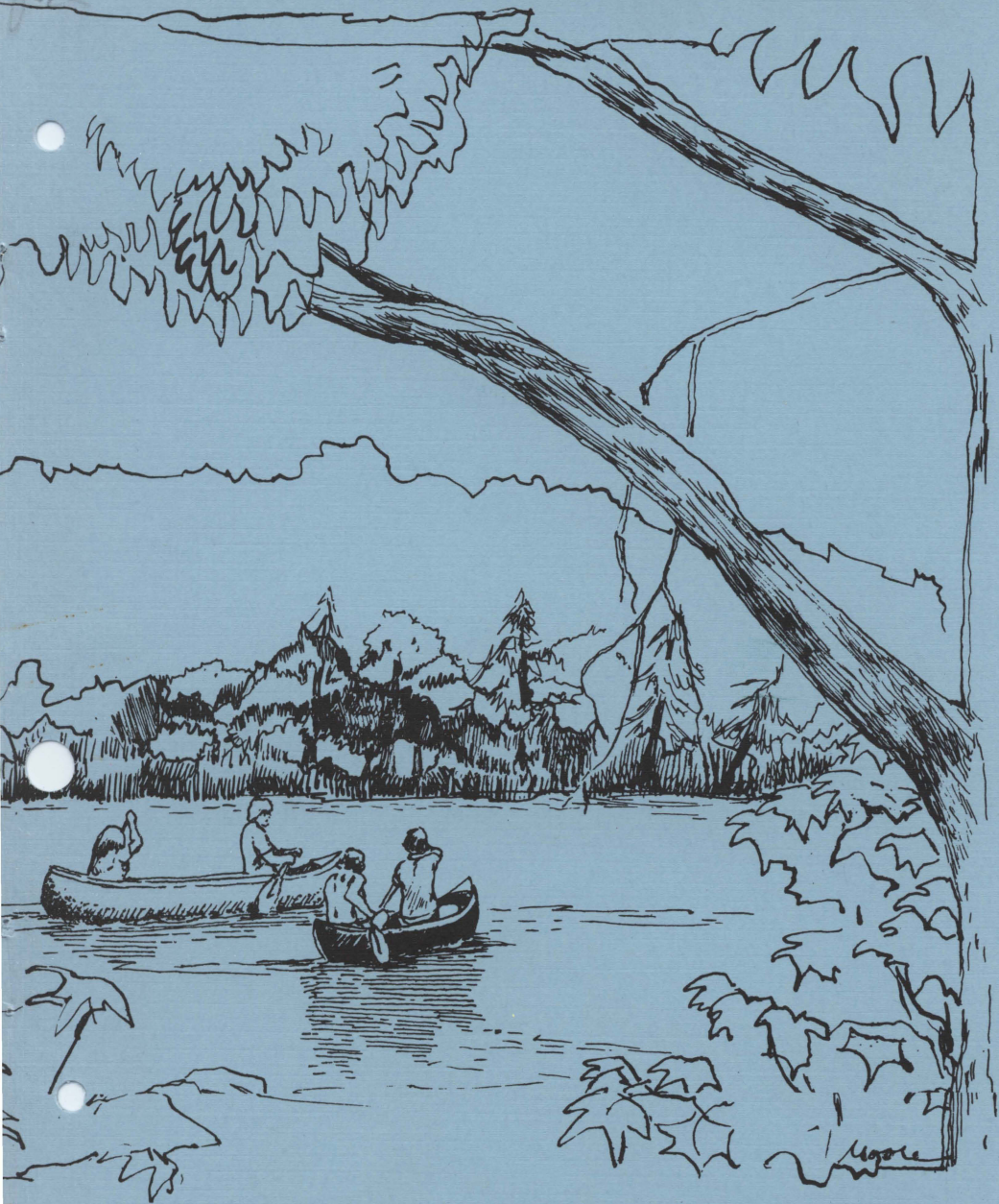


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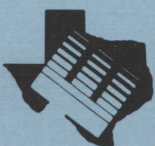
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Rules of the River



The Texas A&M
University System



**Texas
Agricultural
Extension
Service**

Daniel C. Pfannstiel, Director
College Station, Texas

Adapted from a publication developed by The River
Recreation Association of Texas, P.O. Box 12734,
Austin, Texas 78711, 1979.

Sketches by Barbara Moore.

Rules of the River

These "Rules of the River" are for you, the river recreationist.



