



Guidelines for WCA Organizers

The Wilderness Canoe Association takes pride in its long history of providing safe, personally rewarding and environmentally responsible outdoor activities for its members. The following are a set of guidelines intended to assist our club outings organizers in providing safe and successful trips as well as requirements mandated by government or our insurer. The most recent version of these guidelines can be found on the WCA website.

Note: These guidelines only apply to officially sanctioned WCA outings. The organization and management of private trips posted on the club bulletin board are solely the responsibility of the posting club member and those participating.

1. WCA Outings General Rules and Guidelines

Please fully read and follow the WCA's general ***Guidelines for Outing Participants***. This contains valuable outings organizational information, canoeing safety equipment and related safety procedures that will help you as an organizer.

Also review the WCA Trip Rating document and ensure that your trip has a realistic difficulty rating. Trip descriptions should clearly explain the requisite equipment, skills and physical fitness to participate safely. Any specific risks or challenges that could be encountered should be detailed. Members interested in joining your trip who are not familiar with the route will have expectations based on this and your posted description.

Refer to the WCA website for the current editions of participant guidelines and trip ratings.

Please note that canoeing while impaired by alcohol or drugs is dangerous and prohibited under club policy. Additionally, the serving of liquor on WCA outings is not allowed under our liability insurance policy. (Note: this restriction does not apply to purely social functions such as the WCA's annual Wine & Cheese gathering.)

We expect all members and guests on our outings to exhibit positive, helpful behaviour to other group members and to treat everyone with respect and dignity. It is WCA policy that disrespectful or abusive behaviour or language will not be tolerated on our outings. An organizer noticing disrespectful or abusive behaviour or actual physical or emotional harassment on an outing, must report the details to the Outings Chair. Persons engaging in such behaviour will have their memberships revoked, and, in extreme situations, legal authorities could be involved.



Important: Note that material failure of an organizer to follow the WCA guideline will result in loss of that members ability to post trips and/or membership.

2. WCA Waivers of Liability Forms

All persons participating in club outings must sign and accept the WCA Waiver of Liability form. There are no exceptions.

These forms will normally have been conveniently completed electronically for you when the member registers for the outing. Members must complete the waivers using the electronic outing registration.

While the organizer, at their discretion, may allow a non-member to participate (such as a friend of the participating member), it is the responsibility of the organizer to obtain the signed waiver prior to the trip. Electronic copies are available on the Club Activities – Participant Resources page of the website for the non-member to print, sign, scan or photo and return to you. If this is not done, they cannot go on the trip.

If a trip participant has not signed up for the outing electronically, the organizer must provide the participant copies of the waiver and outings guidelines (electronic or hard copy), and have them return a signed copy of the waiver in advance of the outing. Any such supplementary waivers should be collected by the organizer and sent to the Outings Committee.

Note that non-members can only participate in a total of 2 outings. If they wish to continue to enjoy club benefits, they are expected to become members.

Non-member children cannot participate in club outings. Children (that is, under the age of 18) can only participate in a WCA outing if accompanied by a parent or legal guardian who has signed and submitted the paper waiver form.

3. Organizer Qualifications

It is the practice of the WCA to confirm that individuals given the opportunity to organize and lead outings have appropriate skills, experience, and leadership abilities to manage the trips they are proposing to run. New leaders are vetted by the Outings Committee to confirm that they have the necessary capabilities. This can be a flexible process that assesses the potential organizer based on the difficulty and risk of the types of trips they lead. Clearly the requirements for leading a day trip on Duffin's Creek Marsh are not the same as for a month trip on the Back River.

As a general guideline, any aspiring outings organizer should have been a member of the WCA for at least a year and have participated in at least one trip organized by another leader. This ensures that the new leader has some commitment to the club and some hands-on experience with how WCA outings are conducted. This should be adequate for simple low risk flatwater day or weekend trips. If the organizer proposes to lead whitewater trips on Class 1-2 rivers, they need to provide a CV that includes similar trips



they have been on in the past and we should obtain a reference from an organizer of one of the WCA's river trips. If the new organizer wants to lead trips on Class 3 rivers or more remote trips of a week or more duration, they should have been an active member for at least one (1) year and can provide two WCA references to their suitability.

