



Level 2: Essentials of River Kayak Fishing Skills Course

Skills Course Overview

This course is designed as a short program emphasizing safety, enjoyment, and skill development. The skills and knowledge gained through this course can set the stage for a lifetime of exploration, adventures, a healthy lifestyle, appreciation of water and the natural world, lasting memories with family and friends, and a rewarding experience for all - we paddle because it is fun.

This Kayak Fishing curriculum does not specifically pertain to pedal drive fishing kayaks. For the purposes of this course, paddles will be used.

Course Objectives

- Understand that planning and prevention are the keys to a safe trip
- Understand how to avoid waterway hazards
- Develop and practice key self rescue skills
- Learn to focus on fast, simple, low-risk rescue techniques
- Develop the skills to manage minor on-water incidents

Skills Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#)
- No prior paddling experience or training is required to participate in this course

Course Duration

The course duration should be adjusted to best fit the needs and goals of the participants. Up to 1 day (8 hours).

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Moving water on rivers up to and including class I sections. *A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated “-“ and “+” respectively.*

Course Size

5 Participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional qualified assistant, the ratio can be 10 : 2. The maximum number of participants permitted is 10.

Instructor

This course may be offered by Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators with Paddlesports Angler Endorsement.

Complementary Courses

- Level 2: Essentials of Coastal Kayak Fishing Skills Course
 - Level 2: Essentials of SUP Fishing Skills Course
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Course Outline

The sequence of this course should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location, time allowance, and craft being used.

Introduction, Logistics, and Expectations

- Welcome! We're so glad that you've chosen to further your paddling experience and education by attending this course! Let's review a few highlights about the ACA
- Let's talk about the course itinerary, expectations, and limitations
- Lay of the land (and water): the logistics of this venue

- Review liability waiver, assumption of risk, challenge by choice, and medical disclosure
- Life jacket policy: always wear while on the water

Note: Instructor should refer to the published ACA Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking Skills Course curriculum and combine with the Kayak Fishing curriculum included below

Let's talk about the promotion of an angling "Culture of Safety"

- Importance of Fishing Licenses and other related regulations
- Discuss the propensity for anglers to paddle alone, at night, or in cold water and weather conditions
- Discuss safety and rescue concerns when wearing waders, emphasizing the neutral buoyancy factors

Personal Preparation & Getting Started

- Describe and follow safe boating practices (behavior, substance abuse, on water and land etiquette, Leave No Trace ethics)
- Review elements of a float plan (who, what, when, where, filing practices)
- Discuss current weather conditions, forecasts, and other environmental hazards (wind, water, weather, waves)
- Discuss importance of developing good judgment, group responsibility, management, and dynamics
- Warm up to reduce injury
- Evaluate individual's swimming ability, water comfort, and confidence prior to beginning the trip
- Review paddling terminology and care of gear (to be reviewed by the instructor):
 - Boat: parts, materials, sizing, outfitting
 - Paddle: parts, materials, sizing, hand position
 - How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling
 - Life jacket: types, materials, fit

- Review of additional personal and group gear, including, but not limited to:
 - Environmental supplies (food, water, appropriate clothing, sunscreen, etc.)
 - Navigational and signaling tools (maps, charts, whistle, etc.)
 - Safety and rescue tools
 - Repair kit
 - First aid kit (appropriate to training)
- Review securing boat for transport on car or trailer using proper tie downs, straps, or knots
 - Knots: Figure-8, bowline, truckers hitch, and 2 half hitches
- Review proper techniques to safely lift and carry the boat on shore and/or use of a cart when kayak is loaded with fishing gear
- Prepare boat for departure by stowing gear securely and ensuring it is balanced
- Appropriately use communication (paddle, hand, and whistle) signals

River-Specific Considerations for Fishing

- Use of river data and gauges, dam release schedules and topography for fishing
- Identify electronics and power management placement and concerns
- Identify methods of locating fish in rivers
 - Locate fish in current
 - Locate fish in and around eddy line and slack water
 - Locate fish near strainers and lay downs
 - Locate fish in naturally occurring “pools” in the river
- Recognize safety criteria for river kayak fishing, including safe approach to hazards
 - Strainers
 - Laydowns
 - Tailwaters
 - Low-head dams

