

Thread Lightly



What We Do

Tread Lightly! and its partners lead a national initiative to protect and enhance recreation access and opportunities by promoting outdoor ethics to heighten individuals' sense of good stewardship. Tread Lightly!'s goal is to balance the needs of the people who enjoy outdoor recreation with our need to maintain healthy ecosystems and thriving populations of fish and wildlife. The scope of our work includes both land and water, and is representative of nearly every form of outdoor recreation including, but not limited to hunting, recreational shooting, fishing and boating. We also have a niche in promoting safe and responsible use of motorized and mechanized vehicles in the outdoors.

We offer a myriad of programs, trainings and educational material to help educate recreationists across the nation on the importance of treading lightly. Tread Lightly! is also a member-based organization. Without the help and support of our members, we would be unable to deliver award-winning programs and campaigns. Thank you!

Camping Tips

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

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.
- 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.
- When encountering horses on the trail, move to the side of the trail and stop. Ask the rider the best way to proceed. If riding an OHV turn off your engine, remove your helmet, and speak—you want the horse to know you are human.
- Keep your pets under control; this protects your pet, other recreationists and wildlife.

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.

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 if it is left on or near trails or trailhead areas.
- Before and after a trip, wash your gear and support vehicle to reduce the spread of invasive species.
- Build a trail community. Get to know other types of recreationists that share your favorite trail.

Hiking Tips

TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY

Travel responsibly on designated roads, trails or areas.

- Stay on the trail even if it is rough and muddy. Walking on the track edge and cutting switchbacks increase damage, causing erosion and visual scarring.
- Walk single file to avoid widening the trail.
- Spread out in open country where there are no trails. Spreading out, rather than following each other's footsteps, disperses impact and avoids creating a new trail.
- Flagging and marking trails is unsightly. If flagging is necessary, remove it as you leave. Consider using a Global Positioning System (GPS) instead of flagging.
- Comply with all signs and respect barriers.
- Buddy up with two or three hikers, reducing vulnerability if you have an accident.

RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS

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 or trail.
- Leave gates as you find them.
- If crossing private property, be sure to ask permission from the landowner(s).
- Keep the noise down.
- 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.
- When encountering horses on the trail, move to the downhill side of the trail, stop, and ask the rider the best way to proceed.
- Keep your pets under control; this protects your pet, other recreationists and wildlife.

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 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 GPS unit and know how to use it.
- Carry water and emergency supplies even on short hikes.
- Choose appropriate footwear for the terrain. Solid, lightweight hiking boots are best. Sandals can be used on trails in summer and around your campsite.
- Dress in layers and always carry a jacket. Weather conditions can change unexpectedly.
- Your pack weight should not exceed one third of your body weight.

AVOID SENSITIVE AREAS

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- 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.

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.

- Carry a trash bag and pick up litter left by others.
- Pack out what you pack in.
- Repackage snacks and food in baggies. This reduces weight and the amount of trash to carry out.
- In areas without toilets, use a portable waste bag 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. It is recommended to 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 if it is left on or near trails or trailhead areas.
- Before and after a hike, wash your gear and support vehicle to reduce the spread of invasive species.
- Build a trail community. Get to know other types of recreationists that share your favorite trail.

Sharing Our Trails: A Guide to Trail Etiquette

In many parts of the country, trails are open to and shared by equestrians, OHV riders, bicycle riders, runners and hikers. Trail sharing can and does work when people respect each other and work cooperatively to keep each other safe.

While it is important for people to respect each other on the trail, it is important to remember that equestrians are dealing not only with other trail enthusiasts' personalities, they also are working with horses whose temperaments are as individual as our own. Horses' natural instincts can influence their behaviors and affect the way they react to circumstances encountered on the trail.

For these reasons, it is important that equestrians know their horses well enough that they are confident they will be able to control them when they encounter other trail enthusiasts who are allowed on the trail. Conversely, OHV riders, bicycle riders, runners and hikers must understand that "equestrian only" trails must be respected for the safety of both the horse and rider. These trails offer the opportunity for horsemen to acclimate their horses to basic trail conditions without encountering "unknown threats" that can trigger the horse's natural instinct of flight.

When young or inexperienced horses encounter new conditions on the trail like OHVs, bicycles, runners and hikers, and even certain scents, the flight response can end with disastrous results for the horse and/or rider. When equestrians on well-trained horses and other responsible trail enthusiasts meet each other on the trail, the encounters can be enjoyable social exchanges if the groups understand how to work together to keep the encounters safe.

Guidelines for all trail enthusiasts:

Common Courtesy:

- Respect all trail restrictions and use only trails open to your mode of transportation.
- Be considerate of others on the road or trail.
- When traveling on shared-use trails, continually watch for other types of recreationists.
- Slow down when sight lines are poor.
- Keep speeds low around other recreationists.
- Keep noise and dust down.

- Keep your ears open – no ear buds for an MP3.
- Listening to headphones or ear buds can make it difficult to hear and communicate with other recreationists. In some areas, it is illegal to operate vehicles or bikes with both ears covered.
- Keep pets under control. Some trails require dogs to be leashed.
- Be familiar with local rules.

Yielding:

- Yield the right of way to those passing you from behind or traveling uphill.
- Motorized vehicles yield to mountain bikes, runners, hikers and horses.
- Mountain bikes yield to runners, hikers and horses.
- Runners and hikers yield to horses.

Guidelines for Equestrians on shared trails:

- Be sure you can control your horse and it has been exposed to other trail recreational uses before riding on shared-use trails.
- Cooperate with local OHV and bicycle riders to expose your horse to vehicles in a gradual manner and in a safe environment.
- Be alert and aware of the presence of other trail enthusiasts. If possible, pull to the side of the trail when you hear OHVs or bicycles.
- At trailheads or staging areas, park vehicles and secure horses in a manner that provides a safe distance between the horses and passing traffic.
- Be prepared to let other trail enthusiasts know what needs to be done to keep you, the horse and other trail enthusiasts safe when you meet on the trail.
- Less experienced horses and riders should ride behind more “trail-wise” horses and riders.
- If you are “ponying” a horse, go slow and never take a loose horse on the trail.

Guidelines for OHV riders when encountering horses on the trail:

- Pull to the side of the trail far enough for horses to pass safely as soon as you see them.
- Pull to the downhill side of the trail if possible since horses tend to perceive unknown threats on the uphill side as predators.
- Shut off your motor as soon as possible and remove your helmet. The horse will be more likely to recognize you as a human.
- Speak to the rider and horse in a friendly, relaxed tone.
- When approaching horses from behind, stop, call ahead and make yourself known to the rider. Ask them if it is OK to pass and the best way to do so.
- Horsemen may pull to the side of the trail a safe distance if they hear an OHV approaching, but this does not necessarily mean it is safe for you to ride by. Stop and wait for instructions from the horseman.
- Ask the horseman how he/she would like to proceed.
- The horseman will know his/her horse and how the horse reacts to other trail enthusiasts.
- The horseman may ask you to stay put and ride past you.
- The horseman may ride to the side of the trail and ask you to ride or push past them.
- If you ride by a horse, keep your rpm’s low and steady and your sound as low as possible. Sudden movements or sounds can startle horses.
- Be alert, aware and on guard for oncoming traffic.

Guidelines for bicyclists when encountering horses on the trail:

- Pull to the side of the trail far enough for horses to pass safely as soon as you see them.
- Pull to the downhill side of the trail if possible since horses tend to perceive unknown threats on the uphill side as predators.
- Speak to the rider and horse in a friendly, relaxed tone. Remove your helmet if it conceals part of your face. The horse will be more likely to recognize you as a human.
- When approaching horses from behind, stop, call ahead and make yourself known to the rider.
- Ask them if it is OK to pass and the best way to do so.
- Horsemen may pull to the side of the trail a safe distance if they hear a bicycle approaching but this does not necessarily mean it is safe for you to ride by. Stop and wait for instructions from the horseman.
- Ask the horseman how he/she would like to proceed.
- The horseman will know his/her horse and how the horse reacts to other trail enthusiasts.
- The horseman may ask you to stay put and ride past you.
- The horseman may ride to the side of the trail and ask you to ride or push past them.
- If you ride by a horse, do so at a slow, steady pace and avoid making any sudden movements or sounds that might startle the horse.
- Be alert, aware and on guard for oncoming traffic.

Guidelines for other non-motorized recreationists when encountering horses on the trail:

- Hikers and trail runners should always stop and step to the side of the trail when they meet horses on the trail.
- Step to the downhill side of the trail. Speak to the rider and horse in a friendly, relaxed tone.
- Keep pets under control.

Tips for Responsible Personal Watercraft Use

TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY

Travel responsibly on designated waterways and launch your watercraft in designated areas.

- Travel only in areas open to your personal watercraft (PWC).
- Always wear a Coast Guard approved lifejacket (PFD).
- When riding, make sure your lanyard is attached to your PFD, wrist or clothing.
- Always maintain your PWC at a safe speed. If you fall off your PWC, always re-board from the rear.
- Keep an eye out for other boaters, objects and swimmers.
- Never jump a wake. If crossing a wake, cross at low speeds and keep a close lookout for skiers and towables.
- Comply with all signs and respect barriers. This includes speed limits, no-wake zones and underwater obstructions.
- Make every effort to ride with a partner on another watercraft.
- Do not ride at night. PWCs are not equipped with lights.
- Make certain your trailer lights work and your PWC is secure on the trailer before you travel to your destination.
- Balance your load including items stowed inside your PWC.
- Don't mix PWCs with alcohol or drugs.

RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS

Respect the rights of others, including anglers, swimmers, skiers, boaters, divers and others so they can enjoy their recreational activities undisturbed.

- Show consideration to all recreationists on and around waterways.
- Be courteous to other boaters while in boat ramp areas. Launch and retrieve your PWC as quickly as possible.
- Keep the noise down, especially around the shore.
- Do not idly ride around near beaches, picnicking areas, campgrounds or shoreline residences.
- If crossing private property, be sure to ask permission from the landowner(s).

EDUCATE YOURSELF

Educate yourself prior to a trip by learning rules and regulations, planning for your trip, taking recreation skills classes and knowing how to operate your equipment safely.

- Obtain charts of your destination and determine which areas are open to PWCs.
- 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.
- Make sure you have enough fuel and oil for the entire trip.
- Make sure your owner's manual and registration are on board in waterproof containers.
- Always carry a Coast Guard approved working fire extinguisher and warning flares.
- Know distress signals and warning symbols.
- Prepare for the unexpected by packing necessary emergency items.
- Carry a Global Positioning System (GPS) unit and know how to use it.
- Know your limitations. Apply sunscreen, drink lots of water and watch your energy level.
- Take a PWC education course to learn more about navigating waterways and safe and enjoyable PWC riding.
- Make sure your watercraft is mechanically up to the task. Be prepared with tools, supplies and a spill kit.

AVOID SENSITIVE AREAS

Avoid sensitive areas and operating your watercraft in shallow waters or near shorelines at high speeds.

- Always launch at a designated boat ramp. Backing a vehicle on a riverbank or lakeshore can damage the area and lead to erosion.
- Always travel slowly in shallow waters and avoid riding in water less than 2½ feet deep. High speeds near shorelines lead to large wakes which cause shoreline erosion.
- Avoid sensitive areas such as seasonal nesting or breeding areas.
- Do not disturb historical, archeological or paleontological sites.
- Avoid "spooking" wildlife you encounter and keep your distance.
- Motorized and mechanized vehicles are not allowed in designated Wilderness Areas

DO YOUR PART

Do your part by modeling appropriate behavior, leaving the area better than you found it, properly disposing of fuel, oil and waste, 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.
- When fueling a watercraft, take every precaution not to spill fuel into the water.
- Be prepared. Carry a spill kit, which includes absorbent pads, socks and booms.
- Use a fuel collar or bib when fueling to catch drips and overflow and prevent backsplash.
- Observe proper sanitary waste disposal or pack your waste out.

- Before and after a trip, wash your gear, PWC, and support vehicle to reduce the spread of invasive species. Make sure to remove all plant material from your PWC, motor, trailer and other gear and dispose on dry land in a garbage container. Also drain livewells, bilge water and transom wells at the boat launch prior to leaving.

Fishing Tips

How to fish responsibly

If crossing a stream with a vehicle, do so only where the trail crosses the stream or at designated fording points. Choose access to fishing spots wisely. Be mindful of damaging fragile vegetation and soils along shorelines and stream banks.

TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY

Travel responsibly on land by staying on designated roads, trails or areas. On water, stay on designated waterways and launch watercraft in designated areas.

- Travel only in areas open to your type of watercraft or on routes open to your mode of transportation.
- Carry a Coast Guard approved life vest (PFD) that is wearable and comfortable for each person.
- Always maintain your watercraft at a manageable speed.
- Keep an eye out for other boaters, objects and swimmers.
- Do not create new routes on roads and trails or expand existing trails. Go over obstacles, not around, to avoid widening trails.
- Cross streams only at fords, where the road or trail crosses the stream.
- Comply with all signs and respect barriers.
- Buddy up with two or three anglers, reducing vulnerability if you have an accident or breakdown.

RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS

Never discard fish entrails in lake shallows or any area where others might come across it. It is unacceptable to bury it near the lake or stream or burn it in camp. Suitable alternatives include bagging and packing out entrails, disposing of it in water at least 25 feet deep or burying it 100 yards away from any lake, trail or camp. Respect the rights of others on land including private property owners, recreational trail users, campers and others so they can enjoy their recreational activities undisturbed. On water, respect anglers, swimmers, skiers, boaters, divers and others so they can enjoy their recreational activities undisturbed.

- Be considerate to all recreationists on and around waterways and on the roads and trails to fishing spots.
- Be a sportsman; practice catch and release and keep only what you need.
- Be courteous to other boaters while in boat ramp areas. Launch and retrieve your watercraft as quickly as possible.
- Leave ample room for other anglers, so you don't disturb their fishing experience.
- If fishing by boat, don't crowd other anglers or watercrafts.
- Keep the noise down especially around shore and other anglers.
- Be considerate of others on the road or trail. On roads and trails, horses always have the right of way and when driving yield to hikers and bikers as well.