

ICF Environmental Policy



Always moving forward

International Canoe Federation Environmental Policy

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1.0 Introduction

Throughout the world there are very diverse natural heritages and manmade environments which provide great opportunities for open-air recreation, education, income generation and subsistence living.

In many countries the canoe is a vital part of everyday life and is used for transport and as a platform to hunt from for subsistence. In addition for others open-air recreation and competition provides people with great benefits for their health and well-being and contributes to the good of society in many other ways.

The canoe is a traditional craft used throughout the world for thousands of years for exploring wilderness areas and quietly observing wildlife and flora. The canoe has and remains in many countries an important form of transport for day to day life and activities e.g. a platform from which to fish/hunt.

The canoe causes no erosion, noise or pollution, and leaves no trace of its passing. Canoeing at appropriate water levels is an environmentally benign activity and causes no damage to fish stocks.

As canoeists worldwide, we practise our sport and recreation on natural and man made environments. We all have the potential to affect those environments that are so valuable to our experience. We need to be aware of, and to protect, the special features of the environment we use, whether it is on a natural river, lake, the sea or on a manmade canal/course.

2.0 Overview

The ICF recognises that whilst canoeing may not have an environmental impact the actions of the canoeist may have an impact on the environment, and acknowledges responsibility to take and to advise on reasonable measures to safeguard the environment for both the present and future generations.

The ICF will provide clear guidance on environmental issues through its policies, advice, programmes and the way it conducts its business.

The ICF will improve its own environmental performance through the periodic review of working practices and provide assistance and advice to all members on all environmental issues relating to their activities. The ICF *Environmental Panel* (?) will regularly monitor all environmental polices and introduce audits at appropriate intervals to ensure that all the policy objectives are achieved.

The ICF recognises the nature of the environment differs greatly from country to country, continent to continent but will endeavour to provide advice on best practice to suit the needs of all member countries.

3.0 Actions

The ICF has determined the following key areas for action:

3.1 Office Based Activities

In its day to day operations the ICF has the potential to have a significant impact on the environment, through its basic activities and all the resources it uses.

The ICF will seek to quantify these effects and implement measures to ensure day to day office practices have as small an impact on the environment as is possible. This will be achieved through improvements in;

- Recycling of office materials
- Purchasing practices such as use of Fair trade and recycled products
- Reviewing transport use and implement greater use of public transport and telephone conference meetings rather than requiring all to attend meetings from across the country
- Energy efficiency .. heat and light management
- Meeting management to look at ways of eliminating the need to travel all over the country and world for meetings by trying to arrange meetings to be in the same locality to be held on the same day or days etc e.g. Board meetings will provide the opportunity to hold several parallel meetings alongside the main business of the Board
- Make greater use of telephone conferencing and electronic communications

3.2 Travel

To participate in the sport of canoeing requires members to be reliant on their cars and increasing more often air travel. Increasing use of cars and air travel is having an adverse effect on our lives and the environment

We will continue to press for access to inland waterways worldwide so that members do not have to travel miles to participate in their sport.

Where access to waterways is currently available the ICF will promote the reduction of the need to travel to take part in canoeing by

- Promoting use of local waterways
- Assessing the need for teams and volunteers to fly to foreign destinations and reduce as appropriate
- Encouraging use of public transport to centres and events
- Encouraging car share, where appropriate, for staff and sports participants

3.3 Green Travel

The ICF recognises the benefits which can be gained environmentally when travelling by canoe due to its green nature as the passage produces no carbon footprint. The ICF will therefore promote the potential for expanding the use of inland waterways and their bordering paths for sustainable travel.

For example, in urban areas which are linked by waterways which can be used as means of travel to and from work/home and local amenities.

The ICF will continue to support and promote countries and regions where canoeing is a major part of their transport network.

In promoting the greater use of waterways the ICF will also link the promotion to local, transport and health authorities as a means of attracting tourism, decreasing carbon footprints, reducing road congestion and improving the health of local communities.

3.4 Energy use

The ICF recognises that climate change will increasingly lead to changes that threaten to significantly affect our members' recreational and sporting interests as well as life style needs.

The ICF will actively promote and help canoeists to understand how their activities contribute to climate change and provide practical advice and support to help them reduce their impact.

4.0 The Environment

The ICF will promote the need to enhance and protect the environment for the present and future generations.

