

# Paddling/Kayaking at Pictured Rocks

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore



Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore is renowned for its water resources, from Lake Superior to inland lakes. Deciding where to go paddling should be based on a number of factors.

## What Kind Of Boat Do You Plan On Using?



A **Sea Kayak** is over 14.7 feet long, with two bulkheads to prevent water from flooding the interior of the boat. It has a covered deck with a small opening for the paddler, and a pointed upturned bow. **Sea kayaks are designed for paddling on large bodies of water.**



A **recreational or general kayak** is smaller than 14.6 feet long, with a large opening for the paddler. These kayaks are for the casual paddler on calm rivers, ponds, or small lakes.

The large cockpit opening makes it easy to get in and out of the boat, but also allows water to easily enter and swamp the boat. The short length makes it prone to being pushed around in wind and waves and therefore hard to maneuver in rough weather. **Recreational kayaks should not be used on large bodies of water (Lake Superior).**



A **canoe's** height makes them hard to control in windy conditions on open water. Unless packed with flotation, they can also fill with water and more easily swamp. **Canoes should not be used on Lake Superior!**

Good places for canoeing and/or recreational kayaking are the many nearby inland lakes or rivers such as Little Beaver Lake and the Au Train River.

## Do You Have The Right Safety Equipment To Go Out Paddling?

75% of canoe/kayak fatalities were not wearing life jackets. Don't be a statistic!

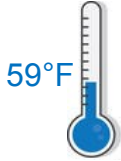


- **PFD (Personal Flotation Device) / Life Jacket** - is required for each person, and should be worn at all times! It is very difficult to put on a PFD once in the water.
- **Wet Suit / Dry Suit** - for paddling on Lake Superior and during cooler weather on other lakes. Cold water kills!
- **Spray Skirt** (for paddling on Lake Superior) - is a waterproof barrier that helps keep waves and rain out of the boat and helps keep the paddler dryer and therefore warmer.
- **Whistle / Air Horn** - Should be attached to you for immediate use, and must be audible for a 1/2 mile.
- An experienced paddling **partner**.
- **Paddle Leash** - attaches your paddle to your kayak, and helps prevent you from losing your paddle and even your boat if you capsize.
- **Paddle Float** - attaches to a kayak paddle and is used to stabilize the boat to help with self rescue / boat re-entry.
- **Bilge Pump** - used to remove water from a boat. A small bucket can work too.
- **Marine Radio** - to keep you informed about the weather.
- A **Float Plan** left with someone who cares about you. If you don't return as planned, they can get a search started.
- Put **contact information** on your boat. **If you lose a boat, report it!**

---

## What Do You Know About Cold Water?

Lake Superior's average summer surface temperature is 59°F / 15°C. Hypothermia can occur in as little as 10 minutes.



## Cold Water Kills!

If you fall out of your boat, you have:

**1 minute** to orient yourself and float.

**10 minutes** before the water starts to numb your extremities and makes moving difficult.

**1 hour** before the cold water kills you.

Learn how to get back into your boat quickly.

And **always wear your life jacket**. It can buy you time and save your life.

Learn more about cold water safety: [www.coldwatersafety.org](http://www.coldwatersafety.org)

---

## Can You Save Yourself?



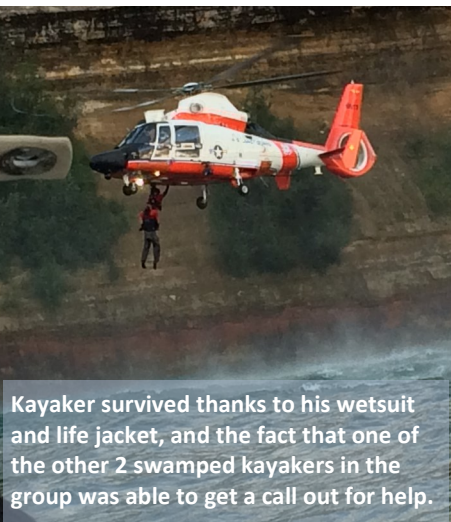
Kayaking on the Great Lakes can be a beautiful experience, but it can also be dangerous and deadly. Conditions can change rapidly. **Help is not a quick phone call away and rescue is not guaranteed!**

If you are able to get a 911 call or text out, help is still far away: at least 30 minutes, but 60 to 90 minutes or longer is more likely. If the weather is very rough, no one will be able to respond until the weather calms down. You are on your own!

The Pictured Rocks cliffs extend for 15 miles and include sheer walls all the way to the water line. These exposed cliffs offer no way off the water if wind and waves increase.

- Know how to re-enter your kayak from the water. Research it, watch videos, take lessons. And practice, practice, practice!
  - Wear a wet or dry suit and a life jacket.
  - Paddle with others. Make sure they know how to perform rescues too.
- 

## Should You Go?



At Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, we respond to many rescues where kayakers were ill-equipped. We implore anyone interested in kayaking Lake Superior to seriously consider the risks, and to properly prepare before setting out. Even experienced and well prepared kayakers have been overpowered by the Lake.

Remember, before going paddling, ask yourself these questions:

1. Do I have the right boat for the location?
2. Do I have a life jacket for each person?
3. Do I know the marine forecast?
4. Can I save myself (get back in my boat from the water)?
5. Did I tell friends or family where I'm going?

If you answered “no” to any of these questions, **DO NOT GO!**

The most important prerequisite for a safe trip is good judgement. Boaters must know their equipment, know their limits, and respect the ever changing Lake Superior environment.

---

## Where To Go Paddling



Your decision on where to go paddling should depend on your type of boat, experience level of each person in your group, and the weather.

**Inland lakes** are the best places for paddling.

Some good choices include: **Grand Sable Lake, Little Beaver Lake, Beaver Lake, and Kingston Lake.** There are many others just a short drive from the park.

**Lake Superior's** cold water, fast forming storms, and rugged shoreline is for the most experienced and well-prepared kayakers.

Launch at **Sand Point, Miners Beach, Twelvemile Beach Campground, or lower Hurricane River Campground.**

If you chose to go on Lake Superior with a small kayak, stay close to the beach. Do not venture out to the Pictured Rocks Cliffs or go across the channel to Grand Island.

---