



Wild and Scenic Rivers:

Health and Safety

Health

Rivers, lakes and oceans—our blue spaces—benefit our physical and mental well-being. We rely on rivers for clean drinking water and as places of spiritual rejuvenation. Blue spaces have historically been used for healing. Even the sound of moving water can have a calming and restoring effect on the mind. Whether you are looking for a peaceful picnic spot by a babbling brook, a scenic river-front hike, or a place to paddle, you can find activities along Wild and Scenic Rivers that contribute to your good health.

Healthy Water and Healthy People

65% of our nation's drinking water comes from rivers and streams. Toxins that contaminate water can harm the human body, meaning that good health starts with good water chemistry.

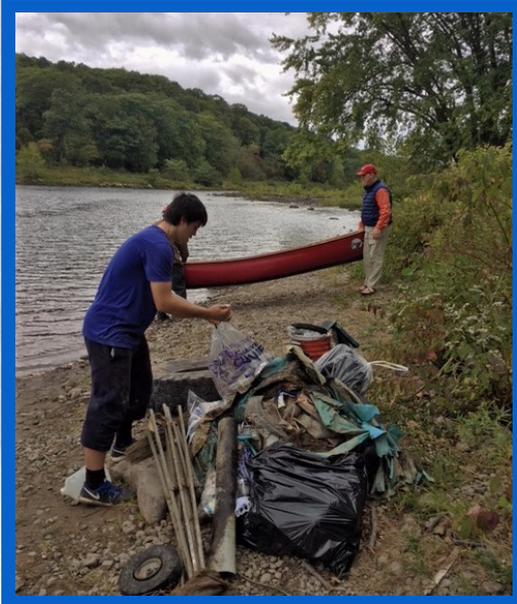


Photo: Kelleen Lanagan

Many plants and some animals, such as freshwater mussels, can filter water by removing harmful chemical compounds. Since humans need assistance making sure the water we ingest is clean, protect your own health by understanding the ecosystems responsible for your clean water and helping your local watershed group clean up litter and remove water pollutants.

Get Active!

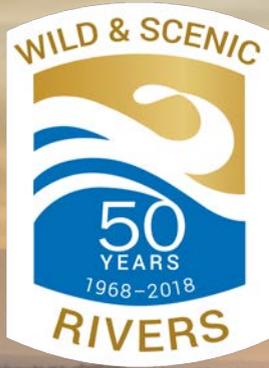


Photo: Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Exercise helps prevent and alleviate health issues including obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. Recreating on and near rivers increases physical activity in the outdoors, which can help your body process vitamin D and produce endorphins—a hormone that makes you feel good. Paddling, in particular, is a low impact form of exercise for upper or whole body. River recreation is also a refreshing and proven way to relax, and recreating with others can improve social health by providing opportunities to build long-lasting friendships and engage in team building.



Photo: National Park Service



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Safety

Rivers are powerful forces in nature and demand respect. Drownings have accounted for the most fatalities in National Parks between 2007 and 2013, and most of those occurred in rivers. Rivers have strong currents that can be very dangerous, even for skilled swimmers. Before you get out on a river, make sure you take the appropriate actions.

Plan Your Trip

Know Before You Go:

- Visit the park's website to learn about the river including river conditions, potential hazards (e.g. underwater terrain) and allowed water activities.
- Know your limits and pick an appropriate activity for your group's size and ability.
- Check that everyone has a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket and that each person's life jacket fits properly.
- Develop a Plan B in case things change and you can't do your planned activity.
- Complete and share your Trip Plan with someone who is not going on the trip.
- Develop a plan of action so you know what to do if there is an emergency (e.g. you go overboard, your boat flips, hazardous river conditions).

When You Arrive:

- Check in with a Park Ranger and ask about river and weather conditions, park alerts and closures.
- Check your food, water and equipment and that everyone has a life jacket.
- Put Plan B into action if necessary.

On the River:

- **Always wear your life jacket!**
- Stick to your intended route.
- Keep an eye on environmental changes (weather, wildlife, water conditions etc) and your group to assess if you should continue your trip or turn back.

For more general trip planning tips look up "Trip Planning Guide" and "Water Safety Article" on nps.gov.

Always Wear a Life Jacket

Life jackets are essential for any kind of river recreation. Make sure you are wearing the appropriate life jacket for the activity you are doing. Whether you are boating, swimming, fishing, wading, tubing, or participating in an activity on the river or along river banks, wearing a properly-fitted life jacket can save your life.



Life jacket for children



Life jacket for personal water crafts and water sports



Inflatable belt pack for stand up paddlers



Inflatable vest for anglers and open motor boats



Life jacket with harness and handles for pets

Pick the Right Life Jacket. It should be:

- Approved by the U.S. Coast Guard (check the label).
- In good condition. Does it float? Get a new one if it has tears, missing straps, broken buckle or zippers, etc.
- The right type of life jacket for your activity.
- The right size for you.

Test the Fit of the Life Jacket:

- Fasten and secure all of the straps and raise your arms.
- Your vest should stay and not ride up.
- Have someone lift the jacket up at your shoulders; it should not move.



Life jacket images: National Safe Boating Council