



**Council Approval:** Required

**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:** B J C S A

**Not Recommended for:** Daisies

**GSNI Properties:** Troops must reserve or provide their own trained facilitator who received GSNI's small watercraft training for canoeing and kayaking at GSNI Camp Dean property. The GSNI Small Watercraft

### About Kayaking

Kayaks were developed by the Inuit people, as well as Aleut tribes, located in Arctic regions of North America. Indigenous peoples built early kayaks from a range of available materials, such as animal skins, bones, and wood, and used the kayaks for transportation as well as hunting. After the arrival of Europeans, kayaking became a sport, and was added to the Olympics in 1936.

Virtually any body of water is suitable for certain types of kayaking. Start with flat water with little or no current, and progress to more advanced conditions. Kayaks come in a variety of shapes and sizes and are designed for different types of water and paddler skill levels. "Sit on top" kayaks are simple, stable boats that are great for beginners. "Decked" or "sit inside" kayaks are covered by a deck and spray skirt; the paddler sits inside with legs extended. All involve moving a kayak across water using a double-bladed paddle and combine exercise, transportation, and fun!

Your troop can kayak on bays, rivers, lakes, and oceans. Currents, waves, rapids, and wind affect conditions. Those conditions and the type of boat will determine what is appropriate for your troop. Be sure all participants have the training and experience to participate in the level expected.

### Learn More

- Interactive maps of places to go: [Paddling.com](#) and [American Whitewater](#)
- [American version of the International Scale of River Difficulty](#)
- About canoeing, kayaking, and stand-up paddleboarding: [Paddling.com](#)
- Info on gear selection: [Paddling.com](#)
- Free online paddling safety course, recommended for all paddlers: [ACA Paddlesports](#)
- Collection of educational paddling videos: [ACA Paddlesports Resource Library](#)

**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. Visit [Move United](#) to learn about inclusion in kayaking and water safety for children with special needs.

**Equity.** Ask the kayak provider about any height or weight restrictions, and communicate this information to families in advance. Choose a different watercraft if these restrictions would keep anyone from participating. 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.

## Kayaking 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.

**Ensure all paddlers 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 should demonstrate self-recovery and righting techniques, and girls should learn and practice these skills. This will help prevent their becoming disoriented or frightened if they end up in the water.

**Paddlers must be trained on how to perform wet exits and must be able to execute one successfully before being allowed to use a decked kayak.** If spray skirts are used, wet exits must be performed before the outing can begin.

**Practice appropriate self-rescue and re-entry techniques.** If kayaking in cold water, paddlers should learn cold water survival techniques and treatment for hypothermia.

**Verify instructor/expert qualifications and experience.** The skill level of the adults must be higher than the difficulty of the intended kayak type. At least one adult instructor or lifeguard should be able to effectively communicate commands and instructions, and be certified or trained per the Kayak section of the Master Progression Chart:

Kayaking	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 heavy boat traffic, with current less than 0.5 knots, and within swimming distance of shore. This includes GSNI's Camp Dean Pond.	B, J, C, S, A	5:1 or 10:1 with qualified assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>American Canoe Association (ACA) Paddlesports Safety Facilitator certification in kayaking and completion of a Flatwater Kayak Safety and Rescue skills course</li> <li>OR ACA Level 1: Introduction to Kayaking Instructor or higher</li> <li>OR Girl Scouts small craft safety training, which trains for Camp Dean's pond only.</li> <li>OR ARC Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module</li> <li>OR Instructor with the demonstrated equivalent experience in line with these credentials</li> </ul>
River Class I: Moving water rivers including class I sections	J, C, S, A	5:1 or 10:1 with qualified assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ACA Paddlesports Safety Facilitator in Kayaking and completion of a Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking skills course</li> <li>OR ACA River Kayaking Day Trip Leading Skills Assessment</li> <li>OR ACA Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking instructor or higher</li> <li>OR an instructor with demonstrated equivalent experience in line with these credentials</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use helmets when they are recommended or provided</li> </ul>
River Class II: Whitewater rivers including class II sections, where limited maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles	C, S, A	5:1 or 10:1 with qualified assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACA River Kayak Day Trip Leader Assessment and Level 3: River safety and Rescue Skills Assessment</li> <li>• OR Level 3: River Kayaking Skills Assessment and Level 3: River Safety and Rescue Skills Assessment</li> <li>• OR ACA Level 3: River Kayaking Instructor or higher</li> <li>• OR an instructor with demonstrated equivalent experience in line with these credentials.</li> <li>• Helmets required</li> </ul>
River Class III: Sections of rivers rated class II-III, where maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles	C, S, A	5:1 or 10:1 with qualified assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACA River Kayak Day Trip Leader Assessment and Level 4: Swiftwater Rescue Skills Assessment</li> <li>• OR Level 4: Whitewater Kayaking Skills Assessment and Level 4: Swiftwater Rescue Skills Assessment</li> <li>• OR ACA Level 4: Whitewater Kayaking Instructor or higher</li> <li>• OR an instructor with demonstrated equivalent experience in line with these credentials</li> <li>• Helmets required</li> </ul>
Kayak Touring: Calm, protected water with constant access to safe landing, within 0.5 mile from shore; wind less than 10 knots, waves less than 1 foot, current less than 1 knot, no surf	C, S, A	5:1 or 10:1 with qualified assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACA Level 2: Essentials of Kayak Touring Trip Leader Assessment</li> <li>• OR ACA Level 2: Kayak Touring Instructor or higher</li> <li>• OR an instructor with the demonstrated equivalent experience in line with these credentials</li> </ul>
Sea/Surf: Waterways with constant access to safe landing, within 1.5 miles from shore; wind 10-15 knots, chop 1-2 foot, surf 1-2 foot, current 0-2 knots	C, S, A	Varies; mandated by outfitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensed professional guide</li> <li>• OR licensed professional instructor who is provided by an outfitter</li> </ul>
Class IV-V	Not Permitted	N/A	N/A
<p><b>Qualified assistants:</b> The American Canoe Association does not put strict parameters on the definition of “qualified assistant” on purpose. Assistants do not need to be certified, but they need to understand the curriculum and be able to meaningfully assist in the delivery of a quality course and provide assistance and rescue should an emergency arise. <a href="#">ACA Paddlesport online course</a>, or Girl Scouts small craft safety training, or similar training is recommended as preparation.</p>			

