



Schuylkill River Water Trail

Paddling and Safety Tips

As with many outdoor activities, there are inherent risks in watersports that can lead to injury or even death, but knowing your abilities and limits, preparing properly, and exercising caution and common sense can reduce the risks and increase the quality of the paddling experience.

The Schuylkill River Water Trail has miles of slow-moving flatwater that are appropriate for beginners, but there are stretches that include swift currents, rapids, dams, and other river hazards that require a higher degree of boat-handling skills. This water trail has been skill-rated, section-by-section. One river feature, like a higher-difficulty rapid, can determine the rating for an entire section.

PADDLING, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS DO NOT MIX! Operating any watercraft, including canoes, kayaks, rafts, stand-up paddle boards, and tubes under the influence of alcohol or controlled substances is illegal.

PLAN & PREPARE...

KNOW YOUR SKILLS: Match your skill level to the river section. Paddling skills should be sufficient to stop or reach shore before danger. A beginner has little or no river experience, especially if they have paddled mostly on lakes and have not practiced boat-handling skills on a slow-moving river.

A novice has mastered the basic forward, turning, and back-paddle strokes and has some river-reading experience, and can spot and maneuver around rocks and other obstacles on moving water. A novice should also be able to exit the kayak while upside-down in the water.

An intermediate paddler has good boat control, a mastery of all the basic strokes, plus pry and draw strokes, the skills to maneuver in strong current, and the ability to make abrupt turns, ferry, and quickly accelerate out of a rapid.

An advanced paddler possesses all novice and intermediate skills, can roll reliably, and has substantial experience in Class III+ rivers.

BEFORE YOU GO CHECKLIST:

- Be a competent swimmer.
- Know the river. Use published river maps and scout ahead to avoid surprises.
- Plan your vehicle shuttle or pickup.
- Check water levels at US Geologic Service websites. <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?01468500> and the water level forecast at <http://water.weather.gov/ahps2/hydrograph.php?wfo=phi&gage=lgvp1>
- Check the weather forecast.
- Dress for weather conditions and water temperatures.
- Double-check your equipment and pack all gear, water, clothing, food, first aid kit, extra paddle, maps, and life jacket or Personal Flotation Device (PFD).
- Advise someone not paddling with you of your trip and ask him/her to alert authorities if you are overdue.
- Never paddle alone. A minimum recommended group size is three paddlers and two boats.

RAIN GEAR: A cold downpour can be uncomfortable and dangerous, especially when air temps are cooler (see Hypothermia). Wear a breathable rain jacket that covers the PFD and can be easily put on and taken off. Do not wear ponchos since they may cause entrapment in the event of a mishap.

FOOTWEAR: Sharp branches, roots, rocks, and broken glass are hiding under the water. Wear sturdy, protective footwear like water shoes, sneakers, or sport sandals with ankle straps are best. Do not wear flip-flops or heavy boots that could reduce your ability to survive a swim.

SUN PROTECTION: Wear hats, sunglasses, high SPF sunblock, light-colored, and lightweight clothing for UV protection from the sun and its reflection from the water.

WET EXIT: Learn and practice to wet exit your boat if upside down in the water.

SPRAYSHIRTS: Properly-fitted spray-skirts will keep the river's splash and rain out of your boat for better control and comfort.

MUST-HAVE ACCESSORIES:

- Eyeglass restraints.
- Whistles or other mechanical sound-producing devices are required by state law and essential for on-water communication and emergencies.
- Lights are required by law, between dusk and dawn, to be held overhead to avoid collisions. When anchored in a non-anchorage area a 360° light must be displayed.
- Stow your cell phone in a secure, waterproof place when on the water.

FOOD AND DRINK: Stay hydrated to avoid conditions leading to dangerous errors in judgement, disorientation, and physical impairment. Drink four to five quarts of water for a full day trip. Eat during the day to replace electrolytes.

PREVENT & PROTECT...

ALWAYS WEAR A LIFE JACKET: Always wear a properly-fitting and fastened vest-type life jacket, also called a Personal Flotation Device or PFD, that offers back protection as well as flotation to swim in moving water. Although paddlers of all ages should wear their PFD at all times, Pennsylvania law requires children under the age of 13 and non-swimmers to wear a PFD and all paddlers, regardless of age, to wear their PFD in the cold-weather months of November through April.

HEAD PROTECTION: Wear a solid, correctly-fitted helmet to protect your head from underwater hazards if you capsizes.

COLD WATER SHOCK: Be aware that sudden immersion in cold water (even as warm as 50-60°F) can cause reflexive gasping and water inhalation, loss of motor skills, and increased heart rate/blood pressure that could lead to a heart attack.

