

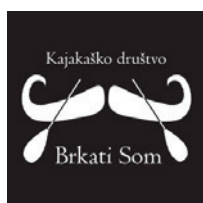


Guidelines for Sustainable Kayaking and Canoeing Practices

**Paddle for
the Earth**



Co-funded by
the European Union



 **Caritas**
Zagrebačke nadbiskupije

Table of Contents



**Paddle for
the Earth**

Introduction	2
Principles of Environmentally Responsible Behavior	4
Equipment and Materials	6
Waste Management During Activities	8
Safety and Environmental Protection	10
Organizing Low-Impact Events	12
Partners Best Practice Examples	14
Conclusion and Call to Action	17
Appendices	19

Kayaking and canoeing are among the most rewarding outdoor activities, offering a unique way to connect with nature, improve physical fitness, and foster teamwork. However, as with any sport conducted in natural environments, these activities have the potential to impact ecosystems if not practiced responsibly. The “Guidelines for Sustainable Practices in Kayaking and Canoeing” have been developed as part of the Paddle for the Earth project, under the Erasmus+ Sport framework, to help clubs, athletes, and event organizers minimize negative environmental impact while enhancing the positive influence these sports can have on communities and nature.

Purpose of the Guidelines

The main aim of this document is to provide practical, adaptable, and action-oriented recommendations for integrating sustainability into all aspects of kayaking and canoeing. Whether you are planning a small local training session or a large-scale international regatta, these guidelines will help you.



Reduce the environmental footprint of your activities.



Promote environmental awareness among athletes, spectators, and local communities.



Align your practices with EU and global sustainability goals.




Inspire others in the water sports sector to adopt eco-friendly practices.



Why Sustainability in Water Sports Matters

Rivers, lakes, and coastal waters are delicate ecosystems that face growing threats from pollution, climate change, and overuse. Kayakers and canoeists are often among the first to notice changes in water quality, wildlife patterns, and the state of riverbanks. This makes them not only users of these environments but also key stewards of their preservation.

Unsustainable practices, such as leaving waste behind, disturbing wildlife during breeding seasons, or using harmful cleaning products, can have cumulative impacts that degrade the very environments we rely on for recreation. Conversely, well-organized, eco-conscious paddling activities can.

- 
- Support biodiversity conservation.
 - Provide a platform for environmental education.
 - Strengthen community engagement and stewardship of local waterways.

Kayaking and canoeing are among the most rewarding outdoor activities, offering a unique way to connect with nature, improve physical fitness, and foster teamwork. However, as with any sport conducted in natural environments, these activities have the potential to impact ecosystems if not practiced responsibly. The [Guidelines for Sustainable Practices in Kayaking and Canoeing](#) have been developed as part of the Paddle for the Earth project, under the Erasmus+ Sport framework, to help clubs, athletes, and event organizers minimize negative environmental impact while enhancing the positive influence these sports can have on communities and nature.

Link to the Paddle for the Earth Project

The Paddle for the Earth project brings together partners from Croatia, Slovenia, and Hungary, each with a strong tradition of water sports and environmental engagement. These guidelines are one of the key outputs of the project, ensuring that sustainability is embedded not just as an optional extra, but as a standard practice.

The project aligns with the Erasmus+ Sport objectives of [the project](#).

- 1 Encouraging healthy lifestyles through sport.
- 2 Promoting inclusion and equal opportunities in sport.
- 3 Supporting environmental sustainability and climate action in and through sport.

Who Should Use These Guidelines

These guidelines are intended for [the following groups](#):

- ✓ Sports clubs looking to integrate sustainable practices into their operations.
- ✓ Event organizers who want to run eco-friendly competitions and festivals.
- ✓ Athletes and coaches who wish to reduce their environmental footprint.
- ✓ Community groups and schools involved in water sports education.
- ✓ Local authorities and policymakers developing strategies for sport and environmental protection.

Whether you are an experienced paddler or new to the sport, the recommendations provided here can be adapted to fit your local context, available resources, and environmental priorities.

