



52nd Annual Connecticut River Raft Race

Start: The Shoals off Gildersleeve Island
Finish: Birdon Marina

July 25th, 2026 @ 10:00 a.m.

Participants can register for the Raft Race by submitting the following **prior to or on the day of the Captains' Meeting:**

- A notarized entry form
- A hold harmless agreement signed by all crew members
- All registration fees

The entry fee is **\$25 per crew member**. Entry forms can be printed from our website: www.ctriverrafttrace.org.

Important: All raft entries must have a support boat to tow the raft to the start and takeout points and to provide emergency support while on the racecourse.

CAPTAIN'S MEETING & REGISTRATION July 11th, 2026 @ 10:00 a.m.

Date & Location: Birdon Marina, 37 Riverview Street, Portland, CT

Attendance: Attendance is **mandatory** for all team Captains who have not pre-registered by mail. This meeting also serves as the final registration deadline for the event. Crew members are strongly encouraged to attend.

Notary Service: A Notary Public will be available at the meeting to certify signatures on entry forms. Two forms of identification are required. Captains may also have their forms notarized in advance at any bank or town hall.

Purpose of the Meeting: The Captains' Meeting provides important event details and is especially helpful for new participants. Topics covered will include (but are not limited to): Race rules, Competition classes, Awards, Safety requirements and equipment, Raft inspection, Support boats, Parking arrangements, Launching procedures, Towing to the mooring areas, Starting location and cannon, Racecourse description, Anticipated race duration, Navigation, Finish line location, Amenities at the finish area, End-of-day procedures, Any last-minute developments or instructions. The race committee will also address questions and comments from the audience.

Additional Information: The race committee will distribute rafting information and materials as needed and there will be event shirts, beverage koozies, and other raft race swag will be available for purchase.

Pets Policy: Pets are not allowed at the Captains' Meeting or during the Raft Race to ensure the safety of all participants, guests, spectators, and marina patrons.



SOCIAL HOUR AFTER MEETING

Once all participants have registered and the event information has been presented, everyone is invited to stay for a casual social hour.

Many participants bring rafting memorabilia to share, including photo albums, newspaper articles, magazine features, and other interesting items for everyone to browse. Feel free to bring your own cold beverages and snacks to enjoy.

This year, the Captains' Meeting will be held at the upriver end of the marina near the campground area. Seasoned rafters will be swapping stories from past races, discussing raft improvements and new ideas, and sharing tales of both glory and misery from last year's event. New participants are especially encouraged to listen in, introduce themselves, and ask questions — the veterans are always happy to share their knowledge and experience.

This is also a great time to explore the marina grounds, check out the launching areas, and visit the shoreline beach near the finish line.

After the social hour, we'll be organizing a volunteer work detail to help clean the finish area. Spring floods often leave behind debris along the shoreline, so we work together to clear it and keep the area safe. This is our way of saying thank you to Birdon Marine for generously allowing us to use their grounds for the event.

RACE RULES & SAFETY ADVICE

The Raft Race Committee promotes a safe, family-friendly event. We ask all participants to compete responsibly and sportsmanlike: follow the safety rules, assist fellow rafters when needed, and above all, enjoy the day. Our excellent safety record makes this annual event possible — and it depends on everyone's cooperation. **Safety comes first!** Watch out for one another, lend a hand when needed, and have fun.

Raft Race Rules

1. No pets are allowed at the Captains' Meeting or during the Raft Race. Service animals are exempt by law.
2. No glass containers are allowed at any time.
3. All entries must have enough designated drivers for their crew at all Raft Race functions.
4. All minors must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.
5. All rafts must be human powered only. Propulsion may include poles, oars, paddles, paddlewheels, sails, propellers, flippers, or any combination of these.
6. Sweeper boats can be power-driven but cannot pass any human-powered raft unless they are performing official duties or providing emergency assistance.
7. All sweepers must be state-registered and meet U.S. Coast Guard requirements.

Safety Requirements

8. Captains must show all crew members where the Coast Guard-approved life jackets are stored and conduct an "abandon ship" drill before launching.
9. Every participant must have a Coast Guard-approved life jacket in their possession and should always wear it during the race.
10. All crew members must wear sneakers or other closed-toe footwear suitable for water and rough surfaces.
11. All minors must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.
12. Sun-sensitive participants should wear sunscreen, a hat with a brim, and appropriate sun protection.
13. Each raft must carry enough drinking water for the entire crew for the duration of the race.
14. Every entry must carry a basic first aid kit and garbage bags for their own trash.

Raft Construction & Inspection

15. All rafts must be homemade construction. No commercially manufactured hulls are allowed.
16. Minimum raft size is 4 ft x 8 ft (measured at the waterline) and must safely support the entire crew.
17. The raft deck must be securely fastened to the frame, and the frame must be securely fastened to the hulls or flotation devices.
18. No inner tubes or inflatable devices are allowed as flotation.

19. Nails are prohibited from below the waterline. All sheet metal edges must be turned over and taped. Any protruding bolts must be cut, filed, and taped.
20. Rafts with open hulls (no bulkheads) must have Styrofoam flotation securely fastened under the deck.
21. Each raft must have a suitable anchor with line and a strong towline, both securely attached.
22. Kayaks and canoes have no construction restrictions and do not require pre-launch inspection.
23. Rafts may be inspected prior to launching and may require modifications at the discretion of the Race Committee.

During the Race

24. All crew members must remain aboard their raft for the entire race.
25. Single kayaks and canoes should use the buddy system or team up with other entries.
26. All entries must complete the entire course under their own power to be eligible for awards. Inform scorers if your raft has accepted a tow.
27. No diving or jumping into the water from any vessel at any time.
28. All entries must have a support boat for towing to the start, emergency assistance, and takeout.
29. Any raft that is floundering or has not finished by 2:00 p.m. will be towed in.
30. All entries must clearly display their class designation and race number in plain view.

General

31. Anyone exhibiting unsafe behavior will be disqualified and may be permanently banned from future events.
32. All vessels must be removed from the river by the end of the day unless other arrangements have been made with the marina.
33. Derelict or abandoned vessels are subject to police action, fines from the D.E.P., and permanent disqualification.

EVENT SAFETY

Health & Safety Protocols

COVID-19 safety protocols remain in effect for the entire event. All participants must follow current local health ordinances.

Emergency Support

The racecourse may be monitored and medical assistance provided (if available) by one or more of the following: U.S. Coast Guard, Connecticut DEP Marine Patrol, Middletown and/or Portland Police & Fire Departments. Additional support may be provided by: Raft Race Committee members and volunteers, Birdon Marina staff, U.S. Power Squadron (District 1), and Sweeper Class rafts.

