

Seven Principles of Leave No Trace

The principles of Leave No Trace might seem unimportant until you consider the combined effects of millions of outdoor visitors. One poorly located campsite or campfire may have little significance, but thousands of such instances seriously degrade the outdoor experience for all. Leaving no trace is everyone's responsibility.

Leave No Trace Awareness

Instilling values in young people and preparing them to make moral and ethical choices throughout their lifetime is the mission of the Boy Scouts of America. Leave No Trace helps reinforce that mission, and it reminds us to respect the rights of other users of the outdoors as well as future generations. Appreciation for our natural environment and a knowledge of the interrelationships of nature bolster our respect and reverence toward the environment and nature.

Leave No Trace is an awareness and an attitude rather than a set of rules. It applies in your backyard or local park as much as in the backcountry. We should all practice Leave No Trace in our thinking and actions—wherever we go.



We learn Leave No Trace by sharing the principles and then discovering how they can be applied. Leave No Trace instills an awareness that spurs questions such as, "What can we do to reduce our impact on the environment and on the experiences of other visitors?" Use your judgment and experience to tailor camping and hiking practices to the environment where the outing will occur. Forest, mountain, seashore, plains, freshwater, and wetland environments all require different minimum impact practices.

Outdoor Ethics

Help protect the backcountry by remembering that while you are there, you are a visitor. When you visit a friend, you take care to leave your friend's home just as you found it. You would never think of trampling garden flowers, chopping down trees in the yard, putting soap in the drinking water, or marking your name on the living room wall. When you visit the backcountry, the same courtesies apply. Leave everything just as you found it.

Hiking and camping without a trace are signs of an expert outdoorsman, and of a Scout or Scouter who cares for the environment. Travel lightly on the land.

The Principles of Leave No Trace

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare

Proper trip planning and preparation help hikers and campers accomplish trip goals safely and enjoyably while minimizing damage to natural and cultural resources. Campers who plan ahead can avoid unexpected situations, and minimize their impact by complying with area regulations such as observing limitations on group size. Schedule your trek to avoid times of high use. Obtain permits or permission to use the area for your trek.

Proper planning ensures:

- Low-risk adventures because campers obtained information concerning geography and weather and prepared accordingly
- Properly located campsites because campers allotted enough time to reach their destination
- Appropriate campfires and minimal trash because of careful meal planning, food repackaging, and proper equipment
- Comfortable and fun camping and hiking experiences because the outing matches the skill level of the participants

2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

Damage to land occurs when visitors trample vegetation or communities of organisms beyond recovery. The resulting barren areas develop into undesirable trails, campsites, and soil erosion.

Concentrate Activity, or Spread Out?

In high-use areas, campers should concentrate their activities where vegetation is already absent. Minimize resource damage by using existing trails and selecting designated or existing campsites. Keep campsites small by arranging tents in close proximity.

In more remote, less-traveled areas, campers should generally spread out. When hiking, take different paths to avoid creating new trails that cause erosion. When camping, disperse tents and cooking activities, and move camp daily to avoid creating permanent-looking campsites. Avoid places where impacts are just beginning to show. Always choose the most durable surfaces available: rock, gravel, sand, compacted soil, dry grasses, or snow.

These guidelines apply to most alpine settings and may be different for other areas, such as deserts. Learn the Leave No Trace techniques for your crew's specific activity or destination. Check with land managers to be sure of the proper technique.

3. Dispose of Waste Properly (Pack It In, Pack It Out)

This simple, yet effective, saying motivates backcountry visitors to take their trash home with them. It makes sense to carry out of the backcountry the extra materials taken there by your group or others. Inspect your campsite for trash or spilled foods. Accept the challenge of packing out all trash, leftover food, and litter.

Sanitation

Backcountry users create body waste and wastewater that require proper disposal.

- **Wastewater.** Help prevent contamination of natural water sources: After straining food particles, properly dispose of dishwater by dispersing at least 200 feet (about 80 to 100 strides for a youth) from springs, streams, and lakes. Use biodegradable soap 200 feet or more from any water source.
- **Human Waste.** Proper human waste disposal helps prevent the spread of disease and exposure to others. Catholes 6 to 8 inches deep in humus and 200 feet from water, trails, and campsites are often the easiest and most practical way to dispose of feces.