HYPOTHERMIA: Being cold for even a short period of time can cause hypothermia, the lowering of the body's core temperature. Symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, impaired judgment, clumsiness, loss of manual dexterity, and slurred speech. Unconsciousness and death can occur if not treated. As soon as possible bundle on warm, dry layers of clothing or blankets and encourage him/her to move around to increase body heat and circulation.

ROPES AND TETHERS: Because of entanglement dangers to a neck, wrists, or legs, never tie a rope or strap to yourself, a pet, another person, or another moving boat. Keep all ropes coiled and secured when not in use.

COLD WEATHER: Wear insulating layers of wool, pile, or polypropylene fleece rather than a single layer to wick moisture away from your skin and keep you warm. Cotton is NOT recommended because it can trap moisture and draw out the body's heat. A neoprene wet suit is recommended for water temperatures between 60 and 50°F and a drysuit for sub-50° water temperatures. Stow a splash jacket or windbreaker top layer, hats, and gloves onboard.

LIGHTNING: DO NOT go on the river if thunderstorms are in the weather forecast. If caught, DO NOT seek cover under the tallest tree or object, in an open space on land or water, on the top of a hill, in a culvert, or near long conductors of electricity such as train tracks, metal fences, or wet ropes. DO safely exit the river at the first sound of thunder, or if storm is approaching without the sound of thunder. An enclosed, permanent building or vehicle, not a pavilion or tent, are the best shelter options. Crouch with your feet close together and avoid close grouping with paddling companions to reduce the effects of current traveling through the ground. Wait for at least 30 minutes from the last sound of thunder before returning to the water.

PADDLE!!!

RAPIDS: Do not enter a rapid unless you are reasonably sure that you can run it safely or swim it without injury. Ratings are only a guide and rapids are rated at average water levels. For paddling in cold water or remote areas, allow an extra margin of safety between your skills and the river section's skill rating. High and low water levels can increase difficulty and may increase rapid class ratings. DO kneel in a canoe through any rough water and rapids and keep your gear low and centered for the greatest stability.

Class I: Fast moving water with ripples and small waves, obstructions are few if any, obvious, and easily avoided with little training. There is a only slight risk to paddlers who unintentionally swim in the river. Self-rescue is easy.

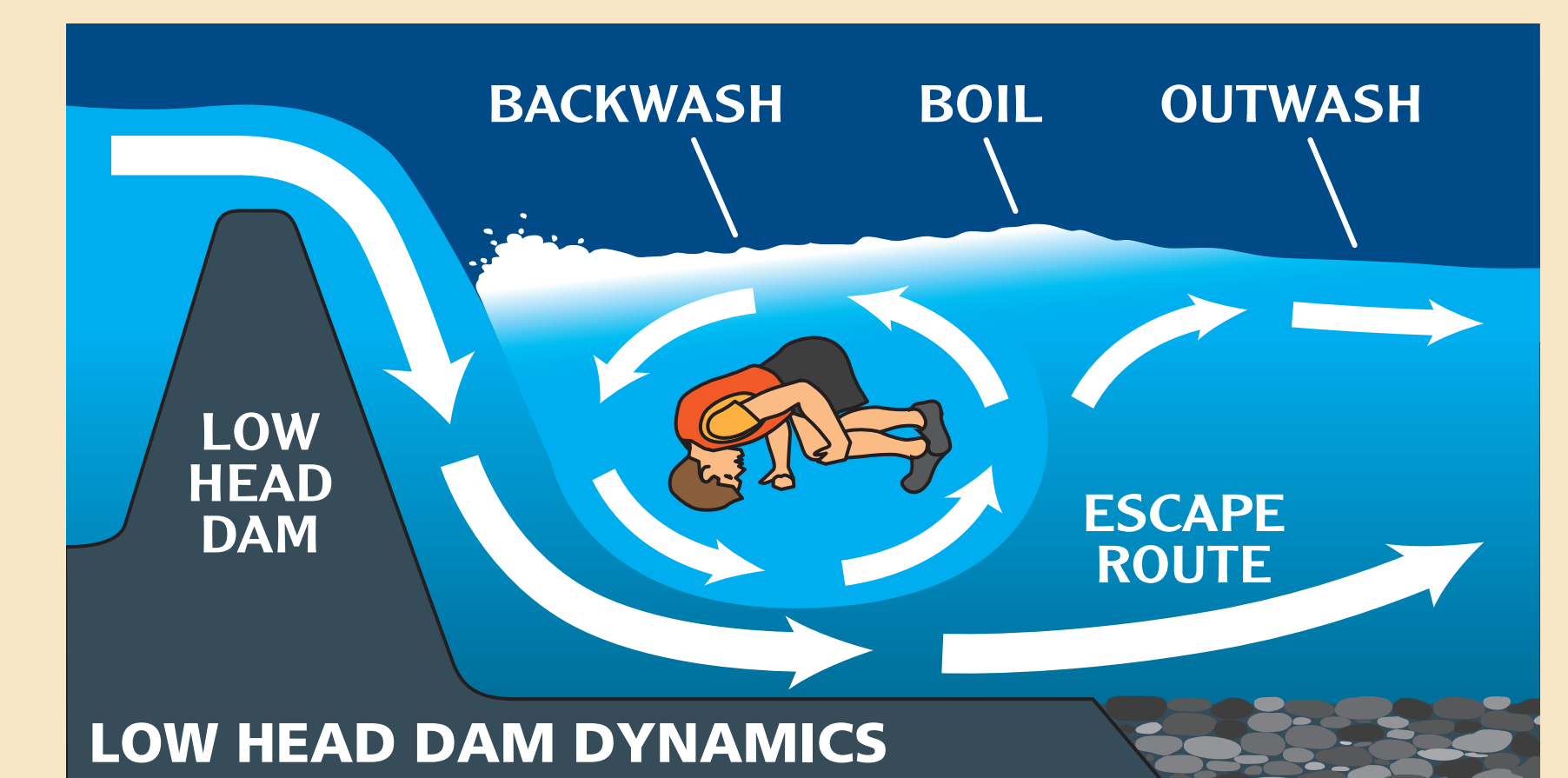
Class II: Straightforward rapids with wide, clear channels that are evident without scouting. Some maneuvering may be required, but rocks and medium-sized waves are easily avoided by trained paddlers. Swimmers are seldom injured and group assistance, while helpful, is seldom needed.

Class III: Rapids with moderate, irregular waves that may be difficult to avoid and can swamp an open canoe. These require complex maneuvers in fast current and good boat control in tight passages or around ledges. Large waves or strainers may be present but are easily avoided. Strong eddies and powerful current effects can be found. Scouting is advisable. Injuries while swimming are rare. Self-rescue is usually easy, but group assistance may be required to avoid long swims.

Class III, IV, V, and VI: Not found on the Schuylkill River Water Trail during average water levels.

BRIDGES: Give bridge piers a wide berth since they collect strainers and can create turbulent, unpredictable currents. There can also be underwater dangers.

DAMS: Always portage around, and never paddle over dams, or even low-head dams, to avoid entrapment from their hydraulic back-current.



STRAINERS: Strainers are partially-submerged trees or debris piles that can be found anywhere in the river but frequently collect around river banks, rocks, and piers. They are extremely dangerous because water can push through a strainer with great force to catch and trap an unwary paddler's boat.

HIGH WATER: Avoid paddling during high water events because the river current's greater force reduces a paddler's time to adequately react to river conditions flooded riverside trees, difficult take-outs, and other abnormal river conditions.

BROACHING: Broaching is being pushed sideways against an obstacle by the current. If your boat broaches, or is about to broach, immediately lean downstream toward the obstruction to raise the upstream cockpit rim to prevent water from entering your boat.

PILE UPS: DON'T closely follow another boat. Keep a five boat-length distance to avoid pile-ups and to better view the river ahead.

WALKING AND WADING: When wading with your boat, loop a short rope to it's carry handle and let it float downstream from you while using the paddle as a walking stick over the river's uneven and slippery rocks.

RIVER OBSTACLES: DON'T grab tree branches, roots, or rocks when moving! Sudden stops may cause capsizing or wrench your arm and shoulder due to the water current's speed.

CAPSIZING

- Save people first. Equipment can wait.
- Move upstream of your boat to avoid entrapment between it and a rock or another hard place. Hold onto the boat and paddle, unless doing so presents a danger to personal safety.
- Float on your back, knees bent with feet pointing downstream near the water's surface. Point your toes up to avoid foot entrapment in rocks and use your legs to absorb shocks from river obstacles. Use your arms to steer and ferry. Swim in this position to the safest river bank or calm water. Because of the possibility of foot entrapment, never try to stand in a strong current or in water that is over the knee.

In case of emergency, call 911 and provide the River Trail Mile Number
En caso de emergencia, llame 911 y proporcione el Numero Milla

Look for the RIVER MILE NUMBER on Landing Signs