



WHATCOM ROWING ASSOCIATION HANDBOOK

ROW HAPPY
RACE HARD

Updated FEB 2026



Whatcom Rowing Association Member Handbook

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WHO WE ARE

The Whatcom Rowing Association is a nonprofit, community-based rowing club that is both a recreational and competitive rowing club that has served the Bellingham and surrounding areas since 2011. We are dedicated to offering individuals of all ages the opportunity to learn the sport of rowing in a safe, fun and beautiful environment. Our Association consists of athletes whose experience ranges from beginner to advanced, and ages 12-80+. We offer programs for a variety of age groups and experience levels. Whether you have never rowed before, are training to be a collegiate athlete, looking for a recreational sport, or looking to be competitive, our Learn-to-Row, Junior and Masters programs offer something for all.

WRA AND USROWING

The United States Rowing Association is the governing body for the sport of rowing. Members of USRowing include clubs, universities, high schools and other rowing organizations and individuals. Whatcom Rowing Association is an organizational member of USRowing in the Northwest Region. All of our rowers are required to have a **Basic USRowing Membership** and sign an annual online waiver before participating. Members that choose to race in USRowing hosted regattas (Junior Regionals, Masters Nationals, etc.), please visit <https://membership.usrowing.org/> to sign your online USRowing waiver and complete your USRowing Membership at the desired level.

USRowing CLUB CODE: APFSD

SAFETY GUIDELINES AND EXPECTATIONS

Safety on the water and in the boathouse is our number one priority. The Board of WRA has enacted a number of policies and procedures to help keep our junior and adult members safe. These policies cover many areas of safety; however, the Board expects all employees and users of WRA to use Common Sense in applying existing safety procedures and policies to situations that are not covered.

Lighting And Visibility

All boats rowing out of the WRA must have a properly functioning bow and stern light when operating in the dusk or dark (1 hour before sunrise or 1 hour before sunset). Rowers are strongly encouraged to wear high visibility or reflective clothing (high-viz) to increase their visibility.

- All lights should meet Coast Guard minimum standards with no less than one nautical mile of visibility for bow lights and stern lights.
- A 360°/all-around white light on the stern of each rowing shell when rowing between sundown and sunup. It should be visible enough to warn approaching vessels.
- The bow of every boat should have a red light on port side and green light on starboard side.

Weather

Always use common sense and know what you can comfortably handle. Rowing in heavy waves is structurally hard on our boats and requires better than average technique. Assessing the weather and

potential weather conditions is the responsibility of every individual going out. Rowing is prohibited under the following conditions:

- Whitecaps. If there are whitecaps on the lake when you exit the dock/swimming area turn around. If whitecaps develop while you are rowing, head for shore and find calm water or a beach.
- Thunder and lightning. Never row when there is the possibility of lightning. Do not start a row if you hear thunder; wait at least 30 minutes. If you hear thunder when you are out on the water, immediately head for shore.
- Fog. Do not row in fog. If you cannot see at least 100 yards, then you shouldn't start a row. If fog rolls in while rowing, head to a shoreline and SLOWLY make your way back to the dock.
- Freezing temperatures. Do not row if there is ice at the edges of the water, or ice on the dock, or the potential of ice forming on the dock while rowing.

Some current weather resources:

- windy.com
- undergroundweather.com
- lakemonster.com

4 Oar Rule

During particularly cold weather (air or air+wind = 32 degrees or colder), the Board designee or member of the Board may invoke the "4 Oar Rule" without warning. This rule is enacted for member safety. When the 4 Oar Rule is in effect, no WRA club 1x or 2- (pair) is allowed to launch from the WRA boathouse without a safety launch.

Independent Boat Use

Independent boat use is offered to masters members only and is permitted in singles, doubles, and pairs. All rowers selecting to go out on the water without a coaching launch must adhere to the rules listed in the WRA Safety Guidelines and Expectations Handbook as well as meet the following requirements:

- Only WRA members who have been coach assessed and approved are permitted to utilize club equipment for independent rowing. Members must make arrangements for an assessment with a WRA Coach and this can be completed in the Masters Program classes.
- One USCG approved personal floatation device (PFD) for each person on board.
- One sound signaling device per boat.
- One phone per boat.
- Leave a record: Always make the reservation and sign in and out on iCrew. Be sure that someone on shore knows you are out on the water and when to expect you back.
- Dress for hi-visibility. It is VERY difficult for boaters to see rowers when shells are so close to the water. Wear light-colored, hi-vis tops and/or hats to improve visibility.
- Know your limits and row within it. Rowing long distances can be a fun journey but rowers should always ensure they are aware of their physical fitness, rowing capacity, endurance, location on the lake, and weather forecast. You need to be able to get home.
- Juniors are not permitted to be independent rowers, per WRA Guidelines and USRowing policies.

