



Long Distance Paddling Recommendations

Long distance paddlers should be competent in all types of environments and conditions, capable of dealing with strong winds and currents, and skilled at crossing open water stretches and boat channels. One should be able to navigate at night and in poor visibility, capable of using navigational maps and charts and a GPS system, and trained in advanced rescue techniques, wilderness first-aid and primitive camping skills. Day trips leading up to weekend trips and trips with competent guides are good ways to build experience. Outfitters and the [ACA](#) often conduct paddling and safety courses.

- **Testing Equipment.** It is especially important to field test equipment beforehand under various conditions, especially all electronic equipment and items such as dry bags, tents and rain gear. Some paddlers have learned the hard way that the "waterproof" label is not always accurate. Online and magazine reviews of equipment can also be helpful, along with consultation with outfitters and other paddlers.

- Do not paddle alone.
- File a detailed float plan that contains departure location, time and date, and expected arrival date, time and location.
- Five short blasts on a whistle is the international signal for an emergency.
- Waving a brightly colored shirt or towel can attract the attention of a passing boater.
- Take careful note of weather conditions and forecasts. If in doubt, don't proceed into open water. Be especially vigilant during hurricane season, from June through November. Warm weather thunderstorms can also bring high winds and heavy rains, along with the risk of lightning strikes.
- Biting insects and hot steamy weather, along with lightning storms, will be less prevalent from late October through April. However, sub-freezing winter temperatures can be experienced in many parts of Florida. Plan accordingly.
- Stay well hydrated. Paddlers should carry at least one gallon of freshwater per person per day. In remote areas such as the Big Bend and Everglades, there can be two or more days between replenishment stops.
- Carry a tide chart if paddling in saltwater environments. Some areas can be very shallow at low tide. In certain tidal creeks, rivers and passes, changing tides can cause strong currents that might help or hinder.
- When primitive camping, employ leave no trace principles (www.lnt.org). In high use areas, you may even be required to carry out human waste in bags designed for this purpose.
- If fishing, a Florida fishing license is required for persons 16 years of age and older (free for Florida residents 65 or older). Visit <http://myfwc.com/license/> or call 1-888-347-4356
- Snakes, including venomous ones, can be active in coastal environments, even in salt marshes. Proceed with caution when you can't see the ground. If encountering a snake, back away and admire these beautiful animals as they go about their lives.

- Poison ivy, poisonwood trees and other plants that cause allergic reactions can be found along the trail. If in doubt, do not touch.
- Don't walk on oysters or coral barefoot. Cactus, sandspurs, glass and other items can cause problems, too. Wear appropriate footwear.
- Long-distance paddling can be rigorous. Adverse tides, currents and head winds can hinder progress and challenge physical endurance. Be physically fit before embarking.
- By setting a relaxed pace for your trip, with plenty of time set aside for side trips and land explorations, you will likely have a richer experience.