

## An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Search and Rescue

**A. Tell someone where you're going.** Leave a detailed itinerary and map of the area with a *responsible* person at home or work on whom you can rely to report you overdue in the event that you do become overdue. Give them with the telephone number to Buffalo National River's 24-hour dispatch: 1-888-692-1162. *Remember, cell phone service is unreliable in the park so you will not be in constant contact with home.*

**B. Seek training prior to your trip.** Whether canoeing, kayaking, rafting, caving, rock climbing & rappelling, fishing, hunting, or horseback riding, be sure to seek the proper training in your pursuit BEFORE you start your trip. Being skilled in your recreational pursuit can help you avoid becoming the object of a SAR.

**C. Know your limits.** SARs often result from visitors who get in over their heads and quickly become overwhelmed, by either trip duration, trip difficulty, or environmental conditions, such as air and water temperature and weather. Are you a strong swimmer? Do you possess basic survival skills, such as lighting a fire, and can you perform those skills while soaking wet and shivering? Are you healthy and do you have your doctor's approval for strenuous activity? Can you walk for several miles *while carrying a heavy pack*? If you're floating the river and conditions change, are you skilled enough with your craft to continue floating, or should you consider pulling off the river to wait for better conditions?

**D. Carry the Ten Essentials and know how to use them. These items include:**

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| 1. Drinking Water & High Energy Food | 2. Shelter (tent, bivvy, tarp, poncho, etc.) |
| 3. First Aid Kit                     | 4. Whistle, Signal Mirror, & Cell Phone      |
| 5. Sunscreen & Insect Repellent      | 6. Adequate Clothing, Footwear, & Hat        |
| 7. Sturdy Knife                      | 8. Light Sources (more than one)             |
| 9. Topographic Map, Compass, & GPS   | 10. Means to Make Fire & Dry Tinder          |

**E. Wear a life jacket – or Personal Flotation Device (PFD).** All persons floating the Buffalo River are required to have a personal flotation device (PFD). All children ages 12 and under are required to WEAR their PFDs at all times while in the boat. This isn't just a good idea, it's the law. Be sure your PFDs are US Coast Guard approved, in serviceable condition, and wear them properly. BUFFSAR recommends that ALL persons, even those age 13 and up, actually wear your PFD. It might just save your life one day. Remember, "It won't work if you don't wear it."

**F. Waterproof and secure everything in your boat.** Capsizes are practically inevitable. Be sure to place all your equipment in sturdy waterproof bags and tie everything down in your boat to prevent it from washing downstream in the event of a capsize. The Ten Essentials will do you no good if they're washed away.

**G. Bring sturdy footwear even if floating.** Every year, some of the people needing rescued could have avoided calling for help if they had only brought proper footwear with them. Flip-flops or slip-on water shoes can get pulled off your feet and swept downstream. If your boat becomes pinned or washed away, you must be able to hike out – have sturdy footwear with you just in case.

**H. Do not attempt to unpin a pinned boat.** If your boat becomes pinned, DO NOT ATTEMPT TO UNPIN IT! This is a very dangerous situation with extremely powerful forces being exerted on the boat. Leave it where it is and report its location to a park ranger as soon as possible.

**I. Do a map reconnoiter prior to departure.** Knowing your intended route ahead of time will help you prepare the trip itinerary you leave with someone at home, as well as help you know your options in the event of a mishap. Many stretches of the Buffalo River have trails that parallel the river, but which are out of sight from the actual river. By knowing your route and knowing if a trail is nearby, you can hike out on your own if you lose your boat.

**J. Obtain a current weather forecast prior to heading out.** If the forecast warns of foul or severe weather, consider postponing your trip. If you decide to proceed with your trip, be sure that you're prepared for: winter weather, lightning, strong winds, high summer temperatures, rapidly rising river levels.

**K. Give yourself enough daylight for day trips.** If you're only planning to do a day trip, give yourself enough daytime hours to complete the trip. Know what time sunset occurs. Be honest with yourself about how fast you hike. Plan for unexpected delays and carry several light sources.

**L. Stay on designated trails.** Carry topographic map of the park and know how to read it. Straying off trails is not prohibited, but unless you have an intended purpose for doing so, it is also not encouraged. If you're hunting, know where trails are and remember visitors might be hiking nearby.

**M. Be aware of hunters.** Hunting is permitted in most of Buffalo National River's backcountry. Consider wearing high-visibility orange outerwear during hunting seasons.

**N. Cotton Kills.** When cotton becomes wet, it loses insulation ability and quickly contributes to a hypothermic state. Hypothermia results when your body loses heat faster than it produces it and it can be deadly. The quickest route to hypothermia is to get wet and stay wet. Your best defense against it is to wear natural wool or synthetic fibers such as polypropylene, or a wetsuit. Gore-Tex or waterproof outer garments are also a must. During cold or even chilly times of the year, avoid cotton at all costs.

**O. Stay clear of edges.** Buffalo National River is crisscrossed with cliffs ranging in height from ten to several hundred feet, providing some of the most stunning landscapes in the Midwest. But they can be treacherous if not respected. Gravity is always "on" at Buffalo National River, and when folks step too close to the edge, they risk falling over. Stay well clear of edges.

**P. Other environmental hazards.** Buffalo National River's backcountry is wild country. It is strewn with cliffs, fast-flowing streams, rocky trails, pit caves, rugged terrain, poison ivy, and is home to several dangerous animals including copperheads, cottonmouths, rattlesnakes, black bears, wild hogs, bobcats, ticks, spiders, and several venomous insects. You cannot predict what you might encounter, but you can prepare for your trip and have a plan in mind.

**Q. Alcohol** Persons over the age of 21 are allowed to enjoy alcoholic beverages while visiting Buffalo National River. We only require that you do so responsibly. Keep in mind that alcohol slows one's reaction times and depresses the central nervous system. If you become intoxicated, you might not be capable of doing what you can do while sober. Do not drink and drive. If you drive drunk at Buffalo National River, Rangers will arrest you. Don't "*come on vacation and leave on probation.*" Be smart and use a Designated Driver.

**R. Glass.** All glass is strictly prohibited on the Buffalo River itself and its gravel bars. Help us keep it off our waterway so that visitors can enjoy the sand and water barefoot without worry of a painful injury.