Now Go Get IN!

But don’t learn safety by accident.

Hello friends, I want you to experience your river in a way that will bring you back and back again. To accomplish this, you must feel and be safe as you enjoy her gentle falling to the sea.  As most of you know, Middle River is a beautiful little river with mostly class one and a few class two rapids. She is not very deep or swift, and in most places, you can easily get to shore if you get separated from your boat.While this is reassuring, it can give you a false sense of safety, especially if you are not aware of other hazards that could potentially harm you or others.  With that in mind, I have written this article to share what I know about safety concepts and best practices when floating the Middle River.

You should be in reasonably good health. First and foremost, fitness is essential. Upper body and core strength are apparent, but leg strength is also important. Extremes in heat and cold can place significant demands on your cardiovascular system. If you have doubts about your fitness for a float, check with your doctor.

Second, skills are essential. Having comfort in the water, knowing how to stop and turn your boat, and maneuver it around obstacles are crucial skills. If you have paddled on flat water but not on moving streams with rapids, it is good to go with a group that knows how to navigate Middle Rivers waters to learn the basics of reading the river.

Now let’s say your fitness is good and you have the basic skills to stay afloat.  Here are my seven musings on best practices and safety.

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1. **Plan your float:**  Put-in, Take-out, expected time on the water, and when you wish to be home are all important.  Make sure people know you are going, and never paddle by yourself. I recommend that you always try to get three or more fellow padders for the best safety. If someone is in trouble, one paddler can go for help while the other stays to help support the one in the situation.

1. **Check the conditions,** not only of the weather but of the water. Both the temperature outside and in the water are essential factors. Hypothermia and heat strokes can kill you !! So before you go, be prepared for any extreme temperature conditions. Here is a good article on [cold water paddling safety](https://www.friendsofthemiddleriver.org/post/cold-water-paddling) from our blog. If there are electrical storms in the forecast, it is best to choose another day or if one pops up unexpectedly, be prepared to follow these [guidelines](https://www.friendsofthemiddleriver.org/post/your-safety-lightning-when-paddling).

1. **Turbidity and High Water** are two other water conditions to monitor. Turbid water (murky water) is dangerous because you may not see any obstacles that could potentially flip your boat, and if you get trapped underwater, fellow paddlers may not be able to find you. Also, for this particular river, E. coli levels in the water increase when the water is turbid from agricultural runoff. So never go when the water turbidity is high. 2) High water increases the water’s speed and power, causing more debris in the water and more dangerous conditions. It is good to keep an eye on water levels and always check before you go at the [USGS Stream gauge at mile marker 2.1 near Mt. Meridian](https://waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/01625000/#parameterCode=00065&period=P7D). One of our experienced members recommends a water level of 2.25 - 5.0 feet on the Mt. Meridian gauge for beginners and a level of 1.75 to 6.5 feet for the experienced.
2. **Pack smart for your trip**. Always bring a certified life preserver and wear it. Also, it is essential to wear a whistle around your neck to give distress calls if you get into trouble or see someone else in danger. These are a part of best practices. Sun hat, sunglasses, good paddling shoes (from experience, it is best to have water shoes that cover those bony ankles), plenty of water and food, and a first aid kit are essential.  A bailer for removing water from your boat may be vital unless you have a sit-on-top. Someone in your group should have a cell phone. However, keep it in a dry bag for emergencies, and remember there are places on the Middle River where cell service is limited.
3. **Know how to read the water** for the safest passage. Look for the tongue or upside-down V.  If you enter the rapids through the upside-down V, you are more likely to be going where there is greater water depth and fewer obstacles. Middle River has many little rapids, and they can be fun if you choose your path correctly. Remember to look at the safe passage route, not the obstacles you are trying to avoid. For more on reading the river, check out this excellent [blog post by Kate](https://www.friendsofthemiddleriver.org/post/first-timer-s-guide-to-reading-the-river).
4. **Streambed conditions**. Middle River has many ledges and wide low water shallows that can stop your boat from time to time. If a little gentle rock and push with your paddle do not free you, please be careful when you get out of your boat. You do not want to let the boat get between you and the flow of the water.  Otherwise, you risk being bulldozed by your boat, possibly resulting in serious injury. If you ever capsize in fast-moving water, it is best to float downstream, leading with your feet up out of the water. This way, you are less likely to get caught in a rock crevice or snagged by underwater debris. And you can use your feet to protect your body from obstacles you see coming your way.
5. **Hazards** both human and nature made must be respected. Human-made dams, low water bridges, broken glass, barbed wire, etc., and nature-made such as strainers (fallen trees that will separate you from your watercraft) and deadheads (underwater obstacles that sometimes are hard to see) can cause serious situations.  We have most of the human-made hazards reported on our hazards map, and we try to stay updated with the nature-made hazards as they are reported to us. You can report any hazards you see here at mailto:mapsfomr@gmail.com. Check out [our hazards map](https://fomr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/countdown/index.html?appid=0ef3f9d81c6a468d8e14a76284994388) before you go and report back to us if you see any changes to be made so everyone can float the river with knowledge, preparedness, and safety. I highly recommend everyone new to the Middle River check out our [Safety Story Map](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d9d23151617d4f3a9e0ef7f8d3e8f00f) it is a great resource for newbies.

Last but not least, please let me know if you have other ideas important to keeping our friends safe on Middle River. I welcome your thoughts and comments.  We are starting a safety committee to ensure we are doing our best to give our friends the knowledge and guidelines they need to feel and be safe on Middle River. Contact me at mapsfomr@gmail.com  and consider joining our safety team :-)  John Bauman