River recreation is increasing in Texas. Recent surveys show as many as 50,000 persons each year enjoy canoeing, kayaking, rafting, or tubing some of Texas' more popular rivers.

But this boom in recreation is not without problems. Too often recreationists begin a river trip ill-prepared and unacquainted with the environment they will be going through and, unfortunately, with little regard for others who share an interest in Texas' inviting and bountiful waterways. These conditions result in conflicts and hard feelings among recreationists and between recreationists and local residents.

The following rules and information on proper conduct of river recreation cover a spectrum of thoughts and suggestions from recreationists, local residents, property owners and professional planners. These rules are organized into four parts:

- Planning Your River Trip
- Selecting Your Equipment
- Rules of Safety
- Rules of Conduct

When put into practice, these “Rules of the River” may turn an uncomfortable river trip into a lasting and special experience. Read them, learn them, practice them and most of all, teach them.

Planning Your River Trip

The best intentions oft go astray . . .

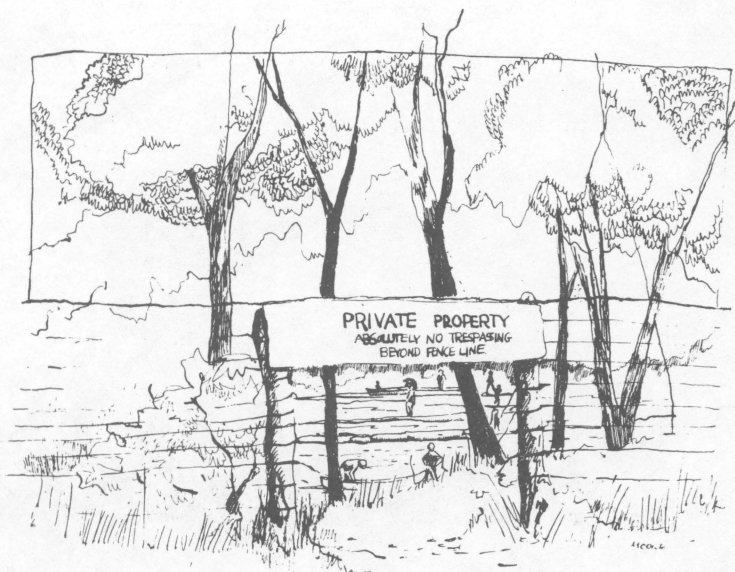


When planning a river trip, pick a stretch of river that is close enough to access, to float and to return from within the time you have to spend. In Texas, you have approximately 80,000 miles of waterways from which to choose.

- Obtain and study reliable maps (county, highway department, U.S. Geological Survey) to determine how much time your trip will involve, including time of travel, time on the river and time for car shuttles.

- Determine the length of your float trip in advance, and identify legal access points for launching and takeout (*for most, a ten mile trip is a full day's trip*). Plan to complete the run before dark.

- If your trip involves an overnight stop along the river, call ahead for reservations (on public lands), or secure permission in advance (on private lands). In some cases, such as in national parks, a written permit may be required.



- Learn about the stretch of river you want to travel.
- If possible, consult someone who has previously run that stretch of river.
- Avoid mixing faster craft (canoes, kayaks) with slower craft (rafts, tubes), particularly on longer trips.
- If you're new at this sport, learn about safety precautions and navigation of your craft. Practice your skills on lakes or slow moving rivers. Build your level of proficiency gradually before attempting difficult rivers.
- Don't attempt to run a river that's flowing too high or too fast. The local sheriff's office, the river authority, reservoir or park manager, or the river recreation advisory in your local paper might be possible places to check.
- Never travel the rivers alone. Plan on at least two boats per outing. Three are preferable.
- Plan on getting wet. Leave dry clothes at your take-out point (on day trips) or take them in air tight containers, as well as food and other supplies. Take only those items which water won't damage.

- Be able to recognize your take-out point. It looks quite different from the water.
- Seek a balance of experienced and inexperienced recreationists on the same trip, and, whenever possible, split up the novices.
- Leave firearms and other weapons at home.
- Children can enjoy a river outing, but discretion should be used in deciding whether or not to take them along. The severity of the river, flow conditions, water and air temperature, known hazards to be encountered and your skill and experience levels should be evaluated carefully in making this decision. *Never tie or strap children to your craft.*
- Unless you have *complete control* over your pets, the best policy is to leave them at home. Animals chasing livestock or causing general disruptions do not earn you the respect of local residents or fellow recreationists. Remember, if floating in a national park, pets are prohibited.
- Don't impair your ability to meet the challenge of the river by overindulging in liquor or other intoxicants.
- When canoeing in cold weather, be cautious of hypothermia (loss of vital body warmth). Be aware of the prevention measures that can be taken, the symptoms of hypothermia and first aid for it.

