



## Safety Plan

### 2026 Delaware River Sojourn: June 20-26

**The purpose of the Delaware River Sojourn** is to heighten awareness and appreciation of the Delaware River; to celebrate the river's unique attributes; to foster stewardship for the river; and to introduce individuals, families and organizations to the Delaware River and paddling, by means of the Sojourn. The goal of the Sojourn is to provide all participants with both a meaningful and safe paddling experience. The Sojourn also seeks to draw positive media attention to the event and to the river. The Delaware River is particularly well suited to a public event of the Sojourn's nature, a multi-day trip that in 2026 will be open to roughly 100 daily participants. In addition to being scenic, the river has sufficient flows for recreational boating, and for the most part, has gradients and stream conditions suitable for both novice and experienced paddlers.

**The purpose of this Safety Plan** is to set forth the safety parameters by which the Sojourn will be conducted as an event that invites public participation. Despite scenic beauty and tranquil surroundings, the river and the natural environment cannot be taken for granted. It is necessary to plan for event safety, particularly as the 2026 Sojourn is a multi-day event covering roughly 70 river miles. Since its inception in 1995, the Delaware River Sojourn has been a planned event. This Safety Plan puts into writing the safety principles that have guided past Sojourns and will continue to guide future Sojourns. The primary components of the Safety Plan are planning; prevention; control; land coordination; emergency response and event/incident review.

**I. Planning and Preparation:** Every day of the Sojourn is planned. Day planners map and verify routes, put-ins, and take-outs before the event to familiarize themselves and to ensure the route's safety. Day sheets and program confirmation sheets are prepared for each day and for all programs and events. Each day, there is a designated trip leader as well as identified, trained National Canoe Safety Patrol members having specific leadership roles. The event is insured, and participants will be required to sign a waiver and to comply with Sojourn rules.

**A. Event Insurance:** The Sojourn Steering Committee will apply for American Canoe Association (ACA) Event Sanctioning and event insurance. Insurance coverage costs will be built into Sojourn registration fees and will be collected as part of the initial registration package. Certificates of Insurance will be provided to Sojourn partners,

sponsors, landowners and vendors. Members of the Steering Committee are covered by a separate D&O insurance policy.

**B. Waiver:** Sojourners and other Sojourn participants will be required to sign a waiver. The waiver forms (for both adults and children) are provided by the ACA and distributed by the Sojourn to its participants. Our livery, Northeast Wilderness Experience, also requires participants to complete a waiver. Failure or refusal to sign the waivers will result in dismissal from the trip. Registration materials warn prospective participants of the danger of outdoor activities and the river environment and also stress personal responsibility.

**C. Day Plans:** The Sojourn is a completely planned event. Each day is planned in detail, and day plans are developed and widely distributed to Sojourners and program providers so that everyone knows the day's schedule. All events take place rain or shine; however, our experienced safety team will not allow paddling in dangerous circumstances. In the case of high water, planners are required to have "back-up" plans. These alternative, land-based activity plans are then utilized. The primary safety-related components of the day plan are:

**1. Rendezvous:** Where to meet, when to meet, and how to get there. Other topics include programs, activities, meal plans, and overnight accommodations. Participants will check in daily, and, if not already done, sign a waiver.

**2. Transportation:** Shuttle arrangements from rendezvous location to put in and/or from take out are addressed and include directions and transportation provider, if supplied.

**3. Put-in:** Location and ownership identified and permission to use the site, if not a public access, is obtained in advance of the Sojourn.

**4. Mandatory Safety Briefing:** Each day, all Sojourners, Sojourn staff, VIP's and members of the media will be required to attend a Mandatory Safety Briefing presented by the National Canoe Safety Patrol members accompanying the Sojourn. Refusal to attend or participate in the Safety Briefing will result in ejection from the trip and forfeiture of the day's Sojourn fees. A brief outline of the topics covered in the safety briefing is included as part of this safety plan.