Emergency Assistance

Participants must obey all race rules and safety requirements. If you see someone in trouble or an emergency occurs, you are required to assist as quickly and safely as possible. Help until a Sweeper Class raft arrives. Race times will be adjusted for participants who stop to provide emergency assistance.

Vessel in Distress

If your raft is taking on water or in danger of sinking, immediately head to the nearest shore and beach your raft.

Mandatory Tow

All rafts must accept a tow from a Sweeper Class raft if they are floundering mid-race or have not finished the course by 2:00 p.m.

Safety First

Safety is our top priority. Please act responsibly and help others when needed. Anyone acting in a reckless or unsafe manner will be disqualified and may face permanent disqualification from future events.

RAFT RACE CLASSES

A – America Class

These are the most competitive, high-performance rafts. They are the fastest entries, with some capable of completing the racecourse in under one hour.

C – Cruising Class

These are the semi-competitive rafts that make up most entries. They typically complete the course in a few hours.

H – Horrendous Class (& Minimum Requirements)

These are the largest & most ambitious rafts - with biggest crews - which must meet the minimum requirements.

- Deck size: 10 ft x 24 ft
- Crew size: 15 people

S – Sweeper Class

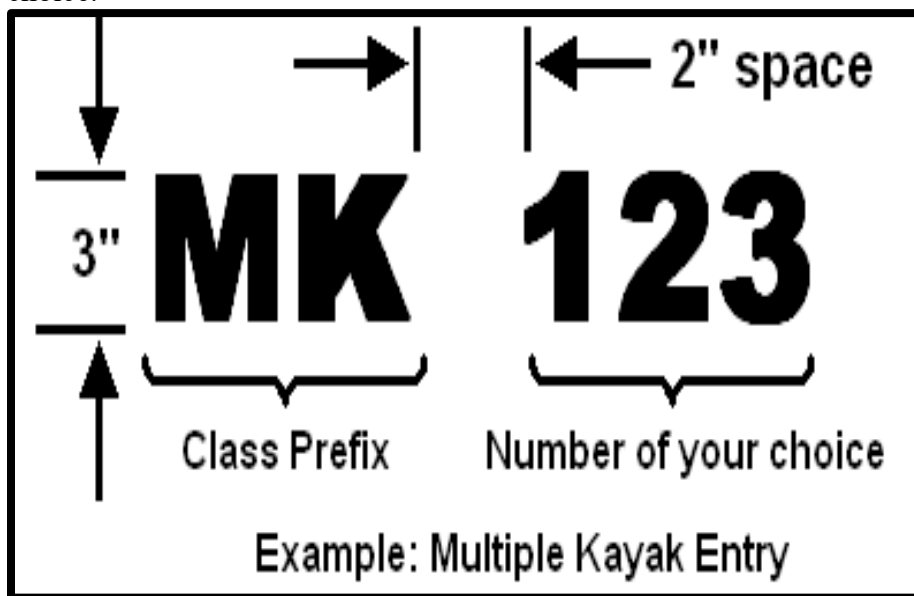
These are power-driven support boats. They may not pass human-powered rafts except when performing official duties or providing emergency assistance to maintain safety.

Kayak & Canoe Classes

- **SK – Single Kayak:** Paddled by one person for the entire race.
- **MK – Multiple Kayak:** Paddled by two or more people for the entire race.
- **SC – Single Canoe:** Paddled by one person for the entire race.
- **MC – Multiple Canoe:** Paddled by two or more people for the entire race.

REGISTRATION NUMBER FORMAT

Each class has a letter prefix assigned to it. This represents the first letter or letters of the class name. This is assigned based on what category you're entered in. This is followed by a one, two, or three-digit number of your choice.



Registration Number Requirements:

- Must be at least 3 inches high.
- Must use colors that contrast with the background.
- Must be in block form (solid, easy-to-read letters/numbers).
- Must be painted on or securely attached to both sides of the vessel.
- Must be clearly visible and legible from at least 100 feet away.
- Must read from left to right on both sides of the vessel.

If the finish line scorekeepers cannot clearly see your registration number, your race position may not be recorded.

Examples of correct registration numbers: A 57 (America Class) - C 756 (Cruising Class) - S 68 (Sweeper) SK 158 (Single Kayak) - MK 123 (Multiple Kayak) - SC 007 (Single Canoe) - MC 999 (Multiple Canoe).

RAFT INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS

Rafts may be inspected by the Raft Race Committee before launching. The Committee may require modifications or disqualify any raft at its discretion. The primary goal of the inspection is to ensure rafts have no obvious mechanical issues and are constructed safely with particular attention to the following:

- All raw edges on sheet metal must be turned over and securely taped.
- Any protruding long bolts must be sawed off, filed smooth, and taped.

Any issues identified during inspection must be corrected before the raft is allowed to launch.

Early Launches (Before Saturday, July 25th)

If you plan to launch your raft before race day the raft Captain must contact a Raft Race Committee member in advance to schedule an inspection. This is especially important for first-time racers and first-time raft builders. A complete list of Committee members, including phone numbers and email addresses, is on the last page of the rulebook. Please reach out when your raft is ready for inspection.

Preparation for Inspection and Race Day

- Be prepared to make any required modifications on the spot.
- On race day, bring hand tools, extra fasteners, rope, duct tape, and other supplies to perform modifications or repairs as directed by the Committee.

Safety is our top priority: These rules are in place to protect you and your crew. Thank you for your cooperation.

SUPPORT BOATS

Launching from Birdon Marina or Portland Boat Works

Participants launching at these spots will need a support boat to tow their raft upriver to the starting area. Because many boats are tied to the docks and moorings, exercise extra caution when maneuvering.

Do not attempt to float or paddle your raft upriver by hand. Obstructions, river currents, and the distance make it unsafe and impractical. The four-mile trip upriver can take one to two hours, so plan to depart with plenty of time.

Alternate Launch Site (Recommended for First-Timers and Participants with Underpowered Support Boats)

If your support boat cannot tow your raft upriver; use the alternate site near the Portland Fairgrounds. This location is approximately ¼ mile upriver from the starting area. You will simply drift a short distance downriver to reach the starting line. This option is strongly recommended for first-time participants and/or underpowered support boats that work best with the river current than against it. Full details of this launch site are provided in the next section of the booklet.

RAFT LAUNCHING FACILITIES

1 - Primary Launch Site

The closest public boat launch to the raft race finish area is at **Portland Boat Works Marina**, located at 1 Grove Street, Portland, CT 06480. It is approximately ½ mile east (downriver) from Birdon Marina.

- **Ramp Hours (Weekends):** 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
- **A ramp pass is required** for each use. The fee is **not included** in your race entry. You must obtain the pass from the main office during business hours.
- For the most up-to-date information, visit www.portlandboatworks.com or call **860-342-1085**.
- **Early Launch (before 8:00 a.m.):** You must purchase your ramp pass in advance during the week.

