

Superb winter whitewater, serene summer boating, spectacular scenery year round!

When winter rains fall on the mountains of the Smith River NRA, water swiftly finds its way to the nearby ocean. The headwaters of the North Fork, Middle Fork, and South Forks of the Smith are within 30 miles of the Pacific. The Smith's three main forks and countless creeks drain a beautiful, rugged terrain of steep, rocky canyons. Torrential rains may bring almost immediate whitewater conditions. Surprisingly, the water is crystal clear again soon after a storm because rocks in the Smith River Basin break down into smaller rocks rather than decomposing into sediment. At times the clarity of the water is so good that boating the Smith is described as floating on air.

Once the three forks join to form the main stem of Smith River, the land levels out somewhat, and the last 16 miles to the ocean present less demanding water conditions (Class 1-2 in medium flows). Just past The Forks (the confluence of the Middle and South Forks), the River leaves the NRA and flows through Redwood National and State Parks, offering visitors stunning views of giant redwoods and great summer floating in Class 1 and 2 waters. In the summer you'll find many picturesque locales for sunbathing and swimming along all three forks of the Smith.

The Smith River offers winter and early spring whitewater opportunities. With average annual

precipitation for the basin at over 100 inches, rainfall runoff is the dominant component of yearly river flow. During the rainy season (late October to May), all rivers are usually available for boating for their entire navigable length. In summer months, the river forks become quite shallow and boating opportunity is largely restricted to the main stem of Smith River.

At the start of the rainy season it takes two or three good basin-wide rainstorms to recharge the ground water system enough to achieve a sustainable, boatable base flow. River flow is as highly variable as the intensity, duration, and location of individual storms. The Smith River has no dams to control river levels. An individual basin-wide rainstorm can cause the river to rise from low water to near flood levels in a day. On the other hand, flow may also drop by half in a day.

WHITEWATER CHALLENGES

The Smith River abounds with Class 4 and 5 rapids on all three forks, and the creeks offer even greater challenges. Its 145 miles of navigable white water require a fairly high degree of technical skills from the boater. Having a winter whitewater season and a technically demanding river also mean fewer visitors, so whitewater enthusiasts may enjoy relatively uncrowded outings. The Smith River offers surprises for even the most seasoned boater. While some

rapids may change little for many years, others are different every year. Careful planning and advance research are essential to having a successful whitewater experience.

THE CREEKS

Creeks offer some of the most challenging whitewater in the watershed but the window of opportunity to experience them is relatively small (see chart). Snow or seasonal road closures also may limit access for the portion of the year when water is at a boatable level. Creeks require expert boat handling and water reading skills. They also require the ability to maintain vigorous physical exertion for the length of the run. If you cannot realistically fulfill these requirements, do not attempt the creeks.

Creeks at boatable flows possess a constant gradient character. Pools between rapids, as well as most eddies, are small to nonexistent. Strainers such as in-stream brush and large woody debris do exist. Creeks are too shallow to float a boat at very low to low flow.

At high flow and above, the opportunity to stop downstream travel, and, more importantly, stop and scout rapids, is very limited. There are no pools between rapids. Eddies, if any, are very small and likely in the trees. Boating the creeks and river headwaters at these flows is not recommended.

THE RIVERS

At very low flow, river pools are deep, but rapids are shallow. Rapids tend to be steeper than at higher flows, and in some cases, unnavigable. Boating the river forks at this flow will likely require several portages around rapids too shallow to navigate. The Mainstem usually has enough water for boating at low flow.

At low through high flows, the rivers exhibit a "pool and drop" character (pool being relatively calm water and drop being quickly dropping rapids). These are the flows that provide the greatest variety of boating opportunity within the watershed.

At very high to extreme flows, the character of the river tends to change from pool and drop to constant gradient. Pools between rapids tend to disappear. Eddies may be very turbulent. Hydraulics are large and in charge. Debris such as floating trees may become an obstacle.