4. Leave What You Find

Allow others a sense of discovery, and preserve the past. Leave rocks, plants, animals, archaeological artifacts, and other objects as you find them. Examine but do not touch cultural or historical structures and artifacts. It may be illegal to remove artifacts.

- Minimize Site Alterations
- Do not dig tent trenches or build lean-tos, tables, or chairs. Never hammer nails into trees, hack at trees with hatchets or saws, or damage bark and roots by tying horses to trees for extended periods. Replace surface rocks or twigs that you cleared from the campsite. On high-impact sites, clean the area and dismantle inappropriate user-built facilities such as multiple fire rings and log seats or tables.
- Good campsites are found, not made. Avoid altering a site, digging trenches, or building structures.

5. Minimize Campfire Impacts

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 make low-impact camping possible by encouraging a shift away from fires. Stoves are fast, eliminate the need for firewood, and make cleanup after meals easier. After dinner, enjoy a candle lantern instead of a fire.

If you build a fire, the most important consideration is the potential for resource damage. Whenever possible, use an existing campfire ring in a well-placed campsite. Choose not to have a fire in areas where wood is scarce—at higher elevations, in heavily used areas with a limited wood supply, or in desert settings.

True Leave No Trace fires are small. Use dead and downed wood that can be broken easily by hand. When possible, burn all wood to ash and remove all unburned trash and food from the fire ring. If a site has two or more fire rings, you may dismantle all but one and scatter the materials in the surrounding area. Be certain all wood and campfire debris is dead out.

6. Respect Wildlife

Quick movements and loud noises are stressful to animals. Considerate campers practice these safety methods:

- Observe wildlife from afar to avoid disturbing them.
- Give animals a wide berth, especially during breeding, nesting, and birthing seasons.
- Store food securely and keep garbage and food scraps away from animals so they will not acquire bad habits. Never feed wildlife. Help keep wildlife wild.
- You are too close if an animal alters its normal activities.

7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Thoughtful campers respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.

- Travel and camp in small groups (no more than the group size prescribed by land managers).
- Let nature's sounds prevail. Keep the noise down and leave radios and pets at home.
- Select campsites away from other groups to help preserve their solitude.
- Always travel and camp quietly to avoid disturbing other visitors.
- Make sure the colors of clothing and gear blend with the environment.
- Respect private property and leave gates (open or closed) as found.
- Be considerate of other campers and respect their privacy.

Learn More About Leave No Trace

More information about Leave No Trace can be obtained by contacting your local land manager or local office of the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, the National Park Service, or the Fish and Wildlife Service. (Check the blue pages of your local telephone directory.) Or, contact the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics toll-free at 800-332-4100 or on the Internet at <http://www.lnt.org>.

For more information, see [Teaching Leave No Trace](#)—an excellent resource for teaching the Leave No Trace principles to Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, and Venturers.

For posters or plastic cards listing the Leave No Trace principles, or information on becoming a Leave No Trace sponsor, contact Leave No Trace, P.O. Box 997, Boulder, CO, 80306; phone 303-442-8222.

The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics

<http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/OutdoorProgram/OutdoorEthics/LeaveNoTrace/CenterforOutdoorEthics.aspx>

Tread Lightly!

Tread Lightly! is a national nonprofit organization with a mission to promote responsible outdoor recreation through ethics education and stewardship. Tread Lightly's goal is to balance the needs of the people who enjoy outdoor recreation with our need to maintain a healthy environment.

Tread Lightly! is a Scouting partner. <https://www.treadlightly.org/?gclid=CKq63szOlcoCFQ6SaQod32sKDg>.

Tread Principles

Travel Responsibly on land by staying on designated roads, trails and area. Go over, not around, obstacles to avoid widening the trails. Cross streams only at designated fords. when possible, avoid wet, muddy trails. On water, stay on designated waterways and launch your watercraft in designated areas.

Respect the Rights of Others including private property owners, all recreational trail users, campers and others so they can enjoy their recreational activities undisturbed. Leave gates as you found them. Yield right of way to those passing your or going uphill. On water, respect anglers, swimmers, skiers, boaters, divers and those on or near shore.