Youth and Junior Participation at WRA

Junior Team Members of WRA Youth programs may only use the WRA facility during scheduled, coached practices.

Coaches' Safety Certifications And Training

All WRA coaches are required, at minimum, to have: current CPR, current First Aid, Washington State Boater ID, certificate of USA SafeSport training, USRowing Level 1 coaching certification, and complete WRA staff training as provided. Additionally, coaches will be required to complete a background check.

Safe Sport

The Whatcom Rowing Association is a SafeSport boathouse. SafeSport aims to eliminate any form of sexual misconduct, emotional misconduct, physical misconduct, bullying, harassment and hazing in our sport. Working with the United States Olympic Committee, the SafeSport program was developed based on education and training for coaches, as well as reporting and enforcement policies that include criminal background checks of all Whatcom Rowing Association staff. Additionally, all USRowing members are required to complete SafeSport training annually with USRowing. Refer to [USRowing SafeSport](#) for more information.

Health And Safety

Clean hands and equipment make for healthy members! We provide sanitizing equipment and we strongly recommend all members use these supplies and wash their hands thoroughly after training.

Boathouse Emergency Response

- All participants are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the locations of the first aid equipment in the boathouse.
- AED - Our coaches are WRA first responders but should it be necessary to use the AED without a first responder present, call 9-1-1 for instructions. WA State has a "Good Samaritan Law" that protects responders unless there is gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct. Note the posters and protocols by the AED, which is currently located on the street side wall, familiarize yourself with its location. We encourage all rowers to take CPR AED training.
- In case of an emergency, call 9-1-1, provide your location **2202 Electric Ave**, and following the incident complete an incident report form (details below).

Incident Report Form

The Incident Report Form must be completed in the event of any on-water or off-water incident whereby any persons, rower, coach, staff, volunteer, or visitor to the Whatcom Rowing Association is injured during a training session and/or competition; during volunteer, regular, or special event duties while on Whatcom Rowing Association grounds or in the boathouse, or off the premises while traveling or using Whatcom Rowing Association equipment or participating in a Whatcom Rowing Association program. **All reports are submitted directly through iCrew** and are automatically distributed by iCrew to the Board.

VOLUNTEERS

WRA is a member forward rowing organization that relies heavily on its volunteer support. All WRA members are encouraged to pitch in when volunteer activities arise. We offer many ways to contribute to WRA, including but not limited to:

- Work Parties
- Regatta Support
- Serving on a Committee
- Volunteering with Learn to Row
- Boathouse chores and more

Record your service hours by logging in to iCrew and selecting VOLUNTEER HOURS. Your involvement keeps our club running the way we like it to run, and it is a great way to meet other rowers! Suggestions are always welcome, and members are encouraged to volunteer with activities whenever feasible.

Reach out to info@whatcomrowing.org to learn more about current needs.

Masters and Collegiate

MEMBERSHIP

Masters - WRA Membership is required for all adult rowers and is priced on an annual basis from January 1 – December 31.

Collegiate - WRA offers a seasonal 120 day membership to collegiate athletes returning to Whatcom county between educational terms.

Membership Benefits

- Access to WRA's indoor equipment
- Vote on club business that is presented at the annual meeting
- Independent Rowing following assessment from Masters' Head Coach
- Register for Member's Masters Programs
- Host a guest for rowing

Becoming a Member and Membership Renewal - Membership is on an Annual Calendar Year Basis

To be a member you must complete the following:

1. Register for membership and pay all membership fees online via iCrew.
2. Read the WRA Rower's Handbook and sign to acknowledge completion in iCrew.
3. Watch the US Rowing Safety Video and sign to acknowledge completion in iCrew.
 - WRA will host a viewing of this at least 3 times a year.
4. Sign the online US Rowing Liability Waiver. Enter **APFSD** under "Athletes" for the club code.
 - Note: Our liability insurance is through US Rowing, so to be covered under our insurance, **all rowers are required to be basic members of US Rowing** and sign and annual waiver before participating
5. Complete and turn in a signed float test if you have not already done so. The float test is valid for 5 years. You can review your flip and float test status in iCrew.

