

Leave No Trace Principles

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.
It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

- Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac (1949)

Forester and philosopher Aldo Leopold expressed this sentiment in the 1930s. Today increasing numbers of backcountry visitors are coming to the same realization as they witness their favorite wilderness haunts being loved to death by recreationists seeking adventure and solitude. But the principles and practices discussed here are meaningless as a set of rules and regulations unless they are based on an abiding respect for and appreciation of wild places and their inhabitants.

Simple living, adventure and solitude can still be part of our backcountry travels, but in order to assure their continued existence we must take the responsibility to educate ourselves and to become equipped with skills and habits that enable us to Leave No Trace.

Since 1965, the National Outdoor Leadership School has pioneered the teaching and development of practical conservation techniques designed to minimize impact.

Plan Ahead and Prepare

Proper trip planning and preparation helps 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.

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 and food repackaging and proper equipment.

Comfortable and fun camping and hiking experiences because the outing matches the skill level of the participants.

Camp and Travel 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. 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. Always choose the most durable surfaces available: rock, gravel, dry grasses, or snow.

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. Minimize the need to pack out food scraps by carefully planning meals. Accept the challenge of packing out everything you bring.

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Dispose of Waste Properly - 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 and 200 feet from water, trails, and campsites 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, animals, archaeological artifacts, and other objects as you find them. 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 drainage 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.

Minimize Campfire Use

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 no larger than an adult's wrist. 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.

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. Help keep wildlife wild. You are too close if an animal alters its normal activities. If you observe a game law violation contact the Arizona Game and Fish Department at 1-800-352-0700.

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Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Thoughtful campers

Travel and camp in small groups 4 to 12 (no more than the group size prescribed by land managers). Keep the noise down and leave their radios, tape players, 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 their 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.

If you observe destruction of property or the environment or private property while in the outdoors you may notify the proper authorities by calling the Arizona Game and Fish Department's 1-800-VANDALS (1-800-826-3257) 24-hour hotline.