



2026 Wild Driftless Rules & Regulations

Abbreviations

Transition Area = TA

A transition area is a location where you switch disciplines between paddling, cycling, trekking on-foot, special tasks, etc. Some transition areas are manned by volunteers and are required for check-in; others are optional and may not be manned.

Checkpoint = CP

A checkpoint is an unmanned location marked by an orienteering control. These controls are typically orange/white flags with an e-punch attached. You must punch these CPs with the provided finger stick (listen for the beep and look for the flashing light).

Special Task:

A location manned by a race volunteer. At this location, you will receive further instructions to complete a special task in order to complete the race point.

Scoring overview and race director's philosophy

1. The Wild Driftless 9-hour is meant to be very challenging to "clear" (i.e. get all the optional checkpoints). In the first year of the race, only 3 teams out of 57 got all the checkpoints. This is by design—you are meant to make tough choices about what to complete and what is too much.
2. The Wild Driftless Lite 5-hour race will also be challenging to clear. The Lite race is meant to give you an impression of what the 9-hour race is like—just on a smaller scale. Just because it's Lite doesn't mean that it's easy.
3. Most checkpoints on the course will be optional and worth 1 point, but there may be required checkpoints as well. Your race instructions will spell out which are which.
4. Most Transition Areas are required but some may be optional. Again, your race instructions will spell out which is which.

General race instructions:

1. Time limits are based on the race start. The 9-hour race is set to start at 8:00 a.m. with a 5 p.m. end time. The Lite race is set to start at Noon with a 5 p.m. end time.
2. The course is secret. You will not know where you are going until you check-in on race morning.
3. You will be provided with maps, a clue sheet, and a race schematic at check-in on race morning.
4. The clue sheet will provide detailed instructions to all the checkpoints and the transition areas. It will tell you which discipline is allowed on which section of the race (paddle, bike, or trek), and it will offer a description for every checkpoint, using topographical terms such as "Hilltop," "Reentrant," or "Trail intersection."
5. Your race schematic will give you a general race overview, including a description of all the legs and transition areas. This will provide an easy-to-understand overview of your day. It will also include general information such as distance and elevation gain on each leg. It's important to note that distance and elevation are based on our best estimate of the most efficient route to collect all the checkpoints. Most teams will not travel to all the checkpoints and/or may get lost and add extra distance. Therefore, the distances are rarely the exact total that you will experience on the course.
6. In order to be considered a full-course finisher, teams must punch all the **required** checkpoints and reach the finish.
 - a. In 2026, there may be optional Transition Areas for one or both courses. You will still be ranked as full course even if you skip these optional TAs, but you will miss out on portions of the course.
 - b. It's up to you to budget your time to spend it where you want to spend it on the course.
7. Within a given stage, checkpoints may be reached in any order unless otherwise specified.
8. Disallowed routes will be clearly indicated on race instructions and race maps. Certain routes—such as highways—may be out of bounds in some areas but may be allowed or even required in other locations.
 - a. You are responsible for knowing where you are on the race maps to stay in bounds and to stay off disallowed roads (see penalties).
9. Checkpoints are e-punch. You must punch them with the e-punch finger stick provided for your team.
10. All participants must wear their team number (provided), and it must be visible either on their clothing or pack.

Maps

1. Your race maps may include:
 - a. Topographical maps

- b. Orienteering maps
 - c. Aerial satellite images
 - d. Trail maps/park maps
 - e. County / State road maps
 - f. Hand-drawn maps
 - g. Historical maps / schematics
2. All maps will include a scale and indicate true north.
3. All maps will be plotted for you. You will not need to plot UTM coordinates.
4. Orienteering maps will be drawn in detail and include a legend.
5. Topo maps may exclude details, such as trails (intentionally or unintentionally). Moreover, the base layers of these maps may be dated. Expect fine details may have changed, such as the course of a river or the location of a park boundary.
6. Overlay details will be accurate and up-to-date. These include plotted checkpoint locations, trails, roads, and out-of-bounds areas.

Food and water

1. Participants should plan to carry all the water and food they need for the race.
 - a. 9-hour course: We expect to have one location with food and water available.
 - b. Lite course: We expect to have one location with food and water available.
 - c. These are expectations—not promises.

Bike selection

9-hour: The 9-hour course will consist of gravel roads, paved roads, and trails. Some trails are smooth, while others are full of rocks and roots. A mountain bike is strongly recommended, though a gravel bike would also be an option depending on your comfort level with more difficult terrain. The mileage breakdown for 2026 is expected to be roughly:

Gravel roads: 50%

Trail: 40%

Paved roads: 10%

5-hour: The 5-hour course will consist of gravel roads, paved roads, and trails. Some trails are smooth, while others are more challenging. A mountain bike is recommended, though a gravel bike would also be an option depending on your comfort level with more difficult terrain. The mileage breakdown for 2026 is expected to be roughly:

Trail: 55%

Gravel roads: 35%

Paved roads: 10%

Course Safety Considerations

1. Private property is clearly marked as out of bounds on your maps. Take extra care not to wander across private property boundaries.
2. The area around Elkader has everything from limestone escarpments similar to the Wild Driftless course in 2025 at Backbone State Park to long-sloping climbs and exposed ridgelines. This is one of the hilliest places in Iowa. Be prepared to climb—both on foot and on bike!
3. This is an open course. On trails, expect to encounter day hikers and bike riders. Portions of the course will require riding on trails in a certain direction. Day-users may be riding in the same direction or the opposite direction. Do not expect them to yield. Be aware, be friendly, and be respectful!
4. All roads are open to cars. Traveling on certain high-traffic roads is prohibited. Most roads are low-traffic but certain sections of the course will be on more high-traffic areas. Expect cars to be passing, especially on paved road sections. Flashing rear taillights are required whenever you are on your bike. You must obey traffic laws.
5. PFDs must be worn for the entirety of the paddle (9-hour only) and bike helmets must be worn whenever you are on the bike.
6. Paddling will consist of splashy rivers and/or streams with lots of riffles. If the flow is high, some rapids may reach Class-I and Class-II levels. The paddle section will be scouted for strainers, which will be marked on your maps. Above a certain flow, the paddling will be canceled.
7. Individuals and teams may abandon the course at any TA. Teams may continue on without a teammate but will be unranked.
8. Any team withdrawing must notify a race official at a TA or the Race Director via the phone.
9. Race officials reserve the right to alter time cut-offs or change the course to accommodate conditions.