These efforts are aligned with wider European Union strategies, including the EU Green Deal and the HealthyLifestyle4All initiative, which emphasize the importance of combining sport with sustainability and health. By implementing eco-friendly practices, kayaking and canoeing clubs not only protect local waterways but also contribute to EU-wide goals of climate action and healthier living.



Tip. [the project](#)

Sustainability is not an all-or-nothing approach. Even small changes, such as replacing single-use plastic bottles with refillable alternatives, can have a significant long-term impact when consistently applied.

Principles of Environmentally Responsible Behavior

Environmental responsibility in kayaking and canoeing means making conscious choices before, during, and after each activity to ensure that the natural environment is preserved for future generations. This section outlines five core principles that form the foundation of sustainable paddling. Each principle is accompanied by practical recommendations, real-world examples, and tips for implementation.



Respect Nature – Leave No Trace

The Leave No Trace principle is one of the most widely recognized guidelines in outdoor recreation. For paddlers, it means leaving each site in the same or better condition than you found it.

Key practices include

- Packing out all rubbish, even if it isn't yours.
- Avoiding noise pollution, especially in sensitive wildlife areas.
- Preventing damage to vegetation when launching or landing.

Example

During the *Soča River Celan Up Paddle* in Slovenia, participants carried small mesh bags attached to their kayaks, collecting any floating waste they encountered. Over a single weekend, more than 40 kg of litter was removed from the river without interrupting the sporting schedule.



Tip

Equip all participants with a small waterproof trash bag during events to encourage collective responsibility.



Stay on Permitted Routes

Paddling only in designated areas helps protect sensitive habitats such as bird nesting sites, aquatic plant beds, and spawning grounds for fish.

Why it matters

- Disturbing breeding areas can have long-term effects on species populations.
- Certain shorelines are vulnerable to erosion if approached repeatedly by watercraft.

In Croatia, rivers are home to several protected species. Local kayaking clubs should coordinate with environmental agencies to update paddling maps annually, marking no-go zones during critical breeding months.

Checklist for route planning

- ☒ Confirm local restrictions with authorities.
- ☒ Share updated route maps with participants before the event.
- ☒ Brief paddlers on areas to avoid and explain why.



Avoid Disturbing Wildlife

Wildlife encounters can be a highlight of paddling, but it's crucial to observe from a distance and avoid any interaction that might stress the animals.

Practical actions

- Maintain a safe distance of at least 30 meters from birds and mammals.
- **DO NOT FEED WILDLIFE** — it can disrupt their natural diet and behavior.
- Reduce sudden movements and noise when near animals.

Example scenario

Organizers can designate quiet zones along certain parts of the route where talking and paddling strokes are minimized for a set distance, helping to increase the chances of observing rare bird species without disturbing them.



Tip

Train volunteers or marshals to monitor wildlife interactions and intervene if participants get too close.



Use Renewable Resources

From the materials in your gear to the energy used during events, choosing renewable or eco-certified resources makes a measurable difference.

Recommendations

- Use biodegradable cleaning agents for boats and gear.
- Select renewable energy sources (e.g., solar-powered lighting for events).
- Purchase equipment from manufacturers with sustainability certifications.

Example scenario

A club could replace a petrol-powered safety boat with an electric motor, potentially reducing fuel use by up to 80% over a single season and significantly cutting noise pollution on the river.



Tip

Include sustainability criteria in all procurement processes for your club or event.



Promote the “Leave No Trace” Philosophy

Sustainability works best when it becomes part of the culture. Raising awareness among athletes, spectators, and the wider community ensures that sustainable practices continue beyond a single event.

Ways to promote

- Display sustainability guidelines at event venues.
- Include short environmental briefings before competitions.
- Organize clean-up paddles as community engagement activities.

Example scenario

The BAIS club in Hungary holds an annual Eco Paddle Day where the competition is followed by a communal clean-up session and environmental workshops for children.



Tip

Offer recognition or small awards for participants who actively contribute to sustainability efforts during events.