Educate Yourself prior to your trip by obtaining travel maps and regulations from public agencies. Plan for your trip, take recreation skills classes and know how to operate your equipment safely.

Avoid Sensitive Areas on land such as meadows, lakeshores, wetlands and streams. Stay on designated routes. This protects wildlife habitats and sensitive soils from damage. Don't disturb historical, archeological or paleontological sites. On water, avoid operating your watercraft in shallow waters or near shorelines at high speeds.

Do Your Part by modeling appropriate behavior, leaving the area better than you found it, properly disposing of waste, minimizing the use of fire, avoiding the spread of invasive species and repairing degraded areas.

TREAD LIGHTLY!'S TIPS FOR RESPONSIBLE CAMPING

TOP 10 WAYS TO MINIMIZE IMPACT WHEN CAMPING IN THE OUTDOORS

Observe all fire restrictions. If you must build a fire, use existing fire rings, build a mound fire or use a fire pan. Use only fallen timber. Gather firewood well away from your camp. Do not cut standing trees. When finished, ensure your fire is completely extinguished. Pack out what you pack in and leave your campsite better than you found it.

1. Whenever possible, use existing campsites. Camp on durable surfaces and place tents on a non-vegetated area. Do not dig trenches around tents.
2. Camp at least 200 feet from water and other campsites. In backcountry areas not open to vehicles, camp at least 200 feet from trails.
3. Pack out what you pack in. Carry a trash bag and pick up litter left by others.
4. Repackage snacks and food in baggies. This reduces weight and the amount of trash to carry out.
5. For cooking, consider using a camp stove instead of a campfire. Camp stoves leave less of an impact on the land.
6. Observe all fire restrictions. If you must build a fire—use existing fire rings, build a mound fire, or use a fire pan. Use only fallen timber for campfires. Do not cut standing trees. Clear a 10-foot diameter area around the site by removing any grass, twigs, leaves and extra firewood. Also make sure there aren't any tree limbs or flammable objects hanging overhead.
7. Allow the wood to burn down to a fine ash, if possible. Pour water on the fire and drown all embers until the hissing sound stops. Stir the campfire ashes and embers until everything is wet and cold to the touch. If you don't have water, use dirt.
8. Detergents, toothpaste and soap harm fish and other aquatic life. Wash 200 feet away from streams and lakes. Scatter gray water so it filters through the soil.

9. In areas without toilets, use a portable latrine if possible, and pack out your waste. If you don't have a portable latrine, you may need to bury your waste. Human waste should be disposed of in a shallow hole six to eight inches deep at least 200 feet from water sources, campsites or trails. Cover and disguise the hole with natural materials. It is recommended to pack out your toilet paper. High use areas may have other restrictions, so check with a land manager.
10. Following a trip, wash your gear and support vehicle to reduce the spread of invasive species.

OTHER TIPS FOR RESPONSIBLE CAMPING

Minimizing your impact on the environment when camping is critical. Below are more tips to tread lightly when traveling to your destination, selecting your site, and leaving it better than you found it.

TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY

Travel responsibly on designated roads, trails or areas.

- While traveling to your favorite camping spot, stay on designated roads and trails.
- Always practice minimum impact travel techniques for your mode of transportation.
- Go over obstacles, not around. Don't create new routes or expand existing trails.
- Cross streams only at fords where the road or trail crosses the stream.
- If hiking on a trail, walk single file to avoid widening the trail.
- If there are no trails and hiking is permitted, spread out in open country. Spreading out, rather than following each other's footsteps, disperses impact and avoids creating a new trail.
- If possible, travel on hardened surfaces such as gravel, rock or in sand washes.
- Comply with all signs and respect barriers.
- Buddy up with two or three campers, reducing vulnerability if you have an accident or breakdown.

RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS

Whenever possible, use existing campsites. Camp on durable surfaces and place tents on a non-vegetated area. Do not dig trenches around tents.

Respect the rights of others, including private property owners, all recreational trail users, campers and others so they can enjoy their recreational activities undisturbed.