Parking & Launch Procedures

Portland Boat Works provides parking at the launch ramp for tow vehicles and raft trailers. To minimize congestion on a busy race day:

- Prepare your raft (assembly, loading equipment, etc.) in the parking area before backing down the ramp.
- Only back down the ramp when your raft and support boat are fully ready.

- Launch your support boat first, followed by your raft.
- Immediately move your raft away from the ramp to the nearby dock so other boats can use the ramp.
- Do not linger in the launch area.

Race day will have heavy traffic with many rafts launching alongside regular marina activity. Arriving early and following these procedures will significantly reduce waiting times and frustration for everyone.

2 - Secondary Launch Site

Use this site if your raft, canoe, or kayak is small enough to carry by hand.

Location

- A sandy shore at the western end of Birdon Marina, just upriver from the last boat slip and mooring dock.
- This area is adjacent to the finish line and the old campground.

Launching Instructions

- There is ample space to assemble and launch your vessel.
- The riverbank is muddy, so wear old shoes or water shoes to protect your feet from submerged sharp objects.

Vehicle & Parking Rules

After offloading your equipment, promptly move your vehicle and trailer out of the campground area. Park in the open area directly in front of the large boat sheds, next to the boats stored on land. Do not block any vehicles already parked there.

Getting to the Starting Line

When using the primary or secondary launch sites, you must tow your vessel about four miles upriver to reach the starting location. Depending on the horsepower of your boat, it could take a few hours or longer. It is your responsibility to plan accordingly for leaving early enough to reach the starting area by 10:00 A.M. If you are unable to tow your raft upriver, use the alternate launch site instead. It is best suited for rafts using underpowered support boats, as these boats are far more effective when moving with the river current rather than fighting it.

3 - Alternate Launch Site

This private boat ramp is located about ¼ mile upriver from the starting area, near the Portland fairgrounds. It is a convenient option for new raft racers, Kayaks, and canoes; that eliminates the need to tow your vessel upriver to the starting area

- **How to use it**
After launching, paddle across the river to the island and float downstream to the starting line.
- **Important limitations**
This site is not suitable for large rafts due to the steep ramp, fast current, and deep water.
- **Parking**
After launching, please move your vehicle to a public road or the finish area.
- **Location Note**
Because this is a private ramp, the exact address is **not published** in the rulebook or on our website. It will be announced at the Captain's Meeting and there will be a handout for its location stapled to the racecourse maps. If you pre-entered by mail and plan to use this site, contact a race committee member in advance for directions. This ramp may only be used on race day. Please respect the landowner's property and follow any instructions they provide.

4 - Other Launch Sites

You may use other spots along the river, but you must first obtain permission from the landowner or marina operator. Always be respectful of private property and local businesses.

PARKING AND FINISH LINE AREA

Parking at Birdon Marina is preferable because it places your crew members' cars right next to the sandy riverbank at the finish line, which is closest to the old campgrounds, the band pavilion, and the spectator areas.

- Please do not park near the band pavilion, spectator areas, or shoreline. These spaces will be used for finish line activities on race day, and we need plenty of room for participants and spectators to move around safely.
- For your convenience, we recommend leaving equipment, lawn chairs, and coolers in your vehicle rather than loading them onto your race vessel. Once the race is over, you can simply return to your car to retrieve what you need.
- All participants are guests of the marinas. Please be courteous, respectful, and on your best behavior.

MOORING EARLY-LAUNCHED RAFTS

Rafts launched before Saturday's race date must be moored securely in a safe location overnight. A recommended spot is slightly upriver of the last boat slip at Birdon Marina. This location makes it much easier to reach the race start on race day. If you are going to moor in this area:

- Leave enough space for your raft to drift a little without contacting other vessels.
- Use two anchors to minimize movement, as tides and currents shift constantly.
- For best security, pull your raft up onto the shore and tie it to a tree.

This is a popular mooring area—each year many rafts launch on Thursday or Friday afternoon and gather here, so the site is easy to find. Many veteran participants launch their rafts a few days before the race. This approach helps them:

- Avoid potential delays at the launch ramp on Saturday morning.
- Take time to organize equipment and finish any final assembly.
- Get a full night's rest before the race, knowing everything is ready.

The extra preparation provides peace of mind and saves your energy for race day.

START AT GILDERSLEEVE ISLAND

The race start is located in sheltered waters off the shoals at the southern (downriver) tip of Gildersleeve Island, well outside the main channel. The main channel runs along the Portland side of the island. Directly across from the start area is Petzold's Marina, with Middlesex Marina situated nearby and slightly upriver. The riverfronts by both marinas are in a no-wake zone, so passing boats travel slowly and create little to no wake. These conditions provide a naturally safe starting location.

RACE COURSE

Start: Southern Shoals of Gildersleeve Island

Finish: Birdon Marina

From Gildersleeve Island, the racecourse follows the Connecticut River downstream for approximately 3.6 nautical miles. For the shortest route, stay close to the eastern shore.

This downriver leg offers scenic views of forests, meadows, and abundant wildlife. At the halfway point, Wilcox Island comes into view. On the eastern side of the river lie the historic Brownstone Quarries, where

early European settlers once cut stone for local homes and buildings. The quarries are now home to the Brownstone Exploration & Discovery Park (<http://brownstonepark.com>), which offers a wide variety of recreational activities.

After passing Wilcox Island, vessels will go under the Arrigoni Bridge, which carries Routes 66 and 17 across the river. A short distance beyond the bridge is an old railroad swing bridge. Meriden Motor Boat Club comes into view next to the eastern shore. At this point, Middletown's Harbor Park will be visible on the western shore, signaling the start of the final leg. The river then gradually turns eastward as it flows toward Birdon Marina.

A racecourse diagram is included at the end of this booklet for a general overview. A larger, more detailed version showing navigation information and water depths will be available at the Captains' Meeting. A downloadable map and chart are also posted on the raft race website:

<http://www.ctriverrafrace.org/racecoursemap.pdf>

STARTING PROCEDURES

Our Cannoneer, Lord Gildersleeve, will position the starting cannon at Petzold's Marina, directly across the river from the start of the race.

For your safety and comfort, please keep a safe distance from the cannon—the report is very loud. Do not moor or position your raft directly in front of it.

The race will begin as close to 10:00 a.m. as possible. If rafts are still arriving or being towed upriver after 10:00 a.m., we may have a short delay. Once all rafts are in position, the National Anthem will be played, followed immediately by the starting cannon.

Thank you for your patience. Starting together as a full group makes the race more enjoyable and fairer for everyone.

