

How Our Permit Party Works

Among paddling adventures, not much tops a multi-day river trip. But for most Western rivers, you need to win a permit in a lottery, and that's hard—the odds might be hundreds-to-one. That's why the Poudre Paddlers hold their annual Permit Party, where we apply in groups to raise our chances. Here's how it works:

Step One is to familiarize everyone with the various rivers—their attractions, their difficulty (Class 1 easy to 5 experts only) and what it's like to paddle them. This year, we'll provide descriptions on the website or by email. Read them and maybe do some research on YouTube and Google. If you can't join the Zoom meeting, you can still apply and join the others in a group.

Step Two: We form groups—who wants to run this river or that—and generate a list. Maybe eight people aim for the Chama and ten for the San Juan, etc.

Step Three: We expect each group member to apply online—if you're a couple, each applies— before the deadline. Usually, you apply on the website, Recreation.gov; the usual deadline is January 31. Most applications allow you to give second and third date choices. (The group does not have to agree on dates; choose the ones you want. Let the Club know what you applied for and for what dates. Then you wait until March or so to hear whether you scored. If you're lucky, someone in your group scores a permit—yippee, you're going—if the dates work for you!

Step Four, maybe: If no one in the group gets a permit, most river agencies allow you to check for cancellations. Each group member might volunteer to watch for cancellations for a different week. Check the regulations to see how.

Expectations (rules) of the Permit Party

A. Learn what to expect in running your rivers of choice. Make sure you know what the difficulty classes mean, one to five. Do you have the skills in your craft when it's loaded with gear? If you overstate your skills or fitness, you can become a liability.

B. Apply, and the others in your group will apply as well, before the deadline. Apply with only one group, for example not with the Poudre Paddler group and another from outside, hoping to raise your chances. That breaks the code of a permit party.

C. When you apply, Rec.gov will send a confirmation that you did so. Save this: It can prove that you did indeed apply. Note that spouses, etc., don't automatically go unless they applied as well.

D. If you get a permit—whoopee—you let the Club know, and the others who applied for that river. They are your A list: they can expect to go on your permit if they want, and the dates work for them. That's the basis for a permit party. Then comes the B list—the ones who said they were interested, or that you'd like to invite, including family who did not apply. Sometimes a group does a test paddle to check skills.

E. If you score a permit, the group expects you to go, so they can as well; you're committed. Of course, in cases of illness or injury, death-in-family... Some rivers allow you to select a back-up permit holder—a good idea.

F. If you hold the permit, you can select another member of the group, maybe with more experience or free time, to be group leader and planner.

Give it a try...and good luck!