



Level 4: Open Water Skills Assessment

Assessor's Guide

Multi-Paddler Field Grid

Single Paddler Field Grid

Skills Only Field Grid

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Delivering the L4 Open Water Skills Assessment

Assessment Overview: The L4 Open Water Skills Assessment course benchmarks the paddler's ability at a high level in the ACA's Coastal Kayak development program. Paddlers may take an assessment course to measure their skills to recognized standards, for personal growth, or to meet prerequisites for L4 instructor development or trip leader training. Therefore, assessors providing the course must strive to conduct the course authentically.

Paddler Competencies, Assessed Skills, and Developing Skills: Each assessment category includes a paragraph describing the paddler's competency, a list of required Assessed Skills, and optional Developing Skills. You are to use the description of the paddler's competency as an overarching guideline for all skills for the category. Assessed Skills are skills you must observe for the participant to pass the assessment. Developing Skills are optional, but success demonstrates that the participant performs at a high level befitting a leader or instructor in open water and progressing toward an L5 Advanced Open Water skill set.

Core and Venue Specific Skills: L4 paddlers explore, learn, and play in various locations, offering incredibly diverse and unique paddling environments. L4 paddlers are kayaking areas with exposure to challenging sea conditions. This assessment course focuses on applying "Core Skills" in L4 venues and conditions.

You will choose one set of Venue Specific skills to assess during the course. Your options are "Tide Races," "Surf Zone," "Expedition Paddling," and "Rock Gardens and Sea Caves." The venues and associated skills have been set to an equivalent level of challenge, allowing for regional accessibility while maintaining the L4 standard. It is not required to assess your participants in all four categories; only one is needed.

In summary, **all "Core Skills" categories and one "Venue Specific Skills" category** must be assessed. As the assessor, you shall structure the course to allow participants to demonstrate skills and knowledge authentically, and participants shall demonstrate their skills to be safe, effective, and efficient to pass.

Assessor's Venue Choice and Environmental Conditions: The choice of venue is critical to making an authentic assessment of your participant and is vital to the overall success of your course. For this course, you must select a location with "exposure to conditions and regular access to landing areas." While a landing spot need not be immediately accessible, paddling to a place where the participants can land should be possible. The location you select shall be conducive to assessing all skills in the "Core Skills" categories and the skills in your chosen "Venue Specific" category.

The parameters for acceptable conditions have been set to ensure a fair assessment of the participant's ability relative to the standard. The parameters for this course are wind speeds between 15 and 20 knots, waves between 3 and 5 feet (0.9 - 1.5 meters), surf between 3 and 4 feet (0.9 - 1.2 meters), and tidal current between 2 and 4 knots. Any three of these four conditions must be experienced during the assessment to qualify for the course. If conditions exceed any of these parameters during the course, you are to use your best judgment to decide if it is safe to operate on the water. If a participant cannot meet the standard for a skill due to a momentary increase in conditions, you cannot assess that skill as "below" standard. Instead, you are to provide the participant another opportunity to perform the skill once conditions are back within parameters.

Determining Success: This guide describes an outcome-based standard for Assessed Skills and what "Exceeds," "Meets," and is "Below" this standard. The participant must meet or exceed the standard for all Assessed Skills to pass the assessment. If a participant is below standard for any Assessed Skill, they are to be provided an action plan that outlines areas for practice and a recommendation of when to return for the assessment. Assessors will enter either "Meets" or "Below" in the CMS Paddler Evaluation form and are to provide more detail in the comment fields.

Participants who plan to attend a Level 4 Open Water Trip Leader Training or Instructor Development/Certification Workshop must pass the L4 Skills Assessment to qualify for these courses. Participants who largely exceed standards for Assessed Skills, and can successfully perform Developing Skills, are performing at the level expected to pass an L4 Open Water Trip Leader Assessment or L4 Open Water Instructor Certification Evaluation/Workshop.

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L4 Paddler Core Competencies and Assessed Skills

Assessors shall evaluate the paddler for their competency in each of the following “Core” categories in the chosen venue.

Core: Boat Handling

L4 Competency: The paddler uses appropriate strokes and maneuvers to position for optimal performance and moves purposefully in the surf, rock gardens, tide races, wind, waves, and following seas. They effectively blend strokes and modify maneuvers according to environmental conditions using both sides of the kayak. They use their paddle appropriately while edging, demonstrating blade awareness relative to conditions (for example, when crossing eddylines and side surfing). The paddler can recover when momentarily destabilized due to environmental factors and consistently rolls in L4 conditions.

Demonstrates ability to paddle and hold position in differing wind and wave directions.

- Exceeds: Uses wind and waves to their advantage and progresses against the wind. Paddler maintains position in relation to ranges/position fix.
- Meets: Maintains directional control and can make progress against the wind. The paddler can hold and regain their position if lost in relation to ranges/position fixes. The paddler can vary their speed and accelerate to catch a wave or reach a target.
- Below: Unable to maintain directional control, or loses progress when paddling into wind or waves, or displays visual discomfort paddling in following seas, or cannot maintain their position.

Demonstrates ability to turn upwind and downwind efficiently.

- Exceeds: Uses wind and waves to their advantage to make upwind and downwind turns.
- Meets: Combines appropriate strokes, speed, and edging to make upwind and downwind turns.
- Below: Cannot turn their kayak upwind or downwind.

Uses forward and reverse paddling to reach an intended target or accomplish a specific task.

- Exceeds: Makes effective stroke choices and appropriately varies paddle angle and cadence (for example, to catch waves or break through an eddyline).
- Meets: Reaches intended target with little loss of directional control.
- Below: Cannot reach the intended target due to loss of directional control or inability to make progress.

Uses forward and reverse sweep strokes to shape a course and avoid hazards.

- Exceeds: Uses sweep strokes effectively to shape an efficient course (for example, successfully attains upstream eddies, breaking in and out of an eddy, surfing with directional control).
- Meets: Combines sweep strokes with propulsion strokes and edging to stay on course. Their course is regained within 10 seconds when lost.
- Below: Cannot stay on course or needs excessive time or corrections to accomplish the task.

Uses bow, midship, and stern rudders to turn and maintain their course.

- Exceeds: Incorporates rudders while making dynamic moves (for example, turns on wave face).
- Meets: Demonstrates effective use of rudders for directional control (for example, to maintain direction while traversing a rock garden).
- Below: Unable to use rudders to change or maintain course effectively

Uses blade support to recover and maintain stability while underway, maneuvering, and holding position.

- Exceeds: Reflexively blends supportive strokes/bracing when maneuvering in rough water to avoid capsizing and consistently recovers if stability is lost.
- Meets: Consistently demonstrates the ability to recover when stability is lost. Where appropriate, the paddler can maintain momentum while recovering their stability.
- Below: Cannot recover when stability is lost or is inconsistent with their ability to recover. Or, when underway, the paddler cannot consistently recover their stability and maintain momentum, resulting in an avoidable capsize.

Uses draw strokes for effective lateral movement, whether the kayak is static or dynamic.

- Exceeds: Consistently incorporates sideways maneuvers for lateral movement of their kayak.
- Meets: Can avoid obstacles and move their kayak sideways to an intended target.
- Below: Cannot move sideways or avoid obstacles and resorts to corrective strokes (for example, stopping, backing up, sweep strokes) instead of draw strokes to maneuver into position.

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Able to roll kayak from both setup and non-setup positions.

- Exceeds: Consistently rolls on the first attempt while paddling in dynamic water.
- Meets: Can roll while paddling in dynamic water. If the paddler swims, they may be given another opportunity for success while rolling in dynamic water.
- Below: Swims two or more times during the assessment due to missed rolls.

Developing Skill: Can demonstrate rolling up on either side of the kayak.

Developing Skill: Displays comfort on edge in the surf, waves, wind, and tidal features.

Core: Rescues and Towing

L4 Competency: The paddler demonstrates competent rescue and towing skills in L4 conditions. They choose rescues and towing configurations appropriate for the circumstances (for example, what is most suitable for a capsize in a surf zone or capsize in tidal rapid) and demonstrate the ability to be an active and safe swimmer when being rescued.

Performs one or more of the following assisted rescues with an able swimmer: Side-by-Side, Scoop, T-Rescue, or Swimmer Deck Carry.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates two or more situation-appropriate rescues and moves the rescue to a position of less risk when necessary.
- Meets: Chooses an appropriate rescue for the situation and moves the rescue to a position of less risk when necessary.
- Below: Unable to rescue the swimmer or performs the rescue in an area of high risk.

