

## International Scale of River Difficulty

The 6 stage International Scale of River Difficulty is used to rate the difficulty of a stretch of river or individual rapid. River difficulty **may change** due to fluctuating water and weather conditions.

**Class I:** Fast moving water, riffles/small waves. Few obstructions, all obvious & easily missed with little training. Risk to swimmers is slight and self-rescue is easy.

**Class II:** Straightforward rapids with wide, clear channels which are evident without scouting. Occasional maneuvering may be required, but rocks & medium-sized waves are easily missed by trained paddlers. Swimmers seldom injured & group assistance, while helpful, is seldom needed. Rapids at the upper end of this difficulty range are designated "Class II+".

**Class III: (Considered the limit for experienced paddlers in traditional canoes)**

Rapids with moderate irregular waves which may be difficult to avoid and can swamp an open canoe. Maneuvers are complex in fast current and good boat control in tight passages or around ledges often required; large waves or strainers may be present but are easily avoided. Strong eddies and powerful current effects can be found, particularly on large-volume rivers. Scouting is advisable for inexperienced parties. Injuries while swimming are possible; self-rescue is usually easy but group assistance may be required to avoid long swims. Rapids that are at the lower or upper end of this difficulty range are designated "Class III-" or "Class III+" respectively.

**Class IV:** Intense, powerful rapids requiring precise boat handling in turbulent water. May feature large, unavoidable waves, holes or constricted passages demanding fast maneuvers under pressure. Fast, reliable eddy turn needed to initiate maneuvers, scout rapids, or rest. Rapids may require "must" moves above dangerous hazards. Scouting may be necessary the first time down. Risk of injury to swimmers is moderate to high, water conditions may make self-rescue difficult. Group assistance for rescue is often essential but requires practiced skill. A strong boat/kayak roll is highly recommended. Rapids that are at the lower or upper end of this difficulty range are designated "Class IV-" or "Class IV+" respectively.

**Class V & VI:** These rivers and rapids should only be attempted by teams of expert paddlers who know and understand the risks.



Visit the Paddle Alberta website for:

- ✓ Alberta Paddling Destinations
  - ✓ River Trip Reports and Maps
  - ✓ Safety and Environmental Programs
  - ✓ Canoe Instructor Programs
  - ✓ Local Recreational Paddling Clubs
  - ✓ Paddling Events Calendar
- And so much more...

[www.paddlealberta.org](http://www.paddlealberta.org)

Toll Free Phone 1-877-388-2722

Produced by Paddle Alberta ©2014 Material incorporated with permission from:

"A Guide to Canoeing in British Columbia" Recreational Canoeing Association of British Columbia  
[www.bccanoe.com](http://www.bccanoe.com)

and American Whitewater Association:  
[www.americanwhitewater.org](http://www.americanwhitewater.org)

Provided By:



# A Guide to PADDLING SAFETY In Alberta

## Guidelines For Safe Paddling On Lakes And Rivers

- Always be prepared.
- Check the current weather forecast, but prepare for the forecast to be wrong!
- Cold water can cause hypothermia within minutes. Wear synthetic or wool clothes appropriate to the weather and water temperature.
- Never paddle alone.
- Drinking and driving whether on land or water is illegal and punishable under the Criminal Code.
- Watch out for fellow paddlers and always keep an eye out for the boat behind you.
- All paddlers must wear an approved personal flotation device (PFD) or lifejacket.
- Never paddle farther from shore than you are ready to swim.
- Be certain your canoe and equipment are in good condition.
- Carry all equipment that is required and recommended in the **Equipment** section of this pamphlet.
- Ensure that your boat will float even when fully swamped. Install extra floatation if needed.
- Appoint a trip leader for each outing who has knowledge of the: river, expected weather conditions, ability of all participants and their equipment.



Learn paddling skills, know your abilities & limitations. Take the online test "*Paddlers Self-Rating Guide*" to give you feedback on your paddling abilities: [www.paddlealberta.org/safety](http://www.paddlealberta.org/safety)

### ON LAKES

- Keep all boats close together and to shore. Watch for changing weather and winds.