SELECTING YOUR EQUIPMENT

If only I'd remembered to bring . . .

Your enjoyment of a river outing, as well as your personal safety, depends in large part on the equipment which you use. Always purchase or rent *light* and *compact quality* equipment.

The following is a list of recommended items. Those items with an asterisk are considered a "must." Other items may vary with individual preferences, and some may wish to add to the list.

Equipment Checklist for River Outing

Floating Equipment

- ___ Canoe, kayak, raft, etc.*
- ___ 3 paddles (2 plus 1 extra)*
- ___ Personal flotation devices*—one for each person in the craft
- ___ 1 bow and 1 stern line* (15 to 20 feet long and $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch diameter)
- ___ repair kit (duct tape, etc.)*
- ___ short ropes for securing equipment*
- ___ canteen*
- ___ bailer or sponge*
- ___ 1 throwline per group* (75 to 100 feet long and $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{3}{8}$ - inch diameter)
- ___ eyeglasses holder or string*
- ___ waterproof bags and/or containers*
- ___ 1 first aid kit per small group* (more if large group)
- ___ 1 snakebite kit or freeze*
- ___ crash helmets
- ___ spray decks
- ___ extra flotation devices or cushions
- ___ plastic garbage bags*
- ___ map or guide for the river and/or general area
- ___
- ___
- ___

* Required or strongly recommended

Clothing

- ___ trousers, shirt, socks, underwear
- ___ extra set of dry clothing
- ___ swimsuit
- ___ tennis shoes or canvas shoes*
- ___ rain gear
- ___ hat or cap
- ___ extra shoes or hiking shoes
- ___ wet suit
- ___ cold weather clothing
- ___ handkerchief or bandana
- ___
- ___
- ___

Personal

- ___ toilet articles
- ___ toilet paper
- ___ suntan lotion
- ___ aspirin
- ___ chapstick
- ___ insect repellent
- ___ sunglasses
- ___ knee pads
- ___ money—change for phone calls*
- ___ towel
- ___
- ___
- ___
- ___
- ___
- ___

Provisions

- ___ ice chest and ice
- ___ sufficient food and water*
- ___ beverages
- ___ paper towels
- ___ stove and fuel
- ___ cooking gear and eating utensils
- ___ waterproof matches
- ___ water purification tablets
- ___
- ___
- ___
- ___

Rules of Safety

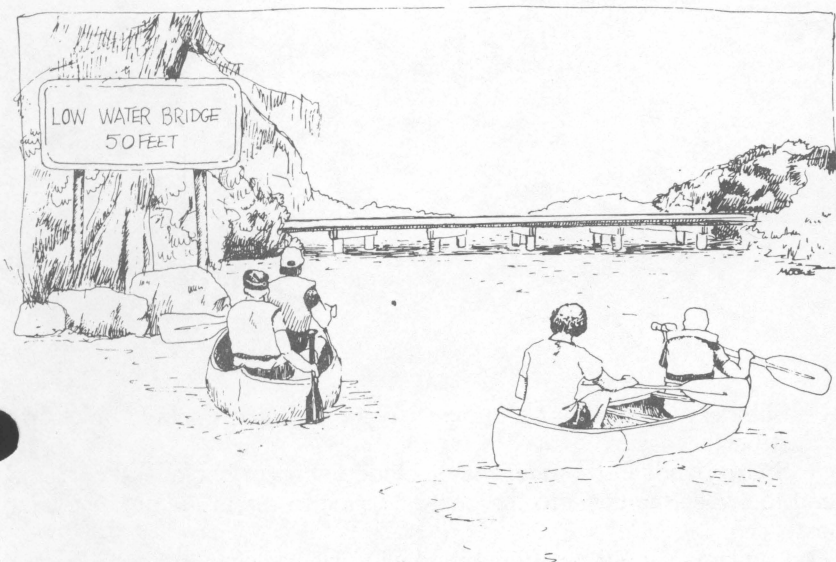
Here's to your health . . . you're at the river now.



Running rivers can be dangerous. Your safety and the safety of others may depend completely on following one or more of these safety rules.

