

Information for Captains and Paddlers

Welcome to the 2026 Washington DC Dragon Boat Festival!!! May 16, 2026

We are looking forward to another great year of dragon boat races, along with another great assortment of cultural events at this year's festival. We are glad to have so many returning paddlers this year.

DIRECTIONS TO THE RACE SITE

The race will be held at [Thompson Boat Center](#). The address of the Thompson Boat Center is:

2900 Virginia Ave NW
WashingtonDC20037
<http://www.thompsonboatcenter.com/>

The team area is located just north of Thompson Boat Center at the Georgetown Waterfront Park along Water Street.

WHAT TIME TO ARRIVE

Registration will open at 6:00 am Saturday.
You can start setting up your canopies at 6:00 AM.

Captains should arrive by 6:30AM so that they can register their teams and be ready for the captains meeting at 07:30.

Team members should arrive by 7:30 AM at the site. Parking can be difficult in the area. You will need to distribute wristbands, and get your belongings settled, and get warmed up. Teams will start marshalling for the first races around 8:30 AM.

Teams in Races 1, 2, and 3 will be in boats during the ceremony that starts at 08:30. (Check the schedule to see who those teams are). Therefore, these teams should arrive by 07:00, and be down at the boathouse ready to load by 08:00.

PARKING

Thompson's Boat Center Parking Lot: Will not be available for parking. The Thompson's Parking Lot will only be available for drop offs.

Street Parking: There is usually a good amount of parking on the street in Georgetown along Waterside or K Street, directly below the Whitehurst Freeway. This is metered parking, and is usually easily available in the morning, and impossible to find after 9AM.

Paid Garage Parking: Most paid parking runs around \$15.00 per day, and is readily available. The closest paid lots are in the Watergate complex, Washington Harbour, and at the Kennedy Center.

METRORAIL

We recommend riding metro to the event, especially for friends and family who don't have to bring many things with them. The site is a short walk (10-15 minutes) from the FOGGY BOTTOM/GWU [Metro](#) stop on the Orange line. When you get off the train, look on the map for Thompson's Boat Center. At the top of the escalator, turn 180 degrees around and cross the courtyard. After passing through the courtyard, cross two streets, and turn left onto New Hampshire Avenue. (The 7-11 is on New Hampshire). At the stoplight, turn right onto Virginia Avenue. The Boat Center will be straight ahead, about two blocks down.

For those who are unable to make this short walk, there is a Kennedy Center Shuttle which runs from the front of the metro station to the front of the Kennedy Center, which is about 100 yards from the main festival site.

Note that [Metrorail](#) does not start service until 7AM on weekends. For more information about metrorail, please visit: <http://www.wmata.com/>

CAPTAINS' MEETING

Captains' Meeting will be held at the Main Gathering Area in front of the Officials Tent **at 7:30am**. At this meeting, we will discuss any changes and pass on important updates. If you are the captain of your team and you cannot make it, please send a co-captain or another representative on behalf of your team.

TEAM REGISTRATION

From 6:00am to 8:30am on Saturday, your captain, co-captain, or other designated person (just one person, not all the team members) should check in at the registration area. The registration area is located in the large Registration / Information Tent located in the center of the main festival area.

During this time, we will:

- make sure that all fees have been paid
- ensure that all paddlers have signed their festival liability waivers
- make sure that all junior paddlers are correctly classified into the youth division.
- Distribute gift bags for your paddlers, and
- Distribute festival wristbands.

You will need to bring:

- Your Final Roster(s) for each Boat.
- Festival Liability waivers for each crew member listed on the Roster.
- ID's will not be required on waivers this year, but all paddlers should have them at the event in case of questions regarding paddler authentication.

Pre-Registration: We will not be having pre-registration this year. All registration will be done Saturday morning on-site.

Event Programs: All registered teams may submit a team photo and short bio to the festival to be included in the festival program. Team bios should be approximately 1/2 page (clubs with multiple crews may combine and expand their bio) and photos should be of high-enough resolution for print media. Bios and pictures are due by late April and should be emailed to ritawyang@gmail.com. Teams are not required to submit a bio or photo.

DIVISION/CLASSIFICATIONS/ROSTER

Youth (Junior) Division: Note that in order to compete in the Youth Division, all paddlers (including drummer) must be (a) 12 years of age, or older as of April 1, 2026 and
(b) 18 years of age or under as of September 1, 2026 and
(c) Currently enrolled as a public or private middle or high school student.

There is no age restriction for the STEERER of a youth boat.

Paddlers under 12 years of age as of April 1, 2026 are not permitted to paddle in this festival.

Mixed Teams: Mixed teams are a combination of men and women. At the DC Dragon Boat Festival, we define a mixed boat as one where the men cannot outnumber the women in the boat (excluding the drummer and steerer). For example, a mixed crew can have 10 men/10 women, but may also be 11 women/9 men. A crew of 11 men/9 women would not be allowed as a mixed crew.

Open: No gender restrictions.

Women: All female crew, including drummer, and paddlers. Steerer on a women's boat may be either gender.

BCS: All members of the crew, including drummer must be breast cancer survivors (male survivors are welcome).

Gender Determination: The gender of a paddler (for the purposes of determining mixed and women's teams) is determined by the gender listed on the ID that is submitted at registration. Please contact the registration desk if you would like to request an exception to this. You may also request an exception in advance, by contacting us at info@dcdragonboatfestival.com.

Double Rostering: This year, we will be having 10 boats in use (2 rotations of 5 boats), which will make it very difficult for a participant to be on two teams. If you are racing in race 17, for example, it will not be physically possible for you to be in races 16 or 18 since these races will be on the water at the same time as race 17.

Therefore, we are not allowing a participant to be on more than one team in the same division (i.e., mixed or open). A participant MAY participate in one open team and one mixed team, **to the extent that their races do not conflict with each other.** (i.e., boats in the same race or in the races immediately before or after another race). No changes will be made to the final race schedule to accommodate double rostering. You are doing so at your own and your teams peril. If a conflict exists, your team may be required to race with less than 20 people. Note, we will try to accommodate conflicts in the first round, but finals are based on seeding and cannot be adjusted to accommodate conflicts.

Hot-Docking: Hot-docking is when a paddler is in one race, and must hop into another boat immediately upon arriving at the dock, in order to be in another race for another team. With our configuration of 2 rotations of boats, that means that if you are in race 17, you will be hot-docking if you are also in race 15 or 19. If you need to hot-dock, please let the marshalling staff know as early as you can, so we can try to make sure your next boat doesn't get loaded before you get unloaded. We will do our best to accommodate hot-docking requests, but we **cannot** guarantee that you will be in the boat. As we said before, all double-rostering is done at your own peril.

Roster Size:

1. A team may have no more than 25 participants. Teams will prepare a roster, with no more than 25 people, including, if applicable, their steersperson. Note, a steersperson is not required. One will be provided by the festival if needed. It is anticipated that only premier teams will have their own steerer.
2. On Saturday, during registration, the team will submit their roster, along with documents for all athletes who will be participating. The team will be issued wristbands equal to the number of athletes listed on your roster. Your competitors must wear the wristbands in order to race. All members listed on the roster are entitled to all the paddler benefits (gift bags, raffle, etc).
3. Drummers and steerers (if the team provides their own steerer) must be included on the roster.
4. The festival will award 25 medals to a medal-winning team per event.
5. For each race, a boat shall have a steersperson, a drummer, and at least 16 (but no more than 20) paddlers.

Substitutions: Paddlers who are not on the roster and who have not gone through the sign-up procedure MAY NOT enter the marshalling area and may not board the boats. This is to ensure that all paddlers are “fit to paddle” and have signed the liability waivers, and have had their age checked. Should an emergency come up and you have a paddler you need to add to your team, please see the registration desk as soon as possible, with plenty of time before the race. Do not attempt to board a paddler who has not gone through the registration process. **If your team is found with an unrostered paddler in your boat, your boat will be disqualified.**

Spot Checks: We will be performing spot checks of teams at the loading area to ensure that only rostered paddlers are in the boats. As we just mentioned, if your team is found with a paddler who is not on your roster, your boat will be disqualified. All paddlers must be wearing their Festival wristbands.

SETTING UP CAMP

We encourage you to bring plenty of chairs, water, hats and sunscreen to keep yourself comfortable during this day-long event.

Loading and Unloading – Teams may use the Thompson’s Boat Center parking lot for immediate loading and unloading of their items. Please follow the instructions of the festival parking lot attendants (wearing orange vests) and do not leave your vehicle unattended. Vehicles must be removed promptly after unloading. **Please DO NOT STOP your car along Rock Creek Parkway to unload.** The Park police can issue you a very expensive ticket, and the National Park Service has threatened to refuse us future permits if people stop along the parkway to unload.

Tents (Pop-ups) – Each team will be provided ONE **10 x 10** pop-up canopy in the athletes village. Teams may not set up their own tents. If a team has multiple crews (e.g., one mixed and one open crew), they will be provided two tents adjacent to each other.

COOLERS: Allowed.
ALCOHOL: Not allowed.
GAS GRILLS, BBQ GRILLS: Not allowed

Valuables – DO NOT leave valuables unattended or out in the open. The race site is in the middle of a large city, accessible to the public, and a large number of spectators will be present. Boating events in the past in this area have had problems with theft of wallets and personal electronics. We recommend that you do not leave your camp unattended while your paddlers are out warming up or going to and from racing.

Signage – Teams may not display signs, flags, or other materials deemed inappropriate or political in nature. If a team displays this type of material as in the athlete’s village area or on team jerseys, the festival may require their removal. Failure to remove these items may result in disqualification from the event. The festival organizers reserve the right to determine if displays or messaging is inappropriate.

MEDICAL

There will be a doctor on duty at all times at the festival. If you need medical assistance, please either go to the main information tent and have the doctor paged or head to the Medical Tent, located right next to the docks.

If you are on the water, flag down any official and let them know that you have a medical emergency on board.

In any emergency, call 911. You are located on National Park Service property on Rock Creek Parkway, across from the Watergate, south of Thompsons Boat Center.

The nearest hospital is George Washington University Hospital. Proceed East on Virginia Avenue one block, turn left on New Hampshire Ave. The hospital is two blocks up on the right. The emergency entrance is on the far side of the hospital.

The most common medical problem that we see during these spring boating events is exercise-induced asthma attacks. **Any asthmatics that use inhalers MUST carry their inhaler with them during the race.** The pollen counts at this time of year can be high, and the stress of the dragon boat race can be enough to trigger an asthma attack.

FOOD AND WATER

Food – Participants are responsible for arranging their own lunches. National Park Service regulations forbid sales of any type on park service property. No vendors will be present. Georgetown and GWU/Foggy Bottom are within a 10 minute walking distance. There is also a small Safeway and mini-mart/deli in the Watergate.

Water–Participants are asked to bring their own water. There are faucets which you can use to refill water bottles at the Thompson Boat Center.

Trash and Recycling – Trash cans and recycling bins will be available through the Festival Site. Please use these bins. Before the end of each day, please make sure that you thoroughly clean up your tent area.

GETTING READY FOR THE RACE

Warming Up - This area is full of wonderful parks, and teams may warm up anywhere they would like. If your race is coming up soon, please don’t wander too far from the race site. In the unlikely event that we are running ahead of schedule, your team may be called early. Please don’t warm up on the footbridge, as this can impede the flow of traffic in the area.

MARSHALLING: GETTING TO THE BOATS

It is important that you are on time to your event. Boats will be loaded and races will start whether or not all of your paddlers are present.

About 50 minutes prior to the scheduled race time, you will hear an announcement to bring your team to the marshalling area, which is on the North side of the Thompson Boat Center ramps.

About 40 minutes prior to race time, your team should be lined up in the chutes in the marshalling area, in the order in which you are going to sit in the boat.

About 30 minutes prior to race time, your team will be instructed to move down to the dock area. There will be a dock master who is in charge of the area and will direct you. When we first started the festival here, we discovered (the hard way!) that the dock will sink underwater if too many people are on the dock at once. Therefore, it is VERY IMPORTANT that you follow the instructions of the dock master and do not go down onto the docks until you are called.

When you arrive at the dock area, your team will be directed by a dock master to pick up PFDs (life jackets) and put them on, and you will also be directed to grab a paddle. Please remain in your seating order during this time.

About 20 minutes before race time, your team will be directed by the dock master to proceed down to the docks. Your team will then be directed to your assigned boat and told to load the boat.

Once everyone is seated and ready to paddle, you will be directed to push off from the docks and your boat will pass in front of the spectator stands. Tell your friends to watch for you (and take pictures, if they'd like) about 20 minutes before your scheduled race time. You will proceed downstream along the sea wall towards the Kennedy Center.

About 10 minutes before the scheduled race time, all boats in your race will gather downstream of the start line. When all boats are present and ready to race, the aligner will have you bring your boats up slowly towards the start line and make sure that all the boats are lined up.

EQUIPMENT

All teams may use their own PFDs (life jackets) and Paddles. All Paddles MUST meet 202a specifications and all Personal Flotation Devices must be U.S. Coast Guard approved. Inflatable PFDs will be allowed for premier teams. Only designated premier teams may use inflatable style PFDs. All community teams must wear full vest style PFDs.

We will also provide paddles and PFDs for participants.

Seat Pads (aka "Butt Pads") may be used.

THE START

When the pack of boats reaches the start line, you will hear the command, "Are you ready?" If your team is not ready, the drummer should raise their hand high and immediately get the attention of the start official to state that you are not ready.

Once all teams are ready, you will hear the "ATTENTION!" call and then an air horn will sound. You may start paddling as soon as the air horn sounds.

If you have breakage, or other problem within the first 50 meters, stop paddling, and the race will be restarted.

Once you leave the start area, you will not be able to protest anything about the start.

THE RACE

A few of the rules to note:

- **DRUMMER:** The drummer must beat the drum continuously during the entire race, once the boat has cleared the start area (50 meters into the race).
- **SITTING:** You must race in a seated position. No standing or kneeling at any point while the boat is away from the dock.
- **SPORTSMANSHIP:** You are expected to behave in a sportsmanlike way. No foul language is allowed while your team is on the water.
- **INTERFERENCE:** If you leave your lane and interfere with another boat, you may be penalized, even if the problem is with the boat or the steerer.

THE FINISH

We will explain exactly how to tell when you've crossed the finish line at the Captains' meeting on Saturday morning. There will be buoys at the finish line, and you should make sure to paddle all the way through the buoys before stopping. Buoys will drift over time, and may not mark the exact location of the finish line.

PROTESTS

If you have a protest, the drummer should raise their hand at the end of the race and get the attention of the trailing umpire. If you do not raise your protest while you are on the water, you will lose your right to raise the protest later. The umpire will attempt to resolve the problem there on the water or in the dock area. If the resolution is not acceptable to your team, you have the right to file a protest. The protest is a written statement of the facts (from your point of view), and what you would like to see done about it. The protest does not have to be any certain length. Submit this written protest to the official at the Finish Line Tent WITHIN 15 MINUTES of the end of the race. The protest must be accompanied by \$20 cash or a check for \$20 payable to "TUSCA". If the protest is found in your favor, the money will be returned to you.

BOAT SWAMPING

In the rare event that your boat swamps, STAY WITH THE BOAT. Not to worry, the boat won't sink. There is a fair amount of current in the river and it is difficult to swim to shore. The Race Officials, Metropolitan Police Department, and the Coast Guard Auxiliary will have enough power boats on the water to rescue all the paddlers on one dragon boat, and will retrieve paddlers with their motor boats in short order.

AFTER THE RACE

After the race, leave your paddle and life jacket (unless it belongs to you) at the top of the ramps and return to the main team area. If there is no protest, we will try to post the results of your race as quickly as possible on the results boards near the Information Tent and throughout the festival area. As soon as the results from all of the heats of an event are in, we will try to post the times and lane assignments for your next race.

New this year... we will be posting results electronically. Details and links to live results will be posted closer to race day.

RACE STRUCTURE

Each registered team will race in two (2) 200m races and two (2) 500m races. The race progression will use the following pattern (subject to change if a division is short on a minimum number of teams). All teams will start with a 200m time trial on Saturday. This time trial will also serve as your 'challenge' race. Each team with the best time amongst your challenge category will receive a challenge cup. Following the first round, all teams will be ranked on time first through last (by division... mixed/open/women). Teams will then be bracketed into division (e.g., the fastest 10 teams in the A division, the next 10 in the B division, etc.). Teams will be placed directly in their division final. The top 5 teams in the A division be placed in the Major Final and the slower 5 teams in the Minor Final. The same advancement will be used for all subsequent divisions. In the finals, teams will be awarded a gold, silver, or bronze medal and accompanying trophy in the Major final. In the Minor final, only a gold medal will be awarded.

Teams will then race a 500m time trial and will be re-bracketed into divisions based on results from the time trial. Teams will proceed directly to a final based on the same seeding progression described above. Teams are again eligible for gold, silver, bronze in the 500m Major finals, and gold only in the Minor finals.

The 200m time trial will also determine the participants in the DC Cup. This is a 200m challenge and is the last race of the day (a bonus 5th race for qualifying teams). The fastest team from each challenge category in the Mixed division category will have the opportunity to race in this challenge. This challenge will be awarded a festival grand champion cup.

Note: the DC Cup is subject to change based on number of registrations and available time on race day. It is intended as a Mixed division race, but could change to a "best of the fest" race including open teams if the number of open teams exceeds mixed teams. Race organizers will determine this make up once registrations are complete.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

All questions and concerns regarding any aspect of the Festival should be directed to the Registration / Information Tent located in the middle of the team area. Unless you are lodging a formal protest, please do not direct questions to the officials in the Finish Line Tent.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

The festival will be run, rain or shine. Come prepared for the weather. The race course will be cleared whenever there is lightning within five miles, or if a severe thunderstorm warning is issued for Washington DC.

If the weather is particularly nasty, and looks to stay that way for a while, we will suspend racing. We encourage you to find a warm dry place to wait out the storm.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

The race site is right in the middle of some of the best sites that Washington DC has to offer. Here are some things you can do when your racing is over, or for your friends to do when they're not watching you race:

Georgetown: There is a sizable shopping district along M street, famous for its variety of restaurants and clothing stores.

Kennedy Center: There is good viewing of the race from the main level of the Kennedy Center. Be sure to take the elevators up to the Terrace for a breath-taking view of Washington DC, Georgetown, and Virginia.

Roosevelt Island: Directly across the river from the festival is the memorial to Teddy Roosevelt. You can walk there across the Roosevelt Bridge or the Key Bridge, or rent a canoe or kayak at Thompson's Boat Center.

FESTIVAL SITE REGULATIONS

There will be no ball playing inside the Athletes Area to ensure safety of all participants and guests.

National Park Service Regulations are applicable to the Festival Site including:

- NO advertisements of any kind will be allowed on the Festival Site
- NO distribution of any pamphlets/brochures will be allowed on the Festival Site without prior approval
- NO selling or cash transactions will be allowed on the Festival Site
- NO signs of your own on the Festival Site. The Park Service MIGHT allow banners with the name of your team, as they have in the past. However, if your team name has a company name in it, then the Park Police are legally within their rights to ask you to take it down, as it could be construed as advertising (which is forbidden on National Park Service grounds). We hope that this won't be a problem, but do ask that you comply with all requests made of you by the Park Police.

The Festival Committee will be strictly enforcing these rules. If we see any of the above, we will remove them.

Questions? Email us at info@dcdragonboatfestival.com.