

# Paddlers Etiquette

## LAUNCH SITES, CHANNELS, BOAT TRAFFIC & WILDLIFE

*Whether you are a new paddler or a seasoned one, there are a few items of etiquette and rules of navigation that paddlers need to be aware of before venturing out on the water. There are many boaters on our waterways and we as paddlers are increasing in numbers and are competing for space in limited access points and crowded waterways. A little understanding can go a long way in keeping peace and respect with others with whom we share these locations.*

### BOAT RAMPS, PARKING AND COURTESY

- Keep your vehicle off ramps designed for trailer boats.
- Unload and load kayaks and canoes from a parking spot or an area away from traffic lanes to the ramp. Keep your kayak or canoe and all gear off the ramp.
- If possible, launch away from the ramp or to the side. Learn to fasten your spray skirt on the water so you don't tie up the area during multiple kayak launches.

Kayaks and canoes do not need to use boat ramps. We can launch from just about anywhere there is permitted access. Use cartop-only launch sites or other legal access, especially during the busy boating season or on weekends whenever you can.

If you are using a public launch site, limit your activity to grassy or sandy areas, as only trailer boats need to use the ramp. If you must use the launch ramp, launch and retrieve your boat quickly. If you are paddling with others organize your efforts to minimize time spent near or on the ramp. Unload or load one vehicle at a time. Where parking is limited, double or triple up in the parking space. (Don't take a deep parking space allotted for cars with trailers)

Consider yourself a guest. Be courteous and avoid creating bottlenecks and overcrowding.

### ON THE WATER - CHANNELS, MARINAS, DOCKS & VISIBILITY

- Stay out of marked channels at all times except to cross over.
- Stay away from marinas and dock areas as much as possible.
- Be visible and stay alert. • Keep a respectful distance from swimmers and fisherman.

Canoes and kayaks **do not have the right of way** on our waterways. Large boats must often operate only in channels. Kayaks and canoes can operate in less than one foot of water. Paddlers have all the rest of the river or ocean to use freely.

Red and green buoys or special markers on piers or posts mark channels. When paddling along side a channel stay outside. Enter only to cross over to a destination point. Be patient and wait for the channel to be clear. Cross at the markers where you are more visible and the channel is often narrower. If with a group, cross in a "pod" or in a line abreast. Cross quickly to the other side.

Large and small powerboats and sailboats often have limited maneuverability in areas around marinas, docks and even ramps. You can't always see them and they cannot see you. If you collide in such a place, it will be determined to be your fault by the Coast Guard because you had other options and the other boat was restricted in maneuvering. Avoiding boats is your responsibility.

Paddle craft are small and sit low in the water. It is up to you to make sure that you are visible at all times. Wear bright colored hats, upper body clothing and PFD's. A brightly colored boat, paddle blades and PFD will help. Use reflective patches on your clothing and equipment.

A safe paddler is informed as well as alert. Purchase a chart of the area you intend to paddle. Plan a route and note all channels and other obstacles. Take the time to learn the rules of navigation. Powerboat and sailboat operators must know the navigational rules of seamanship to operate their boats safely. We too must learn and abide by these rules. If we can learn these simple procedures, it will go a long way towards fostering good relations with the boating community.



## A TYPICAL CHANNEL ILLUSTRATION

Left, is an illustration showing a typical channel situation and what the markers are showing. When you come in to a channel from open sea, the red buoys are on the right (Red Right Return) and the green cans are on the left. Between the two is a two-lane highway that boats use. Why? To keep them from running into a rock or a shallow area. The channel is a safe passage area with deep water. Just like a highway, boats coming in from sea travel to the right side of the channel and keep the red buoys to their right, and boats leaving (going to sea) stay to their right side and keep green markers to their right. A large tug and barge may have to use the center of the channel. This channel or highway on the water is where you want to stay out of - it's meant for boats that need it. We have no rights on the water! Since we have full maneuverability and no real depth concerns, it's our job to stay clear of boats and ultimately out of channels as much as we possibly can.

By showing respect and awareness to the boating community we can help guarantee a paddle sports community that's safe for us and others who use the waterways.

## WILDLIFE, AND ZERO IMPACT ON WHERE WE LAND

- Private Property is "Private"! • Paddlers do not have the right to land wherever they want.
- Respect wildlife habitat and obey posted restrictions. • Use binoculars or spotting scopes for viewing.

Paddle slowly and quietly, keeping a respectful distance from wildlife (birds and seals). The increasing popularity of paddle sports, especially kayaking, is putting pressure on habitat areas where wildlife perceives human presence as a threat. Consequently, the defensive reactions of birds and mammals, which often include staying still and not fleeing, causes curious paddlers to venture closer and interrupt activities, such as feeding, caring for offspring or just resting after feeding or migratory flights. Seals often perceive the low profile kayaker as a predator and will abandon rocks and go into the water. This disruption of their activities can adversely affect nursing pups causing malnourishment and even death.

Many areas are posted for restricted access during nesting and nursery season. Large concentrations of birds are often resting during fall migratory flights. Try your best not land near them or cause them to take flight. When on the water, try keeping at least 200 feet away and even more when you are paddling in groups. If you can, avoid paddling up small creeks where your unexpected presence is even more intimidating. Successful sharing of the waterways with wildlife is achieved through learning and respect.

**Learn as much as you can about boating safety, navigation as well as paddle sports safety skills including hypothermia and dressing for colder water.**

**WEAR YOUR PFD - once you're in the water, it's almost impossible to put it on!**