



Certificate of Insurance (COI): Required from vendor providing this activity for Council Approval. Visit [GSNI's webpage](#) for information on requesting a COI from the venue.

If participating in this activity as part of a trip, troops must complete the [GSNI Troop Trip Travel Request Form](#).

Activity Permitted for: *D B J C S A

Not Recommended for: Daisies, except with an experienced adult in each canoe and on flat water.

Camps with current ACA accreditation are expected to adhere to current ACA standards for canoeing with all Girl Scouts including Daisies.

GSNI Camp Properties: Troops must reserve or provide their own trained facilitator who received GSNI's small craft training for canoeing and kayaking at GSNI Camp Dean property. GSNI's Small Craft Training only qualifies adult volunteers to canoe and kayak on Camp Dean's pond.

About Canoeing

Canoeing is a great team-building exercise and a fun way to enjoy the outdoors. Canoes developed all over the world. Indigenous peoples of Canada designed lightweight, agile boats from wood and used them to transport people and goods for thousands of years. Canoeing only became a sport in the U.S. in the late 19th century.

Whether you're playing games on a pond or taking a whitewater trip on a river, there is a canoeing option for everyone. Canoeists sit on a seat or kneel in the canoe and use a paddle to propel their boat. Most canoes are for two people, but some canoes can hold up to 12. Canoes that are 15 feet or shorter should hold no more than two paddlers with no passengers.

Currents, waves, rapids, and wind affect conditions. Those conditions and the type of canoe will determine what is appropriate for your troop. See [Paddling and Rowing Sports—Master Progression Chart](#) for details. Be sure all participants have the training and experience to participate in the level expected. Class III rapids require prior council approval. Participants may be Cadettes and older who have demonstrated and documented prior experience of progression.

Whitewater canoeing can only be done on water that has been run and rated, and only up to Class III difficulty, as defined by the [American version of the International Scale of River Difficulty](#).

Learn More

- [American Canoe Association](#)
- Interactive maps of places to go: [Paddling.com](#) and [American Whitewater](#)
- Instructional videos about canoeing strokes: [Paddling.com](#)

Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities. Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Always be sure to contact the location and/or the instructor in advance to ensure they are able to accommodate those with disabilities. For more information visit [Move United](#) and [Paralympic.org](#) to find out about inclusion in canoeing, and learn about water safety for children with special needs.

Equity. Consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the Girl Scout members in your troop that could affect their ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with members and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all Girl Scout members and their families feel comfortable and have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as proper equipment, prior experiences, and the skills needed to enjoy

the activity. See the Equity section of the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for general advice about expense,

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) before starting any activity and review it so all are prepared. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong, such as an accident, physical injury, missing person, sudden illness, or sudden weather or water emergencies. All troops must provide one adult certified in Adult and Pediatric CPR/First Aid/AED.

Canoeing Checkpoints

Confirm swimming ability. Success on the water depends on comfort and ability in the water. Conducting a swimming test in advance is highly recommended. See [Swimming Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for a sample or ask your instructor for guidelines. If a swimming test is not possible, presume all participants are non-swimmers. Only strong swimmers are approved for whitewater canoeing.

All participants must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket. Type III life jackets are recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications. Inspect life jackets to ensure they are in good condition and contain no tears.

Practice recovery procedures. The instructor demonstrates self-recovery and righting techniques. All paddlers learn and practice these skills. This will help prevent becoming disoriented or frightened if they end up in the water and provides important skills.