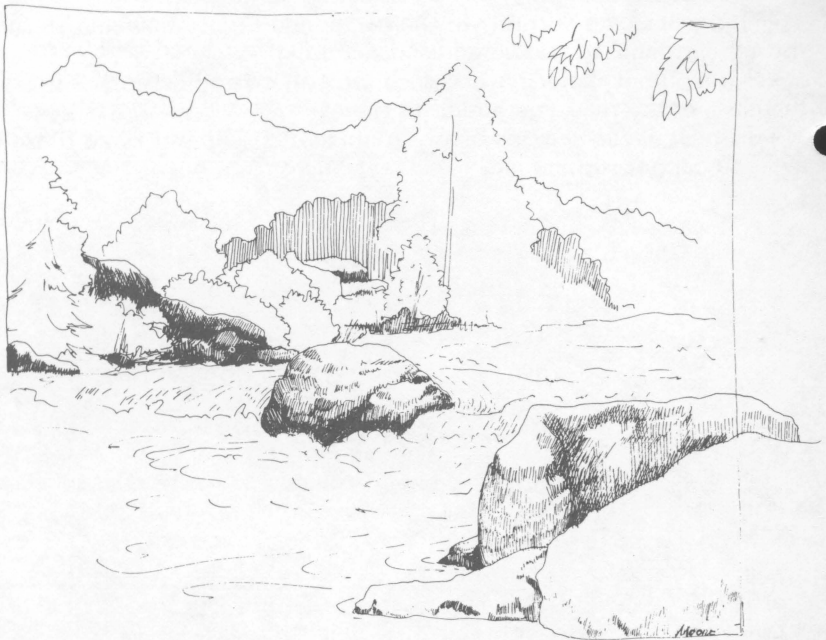
- Know how to swim. If you don't know, learn.
- *Have* and use life jackets, one per person.
- Don't overload your craft with people or with gear. The craft will not respond well. Properly distribute the weight (cargo and passengers) for comfort, paddling ease and safety.

- Don't start a trip angry. You'll need good judgment.
- Tie gear down securely to the canoe and secure bow and stern lines in the canoe (dangling ropes can be dangerous).
- Know the white water classification system and determine in advance the class of the river you intend to travel.
- Inspect water hazards before running the river and avoid those you feel you cannot run.



• *Waterfalls and low water dams* may be particularly dangerous because of difficult-to-see undertow currents at the base of the waterfall or dam. Waterfalls can be recognized in advance by both the loud sound and the almost perfectly level water line across the river. Inspection from shore is important. Portage may be advisable.

• *White water and standing waves* indicate the presence of submerged rocks. In combination, standing waves may create long stretches of rapids. Traversing these rapids requires inspection from shore and careful navigation. The water often forms a white-water free upside-down "v" (Λ), indicating the deepest and probably safest passage route. If the "v" points upstream, it is a rock or obstruction and should be avoided.



- Boulders in the water and overhanging tree limbs should be given the widest berth possible.
- Sharp bends in the river may include undercut banks and currents that tend to sweep canoes into the bank. Staying to the inside of these bends is best.
- Log jams should be approached with extreme caution because of the water current undertow. These jams also may be the home for snakes.
- “Chutes” or the funneling of the river into narrow passageways are common on Texas rivers. Always inspect them before attempting to float them.
- Trees growing in the water present another hazard, particularly when encountered in “chutes.”
- The unfortunate practice of placing fences across rivers presents an additional hazard which must be approached cautiously. Fences are often difficult to see in advance and may collect debris which increases the hazards.
- Rest when you are tired and don’t overexert. Be careful of sunburn, heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
- Leave car keys hidden at launch point or take-out (with shuttle cars), or firmly attach them to an article of clothing on your person with a strong safety pin. Don’t leave valuables unattended, even in apparently uninhabited areas.