STAGGERED START

When the starting cannon fires, the first wave of vessels will depart. This includes all **Cruising Class** and **Horrendous Class rafts**, along with all canoes and kayaks.

Approximately 10 minutes later, a second cannon blast will signal the start of the **America Class** rafts.

This staggered start is designed to keep all competitors closer together throughout the race. The America Class rafts are expected to catch up to and pass the first-wave vessels (rafts, canoes, and kayaks) around the midpoint of the course.

Sweeper Class rafts will start last. They must not pass any human-powered vessel (canoes or kayaks) unless they are performing official duties or providing emergency assistance to a vessel in distress.

All elapsed race times will be adjusted to account for the staggered starts when determining final finisher positions.

NAVIGATION ON THE RIVER

Navigation on the Connecticut River must be taken seriously. Water depths along the racecourse vary dramatically—some sections are only a few feet deep, while others drop off sharply. The riverbed is equally unpredictable and may consist of soft sand, mud, weeds, rocks, or submerged hazards. Never dive or jump into the water from any vessel.

Tidal influences can create strong undercurrents and whirlpools in certain areas. Other boats will be on the river, so always maintain a sharp lookout for all boat traffic.

Listen carefully to the navigation instructions provided at the Captains' Meeting and thoroughly review all handouts and charts you receive.

FINISH AT BIRDON MARINA

The racecourse ends on the northern shore of the river, approximately 300 feet above first set of boat docks at Birdon Marina. Look for a set of anchored buoys painted with a black & white checkered pattern floating just offshore and adjacent to that should be a black-and-white checkered banner onshore. This marks the official finish line.

As you near the finish:

- Ensure your raft's registration number is clearly visible and unobstructed.
- Pass close finish line officials so they can record your registration number and elapsed time.

After Crossing the Finish Line

- Immediately head ashore to the sandy riverbank. The area near the finish line is a no-wake zone due to its proximity to the marina, creating a safe environment for all participants to exit the water.

ANTICIPATED RACE DURATION

The Raft Race starts at 10:00 a.m. and ends at 2:00 p.m., giving participants 4 hours to complete the course. All entries must accept a tow from a Sweeper Class raft if they are floundering mid-race or have not finished by 2:00 p.m. Finish-line activities at Birdon Marina will begin once racing is complete and will continue through most of the afternoon, with festivities winding down around 5:00 p.m.

SPECTATOR SPOTS ALONG THE RIVER

There is no single location that offers a full view of the entire race. The best way to experience the event is from the comfort of your own boat, traveling alongside the competitors.

Spectators can catch glimpses of the rafts from many vantage points along the Connecticut River. Good options include:

- The marinas located along the racecourse
- Boatyards (these are on private property—please ask permission before entering)
- The cliffs adjacent to the Brownstone Quarries
- The Arrigoni Bridge
- Any other accessible spots along the riverbank that provide a clear view
- Middletown's Harbor Park also has public binoculars mounted on pedestals, available for 25¢

RIVER TIDES

The Connecticut River is influenced by tides, with significant water level changes between high and low tide.

The best time to launch or retrieve vessels is during high tide. At that time, there is more water covering the boat ramps, making it safer and easier to maneuver. This greatly reduces the chance of going too far, driving off the end of the ramp, hitting mud, and getting stuck.

Saturday - July 25, 2026	
<u>Connecticut River Tides</u>	
Low Tide	6:18 a.m.
High Tide	11:16 a.m.
Low Tide	6:09 p.m.
High Tide	11:36 p.m.
Sunrise	5:39 a.m.
Sunset	8:15 p.m.

Participants who moor their vessels must leave sufficient slack in the mooring ropes to accommodate changing water levels. Watercraft pulled up onto beaches must be placed well above the high-water mark and securely tied off to a tree or anchor.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO FINISH AREA

Guests are invited to Birdon Marina for the post-race festivities. Everyone is encouraged to come to enjoy the finish area, explore the shoreline, and check out the colorful variety of rafts. Spectators can listen to live music at the band pavilion, dance, mingle with participants, and soak up the fun, friendly camaraderie of the raft racers.

For many years now, the public has been welcome to attend the raft race and take part in the activities at the finish line. The Race Committee hopes this more visible location will boost awareness of the event and help grow participation in future years. This site also makes it easy for racers to invite friends and family to join them for a full day of excitement.

In previous years, the finish line was on Dart Island. While beautiful, the island's location kept the event largely out of sight for the public, as it was only accessible by boat. The Race Committee is now focused on expanding the event, improving accessibility, and building a family-friendly atmosphere.

We hope you'll come out and to see what raft racing is all about!

AMENITIES AT THE FINISH

The finish area at Birdon Marina offers plenty of fun activities throughout the day. The riverfront is especially inviting, with a sandy beach lined with shady trees that also provide a safe place to tie off rafts. Kayakers and canoeists can easily pull their boats onto the beach and relax in the shade alongside other participants. Many visitors stake out a shady spot, set up a picnic, and enjoy the water. Others fire up their grills and cook a meal right by the river. Additional beach activities include socializing, swimming, sunbathing, and building sandcastles.

A local band will once again be on hand this year to provide live music for listening and dancing. Feel free to bring a volleyball net, cornhole boards, or other lawn games for friendly competition with your group.

There will be tables set up where you can purchase official raft race T-shirts and other souvenirs. An awards ceremony will take place at 3:00 p.m., where all winners will be announced and honored.

Portable restrooms will be available for your convenience, and garbage cans will be placed nearby. Please remember to bring your own grill—community grills will not be available. Never leave your grill unattended and be sure all hot coals are fully extinguished before you leave.

SWIMMING

There are no lifeguards on duty at the finish line area. Anyone entering the water does so at their own risk. Please, follow these important safety guidelines:

- Always use the buddy system.
- Children must be supervised by a responsible adult swimmer.
- The river bottom drops off quickly near shore and can become very deep. Young children should wear a properly fitted flotation device (such as life jackets, water wings, or puddle jumpers).
- Feel free to bring inflatable toys, inner tubes, sandcastle buckets, and similar items for play.
- Wear appropriate footwear or old sneakers to protect against sharp objects hidden in the water or sand.
- No diving or jumping from rafts at any time.

Please be courteous and stay alert. If you see anyone in distress, notify others immediately and render assistance to help prevent accidents, injuries, or damage to nearby watercraft.

SCOREBOARD

Raft race results will be posted on a large scoreboard near the band pavilion. The scoreboard features a fun illustration that participants are encouraged to sign, mark, or color—leaving their team's personal touch. Markers will be provided, and everyone is invited to join in!

