

# Tips for Safe Paddling

- **Develop basic skills and knowledge**

SMSKN trips are organized for members who have their own boats and basic paddling skills, including self-rescue skills. The Network does not rent boats and does not provide guide or outfitter services. Network members share information about where to take sea kayaking lessons and tips about buying boats and equipment. There are many good sources of information on kayaks, equipment, navigation, paddling skills and safety, including Sea Kayaker's Savvy Paddler by Doug Anderson, The Complete Book of Sea Kayaking by Derek Hutchinson, Sea Kayaker's Handbook by Shelley Johnson and Vaughn Smith, Canoe & Kayak Magazine ([www.canoekayak.com](http://www.canoekayak.com)), and University of Sea Kayaking ([www.useakayak.org](http://www.useakayak.org)).

- **Match your skills to the trip level and conditions.**

As noted inside, trips are graded into 5 levels according to the paddling challenges likely to be encountered and the length of the trip. Level 1 trips are best for basic-level paddlers. When in doubt about your ability, call the trip organizer in advance to check whether the trip is right for you. A paddling group is only as safe as each member in it.

- **Be prepared with a kayak that's appropriate for the water you'll be paddling in, adequate flotation for the kayak, and a life preserver.**

Depending on the trip, you may need other safety or navigation equipment. Check with the trip organizer.

- **Think "team"**

Paddling with a group means that each member stays alert to and within sight and hearing of other members. Group safety and wellbeing require attention to each other and promote camaraderie. If a health or paddling problem arises, the member experiencing it can let other group members know right away. This can prevent a minor inconvenience from turning into bigger trouble.

- **Know where you are and pay attention to changing weather conditions**

Each paddler knows where he or she is, scans the skies, and tracks the tide, wind, and waves.

**Want to learn more?** Check our website: [www.smskn.org](http://www.smskn.org). You'll find information about planned trips, where to find out about take lessons, tides and weather, and how to join SMSKN.

# Welcome to SMSKN



## Southern Maine Sea Kayaking Network



SMSKN is a network for sea kayakers to meet paddling buddies, learn more about all aspects of safe paddling, and plan trips together.

If you're a member of SMSKN, thinking about joining, or just want to learn how the Network operates, this pamphlet is for you. Learn about:

- Network Purpose and Activities
- How Paddling Trips are Organized
- Tips for Safe Paddling

Need more information?

Check our website: [www.smskn.org](http://www.smskn.org)  
or contact us at  
P. O. Box 4794  
Portland, ME 04112

## SMSKN Purpose and Activities

SMSKN is a network of sea kayakers who get together to paddle, learn, and socialize. It's an all-volunteer, non-profit organization. Network members range from novice to advanced paddlers.

### Network Activities

- Scheduled paddling trips at a variety of locations for various ability levels. These trips are limited to SMSKN members with the necessary paddling and self-rescue skills.
- Monthly meetings, usually held on the 3rd Thursday of the month at 7 PM at the Falmouth Library. Meet for dinner before the meeting at 5:30 at Falmouth Ricetta's.
- Communications, including a website ([www.smskn.org](http://www.smskn.org)), a newsletter, and a membership list.
- Shared learning opportunities and practice sessions, including pool rescue practice sessions and externally contracted skill review sessions. Members pay for these sessions individually.

NOTE: SMSKN does not rent boats, provide lessons for novices, or act as outfitters or guides. SMSKN is providing this brochure as a public service. It is not and is not intended to be comprehensive regarding all possible risks and hazards or safe practices.

## SMSKN Trips

### How Trips Are Organized

Members organize paddling excursions and invite other SMSKN members to come along. Some trips are organized at monthly meetings; others are more spontaneous. All trips appear on the events calendar on the website:

[www.smskn.org](http://www.smskn.org)

Trip organizers are group members who choose a paddling route for a given day and time and invite other group members to join them. Members planning to go on the trip call the organizer ahead and RSVP. This way, the organizer knows how many to expect at the launch site.

### Trip Levels Graded by Difficulty

These are rough guidelines to use in choosing trips from the schedule that fit your skill level and experience. Call the trip organizer in advance to discuss a trip you're interested in.

**Level 0:** Trips for basic level paddlers, usually less than 2 miles in distance and in calmer waters.

**Level 1:** Usually 2 - 5 miles in distance and/or waves of less than 1 foot in height.

**Level 2:** Usually 6 - 14 miles in distance and/or waves of less than 3 feet in height.

**Level 3:** Usually 15 - 24 miles in distance and/or waves less than 6 feet in height.

**Level 4:** Usually 25 or more miles in distance and/or waves 6 feet or more in height.

## Going on a SMSKN Trip

Only SMSKN members participate in paddling events. Each member is responsible for his or her own personal safety and wellbeing on each trip. A trip participant charts the proposed paddling route in advance, checks weather conditions, has proper safety equipment including water and food, and can self-rescue if needed. Neither the trip organizer nor any other paddler who may be acting as an informal "leader" is responsible for others on the trip.

### Steps to Join an Upcoming Paddling Trip

- Check that your paddling, equipment, and safety skills match the level of trip difficulty.
- Contact the trip organizer in advance to let him or her know you plan to come and to ask about any recommended safety equipment.
- Check tides and expected weather conditions for the day of the trip. If conditions are doubtful, call the trip organizer before leaving home.
- Bring a chart of the paddling area.
- Arrive at the designated launch site on time with appropriate gear, clothing, and food.
- Have fun!