Performs one or more of the following assisted rescues to aid an impaired swimmer: Scoop, Unresponsive Paddler, or Swimmer Deck Carry.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates two or more situation-appropriate rescues and moves rescue to a position of less risk when necessary.
- Meets: Chooses an appropriate rescue for the situation and moves the rescue to a position of less risk when necessary.
- Below: Unable to rescue the swimmer or performs the rescue in an area of high risk.

Performs one or more of the following self-rescues: Re-enter and Roll, Paddle Float, or Scramble.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates two or more self-rescues and moves into a position of less risk when necessary.
- Meets: Demonstrates a self-rescue and moves into a position of less risk when necessary.
- Below: Unable to self-rescue.

Is an active and effective swimmer when being rescued.

- Exceeds: Maintains contact with their kayak and gear during a rescue, flips kayak right-side up, and holds decklines while maneuvering to their bow. Stays clear of an approaching rescuer by keeping their kayak between them and the approaching rescuer.
- Meets: Maintains contact with their kayak and gear during a rescue, flips kayak right-side up, and maintains contact with their kayak while maneuvering to their bow.
- Below: Does not maintain contact with their kayak and gear during rescue or cannot re-enter their kayak.

Applies one or more of the following towing strategies with a towline: In-Line Tow, Rafted In-Line Tow, or Anchor Tow.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates application of two or more situation-appropriate towing techniques, maintaining usefulness and moving rescue to a position of less risk when necessary.
- Meets: Chooses an appropriate rescue for the situation and moves the rescue to a position of less risk when necessary.
- Below: Unable to rescue the swimmer, or performs the rescue in an area of high risk, or the paddler chooses an unsafe towing strategy.

Applies one or more of the following towing strategies without a towline: Contact Tow, Bulldozing, or Toggle Tow.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates application of two or more situation-appropriate towing techniques/strategies, maintaining usefulness, and moves swimmer/craft to a position of less risk when necessary.
- Meets: Chooses an appropriate towing strategy for the situation and moves the swimmer/craft to an area of less risk when necessary.
- Below: Unable to tow the swimmer or their kayak, or does not move to an area of less risk, or paddler chooses an unsafe towing strategy.

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Effectively manages tow system and can release system while underway and following a capsize.

- Exceeds: Deploys tow system cleanly, demonstrates the ability to release tow system while underwater and roll up, and stows towline quickly.
- Meets: Deploys tow system cleanly, demonstrates the ability to release tow system while underway, and stows towline quickly.
- Below: Towline does not deploy, or they cannot release the tow system while underway or stow the towline.

Able to rescue a swimmer who has been separated from their kayak and reconnect the swimmer to their kayak.

- Exceeds: Makes the most efficient choice of rescue priority for the situation and reconnects the swimmer to their kayak with or without a towline.
- Meets: Reconnects the swimming paddler to their kayak.
- Below: Unable to reconnect the swimmer to their kayak.

Able to assist another paddler's recovery from capsize by presenting their kayak or paddle.

- Exceeds: Moves their kayak into position and maintains position to effectively assist another paddler's recovery from multiple orientations (for example, bow presentation, stern presentation, side-by-side, paddle presentation).
- Meets: Moves their kayak into position, maintains or regains position to effectively assist another paddler's recovery.
- Below: Causes failed recovery attempts due to their inability to position their kayak or maintain the position of their kayak.

Developing Skill: Deploys multiple techniques and strategies for the above rescues.

Developing Skill: Is present and flexible while under pressure.

Core: Awareness and Seamanship

L4 Competency: The paddler has a heightened awareness of the environment, their performance, and decision-making relative to group members and adapts plans accordingly. The paddler communicates clearly with the group to make necessary changes, is properly equipped for the conditions, and uses equipment appropriately to maintain personal and group safety and comfort.

Understands the effects of wind, tide, current, and land masses on the marine environment.

- Exceeds: Can effectively share with the group what is happening and why regarding environmental factors. Maintains an openness to comprehend, adapt, and apply what is actually happening. Not locked into their expectations. Views forecasts and tables as tools, not absolutes.
- Meets: Can effectively communicate what is happening in the environment around them and why.
- Below: Unable to comprehend how these variables act upon each other or is locked into prior expectations or information.

Practices Leave No Trace and demonstrates appropriate interactions with the ecosystem and wildlife.

- Exceeds: Knows LNT Principles and unconsciously models best practices of LNT Principles. Knows NOAA Marine Wildlife Viewing Guidelines and respectfully informs group members of best practices.
- Meets: Applies best practices of LNT Principles and NOAA Marine Wildlife Viewing Guidelines.
- Below: Is unaware of, or does not adhere to, LNT Principles and NOAA Marine Wildlife Viewing Guidelines.

Understands the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of cold-water shock and hypothermia.

- Exceeds: Properly prepared and takes necessary preventative action for self and group. Recognizes signs and symptoms of hypothermia and treatment for cold-related issues. Knows when to call for Emergency Medical Services.
- Meets: Properly prepared and takes necessary preventative action to prevent cold-water shock and hypothermia for self. Recognizes signs, symptoms, and treatment, including when to call for Emergency Medical Services.
- Below: Is unprepared for paddling conditions or does not recognize signs and symptoms of hypothermia. Or does not take appropriate action to improve the situation.

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Understands the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of heat-related issues and hyperthermia.

- Exceeds: Properly prepared and takes necessary preventative action to prevent heat-related issues and hyperthermia for self and group. Recognizes signs and symptoms of hyperthermia and treatment for heat-related issues. Knows when to call for Emergency Medical Services.
- Meets: Properly prepared and takes necessary preventative action to prevent heat-related issues and hyperthermia for self. Recognizes signs and symptoms of hyperthermia and treatment for heat-related issues. Knows when to call for Emergency Medical Services.
- Below: Unprepared for paddling conditions, or does not recognize signs and symptoms of hyperthermia and other heat-related issues, or does not take appropriate action to improve the situation.

Understands personal and group capabilities relative to the environment and makes decisions accordingly.

- Exceeds: Makes route choices and decisions that keep the group within the remit for L4.
- Meets: Makes route choices and decisions that keep themselves within the remit for L4.
- Below: Makes route choices and decisions which take themselves outside the remit for L4.

Paddles as a cohesive member of the group and positions to provide support.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates awareness of hazards and keeps members of the group in positions to avoid them, communicates effectively, maintains line of sight, and position of most usefulness to the group at all times.
- Meets: Demonstrates awareness of hazards and keeps themselves in a position to avoid them. Establishes a safe position while maintaining communication and line of sight to other group members and maintains a position of most usefulness to the group.
- Below: Is unaware of hazards, loses communication with group members or line of sight with group members, or does not maintain a position of most usefulness to the group.

Maintains properly outfitted kayak and has a working knowledge of the appropriate paddling equipment.

- Exceeds: Kayak is appropriately outfitted for conditions, and the paddler uses equipment to take care of the group's needs and themselves.
- Meets: Kayak is outfitted for conditions, and the paddler demonstrates access to and proper use of equipment needed for tasks given in the assessment. The paddler can complete all assessed skills with their chosen kayak.
- Below: Kayak needs proper floatation or rigging, and the paddler needs to be equipped and sufficiently dressed for the conditions. Or gear choices are detrimental to the success of the group.

Understands how to pack and properly trim their kayak.

- Exceeds: The kayak is packed with equipment needed to take care of group members with quick access while maintaining a properly trimmed kayak.
- Meets: The kayak is packed so that the paddler can access needed equipment, and the kayak is properly trimmed.
- Below: The paddler cannot access equipment needed on the water, or the kayak is not properly trimmed, so it is constantly lee-cocking or weather cocking due to the unbalanced packing of the kayak.

Performs repairs allowing the paddler to return safely to the launch site.

- Exceeds: Carries the equipment necessary to perform repairs for other group members and demonstrates knowledge of likely repairs.
- Meets: Carries the equipment necessary to perform repairs on their kayak and demonstrates knowledge of performing likely repairs (kayak cracks/dings, drysuit tear, lost hatch cover, foot peg issues, etc.).
- Below: Does not carry the equipment necessary to repair their kayak to paddle to an access point.

Carries appropriate visual and auditory signaling device(s) and understands their use and limitations.

