

When paddling at this time of year, it's not unusual to get caught out in an occasional thunderstorm. Now, a little rain has never hurt anyone but lightning is something that we have to take precautions around.

The "rule of thumb" for lightning is the 30-30 rule. If the time between when you see the lightning flash to when you hear it is less than 30 seconds, immediately get off the water and seek shelter! (Note: The ACA recommends 40 seconds.) This is recommended since successive lightning strikes associated with a storm have been observed to be 6-8 miles apart.

After you get off the water, do not venture out until 30 minutes after the last thunder you hear. You can estimate your distance from a lightning strike by counting the time in seconds between when you see the lightning flash and when you hear the thunder by dividing the time by 5 to get the distance in miles. If you see lightning but don't hear thunder, the storm is probably 15 miles away. If you hear thunder, the storm is within 10 miles – almost lightning strike distance.

Once you're off of the water, get as far away from the shore as practical because of ground surge and side splash. Seek clumps of shrubs or trees of uniform height, ditches, trenches, or low ground. Avoid metal objects, isolated tall trees, shallow caves, bridges, and open fields—you don't want to be the tallest object or standing right below it. If you can get inside a car, do so.

If you're on land and your hair begins to stand on end, you hear a crackling noise, smell ozone, or objects develop a blue glow (St. Elmo's fire), this indicates a lightning strike is imminent. You should assume the Lightning Safety Position: 1) crouch on the balls of your feet, preferably on your PFD or some insulated pad, 2) keep your head down, and 3) do not touch the ground with your hands. Several sites also recommend covering your ears with your hands to protect them from acoustic damage due to thunder.

The best prevention is to check your weather radio or computer before you leave so that you know what you will be facing. Marine VHF radios used by sea kayakers allow you to monitor the local weather channel.

The technologically blessed among us can also perform real-time checks of forecasts and weather radar using their smart phones (e.g., Phone or Droid) so they know where they are relative to current storm activity.

Trip Report: Whitewater River, Waterloo to Mahan Park, May 16, 2010
Trip sponsor: Richard Tekulve

A total of eight paddlers from three states enjoyed a 9.7-mile trip on the Upper Whitewater River on Sunday, May 16th. Weather conditions were cloudy, windy and slightly rainy but that didn't provide a let-down for anyone's fast-paced journey down this crystal clear stream.

The Whitewater has a gradient of 7.1 ft. per mile and is labeled as Indiana's fastest river. The current on this trip was approximately 3 1/2 mph. For this trip, the USGS gauge at Alpine read 490 cfs. This is a sweet spot for an easy, fast-flowing run. The best flow level in this area is 300 to 800 cfs. The trip began at Waterloo Bridge [CR 440 N.] and ended at Mahan Park Canoe Launch 3 miles south of Connersville on SR 121.

We had two guests from the CincyPaddlers group—Jerry Messer from Kentucky and Phil Menschen from Ohio. Of the six HCC paddlers, five all had over 35 years of paddling experience. They were Rick Moulton (Converse), Bob Burkhardt (Middletown), Garry Hill (Greentown), George Flexman (Indianapolis), and Richard Tekulve (North Vernon). Our sixth HCC member was Theresa Kulczak—the lone "rookie" and female amongst the bunch.

This stretch of the Whitewater lacks the overpopulated canoe livery crowd and atmosphere that is evident downstream in the Brookville vicinity. The stream is characterized by small islands/splits, multiple sand/gravel bars, several chutes, numerous class 1 rapids and "side" currents. A dismal weather forecast cut attendance at least in half of what was expected to be about twenty participants.

Perhaps next year, a scheduled trip from Mahan Park to either Laurel Feeder Dam or Historic Metamora will be arranged.

