

Smart Start Safe Paddling



*Paddle Smart
Paddle Safe
Have Fun!*



This resource provides essential paddling information to help you stay safe and have fun while on the water. Paddlers who have fun on the water are more likely to become impactful community leaders and caretakers of paddling environments. Paddlers who have and appropriately use safety equipment are better equipped to stay safe, make lasting memories, and share their passion with others. Trip leaders and other supporting personnel who provide accurate and appropriate safety information are more likely to be trusted and valued by new paddling participants and their families.

1

Smart Gear

2

Smart Plans

3

Smart Decisions

4

Smart Skills



1 Smart Gear

Life jackets (Also called PFDs = Personal Flotation Devices) are the most important piece of paddling safety equipment.

Life jackets float, provide sun and cold protection, and are legally required. You don't just need to have it with you, you need to wear it!



Drowning is the most common cause of paddler deaths, and it's harder to drown if your head is floating above the surface of the water.

Also, all boaters are legally required to carry a sound-producing device. Securing a whistle to your life jacket meets this federal requirement; Quick tip: 3 whistle blasts repeated means, "I need help!"

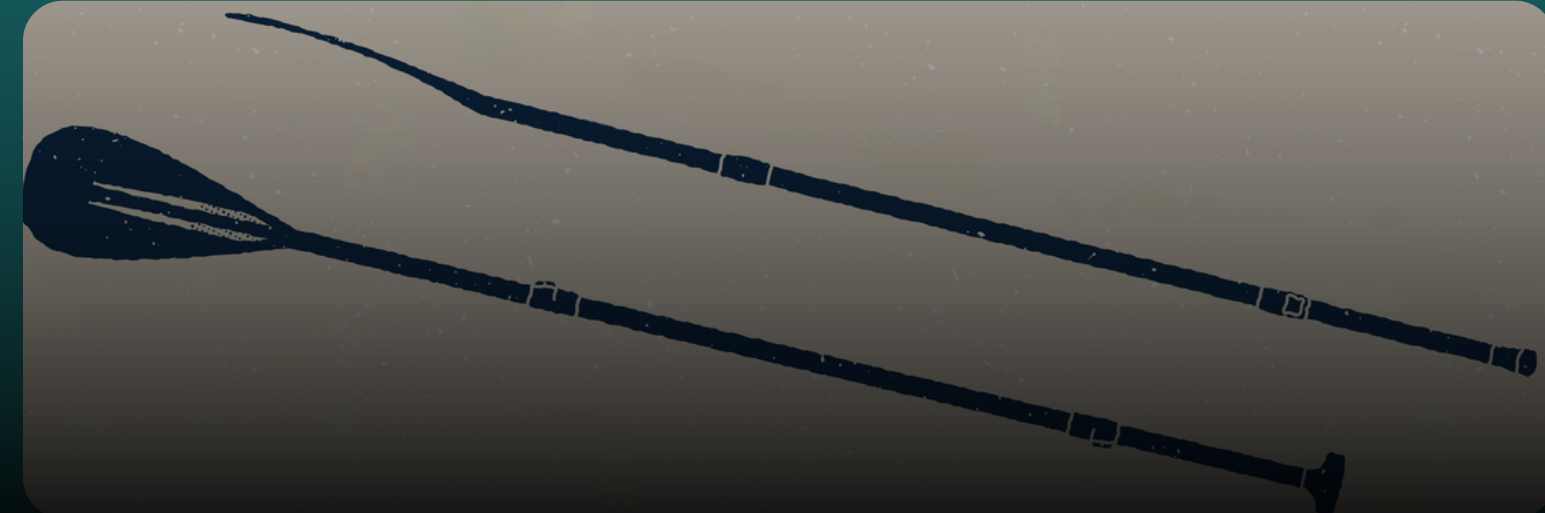
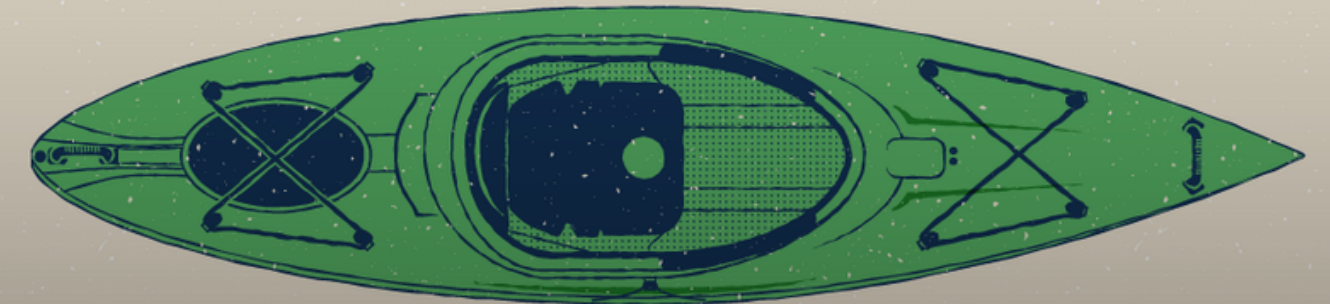
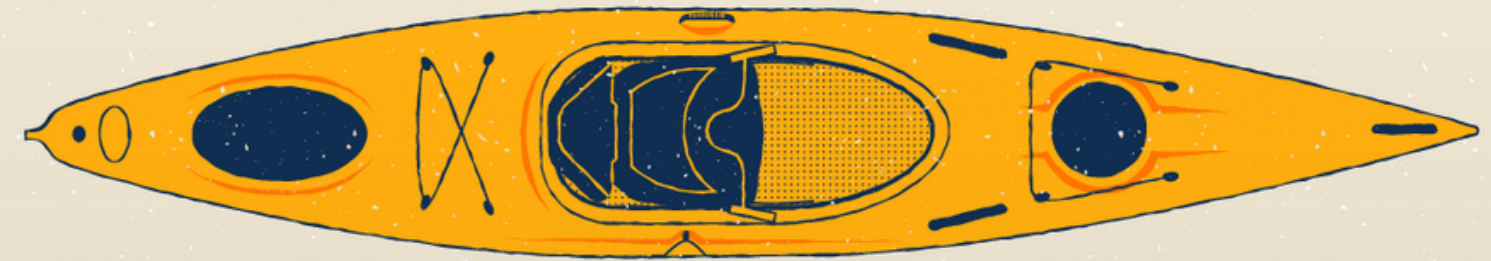
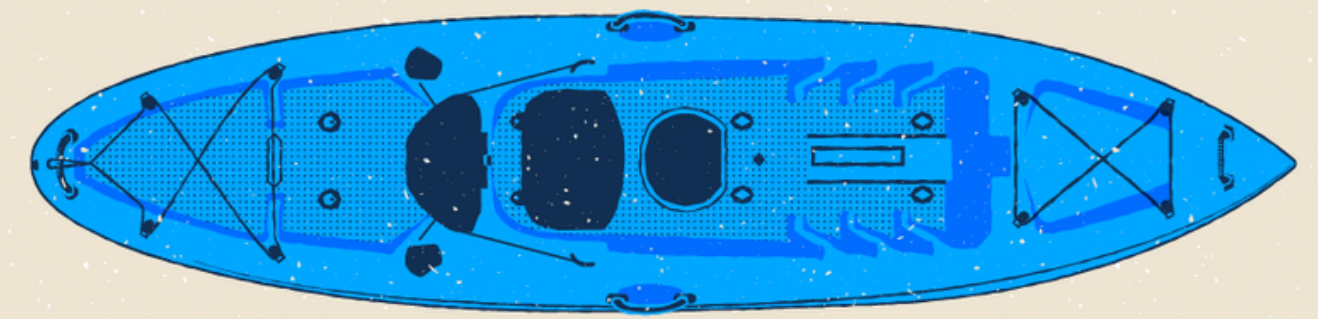
1 Smart Gear, Continued

Paddling boat design is all about trade-offs:

- Longer = faster
- Wider = more stable
- Shorter = more maneuverable

Paddles need to be sized based upon the activity:

- Long enough to reach the water and fully submerge the blade - this takes into account the type of boat, size of the person, and the paddling activity.
- Lighter paddles cause less fatigue, they produce higher performance, but incur more cost. Many beginning paddlers buy an inexpensive paddle to start and then purchase a more expensive paddle when they realize the trade offs and are want to improve their paddling performance.



1 Smart Gear, Continued

Water is cold! 70F air is comfortable, 70F water is not. **Paddlers need to dress for the water temperature and dress to swim!** Wear light, wicking clothing (no cotton), with bright colors, and closed-toed shoes that fully protect your feet.

