

WaterTribe Rules

"The purpose of WaterTribe is to encourage the development of boats, equipment, skills, and human athletic performance for safe and efficient coastal cruising using minimal impact human and wind powered watercraft based on kayaks, canoes, and small sailboats." – Chief, February 2000

1. The Prime Directive

All rules are subject to interpretation by the on-site race manager and/or Chief. Any dispute is settled by Chief.

2. Changes to the Rules

The rules are fine tuned after each event. Changes, additions, and deletions will occur from time-to-time when loopholes are found or clarifications are needed. Except for clerical errors, rules will not be changed within 30 days of an event or while an event is underway. However, remember the Prime Directive.

3. No Outside Authority

WaterTribe events are not subject to interpretation by any outside authority for any reason. Any participant who tries to take a class or rule dispute to an outside authority shall be immediately disqualified.

4. No Support

WaterTribe events are unsupported. Family and friends can watch your progress online and can meet you at checkpoints. Of course, meeting you at the end of the race is a great idea and can provide a nice family vacation while you are out torturing yourself. Even at checkpoints, participants may not receive material support from family, friends, shore contacts, shore crews, bank runners, or so-called team captains. Hugs and kisses and moral support are OK at checkpoints. Other than that, you are on your own.

From time to time people along the way will offer spontaneous support. Some have offered food, water, shelter, and so on. This is OK as long as it is not preplanned, and they do not transport you along the course.

Special permission may be obtained from the Race Manager or Chief if you need assistance to fix broken or lost equipment.

5. Your Safety Is Your Responsibility

You are responsible for your own safety. You are captain or crew of your own boat. You make the decisions. You must sign a waiver and agree to hold any person or entity involved with any WaterTribe event harmless and further agree not to sue for any reason what so ever. You must sign one or more waivers before each event. If the waivers are not signed, you are not part of the event.

6. Expedition-Style

You must bring a full camping load and be self sufficient for the entire event. It is OK to resupply yourself at stores found along the way. You may use restaurants, hotels, inns, campgrounds if you want as long as nothing is prearranged. Each event has a required equipment list which allows a lot of latitude in how you meet each requirement because your safety is your responsibility.

7. Event Cancellation

WaterTribe reserves the right to cancel any event at any time for any reason or for no reason. If WaterTribe decides an event must be canceled before the start, all entrance fees will be refunded minus certain expenses such as t-shirt costs, PayPal fees, and other event expenses incurred before the start. WaterTribe events usually are not cancelled due to weather, but it is your decision whether it is safe enough to launch. If anyone else forces us to cancel an event for any reason, there are no refunds.

8. No Obligation

WaterTribe is under no obligation to anyone unless there is a specific, written contract with WaterTribe. No Challenger or Race Official or Volunteer may make any verbal or implied contracts on behalf of WaterTribe.

9. Routes, Waypoints, and Checkpoints

The routes between checkpoints will be chosen by the captains of each boat. Sometimes waypoints are specified. These waypoints are not intended for precise navigation, but instead are intended to define the general route for that section of the course. All boats and crew must check in at specific checkpoints as described for each Challenge.

10. Camping Along the Way - Stealth Camping

Camping between checkpoints is encouraged, but you must follow all laws and regulations by any "controlling legal authority." If you hear the term "stealth camping," we do not mean that you break laws or trespass. We only mean that you "leave no trace" and "cause no disturbance." When in doubt, anchor out.

11. Deadlines

Deadlines will be set for each checkpoint and the finish as determined in each Challenge. Missing two deadlines will usually result in a DNF. Missing one deadline *may* result in a DNF. Some deadlines may be relaxed if you notify race management of your ETA and provide a valid reason for the delay.

If you cannot make it to a checkpoint by the deadline, you ***MUST*** call race officials and inform them of your status. If you do not contact race officials within two hours of a missed deadline, you will be reported to the Coast Guard or other authorities as a missed float plan and you may be disqualified at the discretion of the race manager. You could be liable for search and rescue costs.

Special Note: If you are outside cell phone range, an OK Message from your SPOT/inReach can be used instead of a call.

12. Weather Holds

From time-to-time the National Weather Service will issue a Small Craft Warning or Advisory. If that happens during a WaterTribe event and impacts the event course, WaterTribe will issue a **No Launch Weather Hold** or a **Prudent Weather Hold**.