Special conditions to be encountered during the day will be covered in the briefing. For example, weather, flows, possible hazards, stream etiquette, and sharing the river with anglers and other recreational users will be discussed. If the river is flowing well above average, Sojourners will be given the option of using rafts instead of canoes/kayaks; conditions will dictate how the trip is to be run.

Several “bailout” spots have also been identified/planned for in case any Sojourn participant needs to stop paddling on any given day.

**5. Stops:** Prior to launching, the day’s programs, stops, and events will be discussed, including how to signal Sojourners to stop and pull over for lunch, a program, or to take-out at the end of the day.

**6. Emergency Contacts:** Each day plan includes a section on emergency contacts with telephone numbers. It is the responsibility of the Sojourn section organizers (day planners) to ensure that the emergency services providers identified have been notified of the Sojourn and have appropriate information on the event.

**a.** On the Upper Delaware Section, National Park Service (NPS) will provide a radio to the National Canoe Safety Patrol (NCSP) for communications with land-based emergency services personnel and NPS dispatcher.

**b.** In the Middle Delaware Section, communications will be by National Park Service radio and cellular telephone.

**c.** In the Lower and Tidal Sections, emergency communications to land-based emergency services will be by cellular telephone. NCSPs on water with us also use radios.

**D. Leadership Roles and Responsibilities:** Each day, individuals playing leadership roles in the Sojourn will be identified on the day plan. These people include:

**1. River Trip Leader:** The river trip leader is a member of the National Canoe Safety Patrol (NCSP). The trip leader will be identified daily by the section leadership (day planners) and is sufficiently familiar with the section of the river being paddled to serve as a local guide for the Sojourners.

The trip leader will be in the lead canoe and will be responsible for setting a suitable pace for the event. If the group gets strung out to the extent that a safe rescue cannot be executed by the sweep boats, then the leader will stop the group until the stragglers catch up. The trip leader will also insist that faster paddlers do not pass the lead boat and that they stay with the Sojourn. The trip leader will know the locations of planned stops and the take-out location and is responsible for ensuring that stops are made. And, the trip leader has the authority to cancel or terminate a day’s trip if they judge river conditions to be unsafe due to weather or flows. Likewise, they will have the authority to eject Sojourners who are behaving in an unsafe manner, which puts themselves, would-be rescuers, other Sojourners, or the Sojourn at risk.

**2. Safety Patrol:** The Delaware Sojourn has properly trained and experienced safety personnel, all active members of NCSP. All members of the safety team must have current certification in CPR and First Aid, and many are members of ACA. Some have swift water rescue training (for example, ACA certification in first aid, water safety, and canoeing). They must be capable of performing rescues and serving as first responders. All must complete annual NCSP training in late April/early May. They are equipped with first aid kits and other rescue equipment.

Approximately eight to ten National Canoe Safety Patrol (NCSP) members will accompany the sojourn each day, with more or fewer as needed depending on group size; on average, we have one safety team member per 10 sojourn participants. All members of the safety patrol will be identified during the mandatory morning safety briefing. They will assess river conditions each day and make recommendations to the other Sojourn Steering Committee members and event planners regarding river safety for the day.

The safety patrol members will present daily safety briefings prior to each day's launch. They will paddle with the group at all times, one in the lead position, several mixed throughout the middle of the group, and one in the sweep position, who will assist stragglers and other Sojourners needing help. They will also assess the formation of the group, and if, in their judgment, the group is getting too strung out, they will signal the lead boat to stop so that the Sojourners can regroup.

**3. Sojourn Committee Chair(s):** On each day of the Sojourn, it is expected that the chair of the Steering Committee will be present. If not, the day planners (see below) will lead communications amongst the River Trip Leader, Safety Patrol, Sojourn Ambassadors, Land Coordinators, and Sojourn participants.

**4. Day Planners:** Each section of the Delaware Sojourn is planned by day planners. These individuals will be present on their planned days, and each day will have one planner named the main point of contact for that day. The main point of contact will be responsible for making morning announcements, communicating important schedule or other updates, and will be available to Sojourn participants throughout the day to deal with any problems, issues, complaints, or concerns that arise. Day planners have scouted the river section to be paddled that day and are aware of current conditions and all planned stops along the day's route.

