U.S. Forest Service

Know Before You Go

Preparing to Visit a National Forest

Boating

Boating is a popular recreation activity, but it can also be a dangerous one. The four major causes of drowning are: (1) not wearing a life jacket, (2) abuse of alcohol, (3) lack of sufficient swimming skill and (4) hypothermia. Nearly 1,000 people die in boating accidents every year. It is estimated that more than 80 percent of boating accident victims would have survived if they had been wearing a life jacket.

Safety Checklist

- ☐ Always check the weather before going out.
- ☐ Visit www.noaa.gov for weather updates.
- ☐ Let others know where you are going and when you are expected to return.
- ☐ Ensure all individuals wear a flotation device. A life jacket will help keep you warm and will keep you afloat if your boat capsizes.
- ☐ Always carry a first-aid kit.
- ☐ A waterproof bag with an extra change of clothes is imperative.
- ☐ Always have appropriate lights on your boat, and be sure to use them from sunset to sunrise.
- ☐ Many states require a safety whistle to be on all boats, even if it is a non-motorized boat.
- ☐ Carry a fire extinguisher on board. If you have an electric or gas motor it is often state law.
- ☐ Avoid dams. Water flowing over dams can create a current capable of drawing boats into the face of the dam and holding them under water. Avoid dam spillways during high water.
- ☐ If your boat should capsize, **stay with your boat** until help arrives so rescuers can find you. Regardless of your age, hypothermia can develop quickly.

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