

## COLD WEATHER CLOTHING

As cool weather approaches, this is a good time to stock up on the right winter clothes for the outdoors, particularly for paddling. There are several high tech fabrics now that make it more comfortable and safer for us to be in an environment where we might get wet – and cold. If you already have a dry suit for which you paid hundreds of dollars, read no further. This article is not for you.

Base layers should be made of one of the polyester moisture wicking fabrics that can now be found, not only in the LL Bean and other major outdoor catalogs, but also in the fitness departments and the men's departments of Wal-Mart and Target. It can be found under a number of different names, and you should look for tags that mention “moisture transfer system” or “moisture wicking.” They should not contain ANY cotton. Moisture wicking items can include underwear and bras, as well as t-shirts and stretch pants. Short-sleeved moisture wicking shirts are really practical for paddling, as they can be worn alone in summer and next to the skin under fleece in fall and as an extra 1st layer in winter.

Over the base layer, you should wear a synthetic fleece. Fleece, such as Polartech, tends to shed water rather than absorb it, and even when the fabric is soaked, you will still be able to retain some necessary body heat after immersion. It also dries very quickly, and coupled with a good base layer, has great wind resistance. Fleece pants are amazingly comfortable and warm for paddling as well as hiking. Polartech fleece may be the best, but I also wear a lot of less expensive fleece from Old Navy ([www.oldnavy.com](http://www.oldnavy.com)) and Sam's Club. Fleece also makes great camping pajamas – they're so warm and comfortable that Bill and I both wear them on overnight camping trips.

A short-sleeved shirt under a long-sleeved moisture wicking shirt covered by a fleece pullover covered by a fleece jacket, along with fleece pants with microfiber tights underneath, will provide very good warmth for paddling without spending a bundle.

Add a fleece hat to your wardrobe, plus paddle gloves, which are necessary in cold weather. Paddle gloves should be made of neoprene – which is the same fabric used in wetsuits. You can probably get by with fleece socks, but neoprene socks will be much warmer and can be worn with the water sandals you use in the summer. If it's really cold, layer microfiber tights under neoprene socks followed by fleece socks and water sandals. Expect to spend about \$25 for the gloves and the same amount for neoprene socks.

If you plan to paddle frequently in the winter, consider investing in other neoprene clothing to wear under your fleece. Neoprene shorts and a vest will give you additional protection if you fall in deep water by protecting your torso from that initial shock of cold. Neoprene also helps retain body heat to a greater degree than fleece alone. Neoprene is not cheap, and it is rarely for sale at discount stores. It can be found at a number of outdoor websites or catalogs. My favorite is Northwest River Supplies ([www.nrsweb.com](http://www.nrsweb.com)), which seems to have a good selection of paddle clothes for men and women. Mukluks are neoprene boots, which can be found in several designs. They are the ultimate cold weather protection for feet, making it possible to wade in freezing cold water. Check out prices in LL Bean for comparison ([www.llbean.com](http://www.llbean.com)) before purchasing any neoprene boots.

Here are some other websites where you may find just the right thing at a discount price: [www.campmor.com](http://www.campmor.com), [www.sierratradingpost.com](http://www.sierratradingpost.com), and [www.rei-outlet.com](http://www.rei-outlet.com). Also, don't overlook our local kayak stores. I've found some great deals at those stores on occasion.

One piece wetsuits or “farmer johns” may provide absolute maximum warmth under outerwear for paddling, but before buying a one piece suit, consider whether you will ever have to go to the bathroom while out paddling and how you will accomplish that. Enough said.

Never, never, never wear cotton when the possibility of cold water immersion exists. Cotton absorbs water and can lower your body temperature faster than if you had nothing on at all. If you don't believe me, lie down in a bathtub of tepid water in a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt.

The final thing you need for winter paddling is a dry bag containing a change of clothes. Always carry one, and you'll be prepared for a quick change if you take an unexpected spill.

Submitted by [Lynda Sadler](#)