



Packrafting

Council Approval: Required. This is a vendor provided activity.

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

About Packrafting

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

Your troop can paddle packrafts on bays, rivers, lakes, and oceans. Currents, waves, rapids, and wind affect water conditions. Those conditions and the type of boat should be decided by the skills and knowledge possessed by 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](#)
- [United States Geological Survey \(USGS\) National Water Dashboard](#) is an interactive map to access real-time water data from over 13,500 stations nationwide
- About canoeing, kayaking, and stand-up paddleboarding: [Paddling.com](#)
- Free online paddling safety course, recommended for all paddlers: [ACA Paddlesports](#)
- Collection of educational paddling videos: [ACA Paddlesports Resource Library](#)
- Info on gear selection and how-to: [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](#) to find out about inclusion in packrafting.

Equity. Ask the packraft 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. Troops must provide one adult certified in Adult and Pediatric CPR/First Aid/AED.

Packrafting Checkpoints

Confirm swimming ability. Success on the water depends on comfort and ability in the water. Conducting a swimming assessment 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, compressed foam, or broken buckles/zippers.

Practice recovery procedures. The instructor should demonstrate self-recovery and righting techniques, and paddlers should learn and practice these skills. This will help prevent disorientation or fear 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 boat. If spray skirts are used, wet exits must be performed before the outing can begin.

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

Verify instructor knowledge and experience. The skill level of the adults must be higher than the difficulty of the intended packrafting type. Use the chart below to verify required instructor certifications. The instructor or guide must be able to effectively communicate commands and instructions.

Required Certifications: Use the chart below to verify required instructor certifications.

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>
Packrafting			
Flat water, protected from wind, waves, and outside boat traffic, with current less than 0.5 knots, and within swimming distance of shore	B, J, C, S, A	5 Participants: 1 trip leader; with an additional qualified assistant, ratio 10:2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> American Canoe Association (ACA) Paddlesports Safety Facilitator certification in kayaking <u>AND</u> completion of a Flatwater Kayak Safety and Rescue skills course OR ACA Level 1: Introduction to Packrafting Instructor or higher OR American Red Cross (ARC) Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module OR an instructor with the demonstrated equivalent experience in line with these credentials

<p>River Class I: Moving water rivers including class I sections</p>	<p>J, C, S, A</p>	<p>5 Participants: 1 trip leader; with an additional qualified assistant, ratio 10:2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACA Paddlesports Safety Facilitator in Kayaking and completion of a Level 2: Essentials of River Packrafting skills course • OR ACA River Kayaking Day Trip Leading Skills Assessment • OR ACA Level 2: Essentials of River Packrafting instructor or higher • OR an instructor with the demonstrated equivalent experience in line with these credentials • Use helmets when they are recommended or provided.
<p>River Class II: Whitewater rivers including class II sections, where limited maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles</p>	<p>C, S, A</p>	<p>5 Participants: 1 trip leader; with an additional qualified assistant, ratio 10:2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACA River Kayak Day Trip Leader Assessment and Level 3: River Safety and Rescue Skills Assessment • OR Level 3: River Packrafting Skills Assessment and Level 3: River Safety and Rescue Skills Assessment • OR ACA Level 3: River Packrafting Instructor or higher • OR an instructor with the demonstrated equivalent experience in line with these credentials • Helmets required
<p>River Class III: Sections of rivers rated class II-III, where maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles</p>	<p>C, S, A</p>	<p>5 Participants: 1 trip leader; with an additional qualified assistant, ratio 10:2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACA River Kayak Day Trip Leader Assessment and Level 4: Swiftwater Rescue Skills Assessment • OR Level 4: Whitewater Packrafting Skills Assessment and Level 4: Swiftwater Rescue Skills Assessment • OR ACA Level 4: Whitewater Packrafting Instructor or higher • OR an instructor with the demonstrated equivalent experience in line with these credentials • Helmets required
<p>Packraft touring: Calm, protected water with constant access to safe landing and within 0.5 nm from shore; winds less than 10 knots; waves less than 1 foot; current less than 1 knot; no surf—shore break less than 1 ft; not applicable to crashing surf zone</p>	<p>C, S, A</p>	<p>5 Participants: 1 trip leader; with an additional qualified assistant, ratio 10:2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACA Level 2: Essentials of Kayak Touring Trip Leader Assessment • OR ACA Level 2: Kayak Touring Instructor or higher • OR an instructor with the demonstrated equivalent experience in line with these credentials