- Exceeds: Carries a variety of signaling devices and can instruct others on proper use and limitations.
- Meets: Carries a VHF radio, whistle, mirror, white light, and flares* and can demonstrate the use and understands limitations. **Flares are not required if traveling by plane to the assessment or where their possession or use is illegal (for example, China).*
- Below: Does not carry appropriate visual and auditory signaling devices or understand their use.

Can tie Bowline, Clove Hitch, Figure 8, and Trucker's Hitch knots.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates the ability to teach and troubleshoot other group members' knot work. Knows more knots than these four, as well as the proper usage of the knots.
- Meets: Can tie the required knots and knows proper usage.
- Below: Cannot tie the required knots or know the proper usage of the specific knot(s).

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Core: Incident Prevention and Management

L4 Competency: The paddler has an incident prevention mindset on and off the water. They make good choices and demonstrate competent decision-making. The paddler can lead and assist with managing incidents in L4 conditions. They can identify appropriate safe zones and work with other paddlers to ensure the entire group's safety.

Safely transports, unloads, and carries kayaks at the launch site.

- Exceeds: The paddler recognizes unsafe transport and carrying of the kayaks and steps in to assist others when loading, unloading, and moving the kayaks.
- Meets: Kayak is properly secured to an appropriately anchored roof rack or trailer. How the kayak is unloaded minimizes the risk of injury to themselves and others.
- Below: The method by which they transport their kayak is a hazard to other vehicles, or the unloading or carrying method puts the paddler at risk.

Actively participates in pre-trip and post-trip debrief sessions.

- Exceeds: Helps facilitate effective briefing and debriefing sessions and provides “leader level” insight during these sessions.
- Meets: Is active and engaged in briefing and debriefing sessions, demonstrates an understanding of the plan for the day, and is helpful in processing lessons learned from the debriefing session.
- Below: Does not participate in pre-trip briefing or post-trip debriefing sessions.

Launches and lands in a safe manner.

- Exceeds: Performs leadership in launching and landing the group in L4 conditions.
- Meets: Demonstrates the ability to launch and land their kayak successfully in L4 conditions.
- Below: Is unable to launch or land successfully in L4 conditions. Or exits their kayak land side when landing.

Communicates and directs others calmly in stressful situations (for example, during rescues).

- Exceeds: Uses clear and concise communication, which is well-received by teammates and facilitates execution of the rescue. Demeanor de-escalates situations that may otherwise be or become stressful.
- Meets: Communicates in a way that teammates respond to appropriately and facilitates execution of the rescue.
- Below: The group is unresponsive to directions, or the atmosphere of stress is escalated. Or, directives given during rescue need to be clarified or result in added confusion during the rescue.

Works with others to perform rescues and move the group to a position of less risk.

- Exceeds: Able to adapt and follow the lead of others and the environment even when different from their preferred methods (except where absolute safety is contradicted). Can facilitate a meaningful debriefing and “lessons learned” session post-incident.
- Meets: Actively engages in the solution regardless of role. Demonstrates flexibility to adapt to changing leadership and environment. Is an active participant in the post-incident debriefing and “lessons learned” session.
- Below: Disregards input and direction from others in the group or forces solutions or does not participate in post-incident debriefing and “lessons learned” session.

Demonstrates proper use of VHF radio and the ability to hail appropriate resources.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates the ability to instruct others on the proper use of a VHF radio and different services for hailing assistance appropriate to the situation or incident.
- Meets: Demonstrates ability to use VHF radio appropriately to hail fellow paddlers, other vessels, Coast Guard, or other resources according to the situation. Can find weather information. Uses proper radio call etiquette and knows key terminology (Securité, Pan Pan, Mayday).
- Below: Does not carry a VHF radio, or does not know how to use VHF, or uses inappropriate radio etiquette.

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Core: Trip Planning and Navigation

L4 Competency: The paddler successfully plans, plots, and executes routes in L4 conditions and venues. Their chosen routes will incorporate a holistic view of all the variables within the venue and contain contingency plans.

Gathers, understands, and utilizes appropriate forecasts (weather, marine, surf, current, and tidal).

- Exceeds: Comes prepared with all pertinent forecast data and can assist others in finding data for the area.
- Meets: Can provide all pertinent forecast data for the day when requested by the assessor.
- Below: Cannot provide pertinent forecast data for the day when requested by the assessor.

Demonstrates use of charts, forecast(s), and knowledge of paddling group when planning a route.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates a high level of understanding when route planning.
- Meets: Successfully completes a tabletop/"decktop" navigation exercise that incorporates forecasts (weather, marine, surf, current, and tidal predictions).
- Below: Is unsuccessful in completing the tabletop/"decktop" navigation exercise.

Incorporates wind, waves, and swell into route plans and trip choices.

- Exceeds: Gathers forecasts and understands how wave and swell characteristics (size, direction, period) can be influenced by wind conditions. Applies a more in-depth understanding of wind forecasts (strength, trend, and direction) and can infer the effect on the group's plan from relief maps and headlands.
- Meets: Uses forecast to determine if the route is feasible and adjusts the trip plan to deal with adverse conditions when necessary.
- Below: Unable to gather and use forecast data on wind, wave, and swell conditions to determine if the route is feasible and fails to adjust the trip plan to deal with adverse conditions when necessary.

Demonstrates ability to calculate stages of the tide and incorporate them into the route plan.

- Exceeds: Able to calculate the depth of tidal waters over time in relation to chart symbols using a nautical chart and tide chart/log upon request of the assessor. Tide tables and marine charts can be used to determine water depth due to tide at any position or time along the route. Applies calculations to route plans and decisions on the water and can explain concepts to others clearly and understandably.
- Meets: Able to calculate the depth of tidal waters over time in relation to chart symbols using a nautical chart and tide chart/log when given the task ahead of time. Applies calculations to route plans and decisions on the water.
- Below: Unable to calculate the depth of tidal waters in relation to the chart or fails to incorporate calculations into their route plan or trip decisions.

Demonstrates ability to calculate tidal drift and incorporate drift into a route plan.

- Exceeds: Able to calculate the amount of drift and apply the calculation to a route plan upon request of the assessor. The paddler shall be able to calculate drift direction and distance for a crossing of more than 2.0 nautical miles where the current changes direction hourly.
- Meets: Able to calculate the amount of drift and apply the calculation to a route plan when given the task ahead of time. The paddler shall be able to calculate drift direction and distance for a crossing of no more than 2.0 nautical miles.
- Below: Paddler is unfamiliar with, or unable to, calculate drift into their route plan.

Demonstrates the ability to calculate current strength and timing and incorporate them into route plans.

- Exceeds: Able to determine when, how fast, and in what direction currents will be running; applies calculations to route plan and decisions on the water upon request of the assessor and can explain concepts to others clearly and understandably.
- Meets: Able to determine when, how fast, and in what direction currents will be running; applies calculations to route plan and decisions on the water when given the task ahead of time.
- Below: Unable to determine when, how fast, and in what direction currents will be running.

Demonstrates use of chart and compass to paddle a course.

- Exceeds: The level of understanding is such that they can lead a group in L4 conditions and explain navigation concepts to other paddlers.
- Meets: Easily works out the route details using a chart, compass, and environmental data. Incorporates piloting and dead reckoning while navigating by chart and compass. Stays on course while paddling from point to point in L4 conditions and can verbalize location and plan when requested by the assessor.
- Below: Does not use chart or compass properly while attempting to paddle the course. Or cannot maintain course in L4 conditions or struggles to answer questions about location or observed features.

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Demonstrates ability to identify their location at all times.

- Exceeds: Continuously shows an understanding of location and is future-minded about destination and speed of travel.
- Meets: Can show the assessor their location on a chart upon request.
- Below: Is unable to accurately point to their current location on a chart within 10 seconds of request from the assessor.

Understands the Nautical Rules of the Road and aids to navigation and demonstrates safe paddling with boat traffic.

- Exceeds: Understands a wide variety of rules. Leads a connected group safely through an area of active boating, correctly honoring aids to navigation and including major shipping channels. Has a "Plan B" route in mind if the planned route proves hazardous due to excessive boat activity.
- Meets: Understands a wide variety of rules. Stays connected to the group and paddles a safe and effective route through active boating areas, correctly honoring aids to navigation.
- Below: Knows some rules or no rules. Or paddles a haphazard route through areas of boat traffic and aids to navigation.