**5. Land Support:** Each day, there will be designated Land Support. In addition to providing water, transporting lunches, snacks, VIP's, and media, land support coordinators will meet the Sojourners at all of their stops and will be available to provide emergency support, directions, and transportation. While dedicated

emergency vehicles are not on-site, our land support team is able to provide emergency transportation, if needed.

**6. Sojourn Ambassadors:** Ambassadors are volunteers who act as the liaisons between sojourn participants and the safety team. Many of the ambassadors are members of the Sojourn Steering Committee. They are experienced paddlers and are there to help answer questions, demonstrate paddling best practices, and help sojourners with launches and landings.

**II. Prevention:** The Delaware River Sojourn Steering Committee places heavy reliance on planning and prevention as the means of assuring that the Sojourn will be a safe and enjoyable experience for all who participate. Members of the National Canoe Safety Patrol serve as partners on the Delaware River Sojourn Steering Committee and participate in planning the trip and the safety component of the Sojourn.

Safety Patrol members will conduct a daily mandatory safety briefing for the Sojourners (an outline of the topics covered is included as part of this safety plan). In addition, they will cover safety for a group paddling together so that Sojourners will know what they are supposed to do if there is an incident. If need be, they will conduct practice drills to ensure a quick response.

Experienced Sojourners are also invited to share their knowledge of the river and paddling with others.

The Sojourn has instituted policies to help assure a successful event.

- A. PFDs:** All Sojourners (adults and children) will be required to wear a U.S. Coast Guard Type III approved personal flotation device (PFD or lifejacket) when they are on the water. Inflatable PFDs are prohibited. Failure or refusal to wear a PFD will result in ejection from the Sojourn and forfeiture of the day's Sojourn fees. This is also mandatory during swim breaks.
- B. Children:** Children under the age of 18 are the responsibility of, and must be accompanied by, a parent or guardian. A waiver must be signed on their behalf. They should be able to swim. Children must weigh at least 40 pounds and be properly fitted with a PFD.
- C. Alcohol:** It is a written and stated policy of the Sojourn that no alcohol will be served or consumed prior to the completion of each day's on-river paddling activities or in campgrounds where it is not permitted.
- D. Glass containers:** Glass containers are not allowed on the river.
- E. Animals:** No pets are allowed.

- F. Safety:** All Sojourners must attend daily safety briefings, adhere to the guidelines presented, and follow the directions of the safety patrol in response to weather and river conditions, trip management, and emergencies.
- G. Spectators:** While at times there may be spectators at launch, take out, or lunch/program sites, this is not guaranteed. The Sojourn committee and day planners try to gauge in advance – to the extent possible – the number of potential spectators on any given day. If they are invited by the Sojourn, they will be notified of the day’s plans and considered part of the Sojourn. These individuals will be treated like participants and will follow the same rules and adhere to the same procedures.
- H. Weather and Shelter:** Sojourn participants are notified of their supply needs prior to the event – i.e., sunscreen, hat, clothing, raingear, water shoes, plenty of water, snacks while on the water, etc. Sojourners are also required to provide their own camping equipment.

Sojourners know in advance that we paddle rain or shine, unless the Trip Leader and Safety Team decide that conditions are not suitable for paddling. These concepts and needs are reinforced in the Mandatory Safety Briefing. Daily weather conditions, pertinent river information, and thunderstorm policies are also outlined during the safety briefing. Sojourners are reminded to look out for one another and notify the Safety Team if they or someone else is in distress and in need of assistance (for example, if starting to show signs of heat fatigue).

- I. Water and Facilities:** Water and some snacks (in addition to meals) are provided by the Sojourn, but participants are encouraged to also bring supplies adequate for their own needs. Toilet facilities will be provided at all camping/registration locations and most lunch and rest stops; some facilities are flush, some may be portable. Shower facilities or sun showers are provided at camping locations.