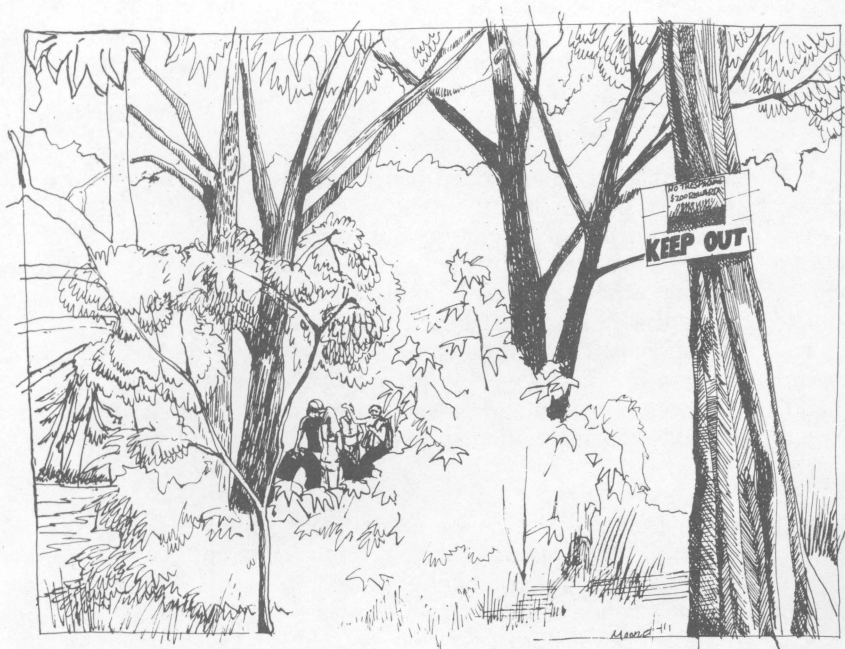
- Boats on the water are like a convoy on the road. Don't straggle behind or tailgate.
- Learn how to paddle your boat both forward and backward.
- Keep your canoe parallel with the current, especially if you capsize (grab the stern or stern rope). Forget your boat if your safety is threatened.
- If you capsize, *don't panic*. Stay upstream of your craft to avoid being pinned against something. Float with the current until you reach calmer water.
- If water fills the craft, go to shore at the first opportunity and empty the water. Even a small amount of water makes a canoe unstable.
- Don't "shove-off" canyon walls with your paddle or hold on to fixed objects (limbs, rocks, vines, etc.) while moving in swift water. These are easy ways to capsize.

- If your canoe becomes lodged broadside on a rock, shift your weight downstream to prevent filling the canoe with water from the upstream side.
- You and your partner should paddle on opposite sides of the canoe. When both persons paddle on the same side, weights tend to shift toward that side, making the canoe unstable. In addition, paddling on the same side quickly forces the canoe toward the opposite bank.
- When paddling, stay on the same side for long periods of time before switching to the opposite side. Frequent switching causes disunity in paddling for both partners and causes the canoe to take an errant course down river rather than tracking straight.

- If you must empty your canoe in a current, empty it downstream. It's impossible to roll the canoe and empty it into a current.
- Don't try to lift a swamped canoe to empty it. Roll it over and pour the water out as the canoe is raised from the water.
- Currents are always stronger than they look. Never underestimate them.

Rules of Conduct

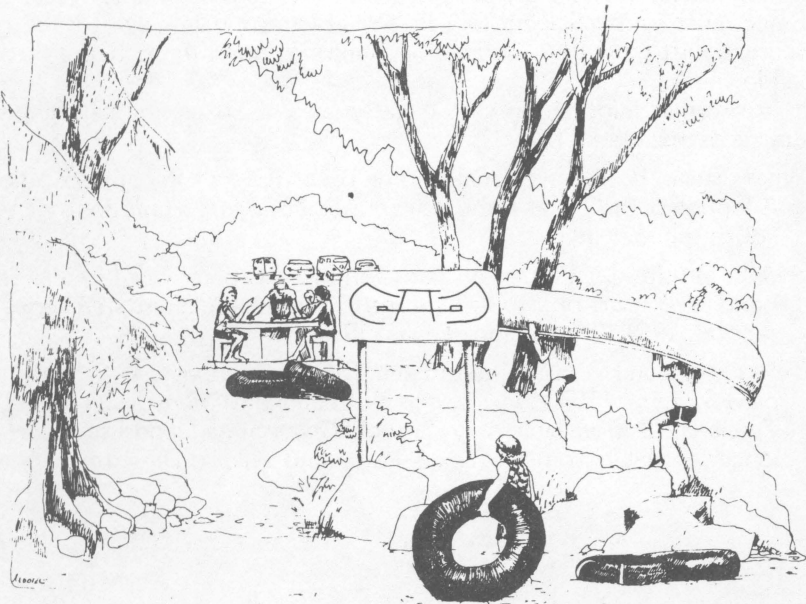
Take only pictures, leave only ripples.



