

ETWC NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2018

PROMOTE canoeing and kayaking as a water sport
TEACH boating techniques and water safety for river travel
PRESERVE our remaining wilderness rivers for future generations

Next Club Meeting

Tuesday, November 20, 2018
7:30 pm at the Casual Pint on
Hardin Valley Rd.

Our program will be a **Movie Night:**
“**Chasing Niagra**” Every Dream has a
point of no return. When pro kayaker
Rafa Ortiz decides to chase his dream
to paddle over North Americas Niagra
Falls, he can't imagine the journey to get

there. As he and his friends prepare for
their adventure, they realize the path
may have a mind of its own.

This is a documentary with some
amazing kayaking and scenery from
around the world.

We will also meet and eat before the
meeting next door at Grill Don Gallos on
Hardin Valley Rd, 6pm. Call or text Mark
865-679-9242 if you want to eat so he
can save you a spot.

Officer Nominations for 2019

We are assembling a nominating committee who will put together our slate of officers
for 2019 who will be voted on at our December meeting/Christmas Party. We're ending
2018 with several vacant positions and we really need folks to step up and fill them. We
can provide you a description of the responsibilities and answer any questions. Call
Mark 865-679-9242 to make nominations or to volunteer to serve.

2019 Donations (PRELIMINARY)

The Club made the following donations in 2018, and this is a good starting point for
2019. This list will be formally reviewed at the November meeting for comments or
changes and voted on if there are no changes. If there are changes the revised
donations list will be published in the December newsletter and approved at our
December meeting.

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| • TCWP (Tennessee Citizen's for Wilderness Planning) | \$200 |
| • AW (American Whitewater) | \$200 |
| • Friends of the Great Smoky Mountains | \$100 |
| • NPCA (National Parks Conservation Association) | \$100 |
| • American Canoe Association | \$125 |
| • TCWN (Tennessee Clean Water Network) | \$100 |
| • Cumberland Trail Conference | \$100 |
| • Little River Watershed Association | <u>\$ 75</u> |
| | \$1,000 |

Christmas Party and December Club meeting, December 8

Our year end Christmas Party and meeting are tentatively scheduled for December 8, so save the date. We hope everyone will be able to attend.

Roll Practice

We are planning to resume Roll Practice indoors at the Oak Ridge Civic Center as in the past on Friday nights beginning January 4 thru April 26 (except April 19, Good Friday). We need someone to be in charge of collecting the money and signing folks in each Friday. If you can help, pick a Friday and let us know when you're available; otherwise, we'll have a sign-up sheet at our November meeting.

Safety

Mind the Gap

By Teresa Gryder

Usually my safety columns are for intended for newer paddlers who may have never taken a river rescue course, and don't coordinate trips or run sweep. This one is different. This is for those of you who sometimes run lead or sweep on club trips, and who are interested in the dynamics of managing larger groups on the river.

The Problem

The situation that I see recurring is that groups can't seem to stick together. The larger the group and the longer the run, the harder it is to prevent gaps from forming in the flow of paddlers. Faster downstream paddlers including novices tend to end up in the front, whereas those who like to catch eddies and surf eddies end up at the back. A swimmer can cause some people to stop while others continue downstream, further splitting the group. Sometimes groups are so large that they can end up having 3 or even 4 distinct pods of paddlers who are mostly sticking together, but there is a lot of space between these pods. I call this space the gap.

The gap is dangerous because in it there is no backup. We are told not to paddle alone and yet a person can easily end up alone in the middle of a large group. It has happened to many of us. If a paddler gets pinned on the rocks while they are in the gap, help could be several long minutes away. If they are injured or their situation is unstable or life threatening, the wait for help could be far too long. Every minute counts.

Eliminating gaps from our trips would make them safer. Running tight allows us to recognize more quickly when someone needs help, and to respond more quickly when needed.

Attempted Solutions that Haven't Worked

I can think of three ways that we attempt to keep our groups together, including splitting big groups into smaller ones, keeping an eye on the boater behind us, and using the buddy system. All of them help, but none are sufficient to meet the objective. We need new ideas.