Technical Knowledge

- Review fishing gear and equipment terminology; types of fishing rods/reels, types of lines and their differences, common tools used when kayak fishing, and overall care of gear
- Choose proper clothing for fishing environments and conditions
- Loading kayak for safety: checklist of fishing gear, stowing fishing gear securely, mitigating entanglements, and ensuring the kayak is balanced
- Recognize the various types of bait
- Recognize proper fish handling techniques
- Recognize water types (still vs moving, clear vs stained, shallow vs deep, structure vs cover)
- Explain proper etiquette towards other anglers, boaters, paddlers, and landowners
- Recognize proper fishing conservation methods and practices

Maneuvers to be performed on-water with appropriate and efficient strokes

- Enter and launch kayak from shore in a controlled manner, checking for clear departure when kayak is loaded with fishing gear
- Paddle the kayak forward, stop it, reverse it, and turn it when kayak is loaded with fishing gear
- Access fishing tackle and other fishing gear and equipment with minimal or no movement of kayak, and maintain balance of paddler
- Cast a fishing rod with minimal or no movement of the kayak, and maintain balance of paddler and kayak
- Retrieve a fishing line with minimal or no movement of the kayak, and maintain balance of paddler and kayak
- Land a fish with minimal or no movement of the kayak (can be simulated by using an empty net or imaginary fish), and maintain balance of paddler and kayak
- Describe the proper types and use of an anchor, including anchor line management and anchor safety

- Situational Awareness: Recognize the importance of keeping an eye on waterways, boats, other paddlers, other anglers, water conditions, weather, environment, and wildlife while fishing
- Arrive at destination point, checking for clear approach, and exit the kayak in a controlled and safe manner

Principles of Safety & Rescue

- Avoiding trouble and hazards
- Use of safe rescue strategies such as
 - T-RETHROG (Talk, Reach, Throw, Row, Go)
 - Rescue priorities: people, kayak, paddle, gear
 - Responsibilities of: rescuer, group, swimmers
 - Rescue organization
 - Realities of injuries
- Identify and demonstrate the use of appropriate rescue and safety gear for the craft and planned activity when the kayak is loaded with fishing gear
 - Whistle, knife
 - First aid kit
 - Cell phone and radios when appropriate
- Exit the craft after capsize, using proper body position and contact with the craft and paddle
- Swimming skills are the basis for self-rescue; a fundamental personal safety skill
 - Defensive swimming
 - Aggressive swimming
- Rescue self and the kayak using an effective self-rescue technique (e.g., swim self and boat to shore, or deep-water re-entry)
- Rescue a person in the water and capsized fishing kayak using appropriate techniques and equipment for the craft (bailers, pumps, paddle floats, tow lines,

etc.)

- Techniques for bulldozing or towing a kayak or swimmer to shore
- Wearing and use of waders when fishing from paddlecraft or when wading in water
 - Discuss safety and rescue concerns when wearing waders, emphasizing the neutral buoyancy factors (demonstrate then allow students to participate if they desire)
- Describe recommended guidelines for the use of tethers and leashes; discuss entanglement hazards
 - Fishing line
 - Tethers/leashes
 - Gear on deck
- Anchor line management

Conclusion and Wrap Up

- This has been a great class! Let's talk through what we've learned with a group debrief and/or Individual feedback
- Course limitations: there is always more to learn, and the skills and concepts we discussed require more practice and experience
- First aid and CPR training is a very valuable tool and could make the difference between a "near miss" and an emergency requiring outside rescue / first responders
- Paddling is a lifetime sport - there are local organizations, clubs, events, competitions, and classes through which you can continue your learning and build community. Get connected!
- Handouts and reference materials (if applicable)

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This curriculum is managed by the ACA Paddlesports Angler Advisory Board. To connect with the leadership of this group, please view the SEIC Committee rosters on [the ACA website.](#)