Type of Craft and Water	Grade Level	Participant to Instructor Ratio	Instructor/Expert Certification <i>With multiple choices, only <u>one</u> is required.</i>
Canoeing	Grade Level	Participant to Instructor Ratio	Instructor/Expert Certification <i>With multiple choices, only <u>one</u> is required.</i>
Flat-water, protected from wind, waves, and outside boat traffic, with current less than 0.5 knots, and within swimming distance of shore. This includes GSNI's Camp Dean's Pond.	D, B, J, C, S, A <i>Daisies permitted only with an adult in their canoe, unless with an ACA accredited camp in compliance with ACA standards</i>	6 participants: 1 trip leader; with an additional qualified assistant, ratio 12:2 <i>ACA accredited camps adhere to all ACA standards for Daisies in canoes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> American Canoe Association (ACA) Paddlesports Safety Facilitator certification in canoeing AND completion of a flat-water canoe safety and rescue skills course OR ACA Level 1: Introduction to Canoeing Instructor or higher OR Girl Scouts small craft safety training, which GSNI only certifies for Camp Dean's pond. OR ARC Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module OR instructor with demonstrated equivalent experience in line with above credentials
River Class I: Moving water rivers including Class I sections	J, C, S, A	6 participants: 1 trip leader; with an additional qualified assistant, ratio 12:2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACA Paddlesports Safety Facilitator in canoeing AND completion of a Level 2: Essentials of River Canoeing Skills Course OR ACA River Canoeing Day Trip Leading Skills Assessment OR ACA River Canoeing Level 2: Essentials of River Canoeing Instructor or higher OR an instructor with demonstrated equivalent experience in line with above credentials

River Class II: Whitewater rivers including Class II sections, where limited maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles	C, S, A	6 participants: 1 trip leader; with an additional qualified assistant, ratio 12:2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACA River Canoe Day Trip Leader Assessment • OR ACA River Canoeing Level 3 Instructor or higher • OR an instructor with demonstrated equivalent experience in line with above credentials • Helmets required
River Class III: Sections of rivers rated class II–III, where precise maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles	C, S, A	6 participants: 1 trip leader; with an additional qualified assistant, ratio 12:2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACA River Canoe Day Trip Leader Assessment AND Level 4: Swiftwater Rescue Skills Assessment • OR Level 4: Whitewater Canoeing Skills Assessment AND Level 4: Swiftwater Rescue Skills Assessment • OR ACA Level 4: Whitewater Canoeing Instructor Level 4 or higher • OR an instructor with demonstrated equivalent experience in line with above credentials • Helmets required
River Trips on Class II–III	C, S, A	Varies, ask outfitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensed professional guide or instructor who is provided by an outfitter • Helmets required

Ensure the instructor or guide reviews site-specific emergency techniques. For example, whitewater canoeists are instructed in how to float through rapids, how to breathe while swimming in rapids, and how to swim to shore. The lead instructor or guide must have firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions of the location being used.

Check lifeguard qualifications. If using lifeguards to oversee canoeing, confirm that they have the proper training, experience, and rescue equipment for the body of water and the specific watercraft involved. See the [Swimming Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).

Be aware of the lifeguard's position. A stationary lifeguard can only be used when canoeing is taking place on flat water close to shore. For large bodies of water or rivers, the lifeguard must be in a canoe and positioned with the group.

Arrange for watchers/helpers. An adult watcher or skilled helper is required for certain size groups. See [Paddling and Rowing Sports—Master Progression Chart](#). This person should have basic skills in the activity and supports the group by reinforcing instructions. They also watch for possible emergencies and help the instructor with rescues if needed. Basic water rescue, [ACA Paddlesport online course](#), or similar training is the preferred preparation. Consult the instructor for specific watcher/helper qualifications.

Select a safe site. Don't paddle in unknown areas. Know the locations of all shipping channels. Do not canoe more than one mile from the nearest shore. Make sure of the following:

- **Avoid busy channels when possible.** If you must cross them, do so at a 90-degree angle to the channel traffic. Also avoid surf zones and areas with standing waves unless they are part of planned whitewater canoeing.
- **On long passages, boats should stay close enough together that a group decision can be made if wind and water conditions change.**
- **Be aware of possible changes in water level,** due to tides or dam releases, and how these affect water conditions.

- **Avoid hazards** such as strainers, sieves, hydraulics, waterfalls, bridges, dams, fences, and low power lines. Rapids must be avoided unless part of a planned whitewater route.

