

Smith River Kayak Tours



A Wild and Scenic Opportunity!

For a limited time in summer, Redwood National and State Parks conducts kayak tours of the Smith River—a crown jewel of the National Wild & Scenic River System and the largest free-flowing river system in California. Led by experienced park rangers, visitors will explore a variety of topics, including the unique geology of the Smith River watershed and how it contributes to the growth of the world’s largest trees, all while paddling pristine waters and enjoying unparalleled scenery.

Tour Description

As summer conditions allow, tours begin at 11:30 am on Friday and Saturday at Hiouchi Information Center in Redwood National and State Parks, where rangers will provide a brief orientation, basic safety information, and essential paddling skills. After being fitted for lifejackets and helmets, participants then shuttle to the Forks put-in and boat launch in Smith River National Recreation Area (see important logistics requirements below).

Based on age, weight, and experience, participants will be paired in tandem inflatable kayaks and paddle approximately 3.5 miles through Class I-II

whitewater that includes moving flatwater, riffles, and small rapids. Along the way, rangers will make interpretive stops highlighting the geology of the river corridor, groves of ancient coast redwoods, and more.

The tour ends at the Jedediah Smith Day Use Area. From there, most paddlers will return to personal vehicles parked at Hiouchi Information Center via a ½-mile walk over easy, paved terrain (which includes crossing U.S. 199).

Tours typically last between 3-4 hours.

Requirements for Participation

Participants must be at least 10 years old and able to swim in moving water. Each individual between ages 10-17 must be accompanied by an adult parent/guardian and can only occupy a kayak in tandem with an adult 18 years old or older. Participants must weigh no less than 50 lbs (23 kg) and no more than 220 lbs (100 kg).

Lifejackets and helmets will be provided and must be worn at all times while in and around water. Personally owned helmets, lifejackets, kayaks, and paddles will not be allowed.

Each individual (or parent/guardian) must read and sign the Visitor’s Acknowledgment of Risk, acknowledging the rules, risks, and requirements of this activity.

Attendance at the introductory presentation of basic safety information and essential paddling skills is also required. *Don’t be late!*

Is it really free? Yes! We do, however, gratefully accept donations to train staff, maintain equipment, and continue tours in the future.

Important logistics info.: *Shuttle service from Hiouchi Information Center to the Forks put-in is not provided.* Participants may arrange their own carpool or shuttle, though most paddlers use local transportation services (currently \$1.50/person, one-way—drivers may not be able to make change). Vehicles entering Jedediah Smith Day Use Area (the tour take-out) must pay an \$8 day use fee.

How to Sign-Up

For a safe and enjoyable experience, only a limited number of participants can be accommodated on each tour. Space is available on a first come-first served basis, only. Visitors can sign-up for a scheduled tour no sooner than two days and no later than one hour before scheduled tour start time.

Sign-ups must be made, in person, at Hiouchi Information Center (1 mile west of Hiouchi, Calif. on U.S. 199, open 9 am–5 pm daily); *reservations by telephone, email, or fax will not be accepted.*

Programs may be cancelled at any time for safety.

What to Expect

Expect to have fun, of course! But also expect to get wet! Summer conditions on the Smith River may change quickly, and vary from very warm to quite chilly. Please dress accordingly; we recommend clothing that insulates when wet and dries quickly, regardless of conditions.

You may fall in the river and lose cameras, cell phones, jewelry, etc. We recommend you not bring these items, or protect them in waterproof containers. Consider securing glasses with a retaining strap or string.