Developing Skill: Calculating tidal drift involving vector analysis.

Developing Skill: Limited Visibility Navigation (for example, night, fog).

Venue Specific: Expedition Paddling

L4 Competency: The paddler utilizes knowledge and resources to plan a multi-day trip. Their understanding of the environment allows the paddler to anticipate conditions during the trip and make decisions to adjust the plan accordingly. During a multi-day journey, they successfully apply L4 paddling skills in the environment/venue.

Provides evidence of multi-day journeys that involve overnight camping.

- Exceeds: Provides evidence of multi-day journeys with exposure to a variety of conditions.
- Meets: Provides evidence of a multi-day trip with some exposure to L2 and L3 conditions.
- Below: Does not provide evidence of a multi-day trip where conditions were present.

Demonstrates ability to plan a successful multi-day journey using available and appropriate planning resources.

- Exceeds: Gathers and appropriately utilizes resources (for example, charts, forecasts, and local information) to plan the assessment trip. The trip plan considers likely risks and the compounding effect of multiple days of paddling in L4 conditions. Knowledge check indicates a high level of planning competency, field forecasting ability, and a leadership mindset.
- Meets: Gathers and appropriately utilizes resources (for example, charts, forecasts, and local information) to plan the assessment trip. The trip plan considers likely risks and the compounding effect of multiple days of paddling in L4 conditions.
- Below: Does not come prepared with needed planning resources, or is unable to apply forecasts and local knowledge to the trip, or needs to consider the breadth of the journey when planning each day.

Makes appropriate expedition decisions both before and during the trip.

- Exceeds: Maintains a holistic approach to decision-making during the trip considering venue, conditions, and group well-being. Demonstrates appropriate energy management regarding group pacing, distances, and provisioning (fueling for the journey and planning for delays). Utilizes contingency plans when necessary and effectively communicates their approach to the group.
- Meets: Chooses realistic times and distances, route decisions, and when to launch and land. Demonstrates appropriate energy management regarding pacing, distances, and provisioning (both fueling for the journey and planning for delays). Has alternate plans in place and demonstrates the ability to modify their plan as necessary effectively.
- Below: Chooses unrealistic determinations concerning times and distances, or route choices, or the ability of the group, or when to launch and land.

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Is appropriately equipped for multi-day journey in a planned environment and is well versed in the use of equipment.

- Exceeds: Has equipment needed to care for themselves and group members on and off the water. Equipment is accessible and appropriate for solving problems they are likely to encounter.
- Meets: Has equipment needed to care for themselves on and off the water. Equipment is accessible and appropriate for solving problems they are likely to encounter.
- Below: Lacking equipment needed to care for themselves on and off the water, or equipment is not accessible or does not apply to problems they are likely to encounter.

Demonstrates all “Core Skills” with a fully laden kayak.

- Exceeds: Functions at a high level in L4 conditions with a fully laden kayak.
- Meets: Functions competently in L4 conditions with a fully laden kayak.
- Below: Unable to perform competently with a fully laden kayak.

Venue Specific: Tide Races

L4 Competency: The paddler understands the tidal environment and can paddle through a tide race in control. They understand the challenges of paddling in areas of current and position themselves appropriately to ensure individual and group safety.

Identifies features of a tide race (eddy, eddyline, current, standing waves).

- Exceeds: Understands the relationship between current (flow direction and speed), wind (direction, velocity, and duration), waves (direction, height, and period), and landforms (seabed and headlands). Uses available data and understanding of these relationships to predict features of the race before arriving at the site.
- Meets: Correctly identifies features in a tide race, including areas of safety and recovery.
- Below: Is unfamiliar with, or needs help to identify, the features of a tide race.

Effectively paddles a downstream course through the current.

- Exceeds: Able to safely lead a group through a tide race and maximize features in the race to achieve a position of maximum usefulness.
- Meets: Chooses a successful course through the tide race and utilizes features of the race to stay on course.
- Below: Cannot determine their route through the tide race or are out of control while paddling in a tide race.

Able to select an appropriate route and return to the top of the tide race.

- Exceeds: Able to safely lead a group to the top of the tide race and maximize features in the race to achieve a position of maximum usefulness.
- Meets: Chooses a successful course to return to the top of the tide race by utilizing eddies or surfing to move upstream efficiently.
- Below: Cannot determine their route to return to the top of the tide race or does not use eddies or waves and paddles against the current when moving upstream.

Demonstrates control while breaking in and out of eddies.

- Exceeds: Varies kayak position, angle of approach, kayak edge, speed, and strokes to make both wide and tight turns on eddylines.
- Meets: Maintains directional control and stability while breaking in and out of eddies.
- Below: Loses directional control or stability when crossing eddylines.

Demonstrates using a ferry glide to reach an intended target while crossing current.

- Exceeds: Varies kayak position, angle of approach, kayak edge, speed, and strokes to ferry glide across the flow and attain upstream.
- Meets: Maintains angle and reaches the target.
- Below: Loses angle or does not reach the target.

Demonstrates appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.

- Exceeds: Provides overwatch with appropriate positioning. Reaches rescue efficiently, performs rescue effectively, and moves rescue into eddy or other areas of less risk when necessary.
- Meets: Reaches rescue efficiently, performs rescue effectively, and moves rescue into eddy or other areas of less risk when necessary.
- Below: Cannot reach, perform, or manage rescue.

Assessor's Guide - Level 4: Open Water Skills Assessment

Venue Specific: Tide Races (continued)

Developing Skill: Demonstrates ability to surf tide race waves under control.

Developing Skill: Demonstrates ability to attain against the current to go from one eddy to another.

Developing Skill: Demonstrates using a reverse ferry glide to reach an intended target while crossing the current.

Venue Specific: Surf Zone

L4 Competency: The paddler demonstrates the use of forecasting tools in combination with charts and maps to predict areas of surf and breaking waves. They can identify the features of the surf zone and the types of waves. They demonstrate the ability to launch, land, and paddle through the surf in control. They can self-rescue in the surf zone, perform assisted rescues, and tow where and when appropriate.

Identifies features of a surf zone (for example, soup, impact, outside, rip, and longshore currents).

- Exceeds: Understands the relationship between fetch, wind (direction, velocity, duration), waves (direction, height, period), and landforms (seabed, headlands). Uses available data and understanding of these relationships to predict whether the surf zone is appropriate for sea kayak surfing.
- Meets: Correctly identifies the features of a surf zone.
- Below: Unable to describe what they observe in the surf zone beyond “breaking waves.”

Identifies different wave types and parts of the wave.

- Exceeds: Correctly identifies and understands the characteristics of different wave types and parts of the wave.
- Meets: Correctly identifies wave types and parts of the wave (for example, type - dumping, spilling; parts - trough, face, crest).
- Below: Is unfamiliar with, or needs help to identify, different wave types and parts of the wave.

Is aware of surf etiquette and applies concepts with situational awareness and appropriate positioning.

- Exceeds: Understands surf etiquette and applies concepts with situational awareness and appropriate positioning when moving through the surf zone and catching waves. For example, receives compliments from other surfers at the break.
- Meets: Understands surf etiquette and applies concepts when positioning in and paddling through the surf zone. For example, is able to ensure the safety of all surfers in the area through positioning and decision-making.
- Below: Is unfamiliar with surf etiquette or needs help to apply concepts when positioning in and paddling through the surf zone. For example, encounters avoidable collisions with other paddlers or surfers.

Demonstrates control while launching and landing.

- Exceeds: Is intentional, patient, and strategic in location and timing of launch and landing.
- Meets: Able to independently launch and land a skirted kayak without surfing.
- Below: Paddler requires more than two attempts to launch or land without assistance. For example, unintentionally surfs, broaches, or capsizes when launching or landing.

Demonstrates the ability to identify a route to shore when sitting outside the surf break and paddle in under control.

- Exceeds: Able to identify possible routes and guide fellow paddlers through the surf zone. Uses coastal features in addition to observed wave action to determine their route.
- Meets: Able to identify a route, determine appropriate timing, and successfully paddle through the surf zone from outside the break. Identifies larger sets and where waves are breaking.
- Below: Unable to identify and successfully paddle a route through the surf zone from outside the break.

Demonstrates control while paddling through the surf and breaking waves to the “outside” or against the breaking waves.