When we have more than 15 or so boats, we might split up the group. Even after splitting we often have groups of 10 or more. Large groups are distasteful to many paddlers and are part of the reason that some won't paddle with us. We could do a better job of separating out pods of playboaters, fast-moving boaters, skills-oriented groups and others to form smaller groups. We could split into smaller groups than we already do. Small groups with similar paddling styles can stick together and flow down the river comfortably, without having to wait, and without being stretched trying to keep up. Unfortunately there is resistance to splitting because clubbies want to socialize, so the practice is under-used. There is also the consideration that we do not want to put all the novices in one group without skilled paddlers.

Keeping the paddler behind us in sight is one of our strongest methods of sticking together, but there are a number of weaknesses to this approach. First, keeping someone "in sight" may not be close enough. The person behind you could be a quarter mile back, and it could take you 20 minutes to get out of your boat and hike back up the riverbank to help them—if you could even tell that they were in trouble a quarter mile away. If the person downstream from you who is charged with looking out for you is also a quarter mile away, they will be of no use if you start going upstream to help someone else. Rather than in keeping them in sight, I think we should stay close enough to assist if the paddler behind us gets into trouble.

Another weakness in having each paddler monitor the paddler behind them is that a less skilled or fit members might not be able to help. Not every paddler carries a rope, for example. Lastly it is patently unfair to leave a conscientious paddler in the gap because they are trying to look out for the paddler behind them and also keep up with the group ahead of them. I know of at least one paddler who only boats solo because at least then she knows no one is going to help her. It's more honest.

The buddy system is another way at least keep two individuals together, if not the group. The problems with the buddy system are as diverse as the participants. If you are buddied with the weakest paddler in the group, you cannot expect them to be of much help if you need it, so you must boat as if you had no buddy or more conservatively, to help get them down the river. Buddies can have such different boating styles that in spite of the best intentions they become frustrated and let the distance between them increase. On top of these kinds of problems, it's possible that a focus on one's buddy might cause people to separate from the group, increasing gaps and negating the primary objective of keeping the group together to optimize the safety contributions of the strongest paddlers. Perhaps if we paddled in "pods" of 4-5 paddlers instead of just 2 paddlers as buddies we would have the same result as splitting the group without officially doing so.

On our largest and longest trips we are a long way from preventing gaps from forming, and we are not especially good at closing them along the way. There is also a tendency for groups to become lax as the miles pass, especially on easier sections. I propose here that we consider adding another tool to our collection, and possibly look for more.

A Possible Solution

One way to facilitate tighter groups is by keeping the lead and sweep boaters in communication throughout the day. We could use walkie talkies, but they don't fare well in the water. I suggest here that we try using paddle signals which only require equipment that we already carry.

To be clear, when I talk about the lead or sweep, I'm talking about people who have volunteered for the role of running first or last for a day of paddling. They are not responsible for anyone's safety, but they are willing to serve. The lead does not have to be the trip coordinator, and you do not have to follow their lines. Ideally these two individuals are skilled in their craft and alert for situations that could need attention. Of the two the sweep is most important, but for this signaling system to work a group needs both a lead and a sweep.

This paddle signaling system was devised by river guides running commercial paddle raft trips. It is used on many rivers in the eastern U.S., California, and internationally. Paddling clubs could borrow these ideas to improve their communications and coordinate smoother and safer whitewater trips.