FLOW MONITORING

Smith River flow rates are monitored at the Jed Smith Gage Station, located on the Mainstem about 3/4 mile south of Tyron Bridge that crosses the South Fork of Smith River east of Hiouchi. Anyone may obtain current flow rates on the Internet at <http://h2o.usgs.gov/realtime.html> which provides information on northern California rivers. The monitoring site for the Smith River is 11532500. It will give flow rates and river stage (in feet) at the Jed Smith Gage. Consult *Whitewater of the Smith River Watershed* (a guide to whitewater recreation on

Smith River), the chart below, or call (707)457-3131 to interpret this information for the section of white water you wish to experience. Call the above number for flow conditions on specific runs as well.

RIVER SAFETY

- ▲ **In case of emergency call 9-1-1.** The Sheriff's Office is responsible for organizing search and rescue operations. They may be reached at 9-1-1 or 464-4191.
- ▲ **Be aware of the remote nature of many sections of the river.** Many of the runs on the Smith River pass through very steep terrain with no road access. Cellular telephones may not function properly. Boaters must realize that in an emergency, rescue efforts will be difficult.
- ▲ **Monitor the river level** starting several days before your trip to determine flow patterns. Remember, the Smith River is not controlled by dams and is subject to significant increases and decreases in flow rate. The river has been known to triple its flow rate in an eight-hour period.
- ▲ **Monitor weather forecasts** for the area (especially extended forecasts) to determine predicted precipitation patterns and projected snow levels.
- ▲ **Call ahead for an update on road conditions** if you are planning a trip on remote streams.
- ▲ **Tell a responsible person where you are going,** the number in your group, and when you expect to return so they can notify authorities if you are late. But be sure to let them know when you have returned.
- ▲ **Allow ample time to travel** to the put-in and get to the take-out before dark. Winter days are short. Average drive time to remote put-ins from Gasquet is 1.5 hours.
- ▲ **Know your ability.** Have a realistic appraisal of your skill level. Do not attempt to boat water beyond your ability. Just because someone has navigated a rapid or stream does not necessarily mean anyone can or should. If you are unsure of your skills, it is strongly recommended that you take the river trip with an experienced whitewater boater.
- ▲ **Always wear safety gear.** Moving water can be dangerous. Always wear a whitewater helmet and a properly secured U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket designed for use in white water.
- ▲ **When in Doubt — Scout!** Do not let the view from above fool you. Rapids are usually harder and steeper than they appear from the road or trail. When boating unfamiliar water, it is a good idea to scout blind turns in the river and rapids that are not completely visible from upstream. A short portage is always better than a long swim.
- ▲ **Be prepared.** Use equipment suited for the stream and in good condition. Always carry rescue equipment such as throw ropes, prussic loops, and carabineers. Carry boat repair material. When boating remote streams, include spare paddles or oars and bivouac items such as waterproof matches, food, and an emergency shelter.

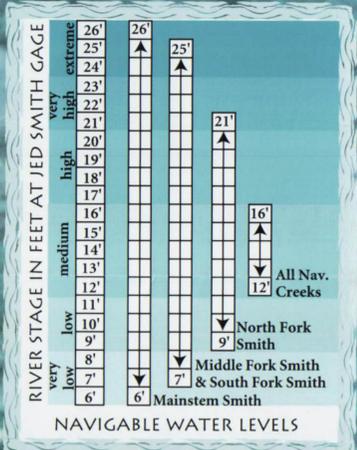
- ▲ **Never boat alone.**
- ▲ **Stay alert for unexpected obstacles:** brush, fallen trees, trees spanning the stream, submerged wood, rock sieves, or anything else that allows water to flow through or by, but pins boats and boaters. Water pressure against anything trapped in this manner is overwhelming and can make rescue difficult or impossible.
- ▲ **Cold water:** Hypothermia can quickly diminish your strength along with your will and ability to save yourself. When boating in cold water, it is critical to wear proper insulating clothing along with a wet suit or a dry suit.
- ▲ **High water:** The power of the water and the difficulty of rescue increase tremendously as flow rate increases. Pools between rapids may disappear. Eddies may be very turbulent. Hydraulics are very strong. Floating debris may be an obstacle. Take extra precautions when boating streams at high flow.
- ▲ **Low water:** Pools remain deep, but rapids become steeper and shallower as water flow diminishes. Some rapids become unnavigable. Even though the power of the water may appear minimal, it remains constant. With little water to provide cushion on rocks, a swim may cause injury.
- ▲ **Whitewater boating is an "assumed risk" activity.** You as a boater are responsible for your own actions and safety and for determining when and where to float.