Throughout the world there are various issues concerning the transportation of bacteria and alien species. Most countries and continents have their own rules and regulations surrounding the movement of goods, animals and food and in addition the ICF will actively encourage all members to promote the best practice of cleaning equipment and carrying only appropriate goods to and from countries thus helping to ensure that diseases and alien species are not unwittingly introduced to other environments.

4.1 Alien Species

Alien species refers to plants, animals and other organisms that are not native to our waters and have been introduced unknowingly to local environments.

The spread of alien species is becoming a major issue in both marine and inland waters around the world because they compete with native plants and wildlife and can cause major changes to waterways.

The ICF will introduce and promote preventative measures to help to contain the further spread of alien species and prevent the introduction of diseases to conserve our remaining native species and protect flora, fauna and wildlife including fish populations.

Around the world there are numbers of nationally and internationally protected flora and fauna species which can be found on waterways and their surrounding area. There is a wealth of wildlife to be seen and enjoyed throughout inland waterways and coastlines throughout the world but a lot of these animals are vulnerable to disturbance if not approached in a responsible way that respects their wild nature. The ICF will promote the protection of protected areas, zones and species by actively encouraging the canoeists using these areas to be very mindful of their behaviour and the potential impact they may have on that particular environment.

4.2 Environmental Protection Support and Promotion

The ICF will promote through its environmental publications and other activities appropriate behaviour and respect for the environment.

It therefore advocates that all canoeists

- **Respect the interests of other people.** Acting with courtesy, consideration and awareness is very important. If you are exercising access rights, make sure that you respect the privacy, safety and livelihoods of those living or working in the outdoors, and the needs of other people enjoying the waterways.
- **Care for the environment.** ie look after the places they visit and enjoy, and leave the waterway it was found.
- **Take responsibility for their actions.** -ie remember that the outdoors cannot be made risk-free and act with care at all times for their own and others safety.

In addition all canoeists

- should aim to create minimal impact on the environment
- should remove and dispose of appropriately any rubbish they find so they leave no trace of their passing only ripples
- should consider and respect the needs future generations.

The ICF will actively ensure that sites owned by them and other member organisations are actively managed as exemplars of good environmental practice.

4.3 Rubbish Canoeists

The ICF will actively encourage canoeists to all be “**Rubbish Canoeists**”. Canoeing is recognised as being environmentally benign and man has been canoeing for thousands and thousands of years and we want future generations to enjoy canoeing too. Therefore, all canoeists should take their own rubbish home with as well as someone else's to dispose of it appropriately. All canoeists have the opportunity to help keep our waterways clean and preserve our natural heritage.

Many items can be found in the waterways and seas all over the world such as bottles, cans, plastic bags, wrappers, fast food containers, paper, car tyres, buckets, fishing lures, lines and hooks galore, scales, rod bags, etc All of these items and many more are not only unsightly but can and do cause great damage to wildlife.

For example it takes almost 5 years for a cigarette butt to breakdown in the water!

The ICF will promote the message - always take your rubbish home and recycle or dispose of as appropriate.

5.0 Activities by other waterways users and waterside development

Development of land and waterways are in many cases essential to the economic and social development of that particular area and the ICF does not oppose all development in the waterways and coastal environment. Such development should only be located where it does not destroy or detract from the natural environment.

The ICF advocates local, sustainable development next to existing settlements when appropriate. It will participate in the planning process at regional and national level having regard for the type of development proposed, the scale, visual impact and design of proposals, the recreational importance of the area, the ecological affects of new developments and the social and environmental value of new development.

6.0 Supporting National, Local and Rural Economies

Canoeing has brought economic opportunities to previously isolated and undeveloped areas within many countries of the world. Canoe tourism is an expanding part of the tourist industry worldwide.

The ICF will continue to promote the national, local, economic benefits of canoeing and encourage canoeists to contribute to the economies of local communities not only where they live but where they travel to take part in their sport for competition or recreation.

7.0 Implementation ICF's Environmental Policy

The ICF's Environmental Policy is a statement of our commitment to help reduce the impact of our activities on the environment. The policy will be supported by an Action Plan, which will specify how the policy will be implemented, complete with targets and dates.

The ICF will provide clear leadership on environmental issues through its policies, programmes and the way it conducts its business.

The ICF will inform members that they are responsible for ensuring their activity does not cause any significant environmental impact or lasting disturbance to wildlife and the water environment through the provision of quality information on the website and in future publications.

Appendix 1

You, your canoe and the environment

Canoeists share the outdoors with other people who earn their living from it or who live there or who enjoy it in other ways, as well as the diverse wildlife. Canoeists and kayakers take very seriously environmental concerns.

As canoeist even though the canoe is environmentally benign you also need to be aware that whilst you might visit a place only occasionally and feel that you cause no harm, the land manager or the environment might have to cope with the cumulative effects of many people. Acting with awareness and common sense underpins responsible behaviour.

For information on where to canoe, including information on access arrangements see advice from the relevant organisations of the country you live in or are visiting.

Take responsibility for your actions

The outdoors is a fantastic place for sport and recreation, but it is also a natural environment which needs to be treated with respect.

- Be aware of information/ hazards for your chosen journey and ensure you are confident in the ability of your party to cope with the conditions expected.
- Take account of water, flows, levels and weather conditions.
- Leave details of your trip with a responsible person and advise a safe arrival
- Ensure your equipment is in good condition. Use and wear it correctly.
- It is recommended to take advantage of advice and courses offered on canoe skills and safety for all levels of ability,
- Be aware of health, water quality and other safety information.
- Permission may be required to cross private land
- It is your assessment of conditions/factors whether to go on the water
- Do not interfere unreasonably with the rights of other people; and act lawfully and reasonably, and take proper account of the interests of others and of the features of the land.
- ***Report pollution, damage and incidents to the relevant authorities.***

Consideration for others

Canoeists will meet a variety of land and water users and activities on their journeys. Common sense, polite behaviour and conversations can help to promote a mutual understanding.

On land

- Stay away from houses and private gardens.
- Change discreetly. Use public facilities where possible
- Drive sensibly at all time
- Car parking - do not obstruct roads or entrances to buildings or farm property.
- Ensure your kit does not cause an obstruction when unloading.
- Leave gates positioned and property as you find them
- Avoid damage to fences and walls

On Water

- Follow the general rules of navigation and any local bylaws. Obtain any necessary licences.
- Respect and do not obstruct other water users.
- Keep a look out. Be aware that larger vessels may not see you and are less manoeuvrable. In confined waters keep to the edge of the deepwater navigation channel
- Keep a look out for wild animals/birds etc who may be disturbed by your presence - some will be harmless but you may disrupt their feeding etc others may be very dangerous and you should research what animals/birds may be on your journey prior to departure and if seen take evasive action
- Keep the numbers in your party consistent with safety, the nature of the stretch of river and the impact on your surroundings.
- When offering assistance to those in need, on or off the water, do not put yourself or fellow canoeists at risk.
- Show consideration to organised bank side activities, and give way as required to on-water events.

Fishermen

Keep a look out for people fishing whilst canoeing. Anglers can be hard to spot on banks or in canoes and boats

- Co-operate to avoid lines, nets and swims -
- If it is unclear where to pass lines or swims, then quietly attract the attention of the anglers and agree a route to follow.
- When an angler is playing a fish from the bank or wading, stop some way off and await their acknowledgement to proceed.
- Do not linger in pools or swims occupied by an angler
- Be mindful that in some areas fishing is not undertaken for recreation but as a means of subsistence and therefore it is essential they are not disturbed.

Caring for the environment

Find out about the area before you go, noting its sensitive places, protected areas, species and breeding seasons.

Alien Species

Alien species refers to plants, animals and other organisms that are not native to our waters and have been introduced unknowingly to local environments.

The spread of alien species is becoming a major issue in both marine and inland waters around the world because they compete with native plants and wildlife and can cause major changes to waterways.

The ICF will provide help and advice on how to prevent the introduction of such species but in addition canoeists should contact the relevant authorities for their country to find out local information and advice.

Appendix 2

Sea Kayaking - A Guide to Good Environmental Practice

The sea kayak offers a fantastic platform from which to see seabirds and seals, and even whales and dolphins in their natural environment. To experience the nature of the sea at such close quarters is an amazing privilege, but like all privileges it carries a responsibility.

In our enthusiasm to see wild animals we can accidentally cause disturbance without realising it, so a good way to minimise our impact on wildlife is to become more knowledgeable about it. For instance, an awareness of the breeding seasons of birds and seals will help us avoid getting too close when they are most sensitive to our presence.