Research water conditions and select the right boats for participant skill level. Consider weather and water conditions, weight of passengers, and equipment to be carried. Make sure:

- The craft weight and capacity are not exceeded. Many boats have a plate near the stern (back) showing these maximums.
- Canoes that are 15 feet or shorter hold no more than two people.
- You are aware of the type of canoe needed for the water to be used.
- Canoes are not overloaded with gear, and gear is distributed evenly among paddlers.

Know universal signals. Whistle and visual signals are used to pass messages or call for help. Learn them at Paddle.com.

File a float plan. If participating in a long-distance trip, file a float plan with a reliable person who will notify authorities should your group not return on time.

On the Day of Canoeing

- At least one adult present must be certified in Adult and Pediatric CPR/First Aid/AED who is not instructing this activity.
- **Get a weather and wind report.** Check Weather.com or other reliable weather sources, including the “boat and beach” forecast, which covers wind speed, water temperature, and wave height. Be prepared with a backup plan or postpone the activity if weather prevents the outing.
- **Review what to do in a storm.** If thunder is heard or lightning is seen, get everyone off the water immediately. Do not return until at least 30 minutes have passed since the last evidence of the storm. If you cannot get to shore, secure all loose gear, keep a sharp lookout for other boats and obstructions, head into the wind at a 45-degree angle, and stay low. If possible, do not touch metal or water when there is a chance of lightning.
- **Use the buddy system.** Instruct paddlers to keep their boat within sight of at least one other boat. Use the buddy system on the water with boats the same as you would on land.
- **Transport boats safely.** Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for canoes. Secure boats with two lines across the top (one at each end) and with lines at the bow and the stern. Drivers must have prior experience hauling trailers.

Report accidents. Notify marine law enforcement or your council as appropriate.

Privately Owned Canoes. Ensure that the owner/operator:

- Is a knowledgeable adult with the understanding and ability to take responsibility for Girl Scouts’ safety and well-being.
- Agrees to follow the Safety Activity Checkpoints relevant to the activity.
- Maintains the vessel in accordance with Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- Coordinates with the activity leader to confirm the required safety gear is available for all participants and gear meets the specifications of authorities for the local jurisdiction.
- Meets Coast Guard and/or local jurisdiction requirements.
- Maintains insurance and registration as required by law in their jurisdiction.

Safety Gear

- Canoes suitable for the type of water, with proper flotation and air bag, if used, checked before use
- Paddles of the appropriate size and style for the canoeist and the type of canoeing
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle, compressed air horn, or VHF radio on navigable waters

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket for each paddler. Type III life jackets are recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications.
- Rescue gear appropriate for boat type and conditions (ask your instructor), such as:
 - throw bag or throw line
 - waist-mounted tow system (lightweight rope that attaches to towing person and to towed boat)
 - rescue sling to get participants back into boat
 - designated rescue craft, such as a paddleboard or chase boat
 - any other items required by the boating jurisdiction where you will paddle
- Emergency gear appropriate for the canoeing type and distance from shore, such as:
 - emergency repair kit: duct tape or electrical tape, screwdriver, pliers, and/or spare paddle, waterproof first aid kit, repair kit, and standard safety equipment, including signaling equipment
- Emergency survival packet: raincoat, waterproof matches, lightweight/space blanket, hat, pocket knife, 10x10-foot tarp, rope, food, and appropriate liquids. Food and water bottles should be secured in the boat.
- A safety helmet with a strong, flexible plastic shell and chin strap, as well as openings for drainage, worn when indicated by instructor or guide
- Bailer (a scoop for removing water from a boat)
- A waterproof flashlight
- A painter (a strong line at the bow used for securing the canoe that is at least half the length of the boat)
- At least one graspable and throwable Coast Guard–approved personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) immediately available for each group on the water
- Compass, waterproof chart, VHF marine radio, and other essentials for extended trips
- Locking blade knife carried by instructor, guide, or qualified adult in their life jacket or other readily accessible place, and a line for towing or rescue

Note: *Canoeing at night may require additional gear; consult your instructor.*