

Wilderness Ethics

“...walk softly and hurt the landscape hardly more than the birds and squirrels...” – John Muir

LEAVE NO TRACE

These principles provide good guidance for routine patrols, covert operations, hunting and fishing, family camping trips, and “survival” practice sessions.

For more information, visit www.lnt.org or call 800-332-4100.



- 1) **Plan Ahead and Prepare:** know your abilities and have the appropriate skills.
Choose an area or route well-suited to your group's ability level.
Good preparation & adequate gear mean less chance of having to disturb or take from nature.
Have the appropriate equipment and know how to use it.
Plan meals to avoid leftovers or shortages.
Leave trip info with a reliable friend: itinerary; route; your phone #; descriptions of vehicles, group members, clothing, and gear; whom to call if you don't return as scheduled.
Know the local regulations & fire restrictions and abide by them.
Avoid popular times (weekends, summer) and popular places as much as possible to avoid overloading the resource and to enhance your experience of solitude.
- 2) **Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces:** even footprints leave evidence of your passing.
Sand, rock, snow, and dry grass are durable: soft meadows, mud, and young plants are not.
Good campsