

Friends of the Chicago River Canoe Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What's the minimum age to participate?

We allow paddlers as young as 5 years of age. Any participant under the age of 18 must have a waiver signed by a parent.

Q: How many people in a canoe?

Most people will paddle two per canoe. There is an option for a third non-paddler to sit in the middle. Only people in a canoe; no pets, please.

Q: What equipment do you provide?

We provide canoes, paddles, and personal flotation devices (PFDs) to each participant.

Q: What should I wear/bring with me?

Bring anything you need to be comfortable! We suggest hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen. Wear shoes that strap onto your feet. Please bring water and any food you might like to eat during the paddle. Dress for the weather, including layers and rain jackets if need be.

Q: Will any of my stuff get wet?

While we usually stay dry during paddles, there is always a chance for your personal belongings to get wet. Friends is not responsible for any belongings that are lost or damaged during the paddle. We have a few waterproof bags that we can provide for cellphones, etc. Ziploc bags are also good waterproofing material, though not 100% effective.

Q: Do you canoe in the rain?

We will paddle rain or shine, hot or cold! Please dress appropriately for the weather!



Q: When would you cancel a paddle?

We will cancel a paddle if there are unsafe conditions, including thunderstorms, high winds, and flooding. We will not canoe within 48 hours of a combined sewer overflow.

Q: Do I have to sign up in advance?

Some of our trips allow walk-ups, but many require advanced registration. Please visit our events page to sign up: <http://www.chicagoriver.org/events>

Q: Do you offer trips for groups?

Yes! We would love to work with you to facilitate a fun canoe adventure.

Q: I've never canoed before. How does it work?

Welcome! We love introducing people to the river and to canoeing for the first time! We will have an experienced guide crew on hand that will give you a safety orientation and how-to-paddle instructional lesson before your trip.

Q: I can't swim; is that OK?

We frequently work with participants who don't know how to swim. We provide all participants with personal flotation devices. These must be worn at all times and will help you float if you go for an accidental swim.

Q: Do you rent boats?

We only offer guided trips.

Q: I've heard the Chicago River is dirty. Is it safe?

The Chicago River is a waterway with continuously improving water quality that supports a wide variety of life. We suggest exercising good hygiene practices after your trip, like washing your hands. Don't plan to drink out of the river—use your water bottle for that!

Q: Can I volunteer with your program?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteer guides. New guides must go through an application and training process, typically each spring. Visit our website for more info.