Equipment and Materials

The equipment you choose for kayaking and canoeing — from boats and paddles to safety gear and maintenance supplies — directly influences both the environmental impact of your activities and the long-term financial sustainability of your club or event. By selecting durable, eco-friendly products and implementing responsible maintenance practices, paddlers can reduce waste, lower costs, and protect the environment.



Choose Durable and High-Quality Kayaks/Canoes

Investing in equipment that lasts longer may seem more expensive at first, but it reduces the need for frequent replacements, saving money and reducing waste over time.

Key considerations

- Look for UV-resistant materials for boats used in sunny climates.
- Choose boats with reinforced hulls for rocky rivers to avoid frequent repairs.
- Opt for modular or repairable designs rather than single-use, disposable models.

Example scenario

If the KDBS club in Slovenia invested in modular kayaks with replaceable parts. Over five years, they would reduce equipment disposal by 60% and save approximately €7,500 on replacements.



Tip

When purchasing, request warranty information and details about spare parts availability.



Prefer Recycled or Recyclable Materials

Where possible, select boats, paddles, and safety gear made from recycled or recyclable components.

Why it matters

- Reduces demand for virgin materials.
- Encourages a circular economy in sporting goods.

Examples of materials

- Recycled polyethylene for kayak hulls.
- Paddles with shafts made from recycled aluminum.
- Life jackets with filling from recycled PET bottles.

Example scenario

A supplier could provide paddling jackets made from 100% recycled polyester, with each jacket diverting the equivalent of around 200 plastic bottles from landfills.



Use Eco-Friendly Cleaning Products

Conventional boat-cleaning chemicals can be harmful to aquatic life if they enter waterways.

Recommendations

- Use biodegradable, phosphate-free cleaners.
- Avoid chlorine-based products.
- Use minimal quantities and rinse boats away from natural water sources.

Example

KKK Mladost could switch to a citrus-based biodegradable cleaner for their fleet, which would help prevent chemical runoff into the Sava River and improve local water quality.



Tip

Create a green cleaning kit for all club members to use, including eco-friendly detergents, reusable cloths, and soft brushes.



Implement Shared Equipment Systems

Sharing equipment within the club or between partner clubs reduces the total number of items needed and maximizes the use of existing resources.

Benefits:

- Lower environmental impact from manufacturing.
- Reduced storage requirements.
- Greater access for new members without high initial costs.

Example

Through an inter-club sharing agreement, KDBS (Slovenia) and KKK Mladost (Croatia) coordinated boat and paddle usage for joint events, reducing transport emissions and minimizing the need for duplicate purchases.

Checklist for shared systems

- ☒ Maintain a booking calendar.
- ☒ Track equipment condition after each use.
- ☒ Clearly label ownership and maintenance responsibilities.



Repair and Upcycle Damaged Gear

Instead of discarding damaged boats or paddles, consider repair, refurbishment, or creative reuse.

Ideas

- Repair cracked hulls with eco-resin patches.
- Convert damaged paddles into training tools or garden decorations.
- Donate functional but outdated gear to schools or community programs.

Example scenario

A club in Hungary repaired 12 damaged boats using recycled fiberglass and donated them to a youth kayaking program, extending their lifespan by an additional 3–4 years.



Tip

Organize an annual Repair Day with volunteers and skilled members to fix equipment collectively.

Equipment Type	Eco-Friendly Option	Benefits
Kayaks	Recycled polyethylene hull	Reduces plastic waste
Paddles	Recycled aluminum shaft	Lightweight, sustainable
Life Jackets	Recycled PET filling	Diverts plastic bottles from landfill
Cleaning Supplies	Biodegradable citrus-based cleaner	Non-toxic to aquatic life

04

Waste Management During Activities

Effective waste management is one of the most visible aspects of sustainability in kayaking and canoeing events. Poorly handled waste not only harms the environment but also undermines the positive image of the sport. A strong waste management plan should focus on prevention, reduction, and proper disposal.



Apply the “Pack In, Pack Out” Rule

This principle ensures that every participant takes responsibility for their own waste, reducing the burden on organizers and protecting the environment.

Implementation tips

- Require all paddlers to carry small waterproof bags for personal waste.
- Include this rule in event briefings and registration materials.
- Display signs at entry points reminding participants to take their waste with them.

Example scenario

At the Eco Paddle Day, all participants were given biodegradable waste bags at the start. By the end of the event, over 95% of waste had been collected by individuals rather than left for volunteers.



Tip

a positive example — have organizers and volunteers actively follow the rule.



Provide Waste Separation Points

Even with Pack In, Pack Out in place, events often generate some on-site waste from food stalls, maintenance areas, and spectators.

Best practices

- Set up clearly marked bins for recyclables, compostables, and general waste.
- Position bins near high-traffic areas such as food stalls, start/finish lines, and parking areas.
- Assign volunteers to monitor bins and prevent contamination.

Case study

During the KKK Mladost clean up events, waste separation bins reduced landfill waste by 70% compared to previous events.



Tip

Use colour-coded bins with multilingual signs for international events.



Eliminate Single-Use Plastics

Single-use plastics, especially bottles and cutlery, are among the most common pollutants found in waterways.

Alternatives

- Provide refillable water stations instead of bottled water.
- Offer reusable or compostable food packaging.
- Encourage participants to bring their own bottles and containers.

Example scenario

KDBS in Slovenia could partner with a local eco-business to supply reusable stainless steel bottles for all competitors. These bottles, branded with the event logo, could also serve as a memorable souvenir.



Encourage Shared Transport

Transportation to and from events often accounts for a significant share of the carbon footprint.

Actions

- Promote carpooling through the event website or social media.
- Offer incentives for those arriving by bike, public transport, or shared rides.
- Provide secure storage for bicycles.

Example

At the BAIS Youth Eco Paddle, participants arriving in carpools could receive free meal vouchers. As a result, carpool usage would increase by 40% compared to the previous events.



Manage Hazardous Waste Responsibly

Some activities may generate hazardous waste, such as fuel, oil, or cleaning chemicals.

Guidelines

- Store hazardous substances in secure containers away from the water.
- Dispose of them at certified collection points.
- Train volunteers on handling hazardous materials.



Tip

Keep a hazardous waste kit with absorbent pads, gloves, and sealed containers for emergencies.



Engage and Educate Participants

An effective waste management plan involves not just rules but also active engagement.

Ideas

- Run short environmental workshops before the event starts.
- Organize Clean Paddle challenges where teams collect the most waste.
- Publicly recognize participants who demonstrate exceptional environmental care.

Example scenario

In Croatia, an event could feature a Trash to Treasure art contest where collected waste is transformed into creative sculptures and displayed at the post-event ceremony, inspiring participants and spectators to see discarded materials in a new light.

Task	Responsible	Deadline	Status
Order biodegradable waste bags	Logistics Manager	2 weeks before event	<input type="checkbox"/>
Set up waste separation points	Volunteer Team	Day before event	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book water refill stations	Event Manager	1 month before event	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrange hazardous waste disposal	Safety Officer	During event	<input type="checkbox"/>

In kayaking and canoeing, safety and environmental protection are deeply interconnected. A well-prepared safety plan not only prevents accidents but also helps safeguard fragile aquatic ecosystems. Every paddling activity — from casual training to international competitions — should integrate these two aspects into a single, coherent strategy.



Safety as the First Layer of Sustainability

A safe activity is a sustainable one. Accidents often lead to environmental damage (e.g., fuel spills from rescue boats, disruption of wildlife during rescue operations).

Key safety measures

- Always wear certified life jackets.
- Ensure all participants have received a safety briefing before departure.
- Assign trained safety marshals for larger events.

Example scenario

Before the start of a river marathon in Croatia, safety officers conduct a 10-minute on-shore demonstration covering paddle signals, capsizing recovery techniques, and emergency contact procedures.



Tip

Incorporate environmental guidelines into safety briefings so participants understand both aspects at the same time.



Pre-Activity Risk Assessment

Assessing potential hazards before launching is essential to minimize both personal and environmental risks.

Checklist for risk assessment

- Weather forecast and water levels.
- Known wildlife activity (e.g., breeding seasons).
- Riverbank stability and potential erosion zones.
- Accessibility for emergency services.

Case study

In Slovenia, the KDBS club could use a digital risk assessment form before each group paddle on the Soča River. This would ensure that both safety and environmental risk factors — such as avoiding spawning areas and minimizing disturbance to riverbank vegetation — are addressed together.



Coordination with Rescue and Environmental Services

Collaboration with local rescue teams, coast guards, or environmental agencies ensures a fast and effective response to emergencies.

Best practices

- Share event maps with rescue teams in advance.
- Have designated communication channels for emergencies.
- Involve environmental officers in planning to advise on sensitive areas.

Example scenario

During a large paddling event on the Sava River, organizers station lifeguards at key points and coordinate with the Croatian Mountain Rescue Service (HGSS) to cover remote river sections.



Preventing Pollution from Support Vessels

Motorized support boats can be essential for safety but pose environmental risks.

Mitigation steps

- Use electric or low-emission engines where possible.
- Conduct regular maintenance to prevent oil or fuel leaks.
- Limit unnecessary trips and operate at low speeds near wildlife.

Example scenario

A Hungarian club replaced their two-stroke rescue boat engine with an electric outboard motor, cutting both fuel costs and emissions while reducing noise disturbance.



Controlled Launch and Landing Areas

Launching and landing in uncontrolled areas can damage vegetation and cause shoreline erosion.

Recommendations

- Use designated access points with stable surfaces.
- Rotate landing areas in training to allow recovery of vegetation.
- Install temporary matting or ramps for events.



Tip

Work with local authorities to improve or formalize safe and eco-friendly access points.



Environmental Monitoring During Events

Assign volunteers or marshals to monitor environmental impact in real time.

Tasks may include

- Ensuring paddlers avoid no-go wildlife zones.
- Checking that waste rules are followed.
- Reporting any pollution incidents immediately.

Example scenario

A team of eco-marshals patrols the course in kayaks, reminding paddlers to keep a safe distance from nesting birds while also checking for floating debris.

Task	Responsible	Deadline	Status
Safety briefing for all participants	Safety Officer	Before start	<input type="checkbox"/>
Risk assessment completed	Event Manager	Day before event	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rescue team on standby	Logistics Manager	Event day	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waste separation points in place	Volunteer Team	Event day	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental marshals briefed	Sustainability Officer	Before start	<input type="checkbox"/>

Organizing Low-Impact Events

Well-organized sports events can inspire entire communities — but they can also generate significant environmental impacts if sustainability is not integrated into planning from the start. Low-impact events focus on reducing waste, minimizing carbon footprints, and protecting local ecosystems while still delivering a high-quality sporting experience.



Early Sustainability Planning

Sustainability should be embedded into the event plan from the first meeting, not added as an afterthought.

Best practices

- Set sustainability goals (e.g., 80% waste recycling rate, zero single-use plastics).
- Assign a sustainability coordinator to oversee environmental measures.
- Build eco-friendly actions into the event budget.

Example scenario

A river festival in Croatia includes a “Sustainability Action Plan” in its official event manual, ensuring every department — from catering to transport — follows the same green objectives.



Tip

Include sustainability criteria when selecting suppliers and service providers.



Communication and Promotion

How you promote your event can either contribute to environmental harm or help set an example.

Recommendations

- Prioritize digital communication over printed materials.
- If printing is necessary, use recycled paper and eco-friendly inks.
- Promote sustainability policies on the event website and social media.

Example scenario

A kayak marathon replaced printed flyers with targeted online campaigns and reduced paper use by 90%, saving approximately €800 in printing costs.



Eco-Friendly Infrastructure

Event infrastructure — from tents to banners — should be reusable, repairable, or recyclable.

Ideas

- Rent equipment instead of buying new.
- Avoid PVC banners in favor of recyclable fabric.
- Use solar-powered lighting where possible.

Example scenario

An international paddling competition in Hungary invests in modular, reusable event signage, saving storage space and avoiding the need for annual reprints.



