



Responding to Flood Risks

Introduction

Most of WRT's trapping equipment is deployed on water, and, for most of the year, the equipment can be safely accessed by staff and volunteers without the need for anyone to enter the water. However, after periods of heavy rain, placid waterways can rapidly become swollen, and rafts that were close to the bank can suddenly be marooned many metres away from dry land. This is no problem most of the time, but can become so if, say, a trap is activated or loses signal contact, thereby causing an error message to be sent and someone scurrying to the site, only to find the raft out of reach. These situations are potentially dangerous, and demand careful consideration as to whether it is safe to access the raft, and, if so, how to achieve that safely and effectively. This short paper provides guidance and instruction on action that minimises the safety risks arising from a flood.

The following protocol must be followed by WRT staff and we would expect volunteers to also follow it for their own safety.

Preparation

Sign up for Environment Agency flood warnings in your area. If you think your smart raft(s) are unlikely to be safely reached under a particular flood threat, close the traps down and move the smart raft to a place of safety prior to the flood. Replace the rafts and reset the traps as soon as the flood has subsided sufficiently for this to be done safely.

Retrieving a smart raft from a flooded area

It is not always possible to anticipate the severity of a flood. Furthermore, correctly tethered rafts will rise and fall with water levels and often no action is needed. However if it is necessary to consider retrieving a raft impacted by a flood adopt the following:

- Do not attempt to retrieve a raft if there is a strong current or you know that there are areas where the land drops away suddenly, such as ditches or dykes, between you and the raft.
- Inform someone of your location and intentions by phone before you enter the water, and let them know when you have completed your task there.
- Thigh boots/waders and a life jacket must be worn prior to entering the water.
- Always use a wading staff when entering the water; use it for support and to probe for underwater trip hazards or deepening water.
- If the water becomes deeper than knee height, **stop** and return to the bank. Then call your Line Manager / Project Officer for advice.

- If you have concerns about snags below the water surface, or possible trip hazards, then always **stop**, return to dry land and contact your Line Manager / Project Officer.
- Once you have got to within 2m of the raft, use the hook on your wading staff to pull it close to you. **At this stage you may well be very near the edge of waterway on which the raft was deployed**, so move very slowly and use the staff to check the depth of water near you.
- Remove the trap from the raft and release the raft to float away securely tethered. You can return to it after the water level has subsided. If there is an animal in the trap, grab the trap handle, avoiding any risk of being bitten.

In the event that the raft cannot be reached after following the guidance above, then it may be appropriate for senior WRT staff to attend and attempt to reach it using another technique and perhaps using a boat. But that's a decision for them, based on their experience and the particular circumstances involved.

Retrieval of the trap and subsequent procedure

- Dispatch any captured mink or release any non-target animal in the normal way.
- Trigger the closure of the trap door if it was still open.
- Take the trap away until river levels are restored to normal, then redeploy.

Instructions for senior WRT staff experienced in boat work and other water-based activities

If a Project Officer or volunteer seeks guidance, use your experience to judge whether your help, or that of another suitably experienced person, could plausibly retrieve the raft in question with minimal personal risk. If so:

- Attend the site with whatever equipment you consider appropriate.
- Minimum of 2 persons to be in attendance at all times.
- Life jackets must be worn at all times.
- Anyone venturing into water more than knee deep must be tethered to the bank.
- If a boat is used, the launch and retrieval area must be surveyed prior to launching.

No two people have the same level of experience and competence in dealing with unusual water conditions. The first and most important instruction is that no-one should enter water if they feel uncomfortable or nervous about doing so. The loss of a raft, or even the risk of an animal dying in a cage trap, is absolutely no excuse or rationale for putting anyone's safety in jeopardy. No-one is going to blame you for not being able to reach a raft in a flood.