- Be considerate of others on the road, trail and campground. Learn the basics of trail etiquette.
- Keep noise to a minimum especially in the early morning and evening hours.
- Be considerate of other campers' privacy, keep your distance and avoid traveling through their campsites.
- Camping supplies in natural colors blend with natural surroundings and are less intrusive to other campers' experiences.
- Leave gates as you find them. If crossing private property, be sure to ask permission from the landowner(s).
- Proceed with caution around horses and pack animals. Sudden, unfamiliar activity may spook animals possibly causing injury to animals, handlers and others on the trail.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

Educate yourself prior to a trip by obtaining travel maps and regulations from public agencies, planning for your trip, taking recreation skills classes, and knowing how to operate your equipment safely.

- Obtain a map (motor vehicle-use map where appropriate) of your destination and determine which areas are open to your type of travel.
 - Make a realistic plan and stick to it. Always tell someone of your travel plans.
 - Contact the land manager for area restrictions, closures, and permit requirements.
 - Check the weather forecast for your destination. Plan clothing, equipment and supplies accordingly.
 - Carry a compass or a Global Positioning System (GPS) unit and know how to use it.
 - Prepare for the unexpected by packing emergency items.
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AVOID SENSITIVE AREAS

Avoid sensitive areas such as meadows, lakeshores, wetlands and streams. Stay on designated routes.

- Other sensitive habitats to avoid, unless on designated routes, include cryptobiotic soils of the desert, tundra, and seasonal nesting or breeding areas.
 - Do not disturb historical, archeological, or paleontological sites.
 - Avoid “spooking” livestock and wildlife you encounter and keep your distance.
 - Motorized and mechanized vehicles are not allowed in designated Wilderness Areas. (What are Wilderness Areas?)
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DO YOUR PART

Do your part by modeling appropriate behavior, leaving the area better than you found it, properly disposing of waste, minimizing the use of fire, avoiding the spread of invasive species and restoring degraded areas.

- Pack out what you pack in. Carry a trash bag and pick up litter left by others. Repackage snacks and food in baggies. This reduces weight and the amount of trash to carry out.
- Whenever possible, use existing campsites. Camp on durable surfaces and place tents on a non-vegetated area. Do not dig trenches around tents.
- Camp at least 200 feet from water and other campsites.
- In backcountry areas not open to vehicles, camp at least 200 feet from trails.
- For cooking, use a camp stove. They are always preferable to a campfire in terms of impact on the land.
- Observe all fire restrictions. If you must build a fire, use existing fire rings, build a mound fire or use a fire pan. For campfires, use only fallen timber. Gather firewood well away from your camp. Do not cut standing trees. Let your fire burn down to a fine ash. Ensure your fire is completely extinguished.
- Do not wash in streams and lakes. Detergents, toothpaste and soap harm fish and other aquatic life. Wash 200 feet away from streams and lakes. Scatter wash water so it filters through the soil.
- In areas without toilets, use a portable latrine if possible and pack out your waste, otherwise it’s necessary to bury your waste. Human waste should be disposed of in a shallow hole (6”-8” deep) at least 200 feet from water sources, campsites or trails. Cover and disguise the hole with natural materials. Pack out your toilet paper.
- High-use areas may have other restrictions so check with a land manager.
- Take a small bag and pack out your pet’s waste— especially in front-country areas or on or near trails or trailheads.
- Before and after a trip, wash your gear and support vehicle to reduce the spread of invasive species.

Invasive Species

Invasive species are one of the greatest threats facing our lands and waterways. Their impacts are not just ecological but social and economic. The Forest Service estimates the economic impact of these invaders is as much as \$138 billion annually. The ecological damage and secondary influences these species have on everything from recreation to agriculture make the cost jump even higher.

Looking specifically at plants, the incursion of a noxious weed is far reaching. Once established they continue to spread—displacing native plants and weakening the natural erosion and water filtration controls within a watershed. Established weeds can also change the fire ecology of an area and, in arid areas, lead to desertification or the death of natural springs. Their presence negatively influences wildlife diversity and the general health of an ecosystem. Most frightening is that once they are established—these plants are virtually impossible to remove or control.

What is the defense? A good offense—by proactively attacking the problem from all angles. Well managed and ecologically healthy lands and waters are the first step. But you can help too. An army of individuals is needed to identify invaders early before they are out of control and to eradicate their advance. It is also essential for people to follow a few simple guidelines when visiting public lands to prevent invasions.