The WCA will also take into account certifications that a prospective trip organizer might hold in areas such as whitewater, tripping, first aid, and wilderness rescue. The WCA views certifications from organizations such as ORKCA and Paddle Canada as useful affirmations of capabilities developed from a combination of outing experiences and organized instruction.

4. Participant Screening

The Outings Committee of the WCA is responsible for reviewing proposed outings to confirm that the trip is reasonable in terms of water levels, access, distance, duration, paddling skills, and boats and other equipment required. The trip description must clearly and accurately explain the route, level of difficulty and physical fitness required. It is important that participants realistically know what to expect.

It is important that participants in WCA outings have adequate skills and be physically and mentally capable of handling the outings they register for. In most cases inadequate suitability results in the individual having to be supported by the organizer and other participants reducing the participants enjoyment of the trip and causing negative feelings about their WCA experience. However, in some situations, especially on remote or difficult whitewater trips, the inclusion of an unsuitable person can create risks of injury or even death to themselves and those trying to help them.

If the organizer is not familiar with a member who has registered for their outing, they should contact the person to conduct a screening introduction. This is an excellent way to develop rapport with the participant, especially with our new members. Participants with inadequate experience, skills or equipment can cause inconvenience to the group and may even create a serious safety risk. For more serious trips, a pre-trip dry run trip is usually helpful.

Equipment suitability is simple to screen for. Confirm that the kind of boat and its outfitting are adequate for the trip. Verify that the participant has any specific necessary personal gear such as waterproof dry bag, wetsuit or drysuit and helmet, etc.

Skills assessment can be accomplished by tactfully asking about experience on previous similar trips. For more challenging trips, clearly stating capabilities to handle certain situations to be encountered is effective. For example, asking about the ability to ferry and turn into small eddies in waves and strong current, or to do rough kilometer long single carry portages, will both make organizer expectations clear and allow participant feedback on capabilities.

If the organizer does not have current first aid certification or river rescue training, this is a good opportunity as part of emergency planning to ask the participants on the trip if they have special certifications.



Ask if they have been on other WCA trips and with whom they have paddled. If the organizer remains uncertain about the prospective participant's suitability, it can be helpful to contact past group members to get their assessments.

5. Canoe Outfitting and Personal Equipment

The applicability of outings safety equipment and rules will vary with the time of year and the type of trip, except for the Coast Guard required equipment, which are obligatory requirements. Participants should never be allowed on the trip without a properly fitting PFD. For whitewater trips of river difficulty Class 2 or greater, a drysuit or full wetsuit is mandatory on trips before June 1, or if the water temperature is below 15 degrees Celsius, or the combined air and water temperature are below 30 degrees Celsius. Organizers should exclude individuals without this equipment from the trip. Allowing persons without such personal protective equipment to participate can create serious risk to that person as well as the entire group.

Group Equipment

The group should carry at least one suitable electronic communication device — cellular or satellite-based phone depending on coverage. Prior to a trip, the organizer should do a test check to confirm the device is working properly.

There should be at least one emergency first aid kit, and repair kit for the group.

For whitewater trips, add at least one de-pin kit.

For more remote trips, at least two sets of navigation devices and maps should be taken in case the group has to separate, as well as sufficient emergency gear and food to sustain the party if delayed.

(Many experienced organizers bring along a spare PFD and paddle for anyone who may have forgotten theirs.)

Decisions as to what specific safety rules, equipment, and boat outfitting are appropriate for outings rest solely with the trip organizer. As with PFDs, if the organizer feels that a boat or personal protective equipment is inadequate or creates a risk, they should exclude them from the trip.

The WCA Board of Directors and the Outings Committee will always support organizers who make these hard but necessary decisions.



6. Pre-trip Planning

Review the intended route. Other than on short, simple trips, carry a map in a waterproof case. If electronic versions of maps are available, send them to participants. Even if you have paddled a route many times before, check for recent road changes or access problems. Be sure to check water levels on river routes before the trip. Extremes can make rivers an unpleasant hike or a whitewater torrent. New sweepers and changing river obstacles can introduce new potentially dangerous situations and care and skills should be up to the task.

We recommend providing clear driving instructions to the put-in on the outing posting on the web site so they are readily accessible. If this cannot be done, or there are last-minute changes, ensure that all participants have been informed of the meeting time and place, and seek confirmation.

Provide the participants with your cell phone number where you can be contacted for last-minute complications, such as illness or car problems.

