



## Canoe and Kayak Safety



Set aside as a Wild and Scenic River for its outstanding scenery and recreational opportunities, the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway includes the St. Croix River and a primary tributary, the Namekagon. The rivers offer outstanding paddling in a picturesque setting. River conditions can vary from fast moving currents with waves up to 3 feet high to slower moving currents with a few riffles and obstructions.

Advance planning will assure a safe and enjoyable trip. Talk with a park ranger at any of the Riverway centers and refer to river section maps and paddling guides for river conditions. Trip planning information and publications can be found at the Riverway website: [www.nps.gov/sacn](http://www.nps.gov/sacn).

### Planning a Trip

When planning your trip do not forget to take into consideration:

#### River currents:

The average speed for the St. Croix and Namekagon rivers is 3 miles per hour. However, some stretches of river can be slower or faster. Experienced paddlers can travel faster than beginners.

#### Wind conditions:

A strong headwind can mean standing waves and can slow down your rate of speed.

#### Portages:

Portages are indicated on river section maps. Know where they are and be prepared for them.

#### Paddling difficulty:

Make sure you know the abilities of each paddler in your group. Normal conditions are Class I on the International Scale of River Difficulty. However, during periods of high water, classifications can reach Class II and Class III on some river stretches.

#### Scheduled breaks:

Are you planning on stopping for picnics or fishing? These activities add time to your trip and may require you to shorten the distance you plan to paddle.

#### Water levels:

High water in spring or low water in late summer can make paddling impossible on some stretches of the Riverway. Pick an alternative stretch of river. Water levels are posted on the Riverway website: [www.nps.gov/sacn/planyourvisit/river/levels.htm](http://www.nps.gov/sacn/planyourvisit/river/levels.htm).

#### Float plan:

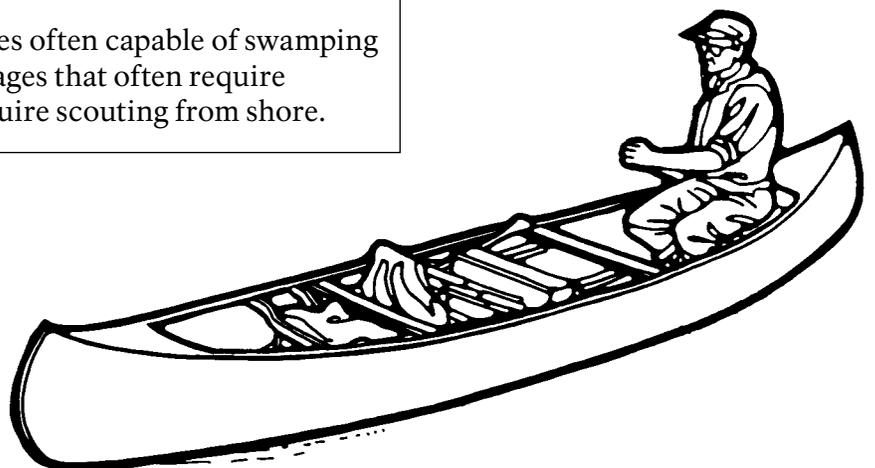
Put-in and take-out plans should be left with someone who will contact authorities if you are overdue. The establishment of a late return phone number is an important way to inform others of delays in your trip.

#### Hypothermia:

Exposure to cool air or cold water temperatures can lead to hypothermia. Always pack a spare set of clothes in a dry bag in case you tip.

#### International Scale of River Difficulty

- Class I Moving water with a few riffles and small waves. Few or no obstructions.
- Class II Easy rapids with waves up to 3 feet and wide, clear channels that are obvious without scouting. Some maneuvering is required.
- Class III Rapids with high, irregular waves often capable of swamping open bow canoes. Narrow passages that often require complex maneuvering. May require scouting from shore.