**Ensure the instructor/expert will review site-specific emergency techniques for the type of craft used.** For example, whitewater kayakers are instructed in how to float through rapids, how to breathe while swimming in rapids, and how to swim to shore.

**Ensure the lead instructor/expert has firsthand knowledge** of the hazards and conditions of the location and type of boat being used. You’ll want to verify that at least one adult instructor/guide is certified by the American

Canoe Association, or other sponsoring organization approved by your council. Certifications must be appropriate for the activity.

**Verify lifeguard qualifications and experience.** If using a lifeguard as your expert, ensure they have current certification in American Red Cross (ARC) Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module, or its equivalent, suitable for the body of water used. Lifeguards are used as experts for flat water, near shore kayaking only.

**Arrange for watchers/helpers.** An adult watcher or skilled helper is required for certain size groups. See qualified assistants in table, above. This person should have basic kayaking skills. They support the group by reinforcing instructions. They also watch for possible emergencies and help the instructor with rescues if needed. Refer to the bottom of the Master Progression Chart and consult the instructor for specific watcher/helper qualifications. It is recommended all adult watchers be certified in American Red Cross Basic Water Rescue, [ACA Paddlesport online course](#), or similar training.

**Keep weight evenly distributed.** Keeping gear and fellow paddlers evenly distributed makes the boat safer and easier to paddle.

**Stay together.** On long passages, boats should stay close enough together that a group decision can be made if wind and water conditions change.

**Select a safe site:**

- **Do not paddle in unknown areas.**
- **Avoid busy channels when possible.** If you must cross them, do so at a 90-degree angle to the channel traffic.
- **Avoid surf zones and areas with standing waves** unless they are part of planned whitewater kayaking.
- **Only perform this activity on water that has been run and rated** and up to Class III difficulty, as defined by the [American version of the International Scale of River Difficulty](#).
- **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 that:

- kayak weight and capacity are not exceeded; many boats have a plate near the stern (back) showing these maximums
- kayakers are using the type of kayak needed for the water conditions present, and ensure the kayak is sized for the person(s) using it
- kayaks are not overloaded with gear; gear should be distributed evenly with 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 Paddling or Rowing**

- 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 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.
- **Review self-rescue techniques.** See above.
- **Use the buddy system.** Instruct kayakers to keep sight of at least one other boat at all times.
- **Transport boats safely.** Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for kayaks. 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, if appropriate.

## Safety Gear

Some gear will depend on the type of kayaking or on water conditions. Check with your instructor.

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket (Type III life jackets recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications)
- Kayak sized appropriately for the participants and suitable for the type of water
- Kayaks with proper flotation and any air bags checked before use (if float bags are used, make sure they are secured to kayak)
- Double-bladed paddle in the appropriate size and style for the activity and person using it (ask instructor about proper fit)
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle, compressed air horn, or VHF radio
- Rescue gear appropriate for kayak type and conditions (ask your instructor), such as:
  - at least one graspable and throwable Coast Guard–approved personal flotation device, throw bag, or throw line
  - waist-mounted tow system (lightweight rope that attaches to towing person and to towed boat); should be one tow system for every three to four kayaks
- Emergency gear appropriate for the kayaking type and distance from shore, such as:
  - emergency repair kit: duct tape or electrical tape, screwdriver, pliers, spare plugs
  - spare paddle, first aid kit, repair kit, and standard safety equipment, such as 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)
- Safety helmet with strong, flexible plastic shell and chin strap, as well as openings for drainage should be worn when:
  - paddling in waters that are Class II or III
  - paddling in or near sea caves
- Bailer (a scoop or sponge for removing water from a boat) secured to the kayak