FREE PRINTABLE RESOURCE

WATER CROSSING FIELD CARD

Choose the place, read the water, cross carefully, know when to turn back.

PICK TIME AND PLACE

- ☐ **Cross early in the day**
  Levels are typically lowest in early morning
- ☐ **Ask a ranger about current conditions**
  Have a backup plan if too high, cold or swift
- ☐ **Scout up and down the stream**
  Safest spot may not be the trail crossing
- ☐ **Straight section, not a bend**
  Bends have deep cut banks and swift water
- ☐ **Widest or braided part of the channel**
  Usually the most shallow
- ☐ **Check downstream hazards and an exit point**
  Never cross above rapids or falls

READ THE WATER

- ☐ **Toss a stick upstream**
  Can't walk as fast as it floats? Don't cross
- ☐ **Standing waves = trouble**
  Submerged boulders, logs or swift water
- ☐ **Water above the knee? Don't cross**
  Unless a flat pool with little current

CROSSING TECHNIQUE

- ☐ **Never cross in bare feet**
  Boots, or spare shoes; wool socks
- ☐ **Loosen pack waist and sternum straps**
  So you can shed the pack if you fall
- ☐ **Pole or stick: two points of contact**
  Both feet, or one foot and the pole
- ☐ **Face upstream, eyes on the far shore**
  Slight angle downstream in faster current
- ☐ **Cross together if you can**
  Line, linked arms, or tripod
- ☐ **Keep fire starter, bag and clothes dry**
  Watertight bags

TURN BACK IF

- ☐ **Fast water or can't judge depth**
- ☐ **Very cold water or above your knees**
- ☐ **Waterfalls downstream, boulders rolling**
  Sound of boulders along the bottom

Remember: “No river crossing is worth your life.” (NPS, Lake Clark)

Want the reasoning behind each line? Read the full guide on the TacticalBox blog.
tacticalbox.com/blogs/tacticalbox-blog

Sources: NPS Lake Clark “Safe River Crossings”; NPS Katahdin Woods and Waters stream crossing safety; NPS Mount Rainier 2018 river crossing release; USFS Mt. Hood National Forest glacial stream safety alert. Conditions vary by location. Informational only.