

River Safety

A safe river trip is a fun river trip! Consider the safety advice below when planning your trip.

1. Know the River

- Gather all the information you can about the river. Use this website, river map, and other resources.
- Be aware of current river levels and the potential challenges different levels bring.
- If you are uncomfortable with your experience level and potential challenges, utilize the services of a [qualified river guide service](#).
- Use a public landing or seek permission from private landowners.
- Consider time, distance, and water level to be traveled and the amount of daylight available.
- Arrange for a shuttle.

2. Have the Skills

- Be a competent swimmer and able to handle yourself underwater and in moving water with a current. River rescue and wilderness first aid experience is recommended.
- Consider total group strength. Beginners should not be on this river without boaters who have advanced paddling skills, rescue skills, and wilderness first aid skills.
- Designate the most experienced paddlers as on-river leaders. However, all must assume responsibility for the group.
- Never paddle alone.
- If you are uncomfortable with your experience level and potential challenges, utilize the services of a [qualified river guide service](#).

3. Equipment and Clothing

- ALWAYS WEAR A PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICE (PFD)! 85% of boating fatality victims were not wearing a PFD at the time of the accident.
- Plan to get wet. Prepare for the weather and river water temperature. In cooler weather, pack a complete change of clothes in a dry bag.
- Stay visible - have a hands free flashlight, whistle, and other medical/safety/rescue equipment.
- Wear proper footwear, layer your clothing, and wear your PFD at all times.

- Carry a supply of food and water adequate for your trip length.
- Carry a spare paddle and PFD if possible.
- Carry navigation equipment (GPS and/or map and compass).
- **Here Is a List of Suggested Gear:**
 - i. Wearable PFD, sized to fit
 - ii. Sound device audible for ½ mile - whistle or horn
 - iii. Hands free flashlight
 - iv. Extra batteries
 - v. Cell phone or marine radio
 - vi. River map, compass, and GPS
 - vii. Rescue gear such as throw bag/rope, carabineer, etc.
 - viii. Knife, saw hatchet
 - ix. Sunscreen
 - x. Insect Repellant
 - xi. Hat
 - xii. Rain gear
 - xiii. First aid kit
 - xiv. Vital prescription medications
 - xv. Drinking water
 - xvi. Duct tape
 - xvii. Trash bags
 - xviii. Waterproof matches or other fire starter
 - xix. Extra Clothing
 - xx. Extra PFD and paddle or pole
 - xxi. Food and water
 - xxii. Camping gear
 - xxiii. Waterproof bag

4. **Other Safety Concerns** - It is recommended that the trip leader or someone in the group take a wilderness first aid class and be aware that the following conditions may occur:

- **Hypothermia:** the lowering of the core body temperature due to cold air temperature, exposure to rain, or immersion in cold or cool water. This can happen any time of year.
- **Heat Stroke:** the raising of core body temperature due to exposure to sunny, hot, and humid conditions. Drinking lots of water, cooling your body with river water, and wearing reflective clothing can help prevent heat stroke.
- **Dehydration:** The average person needs 2-3 liters of fluids per day, more if you are exerting physical activity in a hot and humid climate. Drink water and sports drinks throughout your trip to avoid dehydration.
- **Sunburn:** Wear sun screen and clothing that reflects the sun.
- **Insects:** Bees, wasps, hornets, ticks, mosquitoes, gnats, deerflies, yellowjackets, spiders, scorpions, redbugs and many others make their home along the river. Come prepared to deal with all of them by having a well-apportioned first aid kit and effective insect repellent.
- **Poison Ivy:** Learn to recognize this plant and try to avoid it. When you know you have touched this plant, swim, rinse, or wash the body part as soon as possible.
- **First Aid:** Know how to treat broken bones, sprained joints and burns as it may be a long period of time between the accident site and advanced medical assistance.
- **Thunderstorms:** In the spring and summer thunderstorms can occur every day, usually in late afternoon. The best response to a thunderstorm is to head for shore, secure your boat, put on rain gear, and move inland as far as possible from the waters edge. Find a low place on the ground away from tall trees and sit or squat on your PFDs. Do not let your skin touch the ground during a thunderstorm. Persons in your group should be scattered and not all in one area.
- **Strainers and Woody Debris:** Strainers are one of the most dangerous features that are found on rivers. They can be invisible to the unsuspecting victim laying just beneath the water surface. A strainer is defined as anything that swiftwater can flow through, but that a swimmer or boat cannot. On the Edisto, strainers most often come in the form of large woody debris from downed trees. Avoid strainers whenever possible by paddling around the feature. Portage may be required. If you find yourself as a swimmer being swept toward a strainer, always make every effort to scramble over the top of the debris.