Sustainable Catering

Food and drink services at events are often a major source of waste and carbon emissions.

Best practices

- Source food from local suppliers to reduce transport emissions.
- Offer vegetarian and vegan options, which generally have a lower environmental impact.
- Use compostable or reusable plates, cups, and cutlery.

Example scenario

The Eco Paddle Festival partnered with local organic farmers, reducing catering-related emissions by an estimated 35%.



Transportation Strategies

Participant and spectator travel is often the largest contributor to an event's carbon footprint.

Recommendations

- Provide shuttle buses from major transport hubs.
- Offer incentives for cycling, walking, or public transport.
- Facilitate carpool coordination through an online platform.

Example scenario

A Croatian kayaking event offers free parking only to vehicles with three or more passengers, boosting carpooling rates and reducing traffic congestion.



On-Site Environmental Measures

During the event, maintain constant oversight of environmental practices.

Actions

- Place clearly marked recycling and compost bins.
- Deploy eco-marshals to guide participants and spectators.
- Provide water refill stations to eliminate bottled water use.



Tip

Schedule regular green team check-ins throughout the event to address any sustainability issues immediately.

Task	Responsible	Deadline	Status
Sustainability coordinator appointed	Event Manager	3 months before	<input type="checkbox"/>
Digital-first communication strategy in place	Media Team	2 months before	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reusable signage sourced	Logistics Team	1 month before	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food suppliers contracted	Catering Manager	1 month before	<input type="checkbox"/>
Carpool & shuttle arrangements confirmed	Transport Coordinator	2 weeks before	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waste stations installed	Volunteer Team	Event day	<input type="checkbox"/>

Partners Best Practice Examples

Partnerships are a driving force behind the success of Paddle for the Earth. Each partner contributes unique strengths, experiences, and resources, enabling the project to test and refine sustainable practices in different local contexts. The following examples, both real and scenario-based, showcase how partners integrate environmental responsibility into their operations.



Kayak Canoe Club Mladost (Croatia)

Background

KKK Mladost, based in Zagreb, is a young club primarily focused on recreational kayaking. While competition is not its main activity, the club places strong emphasis on international cooperation and environmental stewardship. Its riverside location on the Sava provides members with direct access to a dynamic aquatic ecosystem, fostering both sport and environmental awareness.

Best practice examples

1 Inclusive Kayaking

Organized dedicated kayaking sessions for Caritas beneficiaries, including young people, underprivileged individuals, people from the House for Youth *That They May Have Life*, and persons with disabilities. These events introduced participants to the sport in a supportive and safe environment, while also teaching basic water safety skills.

2 Eco-Education Workshops

Delivered interactive workshops on sustainability and waterway protection before paddling activities. Participants learned how everyday habits affect rivers and lakes, and how they can contribute to cleaner and healthier environments.

3 River and Lake Clean-Up

The club organized a clean-up action at Jarun Lake, engaging members, volunteers, and local community groups in collecting litter both from the water and along the shoreline. This initiative not only improved the local environment but also raised public awareness about pollution in urban aquatic ecosystems.

4 Whitewater Croatia Spring Meetup

A four-day event bringing together paddlers from Croatia and abroad to share favorite rivers and kayaking spots. Alongside the paddling activities and community building, the program included a dedicated workshop on sustainable practices in kayaking, helping participants integrate eco-friendly habits into their regular paddling routines.

5 Sava River Day

On the occasion of the Sava River Day, the club participated in activities promoting the protection and sustainable use of the river. Members joined a community paddle, organized environmental awareness actions, and engaged with other local organizations to highlight the importance of preserving the Sava's biodiversity.



Kajakaško društvo Brkati Som - KDBS (Slovenia)

Background

Known for its strong recreational paddling culture, Brkati Som emphasizes accessibility and inclusivity, often engaging beginner paddlers and tourists.

Best practice examples

1 Tourist Paddle Clean-Up Events

Combined guided kayak tours with mini clean-up actions, where visitors collected litter along the route. This not only improved the environment but also created memorable eco-tourism experiences.