Let's look at some guidelines for reducing the spread of invasive species while recreating.

On land

- Stay on designated trails and roads especially when traveling by vehicles. Vehicles easily transport seeds and disturb soils.
- Following a trip, wash your vehicles and gear to remove seeds.
- When traveling with pack animals, bring pellets, grain, or weed-free hay to areas where feed is limited or grazing is not allowed. Also, use this feed several days before leaving as seeds are dispersed through waste.
- Check your animals before and after every trip and remove any “hitchhikers” you find.

Notify land managers when you see an outbreak of weeds. Do not pull weeds as you may inadvertently help them spread through both seed and root dispersal.

On water

- Following a trip— wash your gear, watercraft and support vehicle.
- Make sure to remove all plant material from the watercraft, motor, trailer and other gear and dispose on dry land in a garbage container.
- Drain livewells, bilge water and transom wells at the boat launch prior to leaving.
- When fishing, use only artificial lures. Live bait has the potential to accidentally introduce exotics.

The next time you find yourself surfing the web, check out your state's natural resources website to learn about the invasive species in your neck of the woods. Better yet, become one of the many volunteers on the front line combating these invaders threatening the beauty and health of your favorite recreation spots.

Visit the [National Invasive Species Information Center](https://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/) (<https://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/>) to learn more about prevention and management of invasive species.

Please Practice LEAVE NO TRACE



Know Before You Go

- Be prepared! Remember food and water, and clothes to protect you from cold, heat and rain.
- Use maps to plan where you're going. Check them along the way so you'll stay on course and won't get lost.
- Remember to bring a leash for your pet and plastic bags to pick up your pet's waste.
- Learn about the areas you plan to visit. Read books, check online and talk to people before you go. The more you know, the more fun you'll have.

Stick To Trails and Camp Overnight Right

- Walk and ride on designated trails to protect trailside plants.
- Avoid stepping on flowers or small trees. Once damaged, they may not grow back.
- Respect private property by staying on designated trails.
- Camp only on existing or designated campsites to avoid damaging vegetation.
- Good campsites are found, not made. Don't dig trenches or build structures in your campsite.



Trash Your Trash and Pick Up Poop

- Pack it in, Pack it out. Put litter—even crumbs, peels and cores—in garbage bags and carry it home.
- Use bathrooms or outhouses when available. If not available, bury human waste in a small hole 6-8 inches deep and 200 feet or 70 big steps from water.
- Use a plastic bag to pack out your pet's poop to a garbage can.
- Keep water clean. Do not put soap, food, or human or pet waste in lakes or streams.

Leave It As You Find It

- Leave plants, rocks and historical items as you find them so others can enjoy them.
- Treat living plants with respect. Carving, hacking or peeling plants may kill them.



Be Careful With Fire

- Use a camp stove for cooking. Stoves are easier to cook on and create less impact than a fire.
- If you want to have a campfire, be sure it's permitted and safe to build a fire in the area you're visiting. Use only existing fire rings to protect the ground from heat. Keep your fire small.
- Remember, a campfire isn't a garbage can. Pack out all trash and food.
- Before gathering any firewood, check local regulations.
- Burn all wood to ash and be sure the fire is completely out and cold before you leave.

Keep Wildlife Wild

- Observe wildlife from a distance and never approach, feed or follow them.
- Human food is unhealthy for all wildlife and feeding them starts bad habits.
- Protect wildlife and your food by securely storing your meals and trash.



Share Our Trails and Manage Your Pet

- Be considerate when passing others on the trail.
- Keep your pet under control to protect it, other visitors and wildlife.
- Listen to nature. Avoid making loud noises or yelling. You will see more wildlife if you are quiet.
- Be sure the fun you have outdoors does not bother anyone else. Remember, other visitors are there to enjoy the outdoors too.



leave no trace™
CENTER FOR OUTDOOR ETHICS
WWW.LNT.ORG

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The member-driven Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics teaches people of all ages how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly. In its simplest form, Leave No Trace is about making good decisions to protect the world around you—the world we all enjoy. Through targeted education, research and outreach, the Center ensures the long-term health of our natural world. Do your part to pass our nation's outdoor heritage on to future generations by joining us at www.LNT.org.

Special thanks to  SUBARU for the printing of this poster.