**III. Control:** The members of the Delaware River Sojourn have given considerable thought to the development of policies and structuring their organization and event to assure both enjoyment and safety for participants. This plan is flexible and additions will be made as needed to assure a successful event. However, there are additional important components needed to make the plan and preparation effective.

**A. Notice:** Notice of the Sojourn’s policies are included and emphasized in both registration and confirmation materials. Registration and policy information is also posted on the Sojourn website, <https://delawariversojourn.com>.

**B. Enforcement:** In addition to developing plans, preparations, and policies, there must be the will to enforce. Sojourn leadership is responsible for making clear the consequences of violating sojourn policies regarding its policies. Sojourners who do not

follow the instructions of the daily trip leader, safety patrollers, and other sojourn leaders endanger themselves, their would-be rescuers, and the welfare of other Sojourners and the Sojourn itself. *They will be subject to ejection from the Sojourn and will forfeit all fees for the remainder of the trip.* The River Trip Leader, in consultation with Sojourn Staff and Steering Committee members present, has the responsibility and authority to enforce policies and to eject individuals who do not follow Sojourn policies or the directions of the Safety Patrol.

**IV. Other Needed Permits:** If needed, the Sojourn will obtain any and all Special Use Permits necessary, for example, from the National Park Service (NPS) in sections of the river managed by the NPS. The Sojourn will do likewise for Pa. Fish and Boat Commission river access sites, if applicable. The Special Use Permits address safety and insurance issues. Our trip leader, day planners, safety team members, and land coordinators will coordinate with one another in the event of an emergency.

In general terms, emergencies will be managed as follows: Sojourners will be instructed to pull to shore while the Safety Patrol performs rescues or provides treatment; safety will be sought in storms; and when necessary, contact will be initiated with the land coordinator.

**V. Reporting and Incident Review:** Incidents will be reported to the appropriate authorities. Sojourn Steering Committee members will have ACA packets with forms to fill out, if it becomes necessary. If an incident occurs on a section where the National Park Service has jurisdiction, the agency will document the incident and conduct an investigation, if warranted.

**VI. Safety Plan Distribution:** The Safety Plan will be distributed to Sojourn Steering Committee partners and to other individuals, agencies, and organizations on request. It will also be posted on the Sojourn's website.



## SAFETY GUIDELINES – DELAWARE RIVER SOJOURN

### PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

1. **PFD's** (Personal Flotation Device) must be worn **at all times** on the river or within 10' of the water: kayaking, canoeing, swimming, and wading: ALWAYS. PFD's must be properly fastened and tightly fitted. Ask someone to pull upward on the shoulder straps of your PFD. If the straps move up to your ears, the PFD is not tight enough. When wet, the PFD can slide up on your body and interfere with arm movement, or even go over your head, so it is important that it is tightly fitted before getting out on the water. No inflatable or self-inflatable PFDs allowed.
2. **Wear protective foot gear.** River bottoms often contain broken glass and other sharp objects. Water shoes are best, but sneakers also work. Footwear should be closed-toe.
3. **Proper clothing.** Anticipate weather and water conditions. Dress and protect yourself accordingly. See gear list below.

### DAILY CONDITIONS AND WEATHER

1. **Today's weather.** Going over the daily weather forecast is included in the daily safety briefing.
2. **Today's river conditions.** Going over the river conditions of the section to be paddled is part of the daily safety briefing.

