



GUIDE TO PLANNING A PADDLING EVENT



The NYS Canal System is a premier destination for paddlers, offering hundreds of miles of continuous waterway through rivers, lakes, and man-made channels.

Paddling events provide opportunities to explore this scenic and recreational waterway for both novice and experienced paddlers. This guide will help you plan a successful group paddling event or benefit. It is especially pertinent for events with more than 25 participants, which require permits and a greater degree of planning and pose safety concerns.

Getting Started

Start planning by choosing a date, time, mileage/ route and name for your event. *The New York State Canalway Water Trail Guidebook and Navigational Map Set, Second Edition*, can be a valuable resource for planning your route, identifying interesting places, and locating launch and take-out sites.

Consider the following details as you plan your event:

- **Locations of launch and take-out sites** – Group events require space to stage check-in, launching, and take-out. Be sure there is a designated drop-off area to unload boats and ample parking nearby for a smooth start and finish of the trip.
- **Mileage** – Shorter distances are better for less experienced paddlers, while experienced paddlers may want to cover more ground.
- **Direction** – Although it appears placid, there is a noticeable current throughout most of the Canal System. Most paddlers prefer to go downstream. If you are planning an “out and back” event that begins and ends at the same launch site, try to include the upstream leg at the beginning and the downstream leg at the end.
- **Route** – Consider a route that features scenery, wildlife, historic structures, locks, or a combination of these. Include key features in your promotional event description. Scout the route in advance, preferably under varying flow and weather conditions.





- **Nearby Events** – Consider other paddling and non-paddling events that may be going on at the same time. For example, a 5K race or festival nearby could have a positive or negative impact on your attendance, traffic, or resources. Avoid conflicts, and consider whether collaborating with a nearby event could have a mutual benefit.
- **Timing** – Leave extra time at the start for day-of-event registration and launching all boats.
- **Transportation/Shuttle** – Participants will need to get back to their cars after the event. Determine whether you’re providing a shuttle service and decide which way (to, from, or both) will work best. Consider providing maps if participants have to drive to either end of your event for transportation.
- **Rentals** – If paddlers do not have their own vessels, consider partnering with a rental outfitter. You may increase your participation by including this option.
- **Restrooms or portable toilets** – Ensure that there is at least one restroom for every 50 participants at both put-in and take-out and identify other public facilities where paddlers can stop along the route.
- **Safety** – Identify places along the way to take out in case of emergency; determine who will be your safety volunteers and what your safety policies will be (i.e., age requirements, PFDs, number of participants).
- **Trip Leader/Sweep** – Designate a trip leader or guide to lead the group along the route and a sweep to stay with the slower paced paddlers.
- **Weather Policy** – Consider whether you will host rain or shine or if you will have a rain date.

Permits and Permissions

Once you have determined the specifics of your event, you will need to obtain permits and coordinate with the appropriate state agencies. Do this at least 30 days in advance of your event.

MARINE REGATTA PERMIT (NYS OPRHP)

Required for all public events.

1. [Marine Regatta Permit Application](#)
2. Map of your route
3. Letter of “No Objection” from local law enforcement (contact your city, county or town police or sheriff’s department)
4. A minimum of three persons must be listed as Special Navigation Inspectors and are required to be familiar with all provisions of the New York State Navigation Law
5. \$15 fee

Who to Contact

NYS OPRHP, Bureau of Marine Services:
518-474-0445

NYS CANAL CORPORATION

Contact the NYS Canal Corporation by phone to inquire about a need for a permit and anything else they may require. When you call, be sure to have information on:

- Event dates and times
- Route
- Point of contact/Event lead
- Launch and take-out sites
- Landside plans, including on-land events and gathering points

Who to Contact

- **Albany - 518-449-6000**
Erie Canal from the Hudson River to the Montgomery/Herkimer County line; Champlain Canal; Glens Falls Feeder Canal; Port Henry Terminal; Wilcox Dock, City of Plattsburgh
- **Utica - 315-733-9530 ext. 36**
Erie Canal from Montgomery/Herkimer County line to the east end of Oneida Lake, including Sylvan and Verona Beaches; Adirondack canal lands; all reservoirs and feeder canals in Oneida, Madison and Herkimer counties, with the exception of DeRuyter Reservoir and Cazenovia Lake

- **Syracuse - 315-423-2080**
Erie Canal from Oneida Lake (excluding Sylvan and Verona Beaches) to the Monroe/Wayne County line; Oswego Canal; Cayuga-Seneca Canal; Jamesville and DeRuyter Reservoirs; Cazenovia Lake
- **Buffalo - 716-686-4400**
Erie Canal from the Monroe/Wayne County line to the Niagara River

LOCAL PERMITS

Check with your municipality to see if permits are required to reserve or use your starting and ending locations.

Safety

PFDs – Every paddler is required to have a wearable Personal Flotation Device (PFD) on board. NYS Canal Corp regulations **require** that PFDs be worn when passing through locks. **Reduce your liability and keep everyone safe by requiring participants to wear a PFD during your event.**

Insurance – Your insurance company will likely require you to have participants sign a waiver of liability prior to the event. Ask whether there is a standard form you can use or modify.

Emergency Response Plan – Make a basic emergency response plan in advance that specifies take-out points, individual roles for organizers and volunteers, procedures, and equipment to have on hand. (See page 18 of the NYS Canalway Water Trail Guidebook for an equipment checklist.)

Police and EMS – Alert your local police and EMS departments that you are having an event on the canal so they are prepared in case of an emergency. Be aware that your route may pass through several jurisdictions. Depending on the number of participants, you may want to request that a powerboat from the local emergency services or the NYS Police Marine Patrol serve as an escort for your group. Contact emergency/rescue services in advance for their support.