NON - PROFIT STATUS

The Connecticut River Raft Race, Inc. is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All profits from the race are donated to a designated children's charity, typically in the Portland or Middletown area. Funds are raised through racer entry fees, T-shirt and beverage koozie sales, other merchandise, and private donations. Our financial records are open and transparent. If you would like to review our books, please contact our Treasurer, Richard Bartkus. We also welcome suggestions for future charity recipients. If you know of a deserving children's charity in the area, please share your recommendation with any Race Committee member.

VOLUNTEERS

Organizing the Connecticut River Raft Race takes a lot of work, and we warmly welcome any and all volunteers who would like to help.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month. These meetings cover important planning topics such as permits, insurance, advertising, T-shirt design, rulebook distribution, and event logistics.

On race day, we also appreciate any extra hands. Volunteers assist at the launch ramp, manage the finish line area and record finish positions and times, help with towing, clean up the spectator area, and load equipment.

If you're interested in volunteering—whether before the event or on race day—please reach out to any Committee member. A complete list of committee members, including phone numbers and email addresses, is printed on the last page of this publication.

RAFT RACE AWARDS

The awards ceremony will take place between 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. at the band pavilion. Awards will be presented to the fastest captain in each race class. Additional awards will also be given in the four special categories outlined below.

Raft Classes

**America
Cruising
Sweeper**

Kayak Classes

**Single Kayak
Multiple Kayak**

Canoe Classes

**Single Canoe
Multiple Canoe**

Special Category Awards

Howie Rauch - fastest raft

Becky Thatcher - all female crew

American Heritage - most traditional raft

Committee's Choice - exceptional watercraft & crew

END – OF – DAY VESSEL REMOVAL

All race vessels must be removed from the river by the end of the day's activities. Any derelict or abandoned vessels are subject to police action, fines from the D.E.E.P., and permanent disqualification from the event.

Please use extra caution when floating downstream to the boat ramp. We strongly recommend having your support boat assist you.

Once you reach the ramp, please be patient. Many vessels will arrive at the same time, and marina patrons will also be using the ramp. Keep traffic moving, share the ramp courteously, and **do not unload equipment at the ramp itself**. After your vessel is pulled from the water, move it promptly to the parking lot.

Tip to reduce congestion: If your raft or vessel is small, consider pulling it out near the west end of the marina at the finish area instead. This helps everyone get out more quickly and smoothly.

RAFT RACE HISTORY

Race Course History

The Connecticut River Raft Race has had several different courses since it began:

- 1975: Deep River Landing to Goat Island
- Next: Hurd State Park to Haddam Meadows
- Then: Arrigoni Bridge to Dart Island State Park
- Current course: Gildersleeve Island to Birdon Marina

Race Leadership

Franklin Burton served as the first Race Chairman. He was followed by Ken Fischberg, then Malcolm Chapman. Subsequent leaders included Bob Niland, Dan Otto Pritchard, and Shawna Bartkus. Dan Otto Pritchard currently serves as Race President.

Notable Winners

Only a small number of America Class rafts have achieved the highest honor in raft race history. The most successful boats are:

- Lee Jet – 19 lifetime victories
- Millenium Buzzard – 5 lifetime victories
- Raft America and Triceratops – 4 wins each
- Wet Dream (trilogy) – winner of the first three inaugural races
- Triceratops, Lin Lee, Knotty Gurl – 3 lifetime
- Last Chance – 2 victories

Other notable champions include: No Corporation, EB Exterminator, USA/Coca-Cola, Millennium Buzzard, and Drinkasaurus Becks.

America Class Winners throughout the Years

1975	Wet Dream I	2001	Triceratops
1976	Wet Dream II	2002	Lee Jet
1977	Wet Dream III	2003	Lee Jet
1978	River Wurst	2004	Lee Jet
1979	Rubber Lips 1	2005	Lee Jet
1980	Last Chance	2006	Triceratops
1981	Last Chance	2007	Drinkasaurus Becks
1982	No Corporation	2008	Millenium Buzzard
1983	Raft America	2009	Millenium Buzzard
1984	Raft America	2010	Knotty Gurl
1985	Raft America	2011	Knotty Gurl
1986	Raft America	2012	Knotty Gurl
1987	EB Exterminator	2013	Lee Jet
1988	USA/Coca-Cola	2014	Millenium Buzzard
1989	Triceratops	2015	Millenium Buzzard
1990	Lee Jet	2016	Millenium Triceratops
1991	Lee Jet	2017	Lin Lee
1992	Lee Jet	2018	Lin Lee

1993	Lee Jet	2019	Lin Lee
1994	Millennium Buzzard	2020	COVID Pandemic
1995	Lee Jet	2021	The Jolly Julep
1996	Triceratops	2022	Last Minute (Cruiser Class)
1997	Lee Jet	2023	Lee Jet
1998	Lee Jet	2024	Lee Jet
1999	Triceratops	2025	Lee Jet
2000	Lee Jet	2026	

BASIC RAFT CONSTRUCTION

The six basic elements of building a successful raft are: **flotation, deck, propulsion, steering, teamwork, and safety.**

The following information explains each of these key elements in more detail. This guidance will give you a solid foundation for designing and building your own raft.

Rafts can be constructed from all kinds of materials — scrap wood, foam, plastic bottles, barrels, and just about any recycled items you can find. With a little creativity, almost anything that floats can be turned into a raft. The possibilities are as endless as your imagination!

For more detailed raft-building tips and ideas, visit our website at www.ctriverrafrace.org and click on the “Raft Building Info” link.

FLOATATION – THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT

Rafts are not boats, so they do not need to be watertight. They are built from materials that are naturally buoyant, which means they will continue to float even if damaged.

A typical raft is made from a combination of foam, plastic barrels, plastic bottles, wood, and any other floating materials you can find. Because watertight integrity is not required, you can use almost anything that floats. Foam is by far the most popular and effective material.

Finding and Using Foam

- Chunks and odd scraps of foam are often found washed up on riverbanks and beaches.
- These pieces can be stuffed into a wooden frame you build.
- Expandable spray foam (the kind used for home insulation) works great to fill gaps and act as glue to hold everything together.
- To save on spray foam, first fill as much empty space as possible with lightweight floaters such as packing peanuts or small capped soda bottles.
- **Tip:** If you use a wooden frame, enclose it completely with wood on all sides so loose foam pieces don’t fall out.