Trips in Coastal/Sea/Surf Waterways: Lakes or coastal waters with potential areas of exposure to mild wind and wave conditions, with constant access to safe landing and within 1.5 nm from shore; 10–15 knot winds; 1–2 foot waves (chop); 1–2 foot surf; 1–2 knots of current	C, S, A	Varies, mandated by outfitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensed professional guide • OR licensed professional instructor who is provided by an outfitter
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Qualified assistants: ACA does not put strict parameters on the definition of “qualified assistant” on purpose; that person does 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 as well as provide assistance and rescue should an emergency arise. Generally speaking, they should not need constant supervision like a brand new student. ARC Basic Water Rescue, [ACA Paddlesport online course](#), or similar training is the preferred preparation.

Recertifications Timelines: Certification for Paddling Instructors, Paddlesports Safety Facilitators, Guides, and Trip Leader Assessment holders should be renewed every four years.

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

Ensure the lead instructor/guide 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 (ACA) or other sponsoring organization approved by your council. Certifications must be appropriate for the activity.

Be aware of the lifeguard’s position. A stationary lifeguard can only be used when packrafting is taking place on flat water close to shore. For large bodies of water or rivers, the lifeguard must be in a packraft 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 packrafting skills. They support the group by reinforcing instructions. They also watch for possible emergencies and help the instructor with rescues, if needed. ARC Basic Water Rescue, [ACA Paddlesport online course](#), or similar training is the preferred preparation. Consult the instructor for specific watcher/helper qualifications.

Keep weight evenly distributed. Keeping the weight of gear and fellow paddlers evenly distributed makes the boat more stable and easier to paddle.

Select a safe site. Do not paddle in unknown areas. Know the locations of all shipping channels. Do not paddle farther than 1 mile from the nearest shore. [Americanwhitewater.org](#) is the standard for classifying river venues. When certain venues/waterways are not listed on the [Americanwhitewater.org](#) site, expert advice will be sought before approval can be provided. The [USGS National Water Dashboard](#) can be used to assess stream flow, surface water levels, groundwater levels, spring water levels, water quality, precipitation, atmospheric changes, weather conditions, alerts, and more. Make sure of the following:

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

- **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 rain, tides, or dam releases, and how these affect water conditions.
- **Avoid hazards** such as strainers, sieves, hydraulics, waterfalls, bridges, dams, and fences. 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:

- Packraft weight and capacity are not exceeded
- Paddlers are using the type of packraft needed for the water conditions present, and ensure the packraft is sized for the person(s) using it
- Packrafts 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 council so a reliable person can notify authorities should your group not return on time.

On the Day of Paddling

- **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 participants to keep sight of at least one other boat at all times.
- **Transport boats safely.**

Report accidents. Notify marine law enforcement or your council, if appropriate.

Privately Owned Packrafts. 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. Some gear will depend on the type of packrafting, 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)
- Packraft sized appropriately for the participants and suitable for the type of water
- Packraft with proper flotation and any air bags checked before use

- Double-bladed paddle in the appropriate size and style for the activity and person using them (ask instructor about proper fit)
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle or compressed air horn
- Rescue gear appropriate for boat 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
 - 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
 - Any other items required by the boating jurisdiction in which Girl Scouts will paddle
- Emergency gear appropriate for the paddling type and distance from shore, such as:
 - Emergency repair kit: duct tape or electrical tape, screwdriver, pliers, 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.
- Safety helmet with strong, flexible plastic shell and chin strap with buckle, should be worn when:
 - paddling in waters that are Class II or III, or
 - paddling in or near sea caves
- Bailer (a scoop or sponge for removing water from the boat)
- A waterproof flashlight

***Note** that packrafting at night may require additional gear; consult your instructor.*