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## **Paddlers/Floaters -Low Water Levels Mean More Awareness**

It's that time of year when lower water levels create safety challenges for paddlers and floaters, especially inexperienced recreators who are unfamiliar with how to safely maneuver their craft around obstructions near the banks or just below the surface of the water.

The Oregon State Marine Board offers the following tips on how to have fun and stay safe:

- Always float with a friend, especially in paddlecraft or float tubes. Have at least two boats or float devices and a plan if you become separated. Always fill out a [float plan](#) or give detailed information to a friend or family member about where you're going, when you expect to return, what clothing you're wearing, and who's with you. Also, put contact information on your craft so if you get separated, the craft can be returned.
- Keep your wits about you. Boating in rivers can be extremely relaxing; so much so, that it's easy to be hypnotized and less aware of your surroundings. Always keep a sharp lookout and routinely scan from left to right and right to left for logs, submerged objects, and the watch the direction the current is carrying you. Maneuver away from objects well ahead of time.
- Stay well clear of log jams and strainers (root wads, trees, branches, logs). They allow water through them, but can catch and entrap paddlers underwater, entangle lines, and easily puncture float tubes or pool toys not designed for river use.
- Read the water. Where is there white-water? Where does the water eddy? These indicate what's below the surface and give key information to boaters on how to safely navigate the run and what line to take.
- Scouting your float ahead of time -is worth the time. Determine the safest course when boulders, gravel bars, or fallen trees/root wads are present. [Reported obstructions](#) can be found at the Marine Board's website to help plan your excursion.
- Go with your "gut feeling." If something doesn't feel right, listen to it. When in doubt, portage out (take the boat over and around an obstruction -from land or nearby gravel or sand bar).



- Know your limits. Know your ability at the moment, not from what you know you're capable of doing. Stick to rivers that are classified as I or II if you have a medical condition or are new to river running/floating.
- Use the right gear for the type of boating. When running Class III or higher rapids, a helmet, properly fitting life jacket, a throw bag and secured gear is incredibly important. Two inner tubes tied together or in an inflatable craft with more than one air chamber are defined as a "boat" and are required to carry a properly fitting life jacket and a sound-producing device like a whistle. The Marine Board advocates even people floating in single inner tubes or pool toys wear a life jacket. Inner tubes and pool toys aren't designed for rivers and can easily puncture, in addition to quickly floating away from a person in fast current.
- On reservoirs and lakes, sharp drop-off's are a given. Tree stumps, boulders and fallen trees may not be visible. Take special care when operating near the banks, where many of these obstructions lie just below the surface. Wear a life jacket, especially children, when on the banks. Expect banks to be unstable.

Check the Marine Board's website for [reported navigation obstructions](#). The Marine Board cannot mitigate every obstruction, but with the help of our marine law enforcement partners, strive to ensure safe passage for popular waterways for all boaters. Another resource is the "[Paddling Oregon Safely](#)" brochure, located in the Forms Library at [boatoregon.com](http://boatoregon.com).

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*Pictured: Several punctured craft near an obstruction lining the bank on the South Santiam River in Linn County.*

*The Marine Board is funded by registration, title fees and marine fuel taxes paid by motorized boaters. **No lottery, general fund tax dollars or local facility parking fees** are used to support the agency or its programs. Boater-paid fees go back to boaters in the form of boating safety services (on-the-water enforcement, training, and equipment), education/outreach materials, and boating access facility grants (boat ramps, docks, parking, restrooms, and construction and maintenance). The Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Permit program is dedicated funding to pay for border inspection stations, decontamination equipment, inspectors, and signage/outreach materials. The Mandatory Education Program is self-supporting and revenue helps pay for education materials and boater education cards. For more information about the Marine Board and its programs, visit [www.boatoregon.com](http://www.boatoregon.com).*