

WATER SAFETY

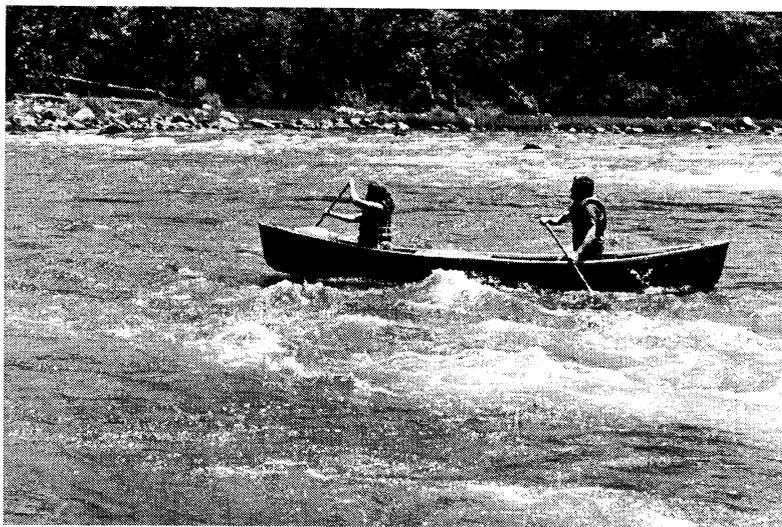
Water Safety within New River Gorge

Overview

Water safety is an important topic to teach children because drowning is the leading cause of accidental death for children. Each year thousands of Americans drown. Many of these deaths could be prevented if people simply knew how to practice water safety. Teaching children basic water safety rules and procedures will enable them to become more responsible for their own safety. It also will instill good safety habits as they become adults.

Some basic water safety rules and procedures for students to learn are:

1. never swim or boat alone
2. wear a personal flotation device (PFD) when boating, fishing, or playing on or in the river
3. have adult supervision when participating in water activities
4. don't dive or swim into un known or murky water
5. swim only in designated areas
6. boat and swim in areas suitable for your abilities
7. no horseplay (dunking, running along the water's edge, pulling or pushing others from a boat, etc.)
8. reach with or throw something to initiate a rescue from the water
9. take swimming lessons and a water safety course to increase proficiency



National Park Service Photo

Canoeist on New River near Terry, WV

Several organizations are dedicated to teaching water safety to children and adults. The American Red Cross not only provides swimming and lifeguard instruction but also has developed materials on water safety for classroom instruction by teachers. Organizations such as the YMCA, YWCA, BSA, and GSA also teach swimming skills and provide orientation in safety awareness for all water-related activities.

The New, Gauley, and Bluestone rivers and their tributaries offer many wonderful places for wading, fishing, boating, or swimming. In many places these bodies of water appear to be tranquil, peaceful spots to enjoy the rivers or streams. However, these rivers and streams are also very deceptive and dangerous to those unfamiliar with the water. The New River especially has a very strong current with many deep holes, sudden drop-offs, and debris covering the bottom. The New River and its tributaries possess numerous hazards that can and do cost lives if proper water safety is not observed and practiced.



The New and Gauley rivers have many rapids that attract tens of thousands of whitewater enthusiasts annually. For guided whitewater rafting trips, three water safety essentials must be practiced: wearing PFDs at all times, possessing a good knowledge and awareness of the hazards that the river presents, and traveling in groups to ensure mutual safety. However, practicing proper personal water safety when canoeing, rafting, or kayaking these rivers (or any river) is a must.



National Park Service Photo

Whitewater rafters take a break on the banks of the New River.

swimmers can frequently be seen at Sandstone Falls, Meadow Creek, Glade Creek, Grandview Sandbar, Terry Beach, Thayer, Stone Cliff, Cunard, and Fayette Station. The Gauley and Bluestone rivers also feature their own swimming holes. None of these locations are designated swimming areas and do not provide safe places to swim.

New River Gorge National River does not sanction swimming in any of the rivers or streams within its jurisdiction. Hazards such as swift currents, debris on the bottom, fluctuation in water levels, and hidden rocks do not make swimming a very safe water sport. To truly protect one's self, family, and friends on any section of the New, Bluestone, or Gauley rivers, everyone who wades, swims, or gets into any type of watercraft should wear a PFD all times and should be aware of the river area.

Water safety is the responsibility of each person who comes to the park. Learning and practicing proper safety rules and procedures is a must to having a safe and enjoyable recreational experience.

If whitewater is not your interest, New River Gorge National River also provide excellent fishing. Several potential hazards are present when fishing from the bank or in a boat. Become familiar with some of these hazards and the proper ways to keep yourself safe, and to have an enjoyable park experience. Sadly, drowning deaths occur every year in the park. These deaths usually occur when people are fishing, swimming, or wading in the river and fail to follow basic water safety essentials.

It is not uncommon to see individuals and families wading or swimming in the river. On the New River,