Where to Get Foam

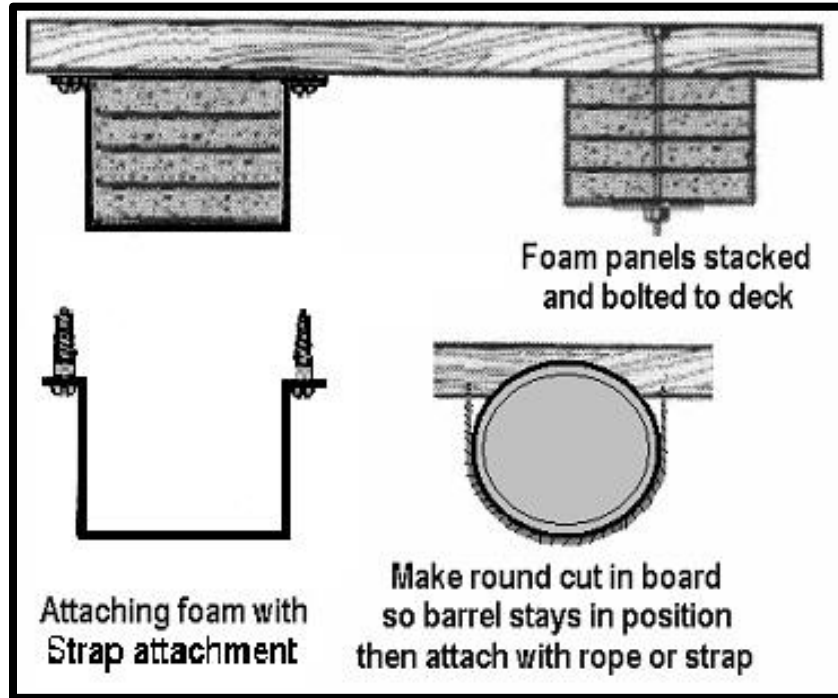
You can often find foam for free by checking:

- Construction sites
- Dumpsters

- Landfills (always ask permission first)
- Marinas or boatyards that may have old dock foam

If you ask politely — or offer to help with some work — you may be able to get surplus foam at no cost.

If free foam isn't available, you can buy it at Home Depot or Lowe's. It usually comes in sheets that can be easily cut and stacked to create your floats. Important: Always test any adhesive on a small scrap piece first, because some glues will dissolve foam.



BUILDING MATERIALS – FREE OR RECYCLED

Build It Cheap – The More Recycled, the Better! One of the most rewarding parts of raft building is doing it on a shoestring budget using recycled materials. You don't need to spend a lot of money — creativity matters more than cash.

A perfect example is the famous “\$1.98 Raft.” A group of guys built it using an old picnic table and some foam scraps they found lying around. Their total material cost was just \$1.98 — hence the name. This raft proves you can build a fun, functional raft without spending much at all.



The “\$1.98 Raft” is a good example of a frugal rafting.

Plastic Barrels and Buckets

Plastic barrels and 5-gallon buckets are excellent, durable flotation options. They can take a lot of punishment from rocks, dragging, and collisions without failing. Where to find them:

- Local car washes
- Bulk juice distributors
- Landfills or recycling centers
- Painters or drywall contractors (for 5-gallon buckets)

Important tips:

- Always get the round bungs (caps) to seal the barrels properly.
- Thoroughly clean out any residue (soap, juice, paint, plaster, etc.).
- Never use barrels that previously contained toxic chemicals — these can leak harmful pollutants into the river.

Easy Bucket Raft Example: “Bucket Brigade”

A great example of simple bucket flotation is the “Bucket Brigade” raft built by a group of girls. They took an old ladder, duct-taped 5-gallon buckets to the rungs and added foam to the sides — also with duct tape. At the suggestion of the raft inspectors, they added an outrigger for stability and even placed a plastic duck on it for fun. The raft performed beautifully and won the Becky Thatcher Award.

Using Plastic Soda Bottles and Milk Jugs for Flotation

Plastic soda bottles are an inexpensive and effective flotation option. You can get them for about 5¢ each by collecting returns at a recycling center. This saves you from having to buy and drink the contents yourself. Be sure to collect the lids too, so you can screw them on tightly and make each bottle watertight.

Soda bottles are very versatile and allow for creative raft designs. Another easy-to-find option is plastic milk jugs, which are commonly placed in curbside recycling bins.

Important Tips for Using Bottles and Jugs:

- Secure the caps on milk jugs with strong glue or tape, as they are not as tight as soda bottle lids.
- Always contain loose bottles and jugs — do not leave them unattached.
- Good containment methods include placing them inside a wooden box, tying them together in a net, or duct-taping them end-to-end onto a frame.
- You can also tie large groups of milk jugs together with rope.

Properly containing your bottles is critical. If they break free during the race, you’ll end up chasing them down the river — and your raft will lose buoyancy fast!



Here is a good example of soda bottle flotation.

BUOYANCY - HOW MUCH FLOATATION DO YOU NEED?

A raft must have enough flotation to support the weight of the raft itself, the crew, and all gear on board. The amount needed varies depending on crew size, raft design, and materials used.

Basic Rule:

For every gallon of water your flotation materials displace, you gain approximately 8 pounds of buoyancy.

Quick Examples:

- One 55-gallon drum \approx **440 pounds** of buoyancy
- One 5-gallon bucket \approx **40 pounds** of buoyancy
- One cubic foot of foam \approx **60 pounds** of buoyancy

Example Calculation

Let's say your raft will carry 3 people with a combined weight of 480 pounds. Add another 200 pounds for the raft and gear.

Total weight = 680 pounds

Divide by 8 \rightarrow You need to displace **85 gallons** of water.

- Using 5-gallon buckets: You would need **17 buckets**.
- Using foam: You would need approximately **12 cubic feet of foam**.

Build in a Safety Margin

Always add extra buoyancy beyond the minimum required. It's difficult to predict the exact weight of your raft plus everything people might bring on race day. Having more flotation than you think you need is much safer than having too little.

Placement for Stability

How you position your flotation is just as important as how much you use:

- Distribute the buoyant materials evenly, ideally on both sides of the raft (like a pontoon boat). This provides the best stability.
- Avoid putting all your flotation in one central spot — this makes the raft unstable and “tipsy.”
- For long, narrow rafts, consider adding an outrigger. It greatly improves stability.

THE DECK

Recommended Construction

- The most common deck is plywood fastened to a sturdy wooden frame underneath.
- Use good-quality, newer wood. Avoid old, splintered wood that can be uncomfortable and unsafe.
- Adding a piece of old carpeting or outdoor rug on top of the plywood creates a much more comfortable surface to sit or kneel on.

Attachment Points

Your deck frame should include strong attachment points on the underside for securing flotation materials.

- Drill holes through the frame so you can pass ropes through and tie the floats securely underneath.
- Install a few eyebolts or cleats on the deck or frame to anchor tow lines, anchor ropes, and other rigging.

Important: Use screws (not nails) to assemble the deck and frame. Nails tend to work loose when the raft flexes in waves and currents. Screws hold much better.