Minimising Disturbance

When encountering wildlife, whether on sea or on land, your aim should be to minimise any disturbance that you might cause to wild animals and the habitats in which they live. In order to achieve this the following basic principles should be adhered to:

- Try not to startle or panic wild animals; never surround them, and don't block them in from their escape routes. You will enjoy the sightings much more if they are relaxed about your presence. Sudden movements scare wildlife and give you away.
- Be aware that the size of your group, the length of time you are there, and the frequency of human disturbance are all factors that could threaten their wellbeing.
- Don't linger for too long when you are close to wildlife. By all means look, but then move on.
- As well as avoiding disturbance to marine animals, also be aware of the need to avoid damaging plants and the habitats that the animals depend upon.
- Remember, you are sharing the environment - leave it undisturbed for the wildlife and those who follow.

Sea Birds

Cliff nesting seabirds are most vulnerable when the adults are with their eggs and young chicks. If they are suddenly scared off the ledges they may lose their young, which may fall or be taken by predators. It is good practice to move by quietly and steadily so as not to panic the birds. As well as being aware of cliff nesting birds whilst you are on the water, remember that your presence whilst walking on clifftops could also be threatening to the birds.

In preparation for your journey check to see what animals and birds might be affected by your presence and when the breeding and nesting times are and manage your behavior appropriately.

Many birds nest in burrows or even on open ground along the tops of cliffs. Walking over a burrow can crush the nest, or cause the adult to desert its young, so try to be aware of their presence. Be vigilant for nest grounds and move out of any breeding area as soon as you realise you are in or close to it.

It is therefore vital that we do our best to avoid disturbance and help seabird numbers to become re-established.

Birds on the Open Sea

Try to avoid panicking seabirds on the water into flight. Adult birds at sea are likely to be feeding or resting so disturbance is likely to cause them to expend extra energy, thereby reducing their feeding time, which in turn affects their survival chances. In late summer many birds moult and are at their weakest and most vulnerable. Move away quietly and steadily as soon as you are aware of being close to a colony.

Seal colonies

Never land on a beach with a colony of breeding seals, except in an emergency.

Avoid beaches with small pups on them, as a sudden disturbance can lead to pups being squashed, or separated from their parents. Common seal pups can go into the sea almost immediately after birth, whereas grey seal pups remain on the beach for about 3 weeks as they cannot swim.

Seals will often watch kayakers pass by, either from a rock or in the water. Do not use your ability to approach quietly as a way to get close to seals. If you approach silently, seals (and other animals) may be startled by your sudden appearance. The best way to avoid causing them to panic is to avoid making eye contact. If you watch a seal out of the corner of your eyes it is far less likely to dive. Try to maintain a slow, steady and predictable rhythm as you paddle past seals.

Please be aware that many tour boat owners make a living from taking tourists to look at seal colonies. The seals usually stay put when these boats approach, but often take to the water when kayaks are in the same area. Difficulties arise when kayakers cause the seals to leave their rocks and beaches, to be followed by tour boats with tourists who are disappointed at not seeing the seals hauled out on land and this in turn leaves the tour boat owners annoyed. Try to be aware of the areas where such tour boats operate and take extra care to avoid disturbing the seals.

Porpoises, Dolphins, Whales and Basking Sharks

Many cetaceans (porpoises, dolphins and whales) and basking sharks etc can be seen from a sea kayak, but it is important to be aware how you can be a danger to the animal, and how it can be a danger to you.

When approaching large animals - such as cetaceans and basking sharks, remember - a moving kayak outline can appear threatening when heading straight towards them. Always approach at an oblique angle. Move steadily and predictably, and do not go too close.

Never chase after a cetacean or basking shark. If they want to see you they will come over and check you out, but if they choose to swim away from you then respect their wish.

- **Porpoises** never show any interest in kayaks so you will just see them swim by without altering their course.
- **Dolphins** on the other hand are more inquisitive and will often come over towards you. The best advice if you are close to dolphins is to just stay still

and watch, or maintain a straight course and they will follow if they are interested in you.

- There are various species of **whales** and they can also come close to you. Their colossal size is obvious when they are next to you, so avoid blocking their escape route, but otherwise stay still and let them do the moving.
- Avoid getting too close to a **basking shark** as it could easily capsize you if you get in front of it, or cause you serious injury if it lashed out with its powerful tail with you alongside it.