RIVER ETIQUETTE

- ▲ **Be discreet** when changing in/out of boating gear.
- ▲ **Be courteous** to other visitors enjoying the river.
- ▲ **When encountering an angler,** gain their attention. Then let the angler determine the best side of the river for you to take to avoid their fishing line. If that's not possible, try to pass by along the far bank or whatever would cause the least disturbance.
- ▲ **Help keep the river as pristine as possible** by keeping your impact minimal. Bury all human waste 6-8" deep and at least 100 feet from any water source. Pack out your toilet paper. Do all washing at least 100 feet from any water source.
- ▲ **Pack it in, pack it out!** Never leave or bury your trash.

RIVER ACCESS

Refer to the *Smith River National Recreation Area* map for routes to specific river access spots shown below or contact the NRA Visitor Center. Also check road conditions and closure status with the Visitor Center prior to entering the back country. Some areas within the watershed are privately owned, with roads that are closed to public use. Most of these closed areas are posted by the owners; please respect their rights by not trespassing. Some river access areas are privately owned with public use historically allowed. Be appreciative of the use of these areas by keeping your presence and impact minimal.

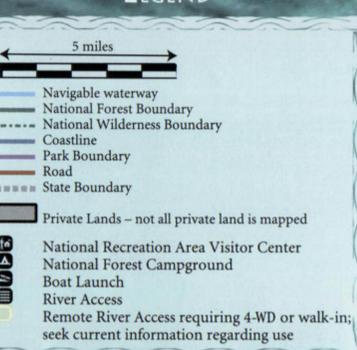


SMITH RIVER NAVIGABLE RUNS (AT MEDIUM FLOW)

Drainage	Put-in	Take-out	Length	Rating
North Fork Smith	Horse Creek	Brown's Flat	9.6 mile	4
	Brown's Flat	Gasquet	13 mile	4
	Frantz Meadow	Brown's Flat	12 mile	4-5
Baldface Creek	Frantz Meadow	Brown's Flat	12 mile	4-5
	end of road	Gasquet	15.3 mile	4
Diamond Creek	Knopke Gorge	Siskiyou Cr. Brdg.	7.3 mile	4
	Siskiyou Gorge	Patrick Creek	0.9 mile	5
	Patrick Creek	Panther Flat	6.1 mile	4
	Panther Flat	Sims Camp	4.1 mile	2-3
	Sims * Camp	M.Fork Gorge	3.9 mile	2-3
M.Fork Gorge	M.Fork Gorge	Forks	2.4 mile	4-5
	Bridge at P.C.	Mouth of Creek	3.2 mile	4
Patrick Creek	Bridge at P.C.	Mouth of Creek	3.2 mile	4
	End of Road	Mouth of Creek	4.9 mile	4-6
South Fork Smith	Island Lake Trail	S. Kelsey Trail	15.9 mile	4-6
	S.Kelsey Trail	Steven Bridge	6.5 mile	4-5
	Steven Bridge	Sandy Camp	5.3 mile	3
	Sandy Camp	S.Fork Gorge	6.1 mile	3
	S.Fork Gorge	Forks	1.8 mile	4-5
Hurdygurdy Creek	Hurdygurdy Forks	Mouth of Creek	9.5 mile	4-6
	Rocky * Saddle Road	Saddle Road	9.9 mile	4-6
Goose Creek	Saddle Road	Steven Bridge	5.6 mile	4-5
	Forks	Hiouchi Bridge	3.4 mile	1-2
Mainstem Smith	Hiouchi Bridge	Mouth	12.5 mile	1-2

*Access on private lands; seek advance permission

LEGEND



Property Lines are based on the best available information; however, accuracy cannot be guaranteed. In addition, these boundaries may be subject to change.