

Rising W

Get Ready for Spring's Splashy Fun

BY NATE HOOGEVEEN

April showers...they aren't just for spring flowers anymore. As the ice breaks up and our rainy season begins, canoeists and kayakers begin salivating at the opportunity to rediscover Iowa's rushing waters.

It's a joyful time of year to view the changing landscape scrolling by from the seat of a canoe. In southern Iowa streams, purple hues prevail when redbuds bloom along with sweet Williams, just as bright green foliage begins to unfurl. In central Iowa, whitewater kayakers cavort their way down small streams that tumble into larger valleys cut by glacial meltwaters. The season arrives more slowly in the rivers of northern Iowa, but plentiful water is still attractive to paddlers seeking views of bare bluffs and stark outlines of hardwoods, cedars and pines.

GET IN SHAPE

Paddling doesn't have to be strenuous. But working on flexibility before your first trip is a good idea.

EARLY-SEASON TIPS


Be there no doubt: splashy fun is certainly the draw for spring kayak and canoe outings. But paddling safely is extra important while the water is cold.

Wear your life jacket: Most paddlers prefer U.S. Coast Guard Type III models with spacious arm holes for a free range of motion. Investing in such a jacket (\$50-100)—or a self-inflating life jacket (\$80-\$200)—makes it much more likely you'll actually use it. Life jackets that get in your way tend to stay in storage.

Dress right: Whenever the weather's cool, layering is important. Next to skin use a moisture-wicking layer, cover with an insulating layer, and seal with a wind/water blocking layer. Standard cottons (like blue jeans, t-shirts, and sweatshirts) are the enemy—they don't hold heat when wet. Wool, synthetic materials like nylon or polypropylene, and microfleece are helpful if you sweat or unintentionally get wet. If you suspect the air and water


Water

GET INVOLVED



Play in the ripples of the Raccoon River and help Iowa's water on Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness and River Expedition), the DNR's annual volunteer clean-up and water monitoring event this June 16-23.

For details, www.iowaprojectaware.com.



Doug Seyb of Donnellson, explores Van Buren County's Big Cedar Creek.

temperature do not add up to more than 100 degrees or so, added protection like a wet suit or dry suit is in order. The most common paddling injuries are to the feet—keep your dogs protected with old tennis shoes, boots or thick-soled neoprene paddling boots.

Plan for the worst: Capsizing isn't all that common, but the cold season is not the time to mess around. Paddle with experienced friends, and have a plan for assisting each other if something goes wrong. If a river is nearing bank-full or there is debris in the water, it's not a good idea to put-in. Either pick a different river or go hike instead.

SEEKING PADDLING BUDDIES:

One of the best ways to locate like-minded paddlers is by joining a club on an outing. Different clubs cater to different interests and regions of Iowa, whether it's a tranquil birdwatching float or Class III whitewater. A good

tool for finding clubs is at www.paddlingiowa.com/clubs/. Alternatively, simply find other paddlers near you by posting a message at www.paddlingiowa.com/forums/.

GEARING UP

A number of retailers carry gear to help you enjoy a safe and pleasant trip on the water. Some local shops include Canoesport Outfitters in Indianola, River Basin Canoe & Kayak near Burlington, Corn Cob Kayak and Canoe in Estherville, Craw Daddy Outdoors in Waverly, Seatasea Watersports and Great Outdoor Traditions in Cedar Rapids and Fin & Feather in Iowa City. National retailers such as Scheel's All-Sports, Dunhams, Bass Pro Shops, Sportsmans Warehouse and others also have paddling departments. 🐾

Nate Hoogveen is the Iowa DNR Water Trails Coordinator and author of the guidebook Paddling Iowa.