

The Leave No Trace Seven Principles



- Plan ahead and prepare.
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
- Dispose of waste properly.
- Leave what you find.
- Minimize campfire impacts (be careful with fire).
- Respect wildlife.
- Be considerate of other visitors.

1 Plan Ahead and Prepare

When you're poorly prepared, you're more likely to run into problems. Lack of good research can lead to situations where you can become fatigued or fearful, and you may be forced to make poor choices.

Planning ahead includes doing research about your destination and packing appropriately.

- Know the regulations and special concerns for the area you'll visit.
- Prepare for extreme weather, hazards and emergencies.
- Schedule your trip to avoid times of high use.
- Visit in small groups when possible. Consider splitting larger groups into smaller groups.
- Repackage food to minimize waste.
- Use a map and compass to eliminate the use of marking paint, rock cairns or flagging.

2 Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

When exploring your surroundings and setting up your picnic or overnight camp, seek out resilient types of terrain. Ideal durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow.

In popular areas, frontcountry or backcountry:

- Concentrate use on existing trails and campsites.
- Camp at least 200 feet from lakes and streams.
- Keep campsites small. Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent.
- Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when it's wet or muddy.

In pristine areas:

- Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
- Avoid places where impacts are just beginning.

3 Dispose of Waste Properly

This principle applies to everything from litter to human waste to rinse water.

- Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food and litter. Always leave a place cleaner than you found it.
- Deposit solid human waste in catholes dug 6 to 8 inches deep, at least 200 feet from water, camp and trails. Cover and disguise the cathole when finished. (Some highly impacted areas, like Muir Base Camp on Mount Rainier or riverside campsites in the Grand Canyon, require human waste to be packed out, too.)
- Pack out toilet paper and hygiene products.
- To wash yourself or your dishes, carry water 200 feet away from streams or lakes and use small amounts of biodegradable soap. Scatter strained dishwater.

4 Minimize Campfire Impacts

While campfires are a timeless camping ritual, they can also be one of the most destructive ones. Far better choices include a lightweight stove for cooking and a candle lantern for light. Stargazing is an excellent alternative, and is best enjoyed when your campsite is in total darkness.

- Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans or mound fires.
- Keep fires small. Use only sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand.
- Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes.
- Don't bring firewood from home, which could introduce new pests and diseases. Buy it from a local source or gather it responsibly where allowed.

See our article, [How to Build a Campfire](#), for more tips.

5 Leave What You Find

The adage “take only pictures, leave only footprints” still holds, although leaving fewer footprints is even better.

- Preserve the past: Examine, but do not touch, cultural or historic structures and artifacts.
- Leave rocks, plants and other natural objects as you find them.
- Avoid introducing or transporting non-native species: Clean boot soles, kayak hulls and bike tires off between trips.
- Do not build structures, furniture or dig trenches.

6 Respect Wildlife

Don't approach animals. Both you and the wildlife will enjoy encounters more if you master the zoom lens on your camera and pack along a pair of binoculars.

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them.
- Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.
- Protect wildlife and your food by storing rations and trash securely.
- Control pets at all times, or leave them at home.
- Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: mating, nesting, raising young or winter.

7 Be Considerate of Other Visitors

“Treat others the way you would like to be treated” is a rule that applies in the outdoors, too.

- Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.
- Be courteous. Yield to other users on the trail.
- Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering pack stock, such as horses and mules.
- Take breaks and camp away from trails and other visitors.
- Let nature's sounds prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises.
- Manage your pet.