### PADDLING PROTOCOL

1. Keep **BOAT POINTED DOWNSTREAM.** If you are sideways and hit a rock, you are more likely to capsize.
2. **LEAD Boat** and **SWEEP Boat.** No one is to paddle in front of the LEAD boat or lag behind the SWEEP boat. If the lead boat is involved in a rescue, all paddlers are to wait for the Safety personnel to return to the lead position.
  - Paddling is an activity that demands effort on your part. We do not simply float, but paddle for several hours, which requires some work. Please keep up with the group and do not hold up others unnecessarily.
  - Likewise, we are not in a race. The lead boat will set a comfortable pace. Keep up, but do not paddle beyond the leader.
3. Always **follow the directions** of the lead boat and safety team members. When the lead boat stops, we all stop.
4. **Do not indulge in horseplay, splashing, or colliding with other boats.** In hot conditions, engage in water play only with those who have given permission. NEVER splash with paddles.
5. **RAPIDS.** Safety personnel will guide us through the more challenging rapids; follow their instructions. Proceed single file through the rapids spaced at least three or four boat lengths behind the boat in front of you. If someone gets stuck on a rock, you do not want to plow into them.
  - Avoid hazards well in advance. Rocks, trees in the water, bridge piers, boats pinned or stuck on rocks – all can cause you problems. Stay clear – start avoiding them well in advance.
  - Safety personnel will often position their boats behind partially submerged rocks. DO NOT paddle toward them. Watch for paddle signals to indicate which channel to take.
6. **STRAINERS.** Strainers are trees and other debris that project into the river from the shoreline that may not be visible. STAY AWAY!
7. Leave nothing but footprints wherever you are. Re-check before leaving. This is important.

### COMMUNICATIONS

Rivers are wide and our group is large, so we communicate with **Paddle Signals** and **Whistle Blasts**. Safety personnel use radios to stay in communication with each other.

### **Paddle Signals:**

1. **Paddle Straight Up.** Clear paddling. Continue straight ahead.
2. **Paddle Horizontal with both hands.** STOP paddling or back-paddle (pass the signal to boats upstream).
3. **Paddle aloft at an angle.** Best channel is in the direction the paddle is pointing.
4. **Paddle aloft at an angle – moving rapidly up and down.** MOVE IN THAT DIRECTION QUICKLY!!

### **Whistle Blasts:**

**One Blast.** Everyone's attention is needed.

**Two Blasts.** Stop paddling downstream. Paddle towards shore.

**Three Blasts.** Danger or trouble! **-OR-** Someone is out of their boat (“Swimmer”).

### **Verbal Communications:**

1. If you have a medical concern that we should know about, please notify a member of the Safety Team.
2. If you need to leave the river, tell a member of the Safety Team before you do.

### **MISHAPS**

1. Should you go **sideways against a rock – lean towards the rock** (away from the oncoming current). Begin to work the boat towards one end to pivot around the rock.
2. If you become **disconnected from your boat**, assume a float position on your back. Your feet should be kept together pointing downstream with toes out of the water. Knees should be bent, and your head should be tilted forward. Use your arms to guide/paddle yourself.
  - Do Not attempt to stand in swift moving water unless it is very shallow (i.e. your bottom is hitting the rocks). If the water is deeper than your mid-calf line, do not attempt to walk in moving water. Foot entrapment can occur, which is very dangerous in swift moving water.
  - If another boat is nearby, ask permission to grab the bow or stern.
  - If someone throws you a rope, they will yell “Rope”. Thrust your arms upwards if you are able. Try to grab the rope even if it is a bit off target.
  - Stay upstream from your boat and stay away from it. Your PFD will support you. The danger of being downstream from your boat is that you may become pinned between it and a rock.

### **TIDEWATER RECOMMENDATIONS / REQUIREMENTS**

1. All boats must stay 20' to 40' feet away from vertical walls (unless there is a storm or other safety issue).
2. Stay at least 50' away from large ships unless given permission to approach. Stay at least 50' from military ships –no exceptions.
3. If it becomes very windy and white caps cover the water surface – WAIT FOR SAFETY DIRECTION, HEAD TO SHORE.
4. If you are unskilled in rough water – approach waves at a 90 degree angle and practice balance like riding a bicycle. Tug boats and other motorcraft can make large wakes.
5. Never go into a channel between the red and green channel markers unless you are instructed or guided to cross the river. Channels are dangerous because large ships cannot see you; they need to stay in the channel and cannot stop or turn quickly.
6. If you become tired, get clammy, sweaty, or confused – call for help immediately. Do not try to ride it out.
7. Everyone is responsible for everyone else. Keep an eye on your fellow paddlers. Speak up if you suspect there is a problem or danger.
8. Do not take pictures of bridges from close up. You may be arrested by Homeland Security.
9. Leave nothing but footprints when on land. Re-check before leaving. This is important.