Additional Features

- Consider adding a canopy or shade structure. A large beach umbrella or a small tarp stretched over a simple frame works well.
- Leave plenty of room for your crew to paddle or row comfortably. A deck that is too small can make it difficult for paddlers to move freely.
- Also plan space for a small cooler, first aid kit, anchor, tow ropes, tools, and other supplies.

A well-designed deck keeps everyone comfortable, safe, and organized during the race.



Here is a good deck design strapped to two Sonotubes.

PROPULSION – MOVING YOUR RAFT

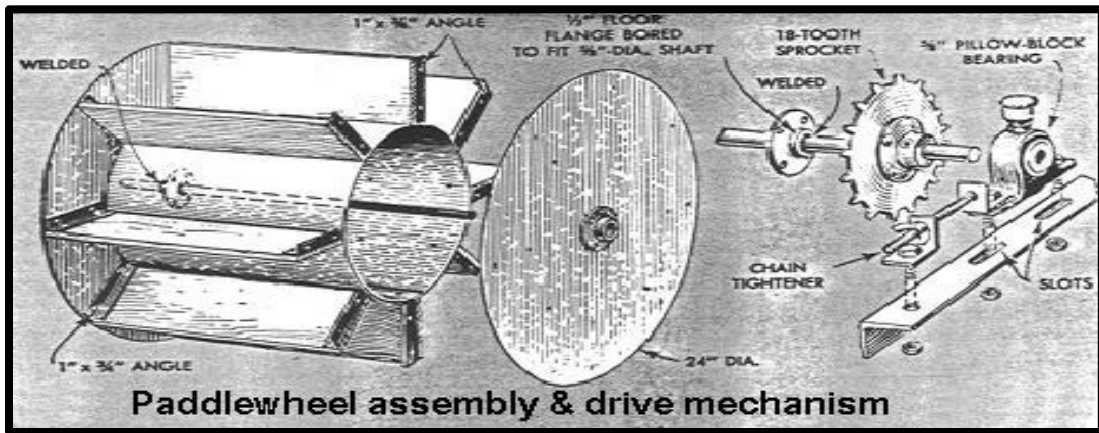
Every raft needs a way to move through the water. Most participants use paddles or oars.

Recommended Options

- **Paddles or Oars**
These are the most reliable and popular choice. Building simple oarlocks makes rowing significantly easier and more efficient.
- **Sails**
Many teams also add a sail made from a plastic tarp or old bed sheet. Sails can be very effective on windy days, but they are unpredictable. The wind may blow in the wrong direction or change suddenly. You cannot count on having a steady, favorable breeze.

Sail Safety Tip

If you decide to use a sail, support the mast from three sides with strong ropes or lines (triangulation). This keeps the mast stable and prevents it from breaking or collapsing in a strong gust of wind.



Alternative Propulsion: Paddle Wheels

Some raft teams have successfully built homemade paddle wheels using bicycle parts and other scrap materials. When well-designed, these can work very effectively.

Key Design Tips:

- Include a height adjustment on the paddle wheel assembly. This allows you to fine-tune how deeply the paddles enter the water for best performance.
 - Pay close attention to weight distribution. The raft must remain stable and balanced for the paddle wheel to work properly.



The “Lin Lee” has a great paddle wheel design.

Alternative Propulsion: Homemade Propeller

Building a homemade propeller is more complex than a paddle wheel and usually requires more than basic bicycle parts.

Easiest Construction Method

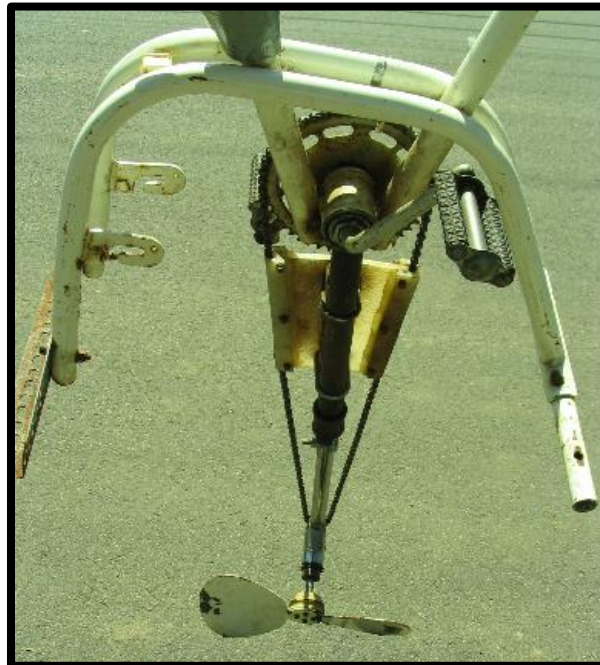
The simplest approach is to start with an old stationary exercise bike. Weld a pipe underneath the pedal sprocket, then attach a T-pipe at the other end. Mount a second sprocket, shaft, bearings, and propeller on the T-pipe.

Chain and Support

- Connect the two sprockets with a long drive chain. You can link two or three bicycle chains together or use a single continuous garage door opener chain (which is longer and stronger).
- Install a chain guide (made from a piece of wood or an old cutting board) to keep the chain from slipping off the sprockets. Without support, the chain will be pushed off by the water.
- You do not need to oil the chain — river water provides sufficient lubrication, and oil can pollute the water.

Deck Installation

Cut a hole in the raft deck so the propeller can reach the water, while the frame and tubes rest securely on the deck.



Homemade Propeller Blades

You can make a simple propeller blade by attaching a strong, flat piece of metal to a pulley, then mounting the pulley on a shaft.

Standard boat or trolling motor propellers can be used, but they are often not ideal for pedal-powered speeds. A larger diameter blade with more surface area generally performs better. You will need to experiment with different shapes and sizes to find what works best for your raft.

Final Tips for Bicycle-Driven Propulsion

Building a reliable pedal-powered system takes time and testing. Plan to test your raft on the water, observe how it performs, and make adjustments until everything works smoothly. The extra effort can result in a very competitive raft.

A great example is the Little Willie raft, which features four pedal stations driving two separate submerged propellers.

Regardless of your propulsion method, always carry extra paddles or oars. They serve as a reliable backup if your main system breaks or stops working.

STEERING

Paddles provide both propulsion and steering, allowing you to maneuver around obstacles. However, if you use a paddle wheel, propeller, or sail, you will need a separate steering system.

Using a rudder is highly recommended — and often essential — for these types of rafts.

Simple Rudder Ideas

- Tie an oar at its midpoint to the back (stern) of the raft.
- Attach a piece of plywood to a door hinge and add a handle for easy control.

Good steering helps you stay on course, navigate safely, and avoid obstacles — making your raft both safer and more enjoyable to operate.