2 Wildlife Awareness Paddle Trails

Designed routes that pass through wildlife hotspots, with trained guides explaining the importance of observing wildlife without disturbing it.

3 Equipment Sharing with Local Schools

Provided kayaks and safety gear to schools for their sports programs, promoting both physical activity and environmental awareness.

4 Educational Competitions with Certificates

Organized friendly paddling competitions combined with short educational sessions on river ecology and safe paddling techniques. All participants received certificates of successful participation, encouraging learning and rewarding involvement.



Budapest Association for International Sports – BAIS (Hungary)

Background

BAIS is a volunteer-based non-profit organization with the mission of promoting physical activity, healthy lifestyle, eco-friendly initiatives, intercultural understanding, active citizenship and participation through sport-based non-formal education for international and local communities.

Best practice examples

1 Eco Paddle Festival

A multi-day celebration combining competitive paddling, hands-on environmental workshops, and cultural exchange activities. The event attracts participants from across Europe and serves as a model for integrating sport with sustainability and community building.

2 Trash-to-Treasure Art Zone

Following a river clean-up paddle, participants repurpose collected litter into creative sculptures and artworks. These are displayed in public spaces, turning waste into a source of inspiration while sparking conversations about recycling and responsible consumption.

3 Green Inclusion Program

An initiative offering free access to eco-themed paddling events for disadvantaged youth. Participants are paired with mentors from the sports community, fostering both environmental awareness and social inclusion through shared paddling experiences.

4 Eco Team-Building by the Lake

BAIS organizes corporate and community team-building days at lakes around Budapest, combining water-based activities such as kayaking, water skiing, and wakeboarding with hands-on environmental action. Alongside the sporting fun, teams participate in shoreline and water clean-ups, ensuring no trash is left behind and highlighting the shared responsibility for protecting natural spaces. The mix of sport, teamwork, and eco-action strengthens group cohesion while fostering a culture of environmental responsibility that participants can carry back into their workplaces and communities.



Tip

While some of these initiatives are real and proven, others are scenario-based ideas that could be implemented in future Paddle for the Earth activities or by similar clubs worldwide.



Caritas of the Archdiocese of Zagreb (Croatia)

Background

Caritas of the Archdiocese of Zagreb provides support to vulnerable groups, including children, youth, and adults facing social and economic challenges. Beyond its social assistance programs, Caritas also runs environmental initiatives such as clothing recycling programs and educational activities for its members. Through Paddle for the Earth, Caritas expanded its work into the field of sports inclusion, using kayaking and related activities as a means of empowerment, social integration, and environmental awareness.

Best practice examples

1 Clothing Recycling and Awareness Campaign (real)

Operates a long-term program for collecting, sorting, and redistributing used clothing, promoting reuse and reducing textile waste. This initiative also includes educational sessions for members and volunteers on the importance of recycling and sustainable consumption.

2 Cultural and Community Exchange

Hosted joint events where Caritas beneficiaries paddle alongside local sports club members and international guests, promoting intercultural understanding, teamwork, and mutual respect.

Conclusion and Call to Action

Over the course of this project, Paddle for the Earth has shown that sport can be a powerful catalyst for environmental change. Through kayaking and canoeing, we connect with rivers, lakes, and coastal waters in a direct, tangible way — feeling their currents, witnessing their beauty, and also confronting the threats they face. This connection creates a responsibility that goes beyond sport; it compels us to protect and restore the very environments that give us so much joy.

The sustainable practices presented in these guidelines — from eco-friendly equipment choices to low-impact event organization — are not abstract recommendations. They are practical steps that clubs, event organizers, and individual paddlers can take immediately. Some require investment, others simply a change in habit, but all contribute to a shared goal, ensuring that our waterways remain clean, safe, and vibrant for generations to come.



Our Shared Responsibility

The health of our aquatic ecosystems is not solely in the hands of environmental agencies or policymakers. It rests equally with local communities, sports clubs, and individuals who interact with these environments daily. Every piece of litter removed, every shoreline restored, every sustainable choice made at an event has a cumulative impact.