Plan for emergencies. If a participant became injured or sick or the progress of the group is slower than anticipated, the organizer should have a game plan for handling the situation. Review the route to locate alternate spots where the group can exit the route and locate medical assistance or transportation back to the vehicles.

Carrying an appropriate communications device is highly recommended. In more populated areas, a cell phone is adequate, plus it can store area maps. In more remote locations an InReach, SPOT, Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) or satellite phone can be a lifesaver. Have local emergency telephone numbers handy such as for police, local hospitals, park office, your outfitter or air service. Carry a small power bank and connection cables in case the battery runs out of power.

The organizer should test emergency communications devices in advance of the outing and confirm that emergency contacts receive a test OK message.

Leave information on your group contact info, route and your estimated time/date of return with a reliable person so there is backup in case your party doesn't arrive on time.

For longer and/or more remote outings, the organizer should distribute key information from a Google Drive WCA trip planning spreadsheet to all emergency contacts. The organizer is encouraged to designate one emergency contact as a "guardian angel" who can assist with the response to issues that might arise during a trip, such as the need to reschedule travel arrangements. Emergency contact information should include names and contacts for any air service or outfitter being used, as well as the contact info for the local authorities that we would need to contact.



As medical evacuation from remote areas can be extremely expensive, purchasing medevac insurance on such trips is recommended for the group. Highly discounted rates are available as a supplementary benefit for InReach and SPOT users.

As a best practice, the group should have a certified first aid person in attendance on WCA outings along with an emergency medical kit appropriate to the trip along with contact information for the nearest medical facility. Longer and more remote trips require more extensive planning and coordination. Organizers who undertake such outings need to have extensive experience at running such trips. The Outings Committee will confirm such experience before approving these outing postings. Details of such planning are beyond the scope of this document.

The organizer may wish to delegate certain responsibilities to specific participants who have recognized skills in areas such as:

- (a) Assessing water conditions
- (b) On-water rescue
- (c) Campsite safety
- (d) First aid
- (e) Route finding and navigation
- (f) Communication

Some groups organize themselves with online spreadsheets placed on shared drive to organize all aspects of their trip. Some information captured could be;

- (a) Member and emergency contact info
- (b) Boat and tent sharing
- (c) Food schedule
- (d) Trip itinerary and travel plans to and from meeting spot
- (e) Group gear, rescue gear, first aid and repair supplies
- (f) Communication, emergency contacts
- (g) Group Expenses

Other groups may have a group call and/or meeting to prepare themselves.

7. Pre-launch Equipment Check & Huddle

At the put-in, the organizer should perform a check to confirm that participants have suitably outfitted boats and that the participants all have all necessary personal equipment as specified in the outing posting. If either are inappropriate such that they could create a safety risk, they should be excluded from the outing.



Before launching, the organizer should have a huddle to discuss safety on the trip. For example, on a river trip, confirm arm signal directions that will be used as well as any specific order for the boats. Everyone should know who are in the lead and the sweep boats. If the organizer has delegated some functions, such as river reading or route finding to other skilled people on the trip, participants should be informed.

Review any special hazards that will be encountered on the outing such as steep portages, sweepers or waterfalls.

Review any applicable public health practices and procedures that are to be followed on the outing and ensure all participants understand them.

Review the maximum distance allowed between the lead and last canoe. This could be important on big water lakes where group T rescues of swapped boats could be required or where many islands are present and members could get confused about where the lead canoes turned.

8. Problem management

In the event of any serious injury or illness occurring during the outing, or a major change in trip itinerary (including an evacuation), the organizer should contact as soon as possible the Outings Chair, another Outings Committee member or the WCA Chair to provide details.

Organizers and other participants are expected to participate in a trip debriefing in relation to any noteworthy outing incidents to ensure that WCA can respond appropriately to issues arising from the outing, including reviewing the sufficiency of its guidelines for outing participants and organizers.

Please also report any major property loss (such as car vandalized) or disputes with landowners or locals or access point problems to the above WCA officers. Where such problems arise, our other organizers need to be aware if they are planning trips to the area.

9. Question/Comments

If you have any questions and/or suggestions, please contact the WCA Outings Committee via email outings@wildernesscanoe.ca

-- Revised and approved by WCA Board, and in effect from 31 March 2026