Ranking:

Teams will be ranked in order of:

1. Completing the Course
 - Full-course will be ranked first: Teams that punch all required points and reach the finish will be ranked above all teams who do not
 - Short-course will be ranked next: Teams that fail to punch one or more required points
 - Non-competitive will be ranked next: Teams that have a member drop out during the race.
 - DNF will be ranked next: Teams that do not reach the finish under their own power.
 - DQ will be ranked last: Teams that are disqualified via penalty
2. Points

- Points will be calculated based on all checkpoints punched with subtractions for penalties, including late arrival at the finish line.
- 3. Finish time
 - If teams are tied on points, then the first team to cross the finish line is ranked higher.

Team spirit award

A team spirit award will be given to one team in each race. Some opportunities to show team spirit include how your team dresses, at race check-in as we call out your team's name (a unique response/chant is very welcome), when you see volunteers on course, and both pre-race and post-race, especially cheering on other participants. In judging team spirit, our volunteers will be looking for the team that best embodies a community-building spirit, respect for one another and other participants, inclusion, and above all, a team who demonstrates joy (especially in doing a hard thing!).

Awards

Awards will be given to first and second place in the following divisions in each race:

- 2-4 person male
- 2-4 person female
- 2-4 person coed
- Family (2-4 person, multi-generational team with at least one racer under 18 years of age)
- Solo male
- Solo female
- Team spirit (one per race)

Penalties:

1. Finishing after the time limit:
 Penalty: -1 point. Add 1 additional penalty point for each minute over the time limit
 - E.g. If a team finishes at 9:01:00, they would lose 2 points—one for being over time and one for being a minute over.
2. Collecting a CP in the wrong discipline (e.g. collecting a Trek CP or Paddle CP on a bike stage)
 Penalty: -1 point per CP for honest mistakes. The Race Director reserves the right to levy harsher punishments for intentional violations up to DQ.
3. Failure to maintain 100-foot proximity to teammates.
 Penalty: First offense -1 point; Second offense – DQ

- A warning may or may not be issued, depending on whether the offense is close or egregious.
4. Not carrying required gear
Penalty: -1 point per missing item
 - If multiple team members are each missing the same item, then your team loses points equal to all missing items combined.
 5. Not displaying race number
Penalty: First offense – Verbal warning; Second offense: - 1 point
 6. Cycling on restricted roads
Penalty: Teams must turn around and go back the way they came. If they have completed the section and/or cannot safely retrace their path, the penalty will be -3 points. (Second offense is DQ)
 7. Cycling on hiking-only trails
Penalty: -3 points (Second offense is DQ)
 8. Traveling on private property
Penalty: Depending on intent, from warning up to DQ (Second offense is DQ).
Respect Private Property!
 9. Littering—Do not litter!
Penalty: -1 CP per item of litter
 10. Use of GPS or other prohibited outside assistance, such as cell phones, smart watches for GPS purposes, receiving motorized assistance, car rides, etc.
Penalty: DQ
 11. Failure to use required safety gear, such as bicycle helmets, PFDs, climbing helmets, etc.
Penalty: DQ
 12. Harassment or abuse of other participants, volunteers, or race officials
Penalty: DQ
 13. Lost race passport (Does not apply assuming race uses e-punch).
Penalty: Loss of all points

Emergency Procedures

Injured Competitor(s)

If a member of a team becomes injured during the event, the following procedure should be carried out:

1. Ensure your own safety and that of the casualty, preventing further injury.
2. Treat the casualty with first aid as much as practically possible.
3. Make the casualty as comfortable as possible and provide shelter from the elements, e.g. emergency blanket.
4. Use the international distress signal – a series of 3 blasts of a whistle.
5. If you have cell reception, call for help (either 911 for an emergency or race staff for a non-emergency) providing exact location, time of accident, and nature of injury.
6. If you do not have cell reception and if other teams or members of the public find you, send them for help. Write down a message giving exact location, time of accident and nature of injuries.

Lost Team or Competitor

In the event that a team or team member becomes lost, follow the procedure detailed below:

1. Move to a location where distinctive landmarks can be seen. You will never be unreasonably far from a roadway. If visibility is very poor, move in a steady direction until you reach a road or trail.
2. Use your cell phone, or if you are unable to get a signal, find a house or a passing car with a phone. Call 911 if an emergency or contact race directors for a non-emergency
3. Describe your location as best you can to allow EMS or the organizers to pinpoint where you are.

Any competitor(s) who become(s) lost or injured and is forced to use an emergency phone number are automatically disqualified from the race rankings. However, they (or the remainder of their team) may be allowed to complete the event as a non-ranking team.

Good Samaritan time credit

If you come across another team with an injured teammate or otherwise in need of assistance, you are required to help to the best of your ability. We will credit you with time and extend cutoffs for every minute you are delayed.