For more information on river safety and paddler safety, consult:

American Canoe Association: <http://www.americancanoe.org/>

US Coast Guard: <http://uscgboating.org/>

SC Department of Natural Resources: <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/>

River Etiquette and Ethics

1. **Respect Private Property:** Most land above the ordinary high water mark (usually the top cut in the river bank) is private property and should be avoided altogether unless you have received permission from the landowner. At lower water levels, [camping](#) may be available on shoreline and sandbars located below the high water mark.
2. **Discharge of Trash:** It is illegal to dump garbage and plastics into state waters. Take out everything you bring in plus any other trash you see that you can safely retrieve.
3. **Human Waste:** In South Carolina, it is not mandatory to carry out all human waste, but it is good practice to do so. There are many products on the many sanitary pack-out products on the market today that a quick internet search will turn up. If you choose not to carry out, please use cat holes (6-8" deep hole at least 70 paces away from water source) and bury your solid waste on dry ground away from the river. Please Leave No Trace of your time spent on this river.
4. **Fires:** Use fires only when needed, using equipment and methods that work best for you. Help keep sandbars clean by burning all wood to ash. Trash should never be burned. When the fire is finished, please bury or rake all the ashes into the river and scatter an unused firewood so the sandbar looks natural and scenic. If possible, carry and use a fire pan and camp cooking stove.
5. **Dishwater:** Food bits left on the sand are magnets for ants and biting insects, so please make sure you strain out food particles and put them with your trash. Then scatter the remaining dishwater well away from your camp.
6. **Ramp Manners:** Please use boat ramps only for loading and unloading your boats from the car or trailer. Once your boat is off the trailer, please move it away from the ramp and out of the way of others. Pack or unpack your boat to the side of the launch area so others may trailer their boats.
7. **River Encounters:** Common sense and polite communication are the keys to successful interaction with other river users. Remember that human-powered crafts have the right-of-way and motor boats should slow to no wake as they pass. Give anchored fishing boats a wide berth as you pass them. Avoiding confrontational behavior will ensure a peaceful experience for all.
8. **Respect Cultural and Archaeological Sites:** The Edisto is steeped in historical value. Along the river, you may see evidence of past communities, historic structures, bridge pilings, and abandoned buildings and roads. Please do not disturb them. It is illegal to remove, deface or destroy archaeological sites in South Carolina. A Hobby License is required for anyone wishing to conduct temporary, intermittent, recreational, small

scale, non-commercial search and recovery of submerged property. It is a state-wide license. Recovery of submerged property must be by hand and must not involve mechanical devices or excavation, Hobby Licensees are never permitted to dig or move sediment to expose material.

9. **Wildlife:** The Edisto River is blessed with an abundance of wildlife the quite paddler will encounter. Please do not feed or disturb wildlife. Chasing, harassing or disturbing wildlife is unlawful in South Carolina.
10. **Group Outings:** We recommend limiting group size to two to ten people or two to five boats. Landings, camp sites, and resting spots tend to be small in size. Limiting group size also helps to mitigate environmental impacts such as cat holes, compaction, vegetation destruction, and noise pollution that your group will have on the resource.

For more information on river etiquette and ethics, consult:

Leave No Trace: <https://lnt.org/>