- Exceeds: Able to safely direct a group through the surf and breaking waves. Clearly communicates the chosen route and maintains a position of maximum usefulness.
- Meets: Chooses a successful course through the surf and breaking waves and utilizes appropriate timing and strokes to stay on course. Maintains safe positioning in relation to other kayaks, swimmers, and other hazards.
- Below: Cannot determine their route through the surf and breaking waves. Or is unaware of their relationship to other paddlers and hazards or regularly experiences unintentional surfing.

Assessor's Guide - Level 4: Open Water Skills Assessment

Side-surfs (bongo slides) with balance and intention.

- Exceeds: Able to proactively begin side surfing with intention when a wave closes out and can recover from a side surf to surfing perpendicularly with control after the wave energy weakens.
- Meets: Able to begin side surfing without losing balance after broaching and exits the side surf under control.
- Below: Unable to recover from a broach with a balanced side surf, resulting in capsize (after repeated attempts). Or demonstrates a lack of control while side surfing in a way that poses a hazard to others enjoying the surf zone.

Chooses the direction of travel on a wave and exits the wave under control.

- Exceeds: Able to establish a position of control on the wave and refine or change direction while surfing, exits a wave with awareness of their position in relation to the next wave.
- Meets: Establishes position on the wave, moves in the chosen direction, and exits the wave under control before being broached.
- Below: Unable to establish position or direction on the wave. Exits only when the wave loses energy or with an unintentional broach.

Can effectively swim and move their kayak to shore when capsized in the surf zone or performs a re-entry and roll.

- Exceeds: Uses wave energy to manage risk and advance to shore. Can identify hazards while in the water and adjust accordingly.
- Meets: Able to get to shore in relative proximity to kayak while minimizing the risk of injury or exhaustion.
- Below: Unable to swim and move their kayak to shore following a capsize in the surf zone. Or struggles to gain composure and make efficient decisions while out of their kayak in the surf zone.

Demonstrates appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates patient urgency and intention when assessing rescue options and adapts approach as needed through a spectrum of options (for example, swimmer support, contact tows, assisted rescues).
- Meets: Reaches rescue efficiently, performs rescue effectively, and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary. Understands risk versus reward when assessing rescue solutions based on surf characteristics.
- Below: Cannot reach, perform, or manage rescue. Or is locked into a single-choice or dogmatic approach (for example, "We never do assisted rescues in the surf.").

Developing Skill: Knowledge of, and can perform, sea kayak surfing moves in L4 conditions.

Venue Specific: Rock Gardens and Sea Caves

L4 Competency: The paddler uses forecasting tools with charts and maps to predict appropriate locations for rock garden and sea cave exploration. They demonstrate the ability to paddle through rock gardens and sea caves safely and efficiently. They can self-rescue in rock gardens, perform assisted rescues, and tow where and when appropriate.

Identify the zones and features of a rock garden (safe zones, transition zones, danger zones, play features).

- Exceeds: Understands the relationship between wind (direction, velocity, duration), waves (direction, height, period), tide height, and landforms (seabed, headlands). Uses available data and understanding of these relationships to predict features before arriving at the site. Can consistently and correctly identify zones and features in a rock gardening venue or environment they are encountering for the first time or given unfamiliar conditions.
- Meets: Correctly identifies zones and play features within a rock garden environment.
- Below: Unfamiliar with or needs help to identify zones or features within a rock garden environment.

Is appropriately equipped for paddling in rock gardens.

- Exceeds: Kayak and gear setup is suitable for paddling in conditions and can explain rock garden-specific choices (for example, plastic kayak, whitewater paddle, bow, and stern grab lines).
- Meets: Kayak and gear setup is suitable for paddling in rock gardens and can complete all assessed skills. Below: Kayak and gear setup is not suitable for paddling in rock gardens resulting in damage beyond normal wear and tear or cannot complete all assessed skills.
- Below: Kayak and gear setup is not suitable for paddling in rock gardens resulting in damage beyond normal wear and tear, or the paddler cannot complete all assessed skills.

Assessor's Guide - Level 4: Open Water Skills Assessment

Demonstrates the ability to traverse zones of a rock garden safely.

- Exceeds: Able to safely lead a group through a rock garden and maximize features in the environment to maintain a line of sight and achieve a position of maximum usefulness.
- Meets: Chooses a successful course through the rock garden and utilizes appropriate strokes, timing, and features to stay on course.
- Below: Cannot determine their route through the rock garden or is out of control while paddling in a rock garden.

Demonstrates the ability to run an appropriate play feature (for example, rock slot, pour-over).

- Exceeds: Identifies, assesses for safety, and successfully runs an appropriate play feature. Achieves position of maximum usefulness before and after running the feature to support group members.
- Meets: Runs an appropriate (minimal risk to high reward ratio given L4 conditions) play feature while maintaining stability and directional control.
- Below: Unable to maintain stability or directional control while running an appropriate play feature.

Demonstrates the ability to explore sea caves safely.

- Exceeds: Able to safely lead a group on a sea cave exploration while maintaining line of sight and achieving a position of maximum usefulness.
- Meets: Identifies suitable caves for exploration, applies appropriate timing when entering and exiting, and maintains stability and directional control in a confined space.
- Below: Unable to maintain stability or directional control when entering, exiting, or paddling within a confined space.

Demonstrates the ability to both land on and launch from the rocks.

- Exceeds: Identifies an appropriate location for a rocky landing and independently lands on and launches from the rocks.
- Meets: Independently lands on and launches from the rocks.
- Below: Needs assistance to land on, or launch from, the rocks with assistance from another paddler.

Demonstrates appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.

- Exceeds: Provides overwatch with appropriate positioning. Reaches rescue efficiently, performs rescue effectively, and moves rescue into an area of less risk when necessary.
- Meets: Reaches rescue efficiently, performs rescue effectively, and moves rescue into an area of less risk when necessary.
- Below: Cannot reach, perform, or manage rescue.

Transport a swimmer to an area of less risk.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates two or more ways to transport a swimmer into an area of less risk.
- Meets: Chooses an appropriate transport technique for the situation and moves a swimmer into an area of less risk.
- Below: Cannot transport a swimmer into an area of less risk.

Convey a swimmer's kayak to an area of less risk.

- Exceeds: Demonstrates two or more ways to transport a swimmer's kayak into an area of less risk.
- Meets: Chooses an appropriate transport technique for the situation and moves a swimmer's kayak into an area of less risk.
- Below: Unable to transport a swimmer's kayak into an area of less risk.

Can effectively swim and move their kayak to an area of less risk following a capsize among the rocks.

- Exceeds: Able to swim among the rocks and demonstrates more than one technique for moving their kayak to an area of less risk.
- Meets: Paddler chooses an appropriate technique to independently move themselves and their kayak to an area of less risk.
- Below: Paddler cannot effectively swim among the rocks and move their kayak to an area of less risk.

Developing Skill: Uses throwline rescue technique(s) in appropriate situations.

L4 Open Water Skills Assessment - Multi-Paddler Field Grid

Assessor 1 _____	ACA # _____	Assessor 2 _____	ACA # _____
Paddler 1 _____	ACA # _____	Paddler 2 _____	ACA # _____
Paddler 3 _____	ACA # _____	Paddler 4 _____	ACA # _____
Paddler 5 _____	ACA # _____		

Location _____ **Was the venue within requirements?** Y / N

L4 Paddling Venue Specific Skills (choose one):

☐ Surf Zone ☐ Rock Gardens and Sea Caves ☐ Tide Races ☐ Expedition Paddling

Conditions Winds 15-20 knots **Actual** _____ Waves 2-4 feet **Actual** _____
 Surf 2-4 feet **Actual** _____ Tidal Current 2-4 **Actual** _____

Key: “E” Exceeds Standard / ”M” Meets Standard / “B” Below Standard

Core: Boat Handling - The paddler uses appropriate strokes and maneuvers to position for optimal performance and moves purposefully in the surf, rock gardens, tide races, wind, waves, and following seas. They comfortably blend strokes and modify maneuvers according to environmental conditions using both sides of the kayak effectively. They use their paddle appropriately while edging, demonstrating blade awareness relative to conditions (for example, when crossing eddylines and side surfing). They can recover when momentarily destabilized due to environmental factors and consistently roll in L4 conditions.

Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Demonstrates ability to paddle and hold position in differing wind and wave directions.					
Demonstrates ability to turn upwind and downwind efficiently.					
Uses forward and reverse paddling to reach an intended target or accomplish a specific task.					
Uses forward and reverse sweep strokes to shape a course and avoid hazards.					
Uses bow, midship, and stern rudders to turn and maintain their course.					
Uses blade support to recover and maintain stability while underway, maneuvering, and holding position.					
Uses draw strokes for effective lateral movement, whether the kayak is static or dynamic.					
Able to roll kayak from both set-up and non-setup positions.					
Demonstrates ability to paddle and hold position in differing wind and wave directions.					
Developing Skills					
Can demonstrate rolling up on either side of the kayak.					
Displays comfort on edge in surf, waves, wind, and tidal features.					

Notes:

Core: Rescues and Towing - The paddler demonstrates competent rescue and towing skills in L4 conditions. They choose rescues and towing configurations appropriate for the circumstances (for example, what is most suitable for a capsize in a surf zone or capsize in a tidal rapid) and demonstrate the ability to be an active and safe swimmer when being rescued.

Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Performs one or more of the following assisted rescues with an able swimmer: Side-by-Side, Scoop, T-Rescue, or Swimmer Deck Carry.					
Performs one or more assisted rescues to aid an impaired swimmer: Scoop, Unresponsive Paddler, or Swimmer Deck Carry.					
Performs one or more of the following self-rescues: Re-enter and Roll, Paddle Float, or Scramble.					
Is an active and effective swimmer when being rescued.					
Applies one or more of the following towing strategies with a towline: In-Line Tow, Rafted In-Line Tow, or Anchor Tow.					
Applies one or more of the following towing strategies without a towline: Contact Tow, Bulldozing, or Toggle Tow.					
Effectively manages tow system and can release system while underway and following a capsize.					
Able to rescue a swimmer who has been separated from their kayak and reconnect the swimmer to their kayak.					
Able to assist another paddler's recovery from capsize by presenting their kayak or paddle.					
Developing Skills					
Deploys multiple techniques and strategies for each of the above rescues.					
Is present and flexible while under pressure.					

Notes:

Core: Awareness and Seamanship - The paddler has a heightened awareness of the environment, their performance, and decision-making relative to group members and adapts plans accordingly. The paddler clearly communicates with the group to make necessary changes, is properly equipped for the conditions, and uses equipment appropriately to maintain personal and group safety and comfort.

Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Understands the effects of wind, tide, current, and land masses on the marine environment.					
Practices Leave No Trace and demonstrates appropriate interactions with the ecosystem and wildlife.					
Understands the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of cold-water shock and hypothermia.					
Understands the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of heat-related issues and hyperthermia.					
Understands personal and group capabilities relative to the environment and makes decisions accordingly.					

Core: Awareness and Seamanship (continued)

Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Paddles as a cohesive member of the group and positions to provide support.					
Maintains properly outfitted kayak and has working knowledge of paddling equipment.					
Understands how to pack and properly trim their kayak.					
Performs repairs allowing the paddler to return safely to the launch site.					
Carries appropriate visual and auditory signaling device(s) and understands their use and limitations.					
Can tie Bowline, Clove Hitch, Figure 8, and Trucker's Hitch knots.					

Notes:

Core: Incident Prevention and Management - The paddler has an incident prevention mindset both on and off the water. They make good choices and demonstrate competent decision-making. The paddler can lead and assist with managing incidents in L4 conditions. They can identify appropriate safe zones and work with other paddlers to ensure the entire group's safety.

Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Safely transports, unloads, and carries kayaks at the launch site.					
Actively participates in pre-trip and post-trip debrief sessions.					
Launches and lands in a safe manner.					
Communicates and directs others calmly in stressful situations (for example, during rescues).					
Works with others to perform rescues and move the group to a position of less risk.					
Demonstrates proper use of VHF radio and the ability to hail appropriate resources.					

Notes:

Core: Trip Planning and Navigation - The paddler successfully plans, plots, and executes routes in L4 conditions and venues. Their chosen routes will incorporate a holistic view of all the variables within the venue and contain contingency plans.

Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Gathers, understands, and utilizes appropriate forecasts (weather, marine, surf, and tidal).					
Demonstrates use of charts, forecast(s), and knowledge of paddling group when route planning.					
Incorporates wind, waves, and swell direction into route plans and trip choices.					
Demonstrates ability to calculate stages of the tide and incorporate them into a route plan.					
Demonstrates ability to calculate tidal drift and incorporate drift into a route plan.					
Demonstrates the ability to calculate current strength and timing and incorporate them into route plans.					
Demonstrates use of chart and compass to paddle a course.					
Demonstrates ability to identify their location at all times.					
Understands the Nautical Rules of the Road and aids to navigation, and demonstrates safe paddling in relation to boat traffic.					
Developing Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Calculating tidal drift involving vector analysis.					
Limited Visibility Navigation (for example, night and fog).					

Notes:

Venue Specific: Fill out at least one of the following Venue Specific assessment categories

Venue Specific: Expedition Paddling - The paddler successfully utilizes knowledge and resources to plan a multi-day trip. Their understanding of the environment allows the paddler to anticipate conditions during their trip and make decisions to adjust the plan accordingly. During a multi-day journey, they successfully apply L4 paddling skills in the environment/venue.

Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Provides evidence of multi-day journeys that involve overnight camping.					
Demonstrates ability to plan a successful multi-day journey using available and appropriate planning resources.					
Makes appropriate expedition decisions both before and during the trip.					
Is appropriately equipped for a multi-day journey in a planned environment and is well-versed in the use of equipment.					
Demonstrates all “Core Skills” with a fully laden kayak.					

Notes:

Venue Specific: Tide Races - The paddler demonstrates an understanding of the tidal environment and can paddle through a tide race in control. They understand the challenges of paddling in areas of current and positions themselves appropriately to ensure individual and group safety.

Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Identifies features of a tide race (eddy, eddyline, current, standing waves).					
Effectively paddles a downstream course through the current.					
Able to select an appropriate route and return to the top of the tide race.					
Demonstrates control while breaking in and out of eddies.					
Demonstrates using a ferry glide to reach an intended target while crossing the current.					
Demonstrates appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.					
Developing Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Demonstrates ability to surf tide race waves under control.					
Demonstrates ability to attain an upstream eddy.					
Demonstrates using a reverse ferry glide to reach an intended target while crossing the current.					

Notes:

Venue Specific: Surf Zone - The paddler demonstrates the use of forecasting tools in combination with charts and maps to predict areas of surf and breaking waves. They can identify the features of the surf zone and the types of waves. They demonstrate the ability to launch, land, and paddle through the surf in control. They can self-rescue in the surf zone, perform assisted rescues, and tow where and when appropriate.

Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Identifies features of a surf zone (soup, impact, outside, rip, and longshore currents).					
Identifies different wave types and parts of the wave.					
Is aware of surf etiquette and applies concepts with situational awareness and appropriate positioning.					
Demonstrates control while launching and landing.					
Demonstrates the ability to identify a route to shore when sitting outside the surf break and paddle in under control.					
Demonstrates control while paddling through the surf and breaking waves to the outside or against the breaking waves.					
Side-surfs (bongo slides) with balance and intention.					
Chooses the direction of travel and exits the wave under control.					
Can effectively swim and move their kayak to shore when capsized in the surf zone or performs a re-entry and roll.					
Demonstrates appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.					
Developing Skill	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Has knowledge of, and can perform, sea kayak surfing moves in L4 conditions.					

Notes:

Venue Specific: Rock Gardens and Sea Caves - The paddler uses forecasting tools with charts and maps to predict appropriate locations for rock garden and sea cave exploration. They demonstrate the ability to paddle through rock gardens and sea caves safely and efficiently. They can self-rescue in rock gardens, perform assisted rescues, and tow where and when appropriate.

Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Identify the zones of a rock garden (safe zones, transition zones, danger zones, play features).					
Is appropriately equipped for paddling in rock gardens.					
Demonstrates the ability to traverse zones of a rock garden safely.					
Demonstrates the ability to run an appropriate play feature (for example, rock slot, pour-over).					
Demonstrates the ability to explore sea caves safely.					
Demonstrates the ability to both land on and launch from the rocks.					
Demonstrate appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.					
Transport a swimmer into an area of less risk.					
Convey a swimmer's kayak to an area of less risk.					
Can effectively swim and move their kayak to an area of less risk following a capsize in the rocks.					
Developing Skill	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Uses throwline rescue technique(s) in appropriate situations.					