Which type of Weather Hold is issued is determined by the language of the Small Craft Advisory or Warning. Further, a No Launch Weather Hold will only be issued if the event has not yet started but still depends on wording of the Small Craft Warning. Deciding to issue a No Launch Weather Hold is up to the Race Manager and/or Chief.

Note that some events may have a “Plan B” to adapt or move the launch site. See the overview for each event.

13. No Launch Weather Hold

This type of Weather Hold is only issued at the start of an event AND only if the Small Craft Warning contains language or location indicates a more severe situation. What that language might be cannot be determined ahead of time.

Skippers cannot launch and start the event if a No Launch Weather Hold has been declared. They must wait until it changes to a Prudent Weather Hold or is lifted.

All other aspects of the No Launch Weather Hold are the same as the Prudent Weather Hold.

14. Prudent Weather Hold

1. The event clock keeps ticking and the official starting time does not change.
2. All checkpoints that have not already closed are extended by the duration of the Weather Hold. This includes the Finish. This gives you plenty of time to sit out any weather hold in a safe manner.
3. If a Prudent Weather Hold is in place at the official starting time, there will not be an official launch until after the Weather Hold is lifted. However, you are all captains of your own boats and can make your own determination when it is safe to launch.
4. When any Weather Hold is lifted, boats that have not yet started must launch within 2 hours or receive a DNS.
5. WaterTribe strongly recommends that all captains stay on shore and sit out any Weather Hold. But the final decision to go or stay is up to the Captain and Crew. Why do we do this? Because depending on the actual weather at any given location, the geography, the type of boat and other factors, sometimes it is safer to go than to stay. The captain and crew decides.
6. During a Weather Hold, all course recommendations and requirements are lifted, and captains may choose whatever safe route to the next checkpoint.
7. Since some of our checkpoints, launching sites, and finish sites are at commercial locations, we may have to adapt. It is up to you and your shore contact to receive any changes.
8. Notice that we won't cancel a race in the future unless we have a very extended Weather Hold lasting a week or more. Under these rules, the NCC2013 and NCPC2013 would not have been cancelled.
9. Note that a hurricane watch or warning will force a cancellation.
10. In the future, if an event is cancelled due to weather, acts of God, war, terrorism, or for any reason, No refunds will be given, but you will retain a partial credit for the same event in the following year.

15. Dropping Out

Pay Attention: If you decide to drop out of the race, you are on your own. If you do not inform race officials that you have dropped out, you may be liable for search and rescue expenses. Sending a SPOT/inReach Help Message indicates dropping out. That should be immediately followed by an OK Message. Help/OK means dropping out. Don't expect us to come and help you - see rules 4, 5, 6, 8, and 18. Also review the Warning and the Waiver.

Sometimes, if possible, we can help to pick you up. Call the CP Captain closest to your location or call the Race Manager. Maybe they can arrange a pick up. Maybe not. We make no promises. We are not obligated to pick you up.

Note that this happened to me (Chief) once. I had to drop out. What did I do? I hitched a ride to the nearest town, called a car rental company, and took care of it myself. That is what we mean by Expedition-Style and No Support. It's part of the whole experience.

16. Correct Use of SPOT/inReach Required

- a. At least one working SPOT/inReach is required for all boats.
- b. You should be in Tracking Mode while moving on the water. If you don't have a tracking subscription, you can send OK messages about once an hour instead.
- c. Send an OK Message when Stopping for a period of time OR at a checkpoint OR after a dangerous situation has been overcome - like a storm. Note that the OK Message at the checkpoint is your official time for that checkpoint. If you don't send an OK Message, you weren't there.
- d. Send a Custom Message when stopping to camp or anchor for a period of time. This can also be used for a checkpoint. Note that if you have an old SPOT/inReach that does not provide a Custom Message, then use the OK Message.
- e. Help Message followed by OK Message - dropping out. Call your shore contact to arrange any actual help you need.
- f. SOS or 911 followed by Help should only be used in life threatening situations. You may be responsible for search and rescue costs.
- g. Read your SPOT/inReach instruction manual
- h. You may want to keep your SPOT/inReach in a waterproof bag with a desiccant pack. Or have a backup SPOT/inReach ready to go. We have had issues with leaks.
- i. You must have practice with using your SPOT/inReach and it must be located where you can see it and operate it.