The examples shared throughout this document, both real and scenario-based, demonstrate that creativity, collaboration, and commitment can lead to measurable results. Whether it is a clean-up action at Jarun Lake, a multi-day paddling meetup with a sustainability workshop, or the celebration of Sava River Day, these initiatives are proof that environmental stewardship can be woven naturally into sporting activities.



Looking Ahead

The next steps are clear.



Adopt these guidelines within your club or organization.



Share them with partners, schools, and community groups.



Inspire others by showcasing your own best practices, no matter how small they may seem.



Collaborate across borders to tackle shared environmental challenges.

Sustainability is not a one-time effort — it is a continuous process of learning, adapting, and improving. As new materials, technologies, and strategies emerge, these guidelines can evolve to reflect the latest and most effective practices.



Call to Action

We invite every paddler, coach, volunteer, and supporter to become an ambassador for sustainable kayaking and canoeing. Talk to your teammates about eco-friendly habits. Encourage event organizers to integrate green policies. Lead by example – on and off the water.

The river's story is not written by nature alone; it is shaped by every human who touches its banks or paddles its currents. Together, we can ensure that this story is one of resilience, respect, and renewal.



Final Thought

When you next step into your kayak or canoe, remember that you are not just a paddler. You are a guardian of the waters you navigate. Let your actions, every stroke, every choice, reflect the care and respect these environments deserve.



Furthermore, these guidelines are in line with key European frameworks such as the EU Green Deal and the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles. Initiatives like Caritas' clothing recycling programs demonstrate how water sports can intersect with broader EU objectives on circular economy, resource efficiency, and sustainable lifestyles, ensuring that the project contributes meaningfully to both sport and European sustainability priorities.

The following appendices provide practical tools and additional resources to support the implementation of sustainable practices in kayaking and canoeing.

Appendix A – Pre-Event Sustainability Checklist

Task	Responsible	Deadline	Status
Sustainability coordinator appointed	Event Manager	3 months before	<input type="checkbox"/>
Digital-first communication strategy confirmed	Media Team	2 months before	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food suppliers contracted	Catering Manager	1 month before	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waste separation points designed and signage prepared	Logistics Team	2 weeks before	<input type="checkbox"/>
Safety & environment briefing prepared	Safety Officer	1 week before	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B – On-Water Safety & Environment Checklist

Task	Responsible	Deadline	Status
Life jackets and helmets checked for all participants	Safety Team	Event day	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rescue boat(s) inspected and ready	Safety Officer	Event day	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eco-marshals briefed	Sustainability Officer	Event day	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No-go zones for wildlife marked on route map	Environmental Liaison	Event day	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waste collection bags distributed to participants	Volunteer Team	Before start	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix C – Sample Event Sustainability Policy

Purpose

To outline the environmental commitments of the event and ensure all stakeholders work towards minimizing ecological impact.

Key points

1. No single-use plastics permitted on-site.
2. All waste must be separated into recycling, compost, and general waste.
3. Refillable water stations available throughout the event.
4. Transport by bike, walking, or carpooling is encouraged.
5. All participants must follow designated routes to protect sensitive habitats.

Appendix D – Training Resources

List of recommended resources for clubs and individuals to learn more about sustainable paddling.

- Leave No Trace Principles for Water Sports – Int.org
- EU Green Sports Toolkit – European Commission
- International Canoe Federation Sustainability Guidelines
- River Network Clean-Up Organizer's Guide
- UNEP Plastic Pollution Factsheets

Appendix E – Template for Reporting Sustainable Practices

Section	Description
Event Name	
Date & Location	
Sustainability Measures Implemented	
Environmental Outcomes (e.g., waste collected, CO ² saved)	
Lessons Learned	
Recommendations for Future Events	

Note. *These appendices are designed to be adaptable – clubs can add, remove, or modify items to fit their local context and scale of activity.*



Co-funded by
the European Union



Paddle for the Earth

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



Paddle for the Earth

**Guidelines for Sustainable Kayaking
and Canoeing Practices**