Safety Checks – The local U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary can also be contacted to provide safety checks of PFDs and boats, offer safety tips, and provide whistles to participants before put-in.



Paddling Guides

You will need several guides to lead your group and ensure safety. Designate a point and a sweep, with additional guides in between, depending on group size. The sweep should never let paddlers get behind them. The point should never let paddlers get in front of them.

All guides should carry first aid kits, tow belts, a whistle or horn (required by law), spare paddle, extra clothes, and water. At least two guides should have advanced first aid training and know how to perform a variety of rescues. Guides should carry a copy of all emergency contact information in a dry bag.

Every guide should have a map with the route clearly laid out and any hazardous areas marked so they can communicate to paddlers well in advance. Guides should carry VHF (preferred) or other waterproof radios for communication. VHF radios are monitored at the locks and allow communication with other boaters, as well as between guides when voice-only communication is unreliable.

Registration, Publicity, and Communication

Choose a registration system for sign up and payment. There are a number of web-based event registration options. Provide the details of your event on the registration site along with an email and phone number for questions. Be sure details of the event are on your regular website as well.

Promote your event on social media, email, local media, advertising, press releases, through your partners and personal and business contacts, and with flyers or brochures. Encourage registrants to share with their networks. Inform Erie Canalway staff about your event as well, so that we can also promote it on social media and in our monthly Water Trail E-Newsletter.

Communicate with registered participants at least a few days before your event by email and social media. Provide the basics such as address, start time, parking, and schedule of the day, as well as other information they will need. Remind participants about safety requirements, such as wearing a PFD, as well as recommendations for comfort given anticipated weather conditions (hat/sunscreen, water, snacks).

Sample Timeline

4+ MONTHS

Choose a date, time, location, and event name

3 MONTHS

Apply for permits and obtain permissions

2 MONTHS AND ONGOING

Publicize and open registration
Secure vendors as needed

3 WEEKS

Contact lock operators if your paddle takes you through locks

1 WEEK

Communicate details to registered participants and vendors

EVENT DAY

Coordinate volunteers, monitor safety, and enjoy!

Vendors

Contact vendors and service providers at least one month in advance. Confirm their services and arrival times a week before your event.

- **Food** – Choose a caterer and menu if you are providing food and refreshments.
- **Portable toilets** – Contact a portable toilet vendor for both starting and ending locations, if needed.
- **Tents/tables** – Contact a rental company for items needed for before or after your event.
- **Sound** – Decide whether you need a sound system for announcements or music.
- **Transportation** – Contact a bus or shuttle company if you are providing transportation.

Event Day

As the coordinator, you'll want your event to be fun, safe, and memorable. Be sure to have enough staff and/or volunteers to help you manage all aspects of the day, from registration and check in to launch, take-out, and everything in between.

Here are additional things to consider for a smooth day for all:

- Schedule of events
- Emergency contacts and take-out places
- Walkie-talkies/cell phone contacts
- Volunteer assignments
- Registration/check-in/check-out procedures
- Participant waivers
- Wayfinding to the launch
- Parking at put-in and take-out
- Transportation/Shuttle
- Announcements and instructions
- Safety briefing and PFD checks
- Route map and driving map
- Giveaways/merchandise
- Photography/videography
- Trash/recycling

Post Event Follow Up

After a successful paddling event, timely follow up is recommended. Thank your participants, volunteers/ staff, and safety/rescue groups. Share photos and a summary on your social media, website, and with your local press.

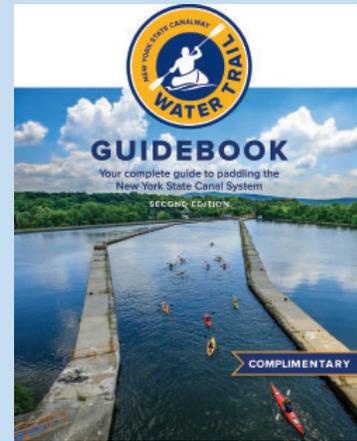
NYS OPRHP requires submission of a one-page, post-event report within 48 hours. A short statement detailing any paddling incidents is required by each (3) Safety Navigation Inspector in the post-event report. The form is included in your application.

If you plan to host the event again, conduct a debrief with volunteers or staff to solicit input on what worked well, what didn't, and suggestions for improvement. This feedback is best gained while details are still fresh.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact Mona Caron, Program Manager
Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor
mona_caron@partner.nps.gov or 518-237-7000 x204.

eriecanalway.org/watertrail



NYS Canalway Water Trail Guidebook & Navigational Map Set, Second Edition

A valuable resource for event and route planning is the *NYS Canalway Water Trail Guidebook and Navigational Map Set, 2E*. The mile-by-mile guide includes launch sites, paddler-friendly facilities and amenities, and places of interest for over 450 miles of the NYS Canal System, including the Erie, Cayuga-Seneca, Oswego and Champlain canals. The four maps are waterproof and tear-resistant.

Unique Features & Page References

- Best bet paddling day trips with mileage charts – pages 26-29
- Descriptions of canal features and structures – pages 8-9
- Step-by-step instructions for passing through a lock – page 10
- Things to see and do on and off the water – page 14-16
- Maps and descriptions of 150 access points for all four canals – throughout the book

Order online (\$20 S&H fee):
eriecanalway.org/watertrail

Note: The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, including its representatives or affiliates, offers this guide for informational purposes only. Event planning and implementation is solely the responsibility of event organizers, and ECNHC is not liable to users or participants.