Paddlers also need protection from sun: bring sunscreen, sunglasses, and hats.

Stay fueled! Be sure to bring plenty of water and food in water tight containers or dry bags.

Sometimes a cell phone doesn't cut it! Bring communications gear (e.g., radio, cell phone, PLB), first aid supplies, shelter and survival equipment, and rescue gear based on your experience / knowledge and the demands of the waterway you've chosen.



2 Smart Plans

Know before you go! Check the weather and water forecast:

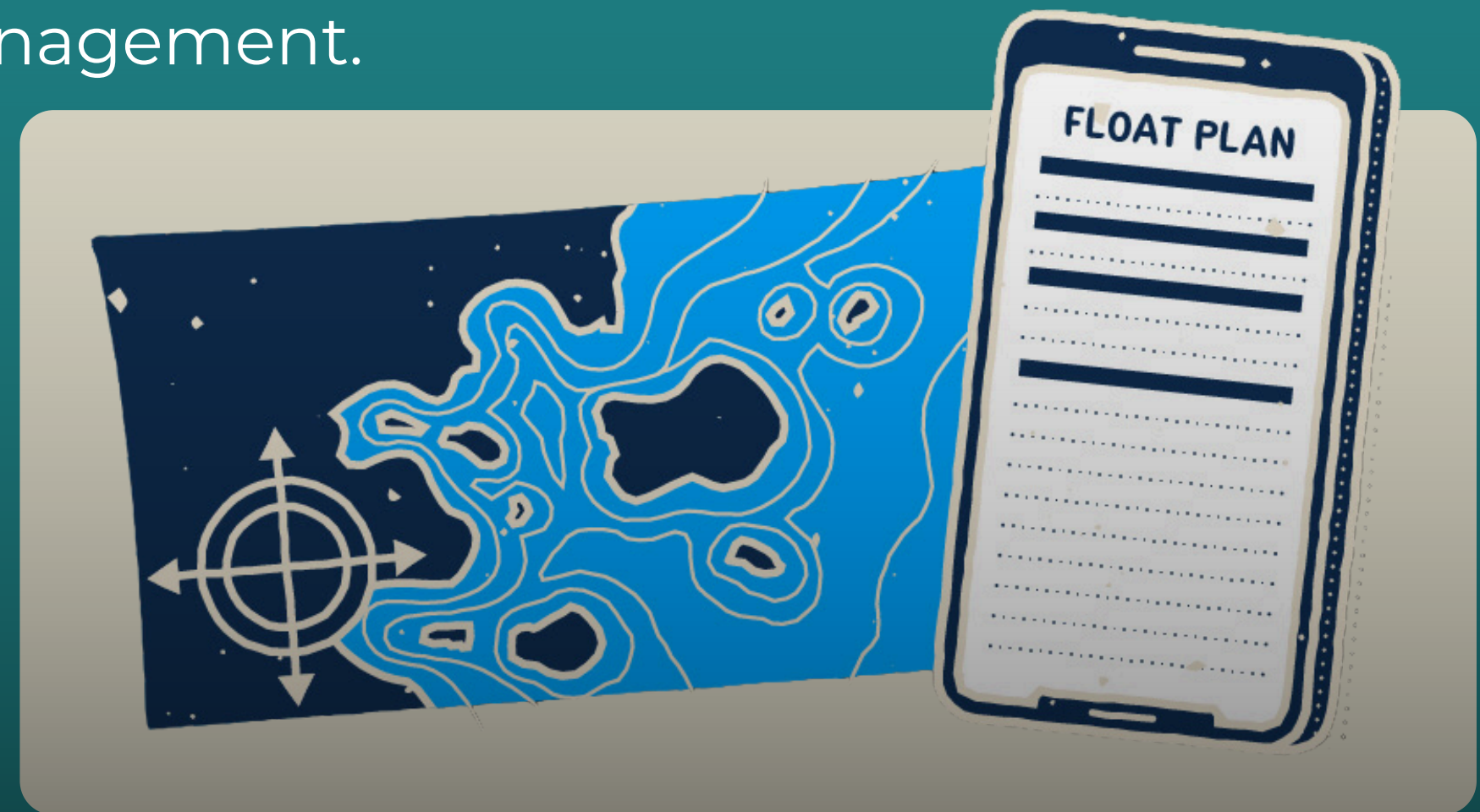
- Plan to paddle into wind and current, and return with them at your back.
- Will the weather and water conditions change during the trip? Plan ahead for quickly changing wind, rain, or tides.

The majority of paddling accidents happen to single-person, single-boat/two-person, or two-boat/two-person trips. It is best to bring 4-7 people on a trip. Paddling in a group is safer and more fun; being alone means there's no one to help if you get in trouble.

Be a leader and practice thoughtful group management.

Take an inventory of everyone who is joining you on the trip:

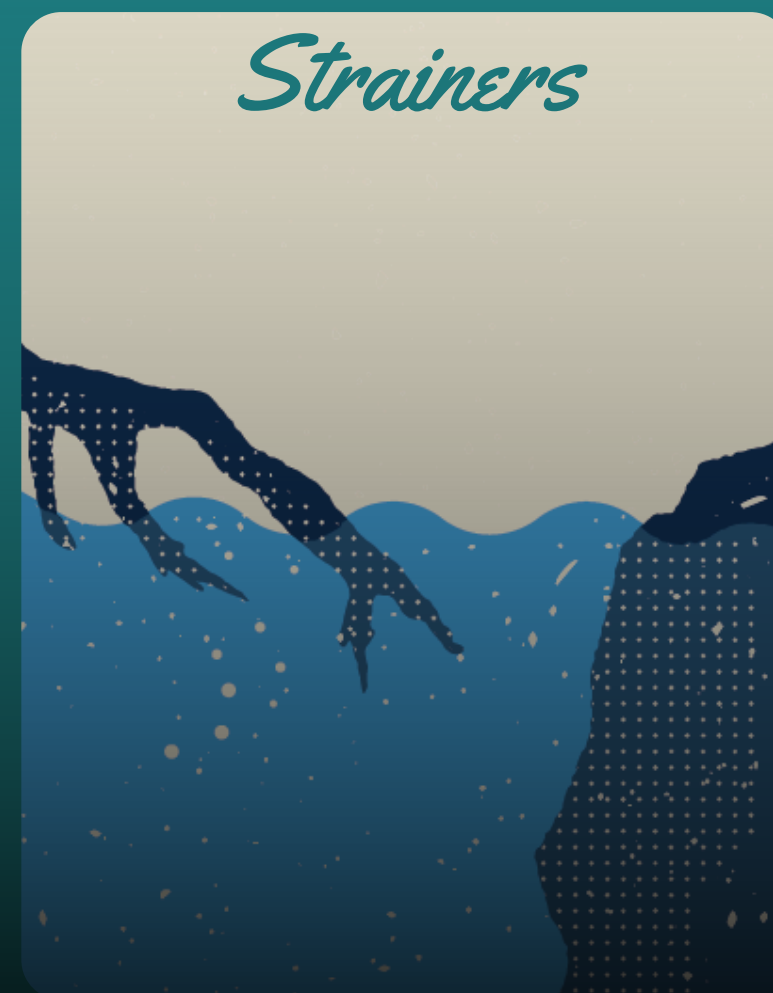
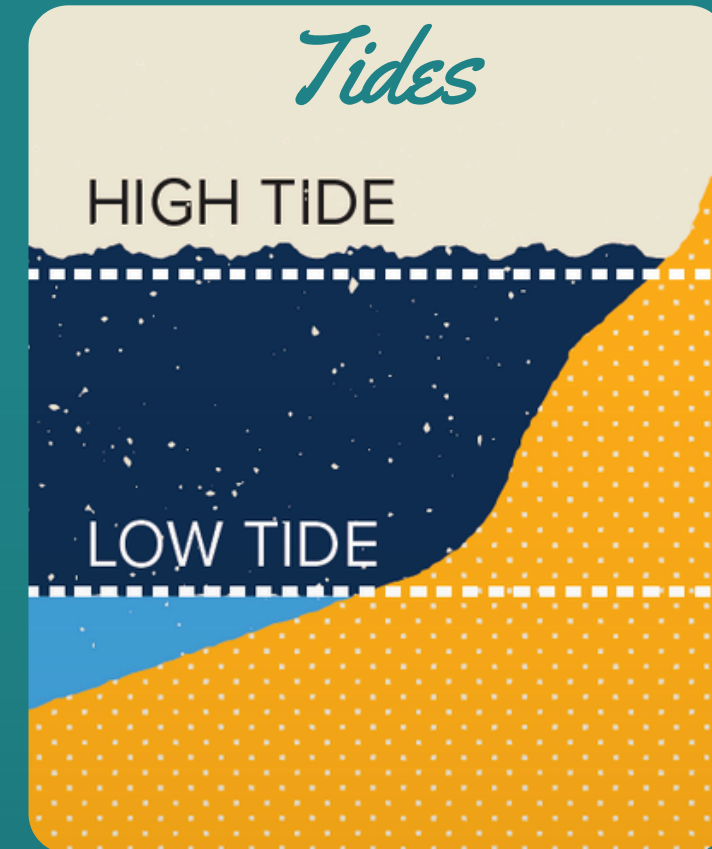
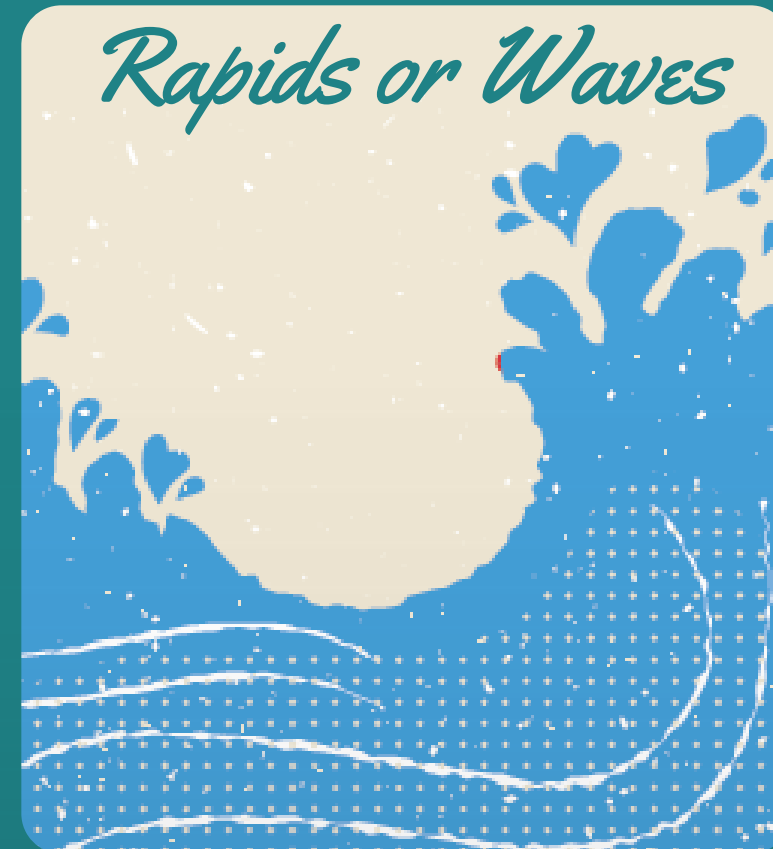
- Abilities
- Health
- Equipment
- Experience



