

Grand River flows for recreation

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Is the water level in the river going to be okay for canoeing or kayaking on the weekend?

This is a common question that people call the GRCA to ask. It is also an important question. Usually they mean is there going to be enough water, but occasionally, there is way too much for most people to canoe safely.

Fly fishermen too need to check river levels so they are safe and don't get swept off their feet by a strong current. An angler will likely move to a different area rather than take a chance.

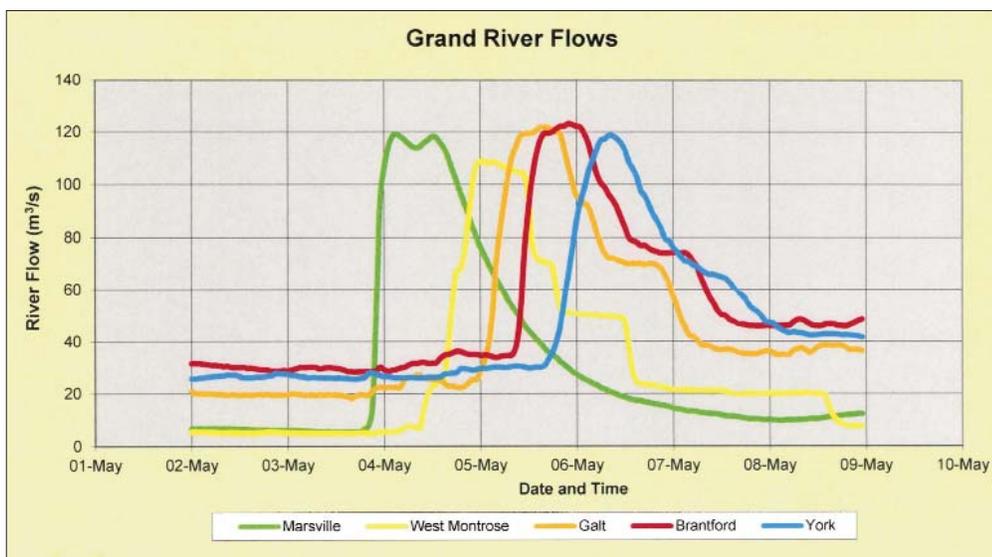
As an organization, the GRCA does not make recommendations as to appropriate water flows for recreational activities along the Grand River and its tributaries because there are many variables to consider. Some people have the expertise and training to enjoy high flows that could be fatal to inexperienced and ill equipped paddlers. Very low flows make for slow going as there may not be enough water for the canoe to float and it may need to be pulled to deeper water at certain times. A skilled paddler will be able to read the water to find the deepest water and will have fewer problems. Some people have a bad day if they have to step out of their boat even once, while others are more tolerant of low flows. That is why there is no definitive answer to this question.

Appropriate water levels are a favourite discussion among paddlers. Those who paddle regularly have their own personal chart, whether it is in their head or on a spreadsheet.

Checking flow information

Many avid river recreation enthusiasts bookmark the River Data section of the GRCA's website and check it when trip planning at www.grandriver.ca/riverdata.

This is one of the most visited sections on the GRCA's website and provides hourly updates on river flows from 39 gauges on the Grand and eight tributaries. Some gauge information is also posted on an Environment Canada website that includes

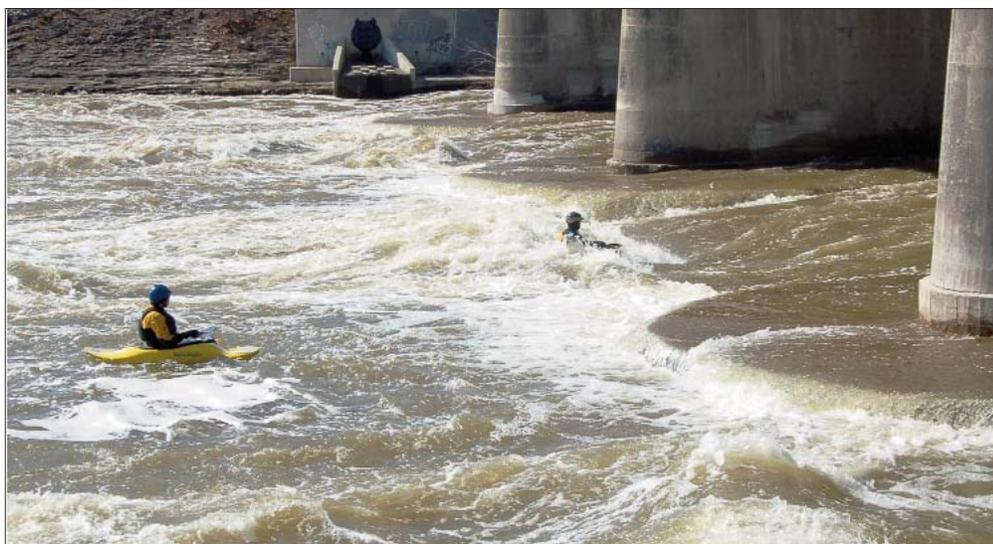


When river flows skyrocket

As the graph above shows, the Grand River may not give much warning of a sudden increase in river flows, which is why the GRCA must sometimes issue high water safety warnings to the public.

This is the flow information from the week of May 2 to 9. Heavy rain on Thursday night May 3 in the northern part of the watershed meant flows ballooned from 8 cms to 120 cms within a couple of hours, as the data from Marsville shows. The GRCA issued a warning after the storm. The rainwater gushed down the river and by the afternoon of Friday May 4, flows were dropping at Marsville but skyrocketing at West Montrose. By Saturday May 5, the river flows in Brantford were extreme and then they peaked at York on the southern Grand on Sunday. Dams can make the impact of a rainstorm less severe but they don't eliminate flooding or high flows. Recreational river users can check our www.grandriver.ca/NewsRoom/News.cfm to find flood warnings, sign up on Twitter @grca_flood_msg or sign up to receive all of our news releases by sending a blank e-mail to GRCAnews-subscribe@grandriver.ca to receive press releases, including flood messages.

The river flow phone line is updated regularly. The number is 519-621-2763, ext. 2511.



A kayaker disappears in the water at Parkhill Dam in March when spring came early.

River flow guidelines used by the Ancient Mariners

This guideline is used by the Ancient Mariners Canoe Club and is based on their river experiences using data collected over many years. Keep in mind that all club members have attended classroom, pool and in-river training so they are well prepared and equipped if they encounter difficulty. It is also safer to paddle in a group.

Low flow: Minimum flow for an average to large trip, although smaller groups of six to 10 canoes can work with flows that are 10 to 20 per cent less.

High flow: At this rate, only paddlers who have completed advanced training and have top-notch canoes can go out. Extreme: No club trips can proceed.

Extreme flow: No club trips proceed at this rate.

River reach	Summer Low Flow	Low flow	High	Extreme
Grand River (Elora-Freeport)	Elora (4.8) ¹	8.	24	40
Grand River (Freeport-Cainsville)	Galt (15.1)	21	65	100
Eramosa River (Eden Mills-Guelph)	Watson Road	4	12	20
Speed River (Guelph-Preston)	Edinburgh Rd (1.7)	7.5	22.5	37.5
Nith River (New Hamburg-Ayr)	New Hamburg (0.6)	3.5	10.5	17.5
Nith River (Ayr-Canning ²)	Ayr (2.6)	7.	21	35
Conestogo (Glen Allan-Kaufman Flats)	St. Jacobs (3.9)	7.5	22.5	37.5

Note 1: There is no gauge at Elora. This is the sum of Salem and Below Shand gauges. **Note 2:** A whitewater run.

rivers in other parts of Canada, but the GRCA site has data for more gauges from this watershed.

The main chart here is called the Flow Summary. Recreational users should pay attention to the column headed “flow.” This one is measured in cubic metres per second or cms. If the rate is 10 cms, that means that 10,000 litres of water is moving past the flow gauge each second at this part of the river. The cms gets bigger as the river moves towards Lake Erie. There are huge changes in river flow due to seasons, weather, ice jams and dam operation.

Compare this to the “summer lowflow” which is the average flow during the dry summer months and you will see in relative terms how much water is flowing down the river.

Following this Flow Summary is a list of sections of the rivers and tributaries with graphs. For example, one of the most popular sections of the river for a day trip, Cambridge to Paris, a paddler would check the Galt gauge on the “Middle Grand River” section. The graph will tell you if the level is going up, down, or holding steady.

Occasionally a flow gauge does not operate and the information can be inaccurate, so the information is provisional.

Outfitter information

There are several local outfitters in the area and they have cut off levels, when they

stop canoe rentals. Canoeing the Grand in Kitchener has a safety section of their website with a five step rating chart for paddling. This goes from “Excellent” to “No Go” with five levels, depending on the paddler age, skill, expertise and river conditions. The link is:

www.canoeingthegrand.com/safety.htm.

Canoe rescue technique:

The photos at right show four of the Ancient Mariners during the in-pool training session which took place this year. The Ancient Mariners Canoe Club, based in Cambridge, has about a hundred members and accepts 10 new members a year. The new members must all participate in classroom and in-pool training sessions. They are learning how to rescue people whose canoe has capsized when they are in deep water.

Step 1: The first step to learning this is for the canoe to capsize.

Step 2: The canoe is turned upside down and brought over to the rescue boat. It needs to be at a 90 degree angle.

Step 3: The canoe is lifted over the rescue boat until it is completely empty of water.

Step 4: The boat is then turned over so that it is right side up and then it is slipped back into the water.

Step 5: The empty boat is then brought along beside the rescue boat. The paddlers in the rescue boat and one from the capsized boat help stabilize the second boat while the paddlers reenter the boat, one at a time.

