

Central Okanagan Naturalists' Club

Risk Assessment and Mitigation for CONC Activities

2016 February 1

While it is expected that CONC activities will be enjoyed without incident, it must be recognized there are significant risks involved in those activities. Assessing and mitigating these risks can be considered from four different angles: leadership, the participants themselves, travel to and during the activity, and the activity environment. Activity Leaders assess and deal with these risks.

1 Leadership

The primary considerations during CONC activities are the safety and well-being of participants, the conservation of the area visited, and the well-being of its flora and fauna. All Activity Leaders plan with these considerations in mind. However, individual participants are responsible for guiding themselves according to the risk. Any route can have significant potential risk if participants do not behave and react in a safe manner.

The Activity Leader holds a meeting at the assembly point to review the course of the activity, review the activity rating, provide an expected time for the activity, identify any risks, and advise the participants what is expected of them to reduce or eliminate the risks identified. If there is more than one assembly point, the Activity Leader will time the meeting so that all participants are briefed.

Having communicated the above information, the Activity Leader's responsibilities are to indicate a route they believe to be safe, to maintain a comfortable pace, and to return all participants to the starting point.

Activity Leaders must adhere to CONC's policies.

2 Participants

If you have not attended our activities in the past, we are pleased to have you with us.

Activities are inherently risky and participants, whether visitors or members, should guide themselves accordingly. At no time should a participant impair their judgement through substance abuse.

You may not fully comprehend what you are undertaking. Nor do the CONC Activity Leaders and members participating in the activity know your abilities and behaviour patterns. This lack of understanding, combined with the inherent risk of the outing, presents increased risk to everyone involved. As a result, you must guide yourself appropriately and assume the responsibility of advising the Activity Leader of medical problems (including allergies) before the activity, as well as of any problems you may be having during the activity.

You must be in good physical condition and properly equipped. If not, you are strongly encouraged not to participate until you are. Remember, you are participating at your own risk.

What should you bring with you on a hike or other activity? BC Nature has a booklet, “Pocket Field Trip Guide for Naturalist Clubs”, which includes an equipment list in Appendix B. There is much other useful information in that booklet, available from www.bcnature.ca or from www.okanagannature.com.

Many sites on the Internet have suggestions of what you should bring.

- Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC, based in Vancouver) has some general ideas. Go to www.mec.ca. Enter “hiking daytrips” (with or without quotation marks) in the search box and follow the links to the article(s).
- MEC has a list of their 13 essentials, things they feel you should bring with you. Enter the phrase “survival essentials” in the search box and follow the links to the article(s).
- North Shore Rescue (based in North Vancouver), at www.northshorerescue.com. Their list of essential systems is at www.northshorerescue.com/education/what-to-bring/
- Recreational Equipment, Inc (REI, based in Seattle) has a large collection of advice, available at www.rei.com. Search for “expert advice” and follow the links to the article(s). They include a list of 14 essentials.
- The Mountaineers, an outdoors group based in Seattle (www.mountaineers.org), have much information on hiking, maps, bears, *etc.* They even have a list of 10 essentials that actually contains 10 items. From their home page, click Outdoor essentials.

All visitors must read and sign the **Registration and Waiver for Visitors**.

Follow the Activity Leader at all times.

3 Travel to and during activities

Carpooling is recommended for travel. Drivers should be experienced and have good driving records. All passengers must feel comfortable with the ability of their driver. If a passenger has any qualms about the ability of the driver, the passenger should request travel in another vehicle or arrange their own transportation.

4 The activity environment

Enjoying the wilderness environment involves risks and, while measures can be taken to mitigate risk, in the end the onus is on all participants to guide themselves so as to reduce that risk.

Each activity is rated as to level of difficulty. Participants must assess their own abilities and only undertake those activities with which they are comfortable.

Every activity rating is based on a route planned by the Activity Leader. However, any activity can become more risky if the behaviour of the participants is risky or if the group does not follow the intended route. Every activity exposes participants to some risk, but common sense can significantly reduce these risks. Some suggestions for reducing risk are listed below. However, this list cannot be exhaustive as circumstances change and participants must exercise their own good judgement.

- Stay back from the edges of cliffs where possible.
- Negotiate steep slopes carefully, on established paths where available.
- Change the route if the consequences of slipping are significant.
- Stay back from rivers, lakes, and streams if they are dangerous or it is cold.
- Stay off snow and ice where possible. Snow and ice can be slippery, particularly on a steep slope.
- If you are going through an area where rocks can be dislodged, ensure no one is below who may be hit. A person dislodging a rock must immediately call out “Rock!” to warn others.
- Respect wildlife. Wild animals can be dangerous.
- Covering your arms and legs and using DEET may deter insects.
- Avoid confrontation with domestic animals.
- If you are caught in a thunderstorm, consider turning back or find a hollow and crouch on your pack. Leave your metal hiking poles a good distance from you!
- Be prepared for changes of weather. A hat, raingear, and a change of clothing are always appropriate things to carry.
- Follow the Activity Leader at all times.