Otters

Otters are commonly encountered along many coastlines. They should be observed from a distance that doesn't disturb their routine activities, such as fishing, resting and playing. Under no circumstances should they be pursued by kayak.

Shingle Shores and Dunes

Remember a variety of birds also nest on shingle beaches. Care should be taken not to disturb nesting birds on these sites. The eggs and chicks are very well camouflaged against the shingle and are easily trodden underfoot. Check before you plan your trip as to the nesting arrangements etc of the birds and mammals in the area you plan to canoe in.

Take care during stops not to damage vegetation on dunes, which is important for stabilising and helping them grow. Carry kayaks rather than dragging them, especially in dunes.

Non-Native or Alien Species

The seas around many countries/continents can contain a number of non-native, or alien, species of plants and animals, some of which can cause problems due to their ability to out compete our native species.

Take care not to transfer alien species including seaweed between locations by cleaning your boat and checking inside the housing of retractable skegs.

Estuaries

Many estuaries in the world play host to waders and waterfowl. Undisturbed feeding and resting may be vital to their survival, especially in severe weather. Avoid mudflats and sandbanks with large concentrations of birds.

Rocky Outcrops and Marshes

Be aware that rocky outcrops and marshes often provide shelter and safety for wildlife. Otters use outcrops for their nest holts and seals haul out onto rocks exposed by the tide. A number of birds live in marsh areas and use reed beds for security from predators.

On Land

When on land kayakers still need to be aware of their responsibilities towards wildlife. Do not leave behind any food scraps, as these attract scavenging animals

and birds. Take out all your litter and if you take out some litter left by other people you will be leaving the coastline that bit cleaner than it was before your visit.

Fires

Sea kayakers on multi-day trips will quite often have a fire on a beach as part of their overnight camping experience. Following a few simple guidelines should ensure that you don't cause any damage. (Check first to see if the local laws/by laws allow fires)

Fires below the high water mark are washed away by the next high tide, so this can be a good way of ensuring that your fire is cleared away and properly put out.

Before starting to build a fire assess the fire risk. Consider the wind direction and strength and think about the proximity of any dry forest or vegetation. If in doubt, don't have a fire.

Be careful on boulder beaches that there aren't any birds, such as storm petrels nesting under the boulders.

If you have a fire above the high water mark then use established fire rings or mound fires on sand or soil piled up to provide a protective base for your fire.

Make sure your fire is well burnt out and that there is no risk of it spreading before you go to your tents and check there is no trace whatsoever of your fire before leaving in the morning.

Kayaking in Context

The impact that sea kayakers have on the sea has to be seen in context. Compared to certain industries and other recreational activities the disturbance we cause is minimal, but we should not be complacent. The ICF will actively promote the fact that all canoeists should strive to learn more about the sea, and develop skills and senses that ensure marine wildlife does not suffer from our visits. The breeding season for birds and common seals coincides with the best conditions for kayaking, so it is important to be aware of the needs of wildlife.

Seeking Further Wildlife Advice

If in doubt about carrying out any activity contact one of the nature conservation bodies in your country for advice regarding special areas, or species that may be at risk from your presence, or particular nesting and breeding times when you should be particularly vigilant.

Follow these three principles and we can all ensure a sustainable coastal environment for us and future generations to enjoy.

Be aware.

- Before you go wildlife watching learn as much as you can about the animals.
- Understand how your actions could affect wildlife and recognise the signs that animals make when they feel threatened.
- Be alert, observant and patient, and be sensitive to the interests of the wildlife you are watching.

Take responsibility for your own actions and those you are leading by

- Constantly assess wildlife, and if you see signs of disturbance move away quietly.
- Consider how much time you spend watching animals. The presence of people over long periods can be disturbing, however careful you may be.

Have respect for other people, other coastal users, wildlife and the environment.

- Respect the privacy and livelihoods of those who live by the sea.
- Leave the environment as you find it.

Identification of Species

It is always interesting to get home from a trip and look up in a wildlife book a bird or mammal that you have seen. Most sea kayakers have a few wildlife books to help them with their identification queries.

Links to Further Information

(We can add more here depending on how much information is needed)

Leave No Trace

<http://www.lnt.org/>