### **IMPORTANT GEAR TO HAVE WITH YOU**

- \* Sunscreen; long sleeve shirt; long pants
- \* Rain gear

- \* Insect repellent
- \* Plenty of Water; other non-alcoholic drinking fluids (no glass containers)
- \* Snacks
- \* Pump or bailer, large sponge
- \* Whistle
- \* Change of clothes in a dry bag (or double garbage bag, tightly tied)
- \* Sunglasses and/or brimmed hat
- \* First aid kit
- \* Medication you require
- \* Eyeglass retainer
- \* Trash bag
- \* Optional camera and binoculars (waterproof enclosures)
- \* Cell Phone or other means of communication (waterproof enclosure)

### **RENTAL BOATS**

1. Adjust foot pedal distance and seat position suitable for you.
2. **Do Not** use the boat for a bathroom.
3. **Remove all Trash** and personal items at the end of each day.



## **Important Safety Information in Case of Unsafe Conditions during the 2025 Delaware River Sojourn**

**Water levels are a critical safety issue in river paddling for two reasons:**

1. High water increases the speed of the river's flow and can inundate the riverbanks and islands where flooded trees and vegetation can create what are known as "strainers." Strainers are very, very dangerous and can trap boats and people under water.
2. High water changes the characteristics of the rapids on the river. Some "wash-out" while others become more dangerous with higher waves.

**In times of high water and/or severe weather, the Sojourn Safety Team will determine whether it is safe to paddle at any time on any given Sojourn Day.**

- Please note that high water rescues endanger the people making the rescue. While Sojourn Safety personnel are well trained in rescue techniques, the person nearest to a boat or boater in trouble could be another Sojourner. High water makes the river more dangerous for everyone.
- Equally important to be aware of is the chance and occurrence of storms or other adverse weather conditions, as it is very dangerous to be on the water during periods of lightning and high winds.

***If deemed too dangerous to paddle, meals, programs, and camping will still be provided and alternate activities will be offered.***

In addition to following the guidance of the Safety Team, the Delaware River Sojourn follows the high water policies of the National Park Service (NPS) Units in the Upper Delaware and Delaware Water Gap and also those that the liveries operating in the Lower Delaware follow.

### **NPS Upper Delaware River Guidance:**

- 1. Barryville Gage at average water levels: 2.5 – 4 ft.** Everyone may take the trip in canoes or kayaks, even if it is raining.
- 2. Barryville Gage at moderate water levels: 4 – 6 ft.** We will take the trip even if it is raining. Rafts are recommended for less skilled boaters. The Sojourn Safety Staff will have the final word in determining who is a skilled boater and who should be in a raft.
- 3. Barryville Gage at high water levels: 6 – 8 ft.** Take the trip even if it is raining and the river is not expected to go above 8 feet. Rafts will be required for all people renting watercraft and for less skilled private boaters. High water waivers will be required for people using private boats; the Sojourn Safety Staff will have the final word in determining who is a highly skilled boater and who should be in a raft.
- 4. Barryville Gage at very high water: 8 feet and above.** There will be No Sojourn River Trip – Alternate activities will be offered.

### **NPS Delaware Water Gap Guidance:**

**1. Montague Gage reads 8-15 ft.** NPS Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area issues river advisories when the Montague gage hits 8-15 feet. The advisory closes swimming areas and makes PFD wearing mandatory for all people in boats (non-motor & motor boats).

**2. Montague Gage is over 15ft.** NPS Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area closes the river corridor to all boating.

### **Lower Delaware River Guidance:**

**1. Riegelsville Gage reads 8 ft. and above.** The Safety Team will confer, but there will likely be no River Sojourn trip. Alternate activities will be offered.