

Kayak Courtesy

By Greg Welker

Kitty Hawk – Kayakers have become a nuisance in a creek connecting Currituck Sound and Kitty Hawk Bay, some residents have complained. They say kayakers congregate in the waterway, blocking other craft from using it, and paddle too close to wildlife.

“It’s getting worse,” said Sandy Sanders, who lives on the creek. “There are more and more kayaks and less and less wildlife.”

Kayak critics surfaced at a town board meeting recently when officials described plans to apply for a grant to promote and mark a popular waterway, known locally as High Bridge Creek. "Some kayakers climb on his (Ed Sanders) dock or just pull up on the shore and picnic in their yard, Ms. Sanders said.

"Some Folks on Outer Banks Say Kayakers Hog Waterways" Associated Press, March 1999

The newspaper article quoted above was printed in a recent North Carolina newspaper. As responsible members of society, kayakers need to extend common courtesies to others. We don't always do that. The image of kayaking as ecologically friendly and low impact is only maintained if we all work to keep it that way. Motor and sail boats have a much larger cruising range than the average kayaker. With a smaller range, kayakers depend on being able to land on shore for lunch and breaks. If we abuse the shoreline, or make ourselves nuisances, we will find it harder to convince local governments to provide kayak access. When you are looking for a landing spot, choose a spot as out of the way as possible. Do not land on a beach which has the likely property owner's house in sight. Try to limit your group to using only the portion of the beach between high and low tide. Above the high tide mark is potentially private property. Especially do not land on property marked with No Trespassing signs. We should never be using private docks unless we have prior permission from the owner. Just as car travel on streets is controlled by a system of rules, so is boat travel on water. The boating equivalent of the Motor Vehicle Code is known in the U.S. as the Inland Navigational Rules. Following these rules provides a sense of order when on the water. In confined areas like a creek, boat traffic should behave as automobiles do - always keeping oncoming traffic on your left as it approaches and passes, and allowing faster sail and power boats to pass when space and safety allow. Kayak groups that spread out and paddle in the middle of a creek are causing a hazard to themselves and others. In narrow areas, it is a good idea for kayak groups to proceed single file, as far to the right as possible. This will also keep you out of the channel, which is where the motor and sail boats want to be. Channels are marked by buoys and numbered posts, called daymarks. When going up a river channel the red buoys and markers indicate the right side of the channel, and the green ones indicate the left side of a channel. Channel markers do not occur in pairs, but are generally staggered, and are shown on nautical charts.

The Inland Navigational Rules allow boaters to be able to reasonably predict the actions and courses of other boaters. Since many kayakers are not aware of these rules of the road, we tend to behave unpredictably. Often when a group of kayakers see an oncoming boat, the tendency is to scatter out of the path of the boat. A better option would be for the group of kayakers to tighten formation while

maintaining course at a slower pace. The group should decide upon a course of action, and then all act in unison. If this is done, then the boater just has to steer around the group of kayaks, rather than having to figure out how to avoid each individual kayak as we all head in different directions.

Most good introductory books on sailing, power boating, and navigation contain a section explaining the Navigational Rules and navigational markers. These books are often available at local libraries. Another excellent way of learning about the rules and markers, and other useful information, is to take the Basic Boating Course offered by The United States Power Squadrons. This course is held regularly and costs only \$20, which includes a good reference book. I recently completed this course, and found it to be very worthwhile for kayakers. The schedule of upcoming courses can be seen at <http://www.usps.org> or call 1-888-367-8777.

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