3

Smart Decisions

- Always paddle with a group, file a float plan, and make sure everyone knows the plan.
- Don't be afraid to change the plan - if weather and water conditions are outside your comfort zone, go another time!
- Choose an appropriate venue: paddle in places with which you're familiar and comfortable. If something unexpected happens, such as wind blowing your group off course - know the surrounding areas in case you need to re-route.
- Do not paddle under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Wear bright colors so others can see you.
- Avoid debris in the water:
 - Downed limbs or trees ("strainers")
 - Low head dams
 - Other boaters such as power boats or sailboats



4 Smart Skills



Take a class! Free education is available online, and you can contact local clubs, instructors, or trip leaders to help you develop your skills. Paddlers who take a class are less likely to be involved in a serious accident.

Scan this code to learn more!





Conclusion

Paddling is fun, and safer paddling is more fun! Smart gear, planning, decision making, and skills development make paddling safer. Wearing a life jacket, paddling in a group, and taking a class are key safety practices. Classes should teach:

- Planning ahead to avoid dangerous situations
- On-water hazard recognition and avoidance
- Self-rescue skills
- How to rescue others



Smart Start For Paddling Safe

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The American Canoe Association's (ACA) vision is to engage millions of paddlers with safe and healthy opportunities for challenge, learning, service, and enjoyment. ACA's Smart Start for Safe Paddling is a holistic program which features comprehensive books, student activity workbooks, free online coursework, instructor's guide with presentation slides, and a wide collection of complementary resources.

Find all this and more:

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