

Leave No Trace principles

The Leave No Trace principles may not seem important first glance, but their value is apparent when combining the combined effects of millions of outdoor visitors. One poorly located campsite or fire ring is of little significance, but thousands of such instances slowly degrade the outdoor experience for all. Leave No Trace is worth the effort.

- *Plan Ahead and Prepare:* Proper trip planning and preparation helps hikers and campers achieve trip goals safely and enjoyably while minimizing damage to natural and cultural resources. Poorly prepared campers, concerned with unexpected situations, often resort to high-impact solutions that degrade the outdoors or put themselves at risk.

Poor planning often results in:

- high-risk travel because campers failed to obtain information containing geography and weather.
 - improperly located campsites because groups failed to plan enough time to reach their intended destination
 - improper campfires or excessive trash because of failure to plan meals or bring proper equipment.
- *Camp and Travel on Durable Surfaces:* Damage to land occurs when surface vegetation or communities of organisms are trampled beyond repair. The resulting barren area leads to unusable trails, campsites and soil erosion.

Should you concentrate activity, or spread out? In high-use areas, campers should gently concentrate activity. Use trails whenever possible and select camp sites so heavily used that further damage is unlikely. In areas of very little or no use, campers should gently spread out. Take different paths when hiking off trail to avoid creating new trails that cause erosion. When camping, disperse tents and cooking equipment and move camp daily to avoid creating permanent-looking camp sites.

These guide lines apply to most alpine settings and may be different for other areas, like deserts. Check if unsure.

- *Pack it In, Pack it Out*

This common saying is a simple yet effective way to get back try visitors to take their trash home with them. There is no reason why people cannot carry out of the back try the extra materials which they carried in with them in the first place. Though most trash and litter in the backcountry is not significant in terms of the

long term ecological health of an area, it does rank high as a problem in the minds of many backcountry visitors. Trash and litter detract from an area's naturalness.

- *Properly Dispose of What You Can't Pack Out.* Backcountry users create body waste and waste water which requires proper disposal.

Waste water: Prevent concentration of natural water sources; disperse dishwater far away from springs, streams, and lakes. Minimize the need to pack out food scraps by carefully planning meals. Avoid the use of soap.

Human waste: Proper human waste disposal prevents spread of disease, exposure to others, and speeds decomposition. Catholes, 6 to 8 inches deep and 200 feet from water, are often the easiest and most practical way to dispose of feces.

- *Leave What You Find:* Allow others a sense of discovery; leave rocks, plants, archaeological artifacts and other objects as found.

Minimize Site Alterations Do not dig tent trenches or build lean-tos, tables or chairs. Avoid hammering nails into trees, hacking at them with hatchets or saws, or damming bark and roots by tying horses to trees for extended periods. If you clear an area of rocks or twigs, replace these items before leaving. On high-impact sites, it is appropriate to clean the site and dismantle in-site user-built facilities, such as multiple fire rings and log seats or tables. Consider the idea that good campsites are found and not made.

- *Minimize Use and Impact of Fire:* Some people would not think of camping without a campfire. Yet, the naturalness of many areas has been degraded by overuse of fires and increasing demand for firewood. Lightweight camp stoves are essential for low-impact camping and have engendered a shift away from fires. Stoves are fast and eliminate firewood availability as a camp site selection concern. If building a fire, the most important consideration is the potential for damage.

The best place to build a fire is within an existing fire ring in a well-placed campsite. Choose not to have a fire in areas with little wood at higher elevations, in heavily used areas, or in desert settings. True Leave No Trace fires show no evidence of having ever been constructed.

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