### ON RIVERS

- River levels can change drastically especially in the spring or during periods of heavy rainfall - river flows can suddenly rise to dangerous levels.
- Know the characteristics of the river you are paddling and its current water level.  
You can get recent river flow information from [www.environment.alberta.ca](http://www.environment.alberta.ca) *Programs-River Basin Advisories and Information*. Low river levels can expose additional hazards such as submerged rocks.
- Be aware of any possible hazards along the section of the river you are paddling.

- Watch out for and avoid dangerous obstructions such as deadhead logs, logjams, strainers (partially submerged trees), sweepers (trees hanging horizontally over the river), rapids, falls & weirs.
- Avoid outside bends on rivers where undercut river-banks and sweepers are common.
- If you capsize, hold onto your paddle and the upstream end of the boat; float on your back, feet pointed downstream, then initiate self-rescue.
- Learn self-rescue procedures.

## Equipment Required by Transport Canada

### Human-Powered Pleasure Craft under 6 meters in length.

- One Canadian approved lifejacket or Personal Flotation Device (PFD) of appropriate size for each person.
- One buoyant heaving line minimum 15m in length (best in the form of a throw-bag).
- One bailer or manual bilge pump.
- One sound signalling device (pea-less whistle).
- One waterproof flashlight if operating in darkness or limited visibility conditions (fog, snow, etc).

For other water craft additional equipment required, consult: [www.boatingsafety.gc.ca](http://www.boatingsafety.gc.ca)

## Paddle Alberta Recommends Additional Equipment

- Tarp or emergency shelter, First-Aid kit, repair kit, fire starter, rain gear, sunscreen, bug spray.
- Wear secure, non-slip footwear that can get wet.
- Be sure to stow the throw bag rope so that it cannot come loose unexpectedly.
- One paddle for each person in the boat plus a spare.
- Pack extra items: dry synthetic or wool clothing; drinking water; and food in a waterproof container.
- Communication equipment: mobile or satellite phone and emergency locator in a waterproof case.
- Navigation equipment— maps (route, topographical and highway), compass, GPS with extra batteries.
- Additional equipment for river paddling:
  - helmet for each person.
  - river knife or rescue scissors.
  - river rescue gear.
  - additional swift water rescue, or canoe river rescue training is advised.

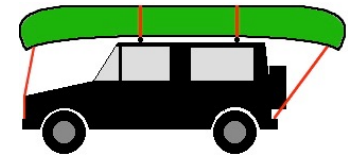
## Transporting Your Boat

When transporting your boat on top of vehicle, do not rely on roof racks alone. Boats offer strong resistance to wind even at slow speeds & roof racks can be pulled off the vehicle by a boat caught in the wind. Secure boat in 4 places including strong bow and stern ropes to bumpers or framework of the vehicle.

Use 3-point tie downs

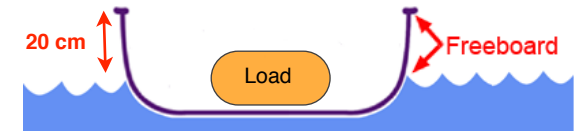


Keep knots close to canoe



## Watch Your Weight

- Avoid over loading your boat. For canoes, leave a minimum 20cm of free board (including body weight).
- Keep weight low in the boat.
- Balance the load; side to side and front and back.
- Secure gear in waterproof containers to protect contents and increase buoyancy.



## Leave No Trace Paddlers' Ethics

Minimize your impact on the environment. Educate yourself & others at [www.leavenotrace.ca](http://www.leavenotrace.ca)

### The 7 Leave No Trace Principles:

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
  2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
  3. Dispose of Waste Properly
  4. Leave What You Find
  5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
  6. Respect Wildlife
  7. Be Considerate of Others (including landowners and other river users)
- Use only marked access points and public land for getting to the water and taking rest stops.
  - Give people fishing a wide berth; paddle down the far shore if possible
  - Help conservationists protect and improve our natural water & watershed environments.