

## **Group Size Considerations - Leaders & Guides**

When venturing out on a paddling trip, the number of people a leader or guide is responsible for has significant implications on the planning and delivery of the trip. For sanctioned and insured American Canoe Association (ACA) trips, there is a maximum ratio of paddlers a leader or guide may have under their care and supervision. These specific ratios are outlined in the individual leader/guide criteria and course overview documents. There may also be ACA-certified leaders and guides running trips or expeditions for a business, outfitter, or other organization that carries its own insurance and sets its own participant ratios.

It's important to recognize that there is no exact number of paddlers that guarantees effective supervision by a leader or guide. There are too many variables and changing circumstances to account for. The ACA ratios, along with those determined by an outfitter or business, are calculated decisions that set a threshold. Once that threshold is exceeded, the risks and potential consequences become unacceptable. If helpful, you can think of this as similar to operating conditions. For example, a river trip may be approved up to Class III rapids. However, depending on water levels, group experience, and the specific characteristics of each rapid, some may still be portaged.

Leaders, guides, and outfitters may also choose to operate below the maximum allowed ratio, selecting a lower number of paddlers per leader or guide. Factors that may influence this decision include:

- Number of people per craft (e.g., single, tandem, or multi-person)
- Quality of the craft (e.g., well-used, brand new, performance-level)
- Type of craft (e.g., canoe, SUP, kayak, raft)
- Skills and abilities of the group
- Skills and abilities of the guide
- Operating capacity of the company or outfitter

Another critical factor in determining group size is any limitations set by permits or managing agencies. These may designate total group size, including everyone on the trip, and may also specify required ratios of leaders or guides to participants. For example, a permit may allow a maximum of 12 people, with at least one leader or guide required.

The simplest and least risky way to navigate these requirements is to follow the most conservative ratio available, whether set by the permit, the ACA, or the outfitter.