

Options for participating in the Great Chesapeake Bay Swim Support

By Dave Biss
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I am always excited that so many people respond every year to the club's request for support during the Great Chesapeake Bay Swim as well as many other swim events in the area. This shows how many active members we have and how eager they are to get on the water and help out!

Here, I wanted to try to clarify some questions that people have been asking as they contact me about joining an event.

Q?: I want to support the swim, which race should I support, the longer or the shorter one?

Firstly, support kayakers are needed for both events during the Great Chesapeake Bay Swim. Just because the shorter event is, well, shorter does not mean that kayakers are not needed. The least experienced swimmers will be in the shorter race, and will need the most support from kayakers to help keep them on the course.

Second, please consider yourself in this decision making process. Remember that you are out there to offer assistance to others, so be sure that you are quite comfortable in the environment where you will be paddling. If you are deciding whether to take part in the longer swim ask yourself these questions:

- **Have I paddled that distance before?** Remember that if you are crossing the Bay once you will be paddling at least *5 miles*. If you need to return to your vehicle, you will be paddling at least *10 miles*.
- **Have I paddled on open water conditions before?** *The Bay May Not Be Smooth and Calm that Day*. It will likely have some waves and chop along with a tidal current.
- **Can I self rescue my kayak?** If you fall in the water 2 miles from shore, can you get back in your boat using an open water rescue? There will be other kayakers around, but we are there to help the swimmers, so kayakers should be able comfortable in the environment they are participating.
- **Will I be able to help a swimmer by letting them hold onto my Bow if necessary?** Will you be comfortable enough in these conditions to allow a swimmer to rest on your bow?
- **Have I set up a shuttle if I do not desire to cross the Bay twice?** This is a possibility, although you will need to work out the logistics.

If I have made you hesitate on your decision to cross the open waters of the Chesapeake Bay in support of swimmers, that is ok! All paddlers are needed for these events, and there is a place for you to help, even if it is not out in the middle of the Bay.

For those who do not wish to do a complete Bay Crossing, here is a viable option that will get you on the Bay and will be just as much fun; come join the 1 Mile pre-launch meeting at the rear of the Bay Bridge Marina (under the dry-dock boat-loader) on the Eastern side of the Bridge. Look for the coordinator(s) there. Park your car where instructed that morning in that lot. Support the shorter swim, and when it completes, or is mostly completed, join with groups of kayaks who are paddling part way out into the Bay to greet the swimmers as they cross. You can line the swim lane and cheer them in, offering support as necessary. Most of the hard swim supporting comes as the swimmers get tired and try desperately to beat the clock during the last 1/3 of the swim. You can be there to help! Then follow the last swimmers into the finish line, and your car will be waiting for you.

Remember to equip yourself well during a swim support. Protect yourself from sun exposure; protect yourself from hot or cold conditions; bring more water than you think you can drink during that time; bring snacks that can be reached and eaten while on the water; bring safety gear to re-enter your kayak; bring a whistle, VHF radio(if you own one), visible flag to help your visibility(coordinators have some), and perhaps an extra float for swimmers to hold onto. And lastly bring preparation; know the course; know the weather; know your goals; know your abilities.

Whichever swim event you support, I am eager to see all of you out there. It is a strong tradition that CPA is keeping alive here as we continue to offer our support to these events. Help us keep it active, lively, and above all safe for everyone involved.