

General Operation & Safety Guide for Non-Motorized Watercraft

Applicable Watercraft:

- Canoes
 - Kayaks
 - Stand-up Paddleboards (SUPs)
 - Pedal Boats / Paddle Boats
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1. General Information

Non-motorized watercraft are human-powered vessels designed for lakes, rivers, and calm coastal waters. Proper use, awareness of water conditions, and safety precautions are essential for a fun and safe experience.

Key Safety Equipment (Always Onboard / Worn):

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket (one per person)
- Whistle or sound-producing device
- Dry bag for keys, phone, or emergency items
- Sunscreen and protective clothing
- Water and snacks for longer trips

Optional but Recommended:

- Paddle leash for SUPs
 - Bilge pump or sponge (canoes/kayaks)
 - Map, compass, or GPS
 - First aid kit
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2. Pre-Trip Checklist

Watercraft Condition:

- Inspect hull, deck, and pontoons for cracks, holes, or damage.
- Check for loose screws, rivets, or fittings.
- Ensure seats, footrests, and pedals are secure (if applicable).
- Verify paddles, oars, or paddling poles are in good condition.

Personal Safety:

- Wear a properly fitted **life jacket**.
 - Inform someone of your planned route and expected return.
 - Check weather conditions and water temperature.
 - Avoid alcohol or drugs before or during your trip.
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3. Launching & Boarding

1. Choose a **safe entry point**, preferably a dock, ramp, or gentle shoreline.
 2. Hold watercraft steady while boarding.
 - Canoe/Kayak: step in slowly, one foot first, center of balance.
 - Paddleboard: place one foot near center, then step carefully.
 - Pedal Boat: both feet in pedals before sitting.
 3. Keep weight **low and centered** to avoid tipping.
 4. For multi-person craft, board **one at a time** starting with the heaviest person for stability.
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4. Basic Operation

Canoes & Kayaks

- Paddle with alternating strokes: one side, then the other.
- Use **J-stroke** or **rudder** for straight travel in canoes.
- Lean slightly forward for speed, back straight for balance.

Stand-Up Paddleboards (SUP)

- Place feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent.
- Use alternating paddle strokes, switching sides every few strokes.
- Keep paddle blade fully submerged for maximum efficiency.

Pedal Boats

- Sit upright, feet on pedals.
 - Maintain steady pedaling speed for control.
 - Steer with the rudder or steering mechanism while pedaling.
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5. On-Water Safety

- Always wear your **life jacket** — even strong swimmers.
 - Avoid standing up in canoes/kayaks unless designed for it.
 - Keep **weight low and centered** to prevent capsizing.
 - Maintain a **safe distance from other vessels, swimmers, and obstacles**.
 - Observe local boating regulations, speed zones, and no-wake areas.
 - Be aware of wind, currents, and weather changes.
 - Use **sun protection** — UV exposure is higher on water surfaces.
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6. Capsize & Recovery

Canoe / Kayak

1. Stay calm; hold onto the craft if possible.
2. Float on your back with legs pointed downstream if in a river.
3. Re-enter using:
 - **Shallow water:** stand and lift craft, climb in.
 - **Deep water:** roll back onto craft if using kayak with spray skirt, or use assisted re-entry techniques.

Paddleboard

- Fall forward or backward, keep board between you and hazards.
- Swim back and remount the board, holding the nose first.

Pedal Boat

- Pedal boats are usually stable; if capsized, hold onto the boat and wait for help.
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7. Weather & Environmental Awareness

- Avoid paddling in thunderstorms or high winds.
 - Check water temperature: wear appropriate gear in cold water.
 - Respect wildlife and aquatic plants; avoid disturbing nesting areas.
 - Leave no trash behind; pack out all items.
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8. Storage & Maintenance

After Each Trip:

- Rinse watercraft with fresh water to remove debris, algae, or salt.
 - Inspect for damage or cracks.
 - Dry completely before storage to prevent mildew.
 - Store paddleboards, canoes, and kayaks off the ground or on racks.
 - Check paddles, oars, and leashes for wear.
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9. Emergency Preparedness

- Carry a **whistle or signaling device**.
 - Know basic self-rescue techniques.
 - Keep a **communication device** (waterproof phone or VHF radio) if on larger lakes or rivers.
 - Always paddle with a partner or group when possible.
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10. Summary of Safety Rules

- Always wear a life jacket.
- Stay low and centered; maintain proper balance.
- Check watercraft and gear before launch.
- Observe weather, currents, and boating laws.
- Stay visible to other boats; wear bright clothing.
- Know self-rescue procedures.