



Whitewater Rafting

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 (Class I–II rapids), J (Class I–III rapids),

C S A (Class I–IV rapids)

About Whitewater Rafting

Humans have been traveling by water for many thousands of years. Indigenous people were the first to navigate rivers and rapids in search of fish, game, and new lands. Although these adventurous people used canoes rather than “rafts,” they were the first known whitewater travelers in what is now known as North America.

Whitewater rafting is a thrilling experience for challenge-seeking Girl Scouts, as well as those who just love the outdoors. Rafts come in a variety of styles and lengths, usually 11 to 20 feet long, seating four to 12 rafters. You will need to find a reputable outfitter to arrange the trip. Ask your council about places and outfitters in your area. A river guide will come with you and provide instruction, steering, and coaching. They will know the river well and be able to perform rescues, if needed.

Rafting should only be done on rivers that have been run and rated, and only up to Class IV. It is important to understand the [International Scale of River Difficulty](#) or Whitewater Classification System. Be sure all participants have the training and experience to participate in the level expected. Be sure your guide has run the leg of the river before. See the [Paddling and Rowing Sports—Master Progression Chart](#) for the types of whitewater Girl Scouts may run, by program level.

The Whitewater Classification System

Class I (Easy): Moving water with small disturbances on the surface and a few small waves; poses little to no danger to swimmers.

Class II (Novice/Beginner): Faster moving water with easily avoided rocks, holes, and waves; danger to swimmers is still slight but care must be taken.

Class III (Intermediate): Fast moving water containing various rocks, holes, currents, and waves that require skillful maneuvering to avoid; swimmers could be at risk and may require help.

Class IV (Advanced): Strong rapids, large waves, big holes, unpredictable currents, and dangerous obstructions requiring multiple maneuvers to get through or around; swimmers at risk and will require help to be rescued.

Class V (Expert): All characteristics of Class IV with the added danger of being longer and containing more continuous features that may not be avoided; serious risk to swimmers, others may be of no help.

Class VI (non-runable): Only a team of experts who carefully plan every aspect of this expedition would have hope of surviving these rivers and rapids.

Learn More

- Interactive map of places to go and a list of rivers: [American Whitewater](#)
- [Whitewater rafting terminology](#)

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](#) for information about adaptive rafting. Learn about water safety for children with special needs.

Equity. Ask the whitewater guide or outfitter about any height or weight restrictions, and communicate this information to families in advance. Choose a different activity 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.

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.

Whitewater Rafting 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.

All rafters 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 that they are in good condition and contain no tears.

All whitewater rafters must wear a helmet.

Ensure the skill level of the adults is higher than the difficulty of the intended activity.

Verify instructor knowledge and experience. Make sure the instructor or guide has certification from a formal training program, such as the American Canoe Association’s rafting program or the International Rafting Federation. The guide needs to be able to effectively communicate commands and instructions. Also, important:

- Instructor can demonstrate self-recovery and righting techniques for the type of trip (learn and practice these skills when possible).
- The guide should review site-specific emergency techniques and help rafters learn how to float through rapids, how to breathe while swimming in rapids, and how to swim to shore.
- The lead instructor or guide has firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions of the location and type of boat being used.
- At least one guide has documented training and experience guiding in the type of river being run and has run the river in advance.
- The guide subscribes to the American Whitewater Safety Code.
- At least one adult instructor or guide should be currently certified for the conditions per the Master Progression Chart:

Whitewater Rafting	Grade Level	Participant to Instructor Ratio	Instructor/Expert Certification <i>With multiple choices, only <u>one</u> is required.</i>
Whitewater rafting day trips Class I–II	B, J, C, S, A	6:1 or 12:1 with qualified assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Canoe Association (ACA) Rafting Level 4 Instructor or higher • International Rafting Federation (IRF) Guide Certification

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated equivalent experience in line with above credentials
Whitewater rafting day trips Class I-III	J, C, S, A	Varies, ask outfitter	Licensed professional river guide provided by an outfitter
Whitewater rafting day trips Class I-IV	C, S, A	Varies, ask outfitter	Licensed professional river guide provided by an outfitter
Whitewater extended trips Class I-IV	C, S, A	Varies, ask outfitter	Licensed professional river guide provided by an outfitter

Select durable rafts. Make sure the outfitter uses rafts that:

- Are of heavy-duty construction.
- Have at least four air compartments.
- Have an adequate number of large D-rings securely attached to the sides.
- Have snug hand lines along the sides.
- Are not loaded beyond their capacity of participants or gear.

Select a safe site. Do not paddle in unknown areas.

- Only raft on water that has been run and rated and up to Class IV 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.

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 Rafting

- Troops must provide one adult certified in Adult and Pediatric CPR/First Aid/AED who is not instructing the activity.
- **Get a weather and wind report.** Check [Weather.com](#) and with your outfitter about expected weather and river flow. 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.
- **Transport boats safely.** Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for the type of craft. 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.

Safety Gear. The gear you will need depends on the type of trip, water conditions, and weather expected. Check with your outfitter.

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket for each person (Type III life jackets recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications)
- Raft sized appropriately for the participants and suitable for the type of rapids
- Paddles of the style and size required for the activity and person using them
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle, compressed air horn, or VHF radio on navigable waters
- 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 (boats 16 feet or longer)

Rescue and emergency gear appropriate for boat type and conditions, such as:

- A throw bag or throw line
- Raft repair kit
- Spare paddle, first aid 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 for each person with a strong, flexible plastic shell and chin strap, as well as openings for when rafting in waters that are Class II or higher
- Protective clothing (wet suit or dry suit) worn when rafting in water below 70 degrees Fahrenheit (when water is warmer, wear layered, non-cotton clothing; store any extra clothing in a waterproof bag)
- Bailer (a scoop for removing water from a boat) or foot pump if the boat is not self-bailing
- Secure, closed-toe hiking/sport sandals or water shoes, or other non-slip footwear (old sneakers are fine), no flip-flops or loose slip-on water moccasins)
- Eyeglass keepers or goggles for those who need them
- Dry bags and/or waterproof containers to keep gear dry on extended trips; encourage all to pack wisely (do not overload rafts)
- Compass, waterproof chart, and other essentials for extended trips
- Locking blade knife carried by river guide in their life jacket or other readily accessible place
- Any other items required by the boating jurisdiction in which you will raft