

Rainbow River Safety Planning

The Rainbow River has become a popular destination for recreational paddling or floating down the river on an inflatable tube. Two fatalities on the river in the last year have shown that being on the river for an extended amount of time can lead to significant risks. It is important for river users to be sensitive to these risks as they plan for a day on the river.

The spring fed Rainbow River is 5.7 miles long and has a flow of approximately 400 million gallons of water a day. This flow creates a strong current which can be challenging if one is not a strong swimmer or has a medical condition. **Some of the threats that have required Marion County Fire Rescue to respond to 911 calls are:**

- Wasps stings, alligator and snake interaction
- Drowning by non-swimmers
- Heat exhaustion and dehydration due to duration of float time
- Injury by jumping from trees and rope swings from underwater hazards
- Loss of control of tubes due to use of alcohol
- Weather stress including sunburn, lightning and/or rain leading to hypothermia
- Boat navigation conflicts

There are a number of wasp nests on low hanging branches on the east side of the river. If your tube, kayak or boat hits one of the nests, the wasps attack and sting with a vengeance. When on the water there is no place to run and the only solution to avoid the wasps is to jump in the water. If you are not a swimmer or do not have a life preserver on you may be in trouble.



Non-swimmers often want to get into the water to refresh themselves and may find that the strong current takes them into deeper water, vegetation or muck which can make it difficult to reenter their tube or kayak. **Respect private property and stay in the river. Only get out in public spaces.**

K P Hole Float times on the river can be up to four hours or longer if the wind is blowing upstream. Sitting in a tube for four or more hours in the sun can be exhausting and lead to dehydration. There are no public exit points on this trip until you get to Blue Run of Dunnellon Park. People with poor health conditions can find such a trip very stressful.

Rope swings from shoreline trees appear from time to time and seem to tease young people to show their bravery by climbing and jumping into the river. Unfortunately, people have misjudged the timing of the swing and fallen onto cypress knees and other objects which have caused serious injury.

Use of alcoholic beverage on the river is prohibited by both county and city ordinances. There are numerous accounts of people being drunk while tubing on the river. The length of a float and the heat during a summer day exacerbates the reduction of good judgement when alcohol is being consumed. This has often led to visitors falling out of tubes and other compromising safety situations.

Heavy storms with lightning are common during the summer season. Although K P Hole and the State Park Float facility stop the launching of floaters when a lightning strike is near, the storms can come up suddenly and surprise a person on both a 4-hour or 2-hour float trip. Going down river at 0.8 mph when there are lightning strikes around you may expose a tuber or kayaker to significant risk.

During the summer weekends the river can be very congested with tube, kayak and boat traffic. Tubes, especially those that are tied together in clusters,

have little ability to navigate. There are some river visitors who rent power boats from outfitters that are not familiar with boat handling and navigation protocol. This can lead to conflict between tubers, snorkelers and scuba divers. The boats can be forced into the shallows of the river or inadvertently drive over a diver that has become separated from their group's dive flag.

When planning or getting on the river you should have a safety plan of what to do in an emergency.

The clarity of the water, the wildlife that live and thrive on the river, and the beauty of the undeveloped natural area on the east side of the river are strong reasons to visit. Local recreational visitors as well as those that come from a distance should make themselves aware of the threats and risks of the Rainbow River as well the joys of visiting this outstanding natural wonder.

Have water in a non-disposable container to hydrate while on the river. Wear a hat, protective clothing and sunscreen to protect from the sun and heat exhaustion. Know your own health conditions and how much heat stress you are comfortable with. Be aware of weather conditions and the risks that you may face if a storm blows in. Do not feed river animals or leave food garbage in the river. This can lead to an alligator nuisance problem. Observe the numbers on Wood Duck Boxes as a reference location on the river. If you are not a swimmer, use a personal floatation device (life jacket) or have a strategy of what you would do if you suddenly find yourself in the water. If you are traveling with children, educate them with both the joys of the river as well as the risks.



Rainbow River Public Access Points



Wood Duck Boxes are numbered from North to South for a location reference on the river



Note
Tubing Facility open Memorial Day until Labor Day and weekends in April May & September



Emergency Phone Numbers
 Marion County Sheriff 352 732 9111
 Dunnellon Police 352 465 8510
 FWCC Dispatch 407-275 4150
 Aquatic Preserve 352 465 8565
 Wildlife Alert 888 404 3922
 Health Emergency 911

Preserve Aquatic Vegetation To Preserve Life In The River