

Editor's Note: Jordan Ross wrote this article for the HCC's Safety Outreach Committee to increase public paddling safety awareness in an effort to bring down paddling fatalities. Our Publicity Chairman, Mariann Davis, has circulated this article to papers throughout the state and it has currently been published in the Bloomington and South Bend papers. The Safety Outreach Program is also planning a poster and brochures to help increase public awareness.

On May 12, Dennis Houck, an experienced South Bend kayaker, set off alone for a run on the St. Joe River. When he didn't return that night, local fire rescue crews began searching the river but his body was not found until May 19. Such tragedies are rare but hardly isolated incidents. In 2009, there were half a dozen reports of drownings of recreational paddlers on Indiana streams and lakes. Among the more newsworthy were the deaths of Ethan Runnel, an experienced outdoorsman who perished in the frigid waters of the White River in Indianapolis in mid-February, and three-year old Megan McNair, who drowned on the Driftwood River on a hot August day when the rental canoe her family was paddling was swept into a log jam and capsized. The circumstances were different in each case, but there was one common thread among these three: none of the victims were wearing a life vest.

Statistically paddle sports are very safe, but sadly every year we read of such accidents. Almost all of them could be prevented by taking a few basic safety precautions. As Memorial Day launches the start of the outdoor activity season, the Hoosier Canoe Club would like to offer a brief list of the most important do's and don'ts for inexperienced paddlers.

1. **DO wear a PFD (Personal Flotation Device)** . A life jacket or vest will float you high in the water so it's easier to breath and swim to safety. PFDs also provide warmth and protection. A PFD must be properly fitted and snug so it won't ride up or come off in the water.
2. **DON'T drink alcohol while paddling.** This may be the original "no brainer." Accident reviews show that alcohol is a contributing factor in many boating accidents, on all craft, in all waters.
3. **DON'T paddle alone.** Solo paddling is for experts. A party of two boats is good, three or more boats ideal. In the event of a mishap, one or more paddlers can stay with a victim while a companion goes for help. Better yet, paddle with experienced partners and avoid mishaps in the first place!
4. **DO dress for a swim.** Is the water cold? You may have no plans to swim but you must prepare for the possibility. If the air plus water temperatures add up to less than 100 degrees, hypothermia is a real danger. If you don't have protective paddling clothing (wet suit, paddle jackets and pants, etc.) wear a waterproof jacket or rain parka over layers of clothing—synthetics like fleece are much better than natural fibers especially cotton. And bring a change of dry clothing in a waterproof bag.
5. **DON'T get caught in deadly strainers and dams.** Without question, these are the biggest killers in Indiana rivers and streams.

Strainers are fallen trees, logs and branches in moving water that allow water to flow past but snag boats and paddlers and trap them underwater. Even on a "lazy" river paddlers caught in a strainer can die of drowning or hypothermia. Strainers may be easy to see or hidden below the surface. They often occur on the outside of a turn where the current is fastest, sweeping inexperienced paddlers into a trap.

With experience, strainers are easy to avoid. Paddle to the inside of turns where the current is slower. Stop and scout if you can't see an easy route around a strainer.

The turbulent currents below dams are often called "drowning machines". They are much, much more dangerous than they look. Boats flip in the currents and paddlers are recirculated helplessly below the dam until they drown. It's not unusual for rescuers to drown trying to save the victims. No matter how small the dam, carry your boat around it and put in well below the currents at the base.



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6. **DON'T paddle flooded rivers.** Even experts avoid flooded rivers. A river above its banks and flowing in the trees is a death trap. Strainers of man-made debris, fencing and cables, log jams and raging currents add to the danger. Fatalities often occur within a hundred yards of the put-in.
 7. **DO join a paddling club.** There is no better way to learn to paddle safely than to join a club and paddle with experts who will show you the simple skills for risk-free paddling. Paddling with a club provides great camaraderie, recreation and exercise. Clubs offer trips to beautiful locations you might never see on your own, expose you to different kinds of boats and paddling experiences and will help you get the most out of your new sport.
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Flatwater Trip Announcement

East Fork, White River Overnighter

Saturday–Sunday , July 17-18, 2010

Trip Sponsor: Richard Tekulve

For nearly four decades (since 1972), I have been paddling the East Fork of the White River on an annual basis. My many journeys have taken me from the start at Mill Race Park in Columbus to its termination 189.9 miles downstream near Petersburg. Having covered every inch of the river, it is my opinion that the best "stretch" of river is from Columbus to Lawrenceport.

This section contains some of Indiana's longest "camp out" sandbars and flows under some of the state's longest and oldest bridges. Many of the over one hundred sandbars in this stretch are between ¼ to ½ mile in length. Firewood is usually plentiful on each bend. To add to this, the East Fork of the White River is one of the few 247/365 streams that exist in the Hoosier state. Even in drought-like conditions, the river can be paddled. An easy, steady flow of 2-2 ½ mph can be expected with Class I conditions provide for a leisurely and pleasant float.

The East Fork's source is provided by the joining of the Driftwood River (1165 sq. mi.) and the Flatrock River (542 sq. mi) at Columbus. With a total of 1707 square miles of drainage area from its start, the East Fork always has water to float. The river drains from 25 of Indiana's 92 counties and at its confluence has drained 5,746 square miles near Petersburg. Add to this the fact that it is served by 19 different DNR boat ramps spaced out evenly throughout its travels.

Also of significance, we will pass under three historical and lengthy bridges. The Shieldstown Covered Bridge (built 1875 and 353 ft), Vallonia Iron Bridge (built 1887 and 279 feet), and the second longest standing covered bridge in the World – the Medora Covered Bridge built in 1875 and an astonishing 453 feet long.

This trip is intended to be part of a two-day event with a camp out on a secluded sandbar, somewhere upstream from the U.S. 50 bridge. I will provide a one-day trip also for those interested from our put-in at Seymour (SR 258) to Brownstown (US 50) of 16.3 miles. The two-day overnighter will be from SR 258 in Seymour to SR 235 in Medora a total distance of 25.7 miles. The campout is optional and a Sunday paddle could be arranged from US 50 Brownstown to SR 235 Medora – a trip of 9.4 miles.

Trip Dates: Saturday July 17 and Sunday July 18

Trip Options:

- Saturday Only: State Road 258 DNR Access – 2 mi. west of Seymour (Delorme Atlas page 51-E10) to US 50 DNR Access – 2 mi. west of Brownstown (Delorme Atlas page 51 – G9)
Trip Distance: 16.3 miles. Shuttle Total: 27 miles.
- Saturday and Sunday: State Road (SR) 258 DNR Access – 2 mi. west of Seymour (Delorme Atlas page 51 – E10) to SR 235 DNR Access – 1 mile East of Medora (Delorme Atlas Page 51 – H8)
Trip Distance: 25.7 miles. Shuttle Total: 44 miles
- Sunday Only: US 50 Brownstown to Medora (meet group at US 50 Access). Trip Distance: 9.4 miles

Meeting Time: 9:30 am, Saturday, July 17

Meeting Place (Put-In): SR 258 Bridge (DNR Access Ramp) 2 miles west of Seymour (Delorme Atlas Page 51 – E10)