17. PLB Is Required

Each participant must have their own working PLB attached to their lifejacket. No exceptions.

18. Transportation During and After Events

Transportation back to your car from the finish line or your drop out point for any challenge is up to you.

19. Coast Guard and Regulation Compliance

Each boat and crew shall be required to comply with all Coast Guard and local regulations. A lifejacket or PFD must be worn at all times when on the water. However, enforcement will be up to regular law enforcement agents -- not race officials.

20. Some Equipment Required

There is a list of required and suggested equipment that applies to all WaterTribe events. See the lists located at [WaterTribeRequiredEquipment](#) .

Note that other equipment that is not included in these lists may be required for safe and efficient participation in these events. Such additional equipment is your responsibility.

21. Helping Others

You may help other WaterTribers unload their boat and position it on the launch beach. However, no assistance of any kind is permitted during the launch. The ability to launch from above the high water mark is an intentional filter and must be accomplished by the captain and crew, if any, without assistance.

After the launch, you will not be disqualified due to helping another boat that is in distress. In fact you must come to the aid of any WaterTribe Challenger who needs assistance if doing so does not endanger you, your crew, or your boat. You may even tow another WaterTribe Challenger, raft up, provide food or water, just about anything without any penalty to you as long as you are both in the race.

On the other hand, outside assistance is not allowed except for emergency rescues.

IMPORTANT: Any WaterTriber who needs help such as towing, food, water, or anything else that indicates the lack of ability to safely take part in WaterTribe events may be DQed and/or barred from subsequent WaterTribe events.

22. Setup and Start

- a. No boat may be placed on the beach until the captain has registered and the captain and crew have signed waivers.
- b. Boats may be carried across the grass by one or two registered racers.
- c. Boats may be rolled across the grass on boat carts by registered racers.
- d. As of 2025, no vehicle access to the launch beach is allowed by the Park. See the [Special Launch Rules PDF](#) for more information.
- e. Only the captain and crew may launch the boat at the start. No other racer may aid in the launch. Rollers, slides, tracks, anchors, or other launching aids must be stored in the boat and may not be deployed until the race starts.
- f. Deflated Beach Rollers can be put in place on registration day. ***They cannot be inflated until AFTER ROLLCALL ON LAUNCH DAY.***

23. Ad Hoc Teams

These are informal and setup during the event. Each boat carries all of the required equipment. Ad Hoc teams might be setup to cross Tampa Bay or some other section of the course to provide safety in rough weather. After the agreed crossing the boats can split up and go their separate ways. An Ad Hoc team can stay together for the whole event - or not. It's up to them. They register as separate boats and do not enter a team name in the registration. The boats in an ad hoc team do not have to be in the same class.

24. Formal Teams

A formal team will register each boat and make sure to enter the exact team name for each registration. Equipment can be shared. A team must stay together within sight and within hailing distance of each other. If any boat in a team needs to drop out, they must do so at a checkpoint and all required equipment must be with any boats that continue. Note that a SPOT/inReach must be in each boat, Each person must have a properly configured lifejacket including a PLB. And each boat must have a waterproof VHF. And the team must have a communication protocol setup regarding the VHFs. Boats in a formal team do not have to be in the same class.

25. Special Case for Teams

Kruger canoes and other class 1 or 3 canoes/kayaks can be catamaraned together as an Ad Hoc Team or a Formal Team. Each boat is registered separately. The captains decide whether to use a formal team name or not. Also, note that the boats do not have to remain catamaraned. I recommend doing it Ad Hoc, but the choice is yours. Also note that this does not put them in class 5.

26. Disqualification

If you are disqualified for any reason either on the beach during inspection or during the event, you will not get a refund. Anyone DQed will not be allowed in any future WaterTribe event.

27. Danger

These are dangerous adventure races across open or moving water and you may encounter sharks, rays, whales, alligators, poisonous snakes, pythons, bears and other critters that bite or sting or suck your blood. Tides and weather will be a factor as well as numerous power boats, both pleasure and commercial. Read the entire WARNING: [WaterTribeWarning.pdf](#) .

And be prepared for adventure!

DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE, FORGET THE PRIME DIRECTIVE.