; responsible paddlers should always carry required equipment.
- Paddlers need to equip their boats with required safety gear, **as well as recommended safety gear**, such as a waterproof hand-held VHF-FM radio and wear proper protective clothing, including dry or wet suits.
- Paddlers are strongly encouraged to purchase and carry communication devices such as an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) or Personal Locator Beacon (PLB).

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- Signaling devices, like day and night flares, a signal mirror, a whistle or an air horn, can help broadcast your distress to other mariners and air emergency crews, especially if boating on large waterbodies and saltwater/coastal areas.
- The Coast Guard recommends completing a [float plan](#) that tells family or friends where you are going and when you'll return. Emergency responders can use this valuable information in order to search for distressed paddlers who are overdue. The Coast Guard [mobile app](#) is available for free download and allows a boater to complete an electronic float plan and send it to a friend or family member.
- Paddlers who are in groups are more visible to motorized boaters. For safety, it's best to stay in groups, especially on narrow waterways where there's mixed boating activity

Label Your Paddle Craft

In 2019, Coast Guard and partner agencies received hundreds of reports of adrift paddle craft. Rescue personnel in these cases were unable to determine if an actual accident had occurred.

Adrift paddle craft sightings result in coordinated search and rescue missions, which annually cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars and pull emergency resources away from actual emergencies.

Placing an identification sticker or using a permanent marker on your paddle craft with your contact information will not only help you get your vessel back but will help rescuers determine the type of response needed.

I.D. stickers are available through the Marine Board, local marine law enforcement, the US Coast Guard Auxiliary, U.S. Power Squadrons and your local Coast Guard unit.

A rectangular orange sticker template with the text "Paddle Smart Identification Sticker" at the top. Below it, in large bold letters, is "IF FOUND - CONTACT". Underneath are three lines for contact information: "Phone 1:" followed by a horizontal line, "Phone 2:" followed by a horizontal line, and "Name:" followed by a horizontal line. At the bottom, it says "Use waterproof marker".

Common Questions and Answers

Q1. What are some common problems that paddlers encounter on the water?

A1. Paddlers run into problems with lack of safety gear and/or life jackets, fatigue, overestimating their capabilities, lack of familiarity on how to self-rescue and not knowing the navigation rules of the road.

Q2. What do paddlers need to remember before entering a waterway shared with other vessels?

A2. The safest direction for paddle craft to cross the path of a motorized vessel is astern (or behind). Remember to cross other boats as a group instead of straggling across restricted waterways or rivers and blocking other boating traffic. In shared waterways, the more boaters watching out for others, the safer everyone will be.

Q3. What are the guidelines that paddlers should follow?

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A3. Paddle crafts are very mobile and agile and should continually remain aware of vessel traffic. Stay out of the way of larger vessels and stay close to the shore. All paddle craft are required to have a sound producing device, like a whistle or air horn. At night, the paddle craft user must don a white light, which must be visible to oncoming traffic.

Q4. What are common safety concerns that the Coast Guard has when it comes to small watercraft during the summer?

A4. The biggest concerns include lack of experience and skills and cold-water awareness. Paddlers should take a safety course and practice self-rescue techniques in the event that their boat capsizes. All boaters should wear their life jacket and know how to swim before going out on a paddle craft. Oregon's waterways are always colder than the air temperature, so paddlers should dress for the water temperature, NOT the air temperature.



Resources:

[National Safe Boating Council](#)

[U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Website](#)

[Safe Boating Course](#)

[Vessel Safety Check](#)

[Wearing Your Life Jacket - USCG](#)

[U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary](#)

[American Canoe Association \(ACA\)](#)

[Paddle TV](#)

State Boating Programs

[Oregon State Marine Board](#)

[Washington State Parks](#)

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