Independent Boat Use

Access to Independent Rowing is subject to a Coach Assessment for ALL Whatcom Masters and Collegiate rowers, where the rower demonstrates their ability to safely operate a rowing shell independently, has a current flip and float test on record in iCrew, and has demonstrated safe operation of a rowing shell in the WRA Programs. All rowers should connect with a WRA Coach to review their Independent rowing access for each class of boat 1x, 2x, 2- as well as for Bowing. Individual independent rowing permissions may be limited by season, type and size of boat, and other criteria deemed appropriate by WRA coaches based on the assessed abilities of the rower. Regardless of previous experience, all new members must be assessed and approved by a WRA Coach.

See safety section for checkout guidelines on Independent Boat Use.

PROGRAMS

Learn to Row (LTR) – This coached program is designed for adults who are new to the sport of rowing. Starting in the spring, summer, and fall each year the Learn to Row program aims to teach the basics of rowing and training with a team. Instruction is both on and off the water and focuses on building fitness, developing rowing technique along with water safety, flexibility, strength training and injury prevention.

WRA has a tiered progression for Learn to Row. LTR is a beginner program for those with no prior rowing experience. Typical progression for new rowers requires completion of two LTR sessions (total 16 weeks training). After successful completion of two Learn to Row sessions, rowers may progress to the **Novice Program** (8 weeks minimum). These programs are offered without a Masters Membership for a total of 2 ‘on the water seasons’, approximately 24 weeks. A US Rowing Membership is required for a nominal fee.

Experienced Adult Programs – These coached programs are for Members only who have the desire to improve physically and technically in a team setting. These programs emphasize refining and improving technical skill, focus on fitness and strength along with race preparation and training. Adult programs are available at a variety of times throughout the day (generally early AM, Mid AM and Evening) and are geared to rower ability as assessed by the coach and by season.

Spring - March thru June

Summer – July thru August

Fall – September thru early November

Private Coaching - The policies for this program are currently under development.

Juniors

MEMBERSHIP

Juniors - Junior Membership is included for the same period as program registration only. (ex. Spring program - registered for membership March through May)

PROGRAMS

Junior Rowing - The Whatcom Rowing Junior program consists of middle and high school students grades 8-12 (7th with permission from Head Coach) from the Whatcom County area. No rowing experience is necessary and new rowers can join at any time. Our focus is on learning proper rowing techniques, teamwork and having fun!

Whether your primary interest is competition, fitness, or fun, we have a place for you! Juniors will row in singles, doubles, quads and eights. They will be encouraged to develop confidence through teamwork and leadership, as well as individual goals. The team will also be participating in regional regattas throughout the year.

Spring - March thru Mid-may

Summer – Late June thru August

Fall – September thru November

Private Coaching - The policies for this program are currently under development and will be updated at completion.

Guest Policy

As a club actively engaged in both rowing and community, we welcome visiting rowers as part of our programs. All guest rowers must complete an individual US Rowing waiver to cover liability. If the guest is a current US Rowing member with another organization, this covers their liability but WRA still requires a US Rowing waiver.

Prospective members and out-of-town visitors can contact the club at info@whatcomrowing.org to arrange a row with us. In your note, please indicate your rowing experience, how long it has been since you rowed, and whether you are interested in sweep rowing, sculling, or both.

Visiting / Traveling Rowers

Experienced, currently active rowers *who are not prospective members* are welcome to join us for a guest row during their travels. We ask guests to please register and pay our guest rowing fee via our website. The guest fee is \$25/day payable at iCrew.

Prospective Members

If you have rowing experience and are interested in getting back in a boat with WRA as a member, join us for a free assessment practice with one of our programs to try out the club

before joining. We offer up to three rows to prospective members before asking for some form of a membership commitment.

Member Guests

Members can welcome guests up to 3x / year with a nominal \$25 Guest Fee paid through iCrew

Guests of WRA are subject to the following rules:

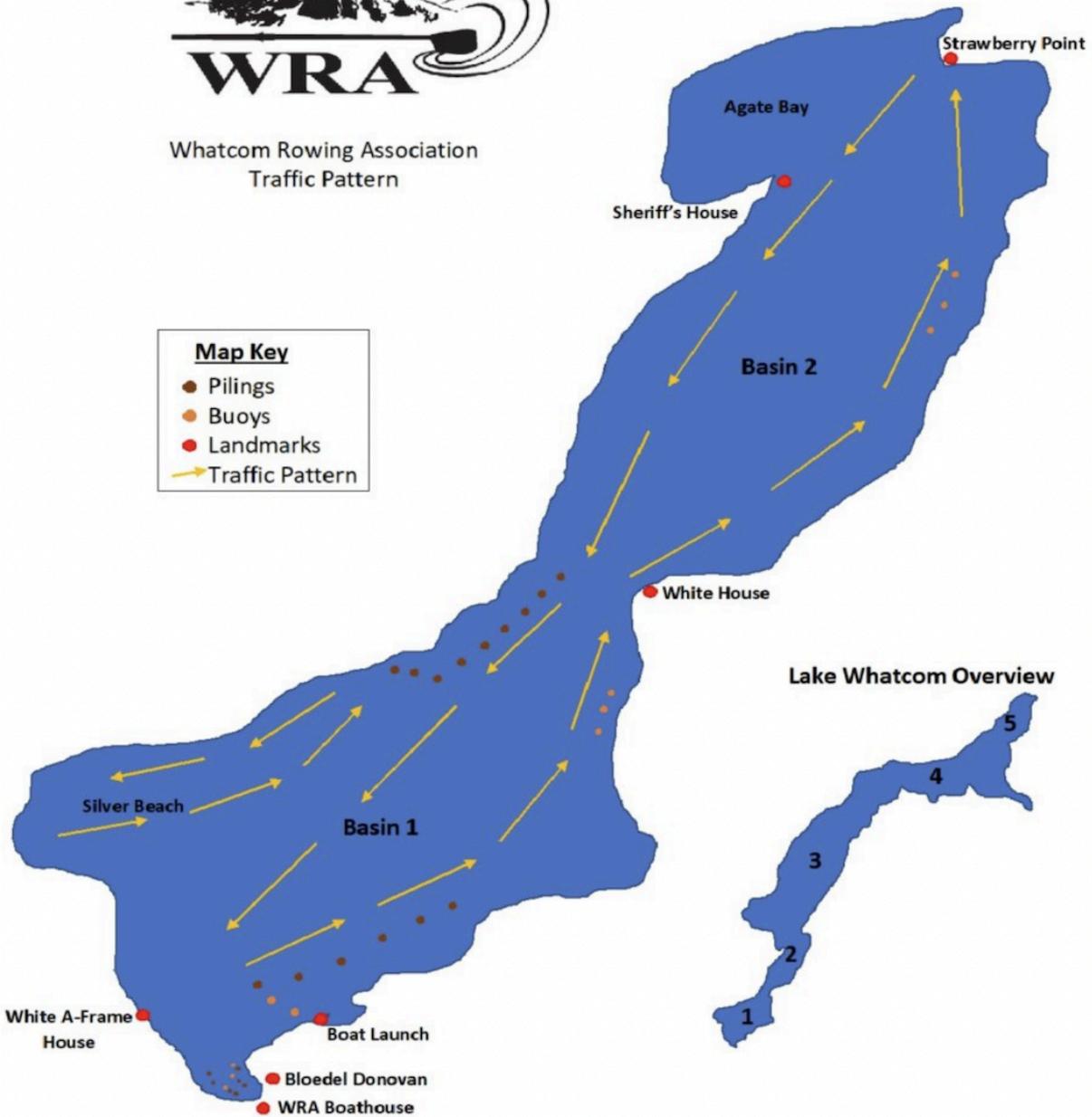
- The guest is expected to follow all WRA procedures, rules, and safety guidelines laid out in the WRA Rower's Handbook.
- The guest is required to sign a USRowing Liability Waiver prior to using WRA facilities or boats.
- The guest is permitted to use the workout facilities with the supervision of the hosting WRA Member
- The guest is permitted to use club boats only while rowing with a hosting WRA Member or Coach with a current Individual Boat Use approval.
- The guest is permitted to use a private 2-/2x only while rowing with the owner of the boat or a Club Member.
- The guest is permitted to use a private 1x only if the owner of the boat is present and rowing at the same time.
- The guest is not permitted to reserve club boats on the reservation calendar. The WRA Member and guest must comply with all WRA safety guidelines as laid out in the WRA Member Handbook and IBC Safety Checkout.
- The guest will pay a guest use fee through iCrew before launching
- Guest visits are limited to 3x / year. For arrangements to row more often, Guests or their host should contact the Head Coach directly for membership options.



Whatcom Rowing Association Traffic Pattern

Map Key

- Pilings
- Buoys
- Landmarks
- Traffic Pattern



Before You Row:

- Leave a record (logbook)
- Know the traffic pattern
- Carry a PFD and sound device
- Be aware of the weather
- Bow and Stern Lights required if rowing in dusk or dark
- Wear hi-viz or reflective clothing to increase visibility on the water

Report all safety incidents or violations safety@whatcomrowing.org