

River Classification Chart

Disclaimer

Please Read Before Proceeding:

The information on this website should be used with caution and is not meant to substitute professional guiding or swift water training. Tourism Fernie accepts no liability for the accuracy, availability, suitability, reliability, usability, or completeness of these river and lake guidelines. River and lake are ever changing with weather, season, and other natural forces; therefore, rivers and lakes should always be approached with caution.

It is the responsibility of all persons who use this site to independently confirm the accuracy of the information. Please ensure that your own knowledge, physical ability, equipment, and training are suitable for the passage of water you are traveling on.

Get informed! Get trained! Go prepared!

Grade	Definition
I	Swift moving water with small waves and few obstructions. Obstructions and passage of water are easily read with minimal training/experience. Risk to swimmers is low and swimmers are likely able to self-rescue. Sweepers and logjams may still occur on riverbanks but are mostly out of play.
II	Lines on rapids are straightforward, easily read with minimal experience/training. Rapids have wide and clear channels, which are evident by boat scouting or by read-and-run. Maneuvering around hazards is occasionally required. Hazards may include rocks and medium-sized waves, which are easily avoided by trained paddlers. Swimmers are likely to be uninjured; group assistance is while helpful for rescue but often not required. Rapids that are at the upper end of this difficulty range are designated Class II+
III	Rapids in this class have waves that are a moderate size, more irregular and have features that are more difficult to avoid. Waves may be large enough to swamp an open canoe. Lines become more complex; rapids require paddlers to be more skilled at maneuvering in fast current, through tight passages, or around ledges. Large wave holes or ledges may be present but are readily avoided. Other features present may include strong eddies, powerful currents, and strong boil lines. Scouting is advisable for those new to the river or inexperienced parties. Risk of injury to swimmers is low to moderate; self-rescue is possible but group assistance is recommended to avoid long swims. Rapids that are at the lower or upper end of this difficulty range are designated Class III- or Class III+ respectively.

IV	<p>Rapids are more powerful, continuous, and intense; these rapids require skilled and precise boat handling and a high level of river reading capability. The river may have large features that cannot be avoided, continuous sections of waves and holes, constricted passages, and/or fast moving water. Paddlers must be proficient at eddying out, able to initiate quick and precise movements in turbulent water, have a strong roll, and have the ability to quickly assess and reassess their lines. Scouting and portaging may be required for sections of the river. The risk of injury to swimmers is moderate to high and river conditions can make self-rescue very difficult. Group assistance for rescue is often required if not mandatory to reduce risk of injury. Rapids that are at the lower or upper end of this difficulty range are designated Class IV- or Class IV+ respectively.</p>
V	<p>Rapids are often extremely long, partially or completely obstructed at points, or have very intense and violent rapids. Hazards on these rapids may include large drops, unavoidable waves and holes, steep and continuous rapids, complex and demanding routes, and/or large sieves and sweepers. Rapids may continue for long distances between stopping points, eddies or pools; therefore these rapids demand a high level of fitness. Eddies are often turbulent and difficult to enter. Scouting is recommended but may be difficult. Swims are very dangerous; rescue is often very difficult even for expert paddlers. These rapids demand a high level of knowledge, extensive training, experience, proper equipment, and proficiency in rescue techniques. High risk of injury to swimmers.</p>
VI	<p>Considered too dangerous for passage, exploratory, or for experts only under very specific water levels.</p>

Please see the [International Scale of River Difficulty](#) for further clarification: