

Beginner (Intro to Moving Water)

For campers who are new to paddling on rivers and ready to experience gentle moving water in a supportive, closely guided environment.

Paddlers at this level should:

- Have little to no prior experience paddling on moving water (flatwater experience is helpful but not required).
- Be comfortable wearing a PFD and willing to get wet.
- Be able to follow basic instructions and stay attentive on the water.
- Be willing to try new skills and communicate with instructors if they feel tired, nervous, or cold.

Parents can expect their child to:

- Paddle on gentle moving water with small waves and slow current, generally up to Class II.
- Learn foundational river skills such as basic paddle strokes, steering, stopping, and entering/exiting eddies.
- Practice safe “swimmer” positions with close instructor support.
- Build confidence with splashes and the idea of getting wet, with the possibility of short, carefully managed swims.
- Spend 2–4 hours per day on the water, with frequent breaks, games, and skill-building activities.

Intermediate (Developing River Paddler)

For campers with some whitewater or river experience who are ready for more challenge.

Paddlers at this level should:

- Have completed a river trip with Telluride Academy **or** have experience paddling inflatable kayaks on moving water.
- Be able to swim comfortably while wearing a PFD.
- Be coachable: able to listen, follow instructions, and work as part of a team.
- Be reasonably self-aware: able to identify when they are tired, nervous, or cold and communicate that to staff.

Parents can expect their child to:

- Paddle on moving water with waves, eddies, and moderate maneuvers on water up to Class III.

- Practice active paddling, boat control, and safe “swimmer” skills in a supportive setting.
- Build comfort with splashes and the possibility of short, managed swims in the river.
- Spend 3–6 hours per day on the water with sustained paddling effort and teamwork.

River Conditions & Instructor Judgment

Our moving water instructors carefully choose which river sections to run each day based on **current conditions and the specific group of campers on the trip**. They will adjust river choices, time on the water, and the type of maneuvers practiced according to:

- Each camper’s **paddling skill and swimming comfort**.
- The group’s ability to listen to instructions, self-regulate, and communicate needs
- The **cohesion and teamwork** of the group as a whole.

If conditions, water levels, or group dynamics are not appropriate for a particular rapid or stretch of river, instructors will **modify the plan, walk around features, or choose mellower sections**.