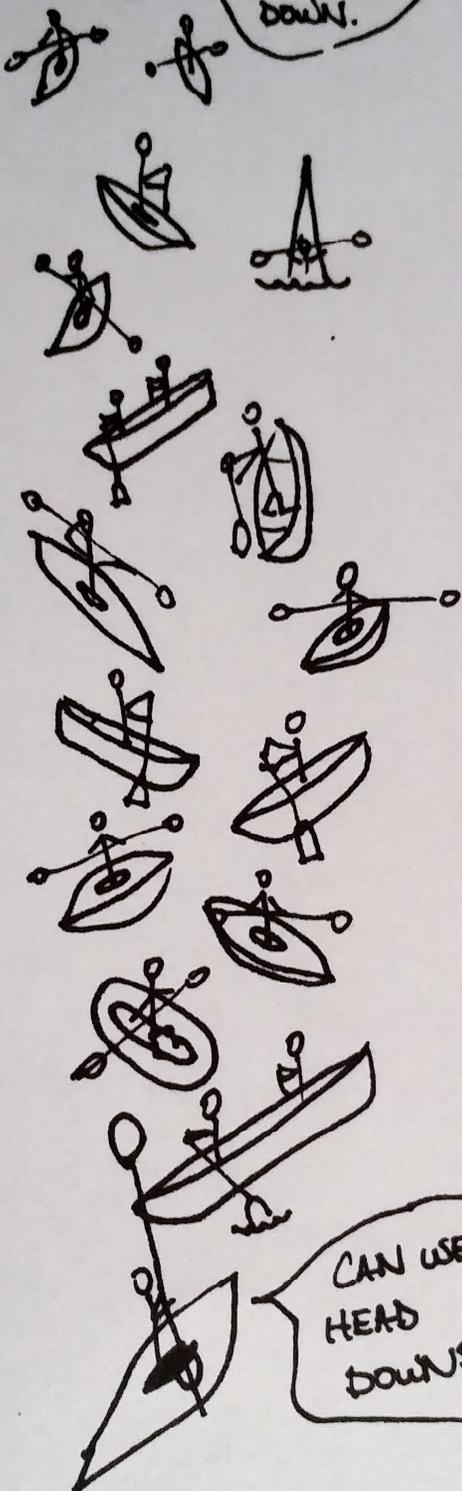
You have probably already learned certain meanings for each signal. The advanced system uses the two most basic signals (*all clear* and *stop*) with added meanings, and continues to use them for the old meanings. The lead and sweep talk to each other via signals to keep a large group moving downstream together without getting crowded or separated. With active management and open communication between lead and sweep, a trip can stretch out and compress evenly like an accordion.

The lead and sweep boaters are the main signalers, though other boaters may pass signals back or forward in the pack. Using line of sight and forwarded signals the lead and sweep can remain in direct communication all day long.

Standard paddle signals are illustrated in the [American Whitewater Safety Code](#) and all whitewater paddlers should know them. We may have other signals that we also use within our home crew. Most signals can be both a question and an answer. Patting the top of the head can mean *Are you OK?* and *Yes I'm OK*. Holding a paddle vertical in the air means *All clear?* and *Yes, all clear* and *Coming down*. Signals can also be statements and confirmations. A horizontal paddle held overhead means *Stop!* and it can be reflected to confirm *Ok, we'll stop*. The one exception is a waving paddle or arm which means *Emergency!* and only has this one meaning. Further confirmation of an emergency is the use of triple whistle blasts. The proper response to an emergency signal is assessment of the situation and preparation to assist. An emergency signal should not be used for routine swims or casual stops; it means a life- or limb threatening situation.

YES!

ALL GOOD
BACK HERE!
COMING
DOWN.



CAN WE
HEAD
DOWNSTREAM?

ALL CLEAR
SIGNAL

The proposed system uses the *all clear* and *stop* signals, mainly from the sweep to the lead. It requires that the lead remember that they are looking for the sweep to come into view and give a signal. The lead does not go downstream until they receive an *all clear* from the sweep. The lead can ask for a signal by raising their paddle vertical in the front of the pack. When the sweep sees this paddle raised, they respond with either *all clear* or *stop*. Both lead and sweep can be moving downstream and exchange these signals.

At the put-in is the first time that the lead looks to the sweep to be sure all systems are go. The lead boater launches and goes to a gathering spot in sight of the put-in. If the river is very continuous and there are no eddies, paddlers including the lead may wait on shore until they are cleared to launch. When the sweep gives the *all clear* it really means “we’re set to go down river, lead on!” If there is a problem, for example someone forgot something in a car and they are coming to get the keys, it is counter productive for the group to leave before getting the signal.



All Clear

When using a lead boat, participants should be instructed to pull over if they get ahead of the lead. I’ve heard the saying that “If you pass the lead, then you’re the lead.” While this gets some laughs, I would like to discourage the joke, because we could end up with novice boaters floating downstream thinking that it’s OK for them to take the lead. They may have no concept of the condition of their group or what is ahead, and they almost certainly won’t be looking for the signals from the sweep at the other end of a long string of boats. If, on the other hand, another skilled individual takes the lead, hopefully they can also take on monitoring the sweep’s status and managing group spacing.