Notes:

L4 Open Water Skills Assessment - Single Paddler Field Grid

Assessor _____ **ACA #** _____ **Paddler** _____ **ACA #** _____

Location _____ **Was the venue within requirements?** Y / N

L4 Paddling Venue Specific Skills (choose one):

☐ Surf Zone ☐ Rock Gardens and Sea Caves ☐ Tide Races ☐ Expedition Paddling

Conditions Winds 15-20 knots **Actual** _____ Waves 2-4 feet **Actual** _____

Surf 2-4 feet **Actual** _____ Tidal Current 2-4 knots. **Actual** _____

Key: “E” Exceeds Standard / ”M” Meets Standard / “B” Below Standard

Core: Boat Handling - The paddler uses appropriate strokes and maneuvers to position for optimal performance and moves purposefully in the surf, rock gardens, tide races, wind, waves, and following seas. They comfortably blend strokes and modify maneuvers according to environmental conditions using both sides of the kayak effectively. They use their paddle appropriately while edging, demonstrating blade awareness relative to conditions (for example, when crossing eddylines and side surfing). They can recover when momentarily destabilized due to environmental factors and consistently roll in L4 conditions.

Assessed Skills	B/M/E	Note
Demonstrates ability to paddle and hold position in differing wind and wave directions.		
Demonstrates ability to turn upwind and downwind efficiently.		
Uses forward and reverse paddling to reach an intended target or accomplish a specific task.		
Uses forward and reverse sweep strokes to shape a course and avoid hazards.		
Uses bow, midship, and stern rudders to turn and maintain their course.		
Uses blade support to recover and maintain stability while underway, maneuvering, and holding position.		
Uses draw strokes for effective lateral movement, whether the kayak is static or dynamic.		
Able to roll kayak from both set-up and non-setup positions.		
Demonstrates ability to paddle and hold position in differing wind and wave directions.		
Developing Skills		
Can demonstrate rolling up on either side of the kayak.		
Displays comfort on edge in surf, waves, wind, and tidal features.		

Notes:

Core: Rescues and Towing - The paddler demonstrates competent rescue and towing skills in L4 conditions. They choose rescues and towing configurations appropriate for the circumstances (for example, what is most suitable for a capsize in a surf zone or capsize in a tidal rapid) and demonstrate the ability to be an active and safe swimmer when being rescued.

Assessed Skills	B/M/E	Note
Performs one or more of the following assisted rescues with an able swimmer: Side-by-Side, Scoop, T-Rescue, or Swimmer Deck Carry.		
Performs one or more assisted rescues to aid an impaired swimmer: Scoop, Unresponsive Paddler, or Swimmer Deck Carry.		
Performs one or more of the following self-rescues: Re-enter and Roll, Paddle Float, or Scramble.		
Is an active and effective swimmer when being rescued.		
Applies one or more of the following towing strategies with a towline: In-Line Tow, Rafted In-Line Tow, or Anchor Tow.		
Applies one or more of the following towing strategies without a towline: Contact Tow, Bulldozing, or Toggle Tow.		
Effectively manages tow system and can release system while underway and following a capsize.		
Able to rescue a swimmer who has been separated from their kayak and reconnect the swimmer to their kayak.		
Able to assist another paddler's recovery from capsize by presenting their kayak or paddle.		
Developing Skills		
Deploys multiple techniques and strategies for each of the above rescues.		
Is present and flexible while under pressure.		
Notes:		

Core: Awareness and Seamanship - The paddler has a heightened awareness of the environment, their performance, and decision-making relative to group members and adapts plans accordingly. The paddler clearly communicates with the group to make necessary changes, is properly equipped for the conditions, and uses equipment appropriately to maintain personal and group safety and comfort.

Assessed Skills	B/M/E	Note
Understands the effects of wind, tide, current, and land masses on the marine environment.		
Practices Leave No Trace and demonstrates appropriate interactions with the ecosystem and wildlife.		
Understands the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of cold-water shock and hypothermia.		
Understands the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of heat-related issues and hyperthermia.		
Understands personal and group capabilities relative to the environment and makes decisions accordingly.		

Core: Awareness and Seamanship (continued)

Assessed Skills	B/M/E	Note
Paddles as a cohesive member of the group and positions to provide support.		
Maintains properly outfitted kayak and has working knowledge of paddling equipment.		
Understands how to pack and properly trim their kayak.		
Performs repairs allowing the paddler to return safely to the launch site.		
Carries appropriate visual and auditory signaling device(s) and understands their use and limitations.		
Can tie Bowline, Clove Hitch, Figure 8, and Trucker's Hitch knots.		
Notes:		

Core: Incident Prevention and Management - The paddler has an incident prevention mindset both on and off the water. They make good choices and demonstrate competent decision-making. The paddler can lead and assist with managing incidents in L4 conditions. They can identify appropriate safe zones and work with other paddlers to ensure the entire group's safety.

Assessed Skills	B/M/E	Note
Safely transports, unloads, and carries kayaks at the launch site.		
Actively participates in pre-trip and post-trip debrief sessions.		
Launches and lands in a safe manner.		
Communicates and directs others calmly in stressful situations (for example, during rescues).		
Works with others to perform rescues and move the group to a position of less risk.		
Demonstrates proper use of VHF radio and the ability to hail appropriate resources.		
Notes:		

Core: Trip Planning and Navigation - The paddler successfully plans, plots, and executes routes in L4 conditions and venues. Their chosen routes will incorporate a holistic view of all the variables within the venue and contain contingency plans.

Assessed Skills	B/M/E	Note
Gathers, understands, and utilizes appropriate forecasts (weather, marine, surf, and tidal).		
Demonstrates use of charts, forecast(s), and knowledge of paddling group when route planning.		
Incorporates wind, waves, and swell direction into route plans and trip choices.		
Demonstrates ability to calculate stages of the tide and incorporate them into a route plan.		
Demonstrates ability to calculate tidal drift and incorporate drift into a route plan.		
Demonstrates the ability to calculate current strength and timing and incorporate them into route plans.		
Demonstrates use of chart and compass to paddle a course.		
Demonstrates ability to identify their location at all times.		
Understands the Nautical Rules of the Road and aids to navigation, and demonstrates safe paddling in relation to boat traffic.		
Developing Skills		
Calculating tidal drift involving vector analysis.		
Limited Visibility Navigation (for example, night, fog).		

Notes:

Venue Specific: Fill out at least one of the following Venue Specific assessment categories.

Venue Specific: Expedition Paddling - The paddler successfully utilizes knowledge and resources to plan a multi-day trip. Their understanding of the environment allows the paddler to anticipate conditions during their trip and make decisions to adjust the plan accordingly. During a multi-day journey, they successfully apply L4 paddling skills in the environment/venue.

Assessed Skills	B/M/E	Note
Provides evidence of multi-day journeys that involve overnight camping.		
Demonstrates ability to plan a successful multi-day journey using available and appropriate planning resources.		
Makes appropriate expedition decisions both before and during the trip.		
Is appropriately equipped for a multi-day journey in a planned environment and is well-versed in the use of equipment.		
Demonstrates all “Core Skills” with a fully laden kayak.		

Notes:

Venue Specific: Tide Races - The paddler demonstrates an understanding of the tidal environment and can paddle through a tide race in control. They understand the challenges of paddling in areas of current and position themselves appropriately to ensure individual and group safety.

Assessed Skills	B/M/E	Note
Identifies features of a tide race (eddy, eddyline, current, standing waves).		
Effectively paddles a downstream course through the current.		
Able to select an appropriate route and return to the top of the tide race.		
Demonstrates control while breaking in and out of eddies.		
Demonstrates using a ferry glide to reach an intended target while crossing the current.		
Demonstrates appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.		
Developing Skills		
Demonstrates ability to surf tide race waves under control.		
Demonstrates ability to attain an upstream eddy.		
Demonstrates using a reverse ferry glide to reach an intended target while crossing the current.		

Notes:

Venue Specific: Surf Zone - The paddler demonstrates the use of forecasting tools in combination with charts and maps to predict areas of surf and breaking waves. They can identify the features of the surf zone and the types of waves. They demonstrate the ability to launch, land, and paddle through the surf in control. They can self-rescue in the surf zone, perform assisted rescues, and tow where and when appropriate.