## Equipment

Make sure you have all the proper equipment before you begin your trip. Suggested gear includes:

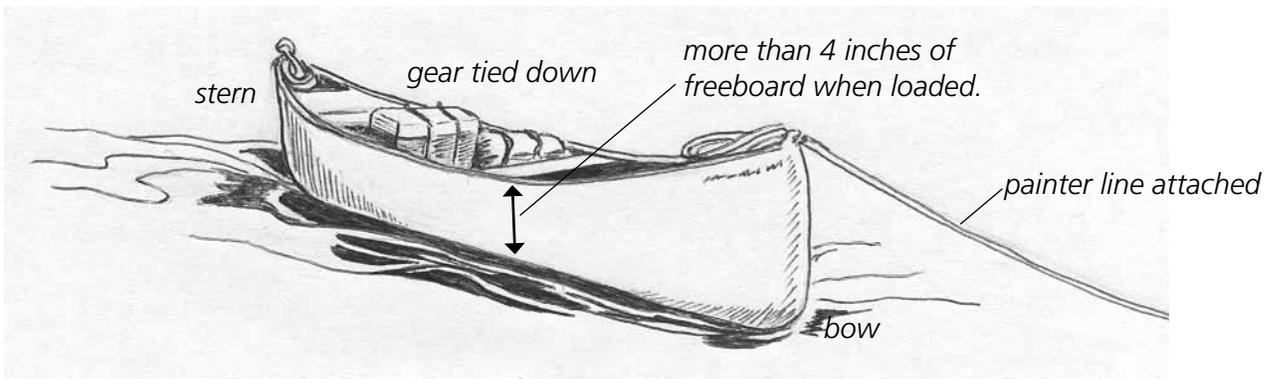
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life jackets (the law requires one for each person)    | <input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child/youth life jackets (Coast Guard approved)        | <input type="checkbox"/> Drinking water      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paddles (1 for each person plus 1 extra for the canoe) | <input type="checkbox"/> Water-proof matches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Garbage bags   | <input type="checkbox"/> Insect repellent    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Portable toilet  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sunscreen           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food and food storage equipment                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Rain gear           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change of clothing in waterproof container             | <input type="checkbox"/> Water bailer        |



## Before You Start

Make sure your equipment is in working condition. A painter line should be attached to the front and back of canoes and kayaks. Secure all equipment to the canoe to prevent shifting loads or loss in case of tipping. A canoe is considered overloaded if it has less than 4 inches of freeboard.

Check the local weather forecast. Storms can move in fast. Check the water levels and the water temperature. You can obtain general information at any of the Riverway centers.



## Paddling Safety Tips

▷ Wearable personal floatation devices (PFDs), or life jackets, are required onboard for each person. Seat cushions are no longer legal. PFDs should fit properly, otherwise they will ride up over the shoulders and could come off. **Never** tie or strap a person or their PFD to a canoe or kayak.

▷ **Children under 13 years of age must wear a properly fitting life jacket while your vessel is moving.** On the St. Croix and Namekagon rivers, motorboats, canoes, kayaks, and inner tubes are considered vessels. The National Park Service encourages all people who spend time on the water to wear a life jacket.

▷ Kneel in the bottom of the canoe while in areas of rough water for stability.

▷ Water ripples mean that rocks lie dangerously close to the surface. Follow the smooth water shaped like a "V" pointing downstream.

▷ If you fall out of a vessel, keep your feet above the surface, kicking and backpaddling to control your course downstream. **Never** attempt to hold a canoe from the downstream side.

▷ If you capsize, stay upstream of your vessel. Your canoe or kayak will float.

▷ Always follow the easiest route.

▷ Keep the bow headed downstream with the current; if the canoe or kayak is sideways it will tip if it strikes a wave or rock.

▷ **Never** stand or change positions in a canoe or kayak while afloat.

▷ In areas of high motorboat traffic, paddle near the shore and head into the wakes to avoid capsizing.

▷ Don't paddle near dams. The reversal current can suck you back in towards the dam.

▷ Do not lash canoes together. Many river channels are too narrow to allow passage.

## Riverway Visitor Centers

National Park Service rangers can answer questions and help you plan your trip. Bookstores are located in each visitor center and offer publications about canoeing and kayaking. River section maps and other publications are available at the centers.

**St. Croix River Visitor Center**  
401 N. Hamilton St.  
St. Croix Falls, WI 54024  
(715) 483-2274

**Namekagon River Visitor Center**  
P.O. Box 100  
Highway 63, 1 mile east of Hwy 53  
Trego, WI 54888  
(715) 635-8346

Or visit the Riverway website:  
[www.nps.gov/sacn](http://www.nps.gov/sacn)