TEAMWORK

Teamwork is one of the most important ingredients for a successful and enjoyable raft race experience.

Bring together as many friends and family members as possible. The benefits of working as a group show up immediately — whether you're gathering materials, brainstorming ideas, or building the raft.

The preparation phase is often one of the best parts of the entire event. You'll share laughs, get excited together, and motivate one another to get everything done. Each person usually brings their own special skills and talents, and it's the combination of all these contributions that makes a great raft team.

SAFETY FIRST

Safety must come first while collecting materials and building your raft. No one wants to get hurt before or during the race.

Important Safety Practices

- Always wear safety glasses when using power tools or hand tools.
- Wear gloves when handling materials and use caution when cutting anything.
- Watch out for your teammates. Stay aware of what others are doing nearby.
- Smooth all rough or sharp edges with sandpaper or a file after cutting.
- Bend over exposed sharp metal edges, cut off protruding bolts, and cover them with duct tape.
- Since many people wear shorts on race day, removing splinters and sharp edges is especially important.

Keep a first aid kit on hand during all building sessions and on the raft during the race. Working together safely makes the whole experience more fun and stress-free.

TEST YOUR RAFT BEFORE RACE DAY

Once your raft is built, take it for a test run. This is one of the most important steps — you don't want any surprises on race day.

What to Test

- **Floatation & Stability:** Launch the raft in a pond or calm water with your full crew and all gear on board. Check if it floats level. You may need to add more buoyancy or reposition some flotation materials for better balance.
- **Propulsion:** Test your paddles, oars, paddle wheel, propeller, or sail to make sure everything works properly.
- **Steering:** Try out the rudder and confirm it turns smoothly.
- **Crew Setup:** Have each paddler test their position and make sure oarlocks are in the right spot and function well.
- **Sail & Paddle Wheel:** Verify the sail sets correctly. For paddle wheels, adjust the height so the paddles are only slightly submerged for smooth operation.

There are many factors that affect how well your raft performs on the water. You won't know for sure until you test it. Make adjustments, then re-test until everything feels stable and works smoothly. This preparation will help you race with confidence.

Safety Reminder:

Every person testing the raft must wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Never go on the water without one and always look out for each other.

EMERGENCY TOOLS & REPAIRS

Be prepared to make quick fixes out on the water. Things can break, come loose, or jam — especially during a long race.

Recommended Emergency Kit

Carry these items (and anything else you think might be useful):

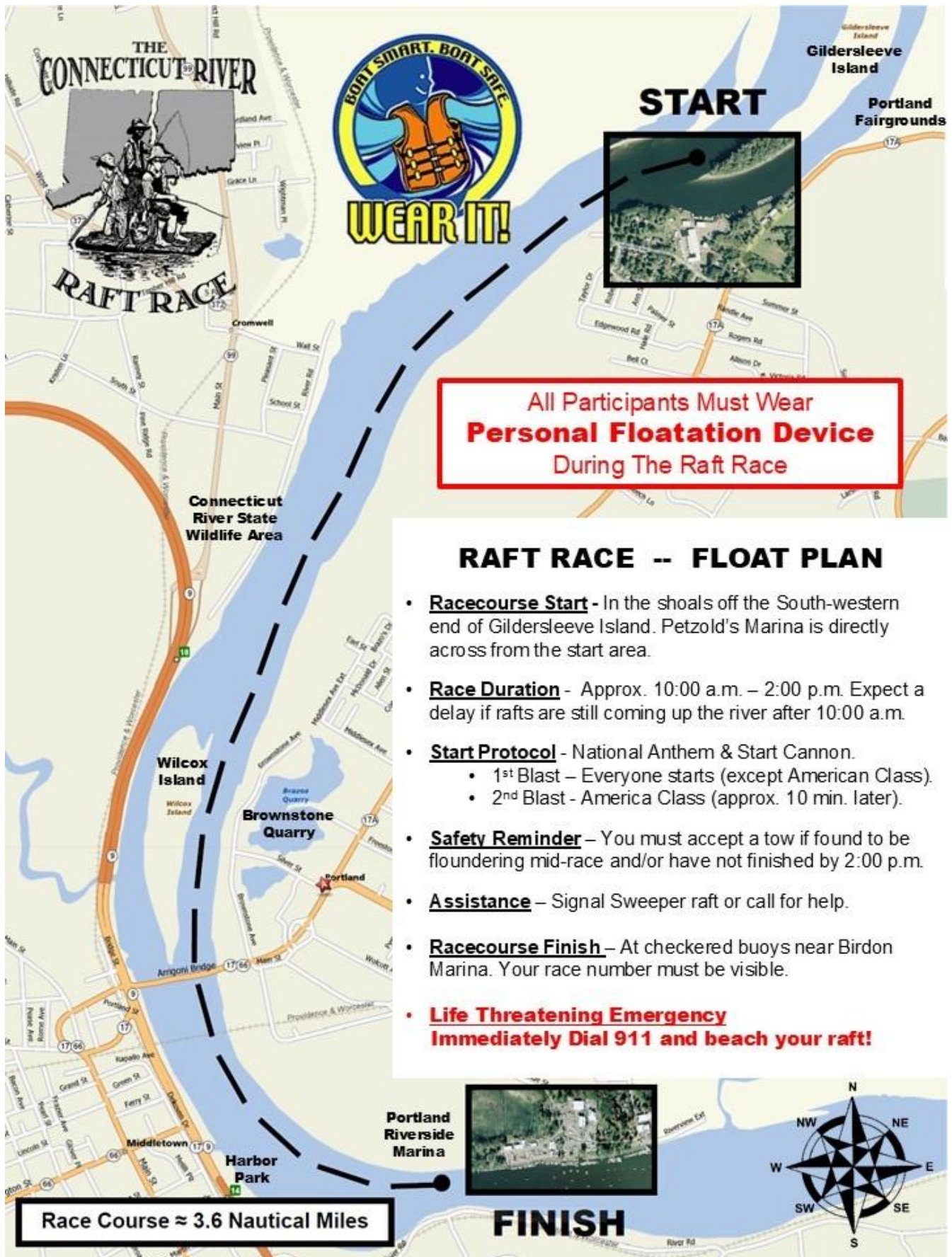
- Duct tape
- Bungee cords
- Rope
- Fasteners (screws, zip ties, etc.)
- Basic tools
- Any other repair materials specific to your raft

Periodic adjustments are often needed during the race, especially with paddle wheels or moving parts.

Important Safety Tip

Attach a safety lanyard to every tool so it stays connected to the raft. You can also tie a piece of foam to tools so they won't sink if dropped overboard.

Being able to make quick repairs can be the difference between finishing the race and dropping out. A well-equipped emergency kit often saves the day and can even help you win.



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