Assessed Skills	B/M/E	Note
Identifies features of a surf zone (soup, impact, outside, rip, and longshore currents).		
Identifies different wave types and parts of the wave.		
Is aware of surf etiquette and applies concepts with situational awareness and appropriate positioning.		
Demonstrates control while launching and landing.		
Demonstrates the ability to identify a route to shore when sitting outside the surf break and paddle in under control.		
Demonstrates control while paddling through the surf and breaking waves to the outside or against the breaking waves.		
Side-surfs (bongo slides) with balance and intention.		
Chooses the direction of travel and exits the wave under control.		
Can effectively swim and move their kayak to shore when capsized in the surf zone or performs a re-entry and roll.		
Demonstrates appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.		
Developing Skill		
Has knowledge of, and can perform, sea kayak surfing moves in L4 conditions.		

Notes:

Venue Specific: Rock Gardens and Sea Caves - The paddler uses forecasting tools with charts and maps to predict appropriate locations for rock garden and sea cave exploration. They demonstrate the ability to paddle through rock gardens and sea caves safely and efficiently. They can self-rescue in rock gardens, perform assisted rescues, and tow where and when appropriate.

Assessed Skills	B/M/E	Note
Identify the zones of a rock garden (safe zones, transition zones, danger zones, play features).		
Is appropriately equipped for paddling in rock gardens.		
Demonstrates the ability to traverse zones of a rock garden safely.		
Demonstrates the ability to run an appropriate play feature (for example, rock slot, pour-over).		
Demonstrates the ability to explore sea caves safely.		
Demonstrates the ability to both land on and launch from the rocks.		
Demonstrate appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.		
Transport a swimmer into an area of less risk.		
Convey a swimmer's kayak to an area of less risk.		
Can effectively swim and move their kayak to an area of less risk following a capsize in the rocks.		
Developing Skill		
Uses throwline rescue technique(s) in appropriate situations.		

Notes:

L4 Open Water Skills Assessment – Skills Only Field Grid

Core: Boat Handling - Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Demonstrates ability to paddle and hold position in differing wind and wave directions.					
Demonstrates ability to turn upwind and downwind efficiently.					
Uses forward and reverse paddling to reach an intended target or accomplish a specific task.					
Uses forward and reverse sweep strokes to shape a course and avoid hazards.					
Uses bow, midship, and stern rudders to turn and maintain their course.					
Uses blade support to recover and maintain stability while underway, maneuvering, and holding position.					
Uses draw strokes for effective lateral movement, whether the kayak is static or dynamic.					
Able to roll kayak from both set-up and non-setup positions.					
Demonstrates ability to paddle and hold position in differing wind and wave directions.					
Developing Skill: Can demonstrate rolling up on either side of the kayak.					
Developing Skill: Displays comfort on edge in surf, waves, wind, and tidal features.					
Core: Rescues and Towing – Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Performs one or more of the following assisted rescues with an able swimmer: Side-by-Side, Scoop, T-Rescue, or Swimmer Deck Carry.					
Performs one or more assisted rescues to aid an impaired swimmer: Scoop, Unresponsive Paddler, or Swimmer Deck Carry.					
Performs one or more of the following self-rescues: Re-enter and Roll, Paddle Float, or Scramble.					
Is an active and effective swimmer when being rescued.					
One or more of the following towing strategies with a towline: In-Line Tow, Rafted In-Line Tow, Anchor Tow.					
Applies one or more of theses towing strategies without a towline: Contact Tow, Bulldozing, or Toggle Tow.					
Effectively manages tow system and can release system while underway and following a capsize.					
Able to rescue a swimmer who has been separated from their kayak and reconnect the swimmer to their kayak.					
Able to assist another paddler's recovery from capsize by presenting their kayak or paddle.					
Developing Skill: Deploys multiple techniques and strategies for each of the above rescues.					
Developing Skill: Is present and flexible while under pressure.					
Core: Awareness and Seamanship - Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Understands the effects of wind, tide, current, and land masses on the marine environment.					
Practices Leave No Trace and demonstrates appropriate interactions with the ecosystem and wildlife.					
Understands the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of cold-water shock and hypothermia.					
Understands the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of heat-related issues and hyperthermia.					
Understands personal and group capabilities relative to the environment and makes decisions accordingly.					
Understands the effects of wind, tide, current, and land masses on the marine environment.					
Paddles as a cohesive member of the group and positions to provide support.					
Maintains properly outfitted kayak and has working knowledge of paddling equipment.					
Understands how to pack and properly trim their kayak.					
Performs repairs allowing the paddler to return safely to the launch site.					
Carries appropriate visual and auditory signaling device(s) and understands their use and limitations.					
Can tie Bowline, Clove Hitch, Figure 8, and Trucker's Hitch knots.					
Core: Incident Prevention and Management - Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Safely transports, unloads, and carries kayaks at the launch site.					
Actively participates in pre-trip and post-trip debrief sessions.					
Launches and lands in a safe manner.					
Communicates and directs others calmly in stressful situations (for example, during rescues).					
Works with others to perform rescues and move the group to a position of less risk					
Demonstrates proper use of VHF radio and the ability to hail appropriate resources.					
Core: Trip Planning and Navigation - Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Gathers, understands, and utilizes appropriate forecasts (weather, marine, surf, and tidal).					
Demonstrates use of charts, forecast(s), and knowledge of paddling group when route planning.					

Incorporates wind, waves, and swell direction into route plans and trip choices.					
Demonstrates ability to calculate stages of the tide and incorporate them into a route plan.					
Demonstrates ability to calculate tidal drift and incorporate drift into a route plan.					
Demonstrates the ability to calculate current strength and timing and incorporate them into route plans.					
Demonstrates use of chart and compass to paddle a course.					
Demonstrates ability to identify their location at all times.					
Understands Nautical Rules of the Road, aids to navigation, demonstrates safe paddling related to boat traffic.					
Developing Skill: Calculating tidal drift involving vector analysis.					
Developing Skill: Limited Visibility Navigation (for example, night, fog).					
Venue Specific: Expedition Planning - Assessed Skills					
Provides evidence of multi-day journeys that involve overnight camping.					
Demonstrates ability to plan a successful multi-day journey using available and appropriate planning resources.					
Makes appropriate expedition decisions both before and during the trip.					
Appropriately equipped for multi-day journey in planned environment and is well-versed in use of equipment.					
Demonstrates all “Core Skills” with a fully laden kayak.					
Venue Specific: Tide Races - Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Identifies features of a tide race (eddy, eddyline, current, standing waves).					
Effectively paddles a downstream course through the current.					
Able to select an appropriate route and return to the top of the tide race.					
Demonstrates control while breaking in and out of eddies.					
Demonstrates using a ferry glide to reach an intended target while crossing the current.					
Demonstrates appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.					
Developing Skill: Demonstrates ability to surf tide race waves under control.					
Developing Skill: Demonstrates ability to attain an upstream eddy.					
Developing Skill: Demonstrates using a reverse ferry glide to reach intended target while crossing current.					
Venue Specific: Surf Zone - Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Identifies features of a surf zone (soup, impact, outside, rip, and longshore currents).					
Identifies different wave types and parts of the wave.					
Is aware of surf etiquette and applies concepts with situational awareness and appropriate positioning.					
Demonstrates control while launching and landing.					
Demonstrates ability to identify a route to shore when sitting outside the surf break and paddle in under control.					
Demonstrates control while paddling through surf and breaking waves to the outside against breaking waves.					
Side-surfs (bongo slides) with balance and intention.					
Chooses the direction of travel and exits the wave under control.					
Can effectively swim and move their kayak to shore when capsized in surf zone or performs a re-entry and roll.					
Demonstrates appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.					
Developing Skill: Has knowledge of, and can perform, sea kayak surfing moves in L4 conditions.					
Venue Specific: Rock Gardens and Sea Caves - Assessed Skills	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Identify the zones of a rock garden (safe zones, transition zones, danger zones, play features).					
Is appropriately equipped for paddling in rock gardens.					
Demonstrates the ability to traverse zones of a rock garden safely.					
Demonstrates the ability to run an appropriate play feature (for example, rock slot, pour-over).					
Demonstrates the ability to explore sea caves safely.					
Demonstrates the ability to both land on and launch from the rocks.					
Demonstrate appropriate rescue and towing skills and moves rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.					
Transport a swimmer into an area of less risk.					
Convey a swimmer’s kayak to an area of less risk.					
Can effectively swim and move their kayak to an area of less risk following a capsize in the rocks.					
Developing Skill: Uses throwline rescue technique(s) in appropriate situations.					