

Water Safety Thoughts for Volunteer Stream Monitoring

Risk Assessment - Your “GoNoGo Decision” should be based on the weather, the water, your skills, your training and your experience with the understanding that:

- a. You are engaging in an activity with inherent dangers,
- b. You accept & acknowledge you are participating at your own risk, and
- c. You are responsible for your own safety and to use your own judgment.

Wear a Flotation Device - Always wear a [personal flotation device \(PFD\)](#), especially if the river is more than knee deep. Wearing a Life Jacket is the one thing that people can do to give them the best chance at surviving a sudden, unexpected fall into the water, whether wading in the water or walking on the shoreline. Slopes leading to the river can be slippery, making it easy to slip into the water.

Do Not Wade In Rivers that are more than thigh deep or swift moving. Ideally the water should be only knee deep. If the water is above your thighs then it is too dangerous to cross. You can be easily knocked off your feet in water that is waist or chest deep, especially if there is any current, and then you are swimming for your life. Check how fast the river is moving by tossing a stick in the current. If it’s moving faster than you can walk along the bank then the river is probably too fast and strong to safely cross.

Use a Walking Stick for Balance. Use a stout wooden stick about shoulder-height for balance when you enter a river. Use it to form a stable tripod with your two legs and always move with two solid points of contact. Keep the stick on your upstream side so that the current keeps it in place. Scoot your feet along the river bottom using small steps.

Face Upstream and Shuffle Sideways - In crossing fast water, face upstream. Lean against your walking stick and into the current while shuffling your feet sideways. Always maintain two points of contact with the riverbed—two feet or one foot and the stick—to keep a solid base. Angle slightly downstream as you cross the river.

Foot Entrapment – Be careful about catching a foot in rocks or debris on the bottom of the river. In water as shallow as knee deep you can get your feet trapped under a ledge or branch and be physically unable to pull your foot out. Foot entrapment may also be caused by trying to stand up while being swept downstream in water higher than your knees. If your foot wedges on the bottom, fast water will push you under and keep you there. Get to slower moving or very shallow water before attempting to stand or walk.

Wading Boots - Waders are dangerous when worn with stretchy, loose belts or no belt at all. If you trip or fall in the water wearing waders without a snug fit wading belt, the waders fill up quickly. The belt should have a buckle that can be popped open even under load. A proper wading belt worn at the waist makes the sea anchor effect unlikely, adding another belt around the chest adds another level of safety. With or without a belt, do not passively float down a river feet first in your waders. Get on your stomach, swim aggressively down and across the current toward safety.

Some of the above comments are excerpts from the following publications:

Keep Yourself Safe at Stream Crossings By Matt Jaffe

Safely Cross a River or Stream & Safety Tips to Cross a River or Stream By Stewart Green

Wading Safety by Ralph Cutter Wading 101 Tips On How To Wade Safely by Mark D. Williams

For more information please reference these materials.