The way you behave on a river trip will greatly influence the extent to which you are welcomed on different rivers. These rules of conduct are important. Learn them, practice them, teach them.

- Unless you have permission, keep off private land.
- Don't litter. Take it *all* home, including what someone else left.
- Enjoy the noise of the river, not your own. You didn't take this trip to make noise.
- Camp in designated or pre-approved areas only (public and private).
- Leave fences and trotlines alone. They're private property.
- If traveling to the river through private lands with permission, be sure to leave all gates as you find them.

- Use only public property (such as road crossings, parks, etc.) to gain access to the river, unless you have permission otherwise.
- Park only within, and completely within, road rights-of-way, not on the road surface, nor on the private land. Park above the flood-prone areas, for flash floods can occur anywhere at any time of the year.
- Plants, wild and domestic animals and other elements of the natural river environment all belong to someone, either some individual or all of us. Don't disturb, alter or deface the natural environment. Leave it for others to enjoy too.
- Most importantly, be courteous and friendly to all those you meet.



Appendix

Texas Water Laws

The laws of the State of Texas are vague concerning the rights of recreationists to use the rivers, streams, creeks and bayous of Texas. Although the public's ownership of the water itself is never questioned, use of and access to that water may depend on whether the land under or around it is public or private. If it is public (generally speaking, the larger, navigable bodies of water), the public can use it. If it is private, legal authority says that the public cannot fish or boat there.

Another problem is that it is difficult to determine where a public streambed ends and a private bank or shore begins. There is no easy formula for determining the width of a publicly owned river bed and there is no law defining the public's rights in using the banks of a navigable stream. Since most lands adjacent to Texas rivers are privately owned, the river recreationist must be cautious not to infringe upon the rights of those landowners.

For further information on the water laws of Texas, the following sources are recommended:

Biggs, Susan B. "Recreational Use of Texas Rivers - Recommendations for Adoption of the Texas Public Rivers Act," *St. Mary's Law Journal*, VII, 1973 (1975), pp. 575-593.

Senate Interim Committee on Parks and Recreation. *This Land is Still Our Land: A Report on Texas' Natural Environment*. Third in a series of reports, 1969-1973. Austin, Texas, 1973.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. *Texas Waterways: A Feasibility Report on a System of Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Waterways in Texas*. Austin, Texas, 1973. (Available only through Texas State Depository Libraries. No longer available from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.)

The River Recreation Association of Texas

The River Recreation Association of Texas (RRAT) is a non-profit organization chartered to promote the wise use and management of Texas waterways.

The organization was formed in 1970 by a group of individuals who shared a love of canoeing and the outdoors. In 1974, the Association was incorporated by the state of Texas and has continued to grow since that time, with members from all across Texas as well as several other states. The objectives of the River Recreation Association of Texas are:

- To develop an awareness of the rights of citizens of Texas and of riparian landowners concerning the use of Texas streams.
- To promote safe travel on Texas waterways as a means of healthful recreation.
- To develop environmental awareness and respect for the diverse natural waterways in Texas for the purpose of protecting these environments.
- To promote mutual respect among recreationists and private landowners for the inherent legal rights of each other.
- To offer the opportunity for members to share in an exciting and gratifying pastime.

Recommended Reading

Department of Transportation and U.S. Coast Guard. "Hypothermia and Cold Water Survival." Leaflet No. AUX-202 (10-76). Can be ordered from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744.

Josselet, Ron and Bob Evans. "Floating Texas Waterways." Leaflet No. 9000-39, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744.

Josselet, Ron and Bob Evans. *The Waterways of Texas*. Leaflet No. 9000-38, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744.

Malo, J. W. *Wilderness Canoeing*. McMillan Company, New York, New York.

Nolen, Ben M. and R. E. Norromore. *Texas Rivers and Rapids*. Humble, Texas.

Sam Houston Council, Boy Scouts of America. *Camping and Canoeing Guide to Texas Rivers*. Houston, Texas.

Taylor, P. D. and A. A. Graefe. "Evaluating Satisfaction in the River Recreation Experience in Big Bend National Park." Leaflet No. L-1638, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Agricultural Communications, Reed McDonald Building, College Station, Texas 77843.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. *An Analysis of Texas Waterways*. Austin, Texas. (May be purchased for \$4.00 by contacting: Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Department of Agricultural Communications, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843. Publication is no longer available from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.)

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