

Leave No Trace Seven Principles



Reference cards explain the Leave No Trace Seven Principles

Each of us plays a vital role in protecting our national parks. As we spend time outdoors, in the natural world and in wilderness, it's important to be conscious of the effects our actions may have on plants, animals, other people, and even entire ecosystems. Following the [Leave No Trace Seven Principles](#), summarized below, can help us minimize those impacts. They can be applied anywhere, at any time, while taking part in recreational activities.

- **Plan Ahead and Prepare**
 - 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 or GPS to eliminate the use of marking paint, rock cairns or flagging.
- **Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces**
 - Durable surfaces include maintained trails and designated campsites, rock, gravel, sand, dry grasses or snow.

- Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams.
- Good campsites are found, not made. Altering a site is not necessary.
 - *In popular areas:*
 - Concentrate use on existing trails and campsites.
 - Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when wet or muddy.
 - Keep campsites small. Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent.
 - *In pristine areas:*
 - Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
 - Avoid places where impacts are just beginning.
- **Dispose of Waste Properly**
 - Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite, food preparation areas, and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food and litter.
 - Utilize toilet facilities whenever possible. Otherwise, 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.
 - 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.
- **Leave What You Find**
 - Preserve the past: examine, photograph, 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.
 - Do not build structures, furniture, or dig trenches.
- **Minimize Campfire Impacts**
 - Campfires can cause lasting impacts to the environment. Use a lightweight stove for cooking and enjoy a candle lantern for light.
 - Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires.
 - Keep fires small. Only use down and dead wood from the ground that can be broken by hand.
 - Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes.
- **Respect Wildlife**
 - Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them.

- Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, [habituates them to humans], 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.
- **Be Considerate of Other Visitors**
 - 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.
 - Take breaks and camp away from trails and other visitors.
 - Let nature's sounds prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises.

These principles were established by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, and built on work by the US Forest Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management in the mid 1980s. This relationship continues today. The principles are based on and informed by scientific research in the fields of recreation ecology and human dimensions of natural resources. Take a look at the [science behind the principles](#) on the Leave No Trace website.

Thank you for doing your part to protect our natural world.

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