OK

Once a large group is heading downstream, it is not always possible to see everyone. Long straightaways and pools are the best times for the lead and sweep to catch sight of each other, exchange signals, and adjust the spacing of the group. Before going around a bend that blocks their view, the lead boat raises a paddle high to ask how it's going in the back. The sweep boat sees the vertical paddle and responds. If it's an *all clear* signal the whole group can keep floating downstream. If the signal is a *stop*, the lead boat picks a good stopping point and collects the group.



STOP

If the sweep doesn't come into view on a long straightaway, the lead needs to slow down or stop the group until they come into view and give a signal. If there are swims or other delays in the back of the pack, the sweep can give a *stop* signal and if the rest of the group understands and is paying attention they will pass the *stop* signal forward to the front of the group. This will happen only if participants look back behind them and know to pass the signal on from sweep to lead. This practice can prevent a group from getting spread out in the first place.



HELP

A lack of a *stop* signal from the sweep does not mean *all clear*. It could mean that the sweep is busy (could be an emergency), the participants didn't pass on the signal, or that the sweep doesn't use this system and you won't have strong communication on this trip. This is one reason why it's worth talking about this system and trying it out with people you boat with regularly. Lead boats that continue downstream without waiting to at least see the tail of the trip are the main reason that trips develop large gaps.

This pattern of the lead getting an *all clear* from the sweep repeats all the way down the river. This system relies on two people paying close attention to each other. It is not widely practiced among private boaters, but it could be. Regular practice of basic signals helps us develop the habit of using them, and hones our trip awareness. If we develop the habit of communication via signals between the back and front of the pack, and we can create the conditions for a large group to flow downstream in a cohesive way, close enough to execute prompt rescues, and yet spaced out enough to enjoy paddling. Managing a large group on the river is a challenge, but with good communications it gets much easier.

Tennessee Wildlife Federation Promoting Permitting for Commercial River Outfitters

This from a recent email blast.

Share Our Rivers Coalition: Commercial Boat Rentals

Canoe and kayak rental services dominate several Tennessee rivers. But, they don't help pay for the public resource they profit from.

Is it time they do? We think so.

We believe all users—including individual anglers and paddlers—have a right to freely use these rivers and enjoy the recreational opportunities they offer. That requires balance and sharing the responsibility of maintaining our rivers.

But on our most popular rivers, there are increases in water rescues, unsafe practices, litter, bad behavior, and conflicts with other citizens using the river. Reasonable rules are needed to correct bad actors and give guidelines to good ones.

Learn more about the Share Our Rivers movement and Coalition at <https://tnwf.org/share-our-rivers/>.

(Note: ETWC does not have an official position on this proposal yet but we thought the membership might be interested.)

Winter Trips

Things typically slow a bit in the winter depending on the weather and the water levels. However, that does not mean that some folks are not still paddling. I had one of our members tell me once that he had paddled every weekend of the prior year except Christmas weekend. Of course, you'll need the proper gear, dry top with waterproof leggings or dry suit, gloves or poggies, and a helmet liner to start.

With the end of our formal trips check in on our forum: <http://etwcweb.com/discuss/> or facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/179301605435695/> for trip plans. Don't hesitate to post if you're looking for an opportunity to paddle; it's likely that someone else out there is thinking the same thing or has a trip planned you can join.

ETWC Webpage and Forum and Facebook

Check out the discussions on our forum and check out some great whitewater photos.

<http://etwcweb.com/discuss/>

Or see us on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/179301605435695/>

Trip Reports!

Tell us about the highlights of your summer trips! Send trip reports to Bill, including videos if you have them!

Please send reports to Yours Truly at bill.lewis865@gmail.com.

PROGRAMS

We are always looking for interesting programs for our meetings. If you have a program or an idea please contact Donna Price at 865-406-1058.

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 Reports and Classifieds as a Word or Text File Document.
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River Gauges, see ETWC Forum
[**AWW What's Running in East Tennessee**](#)

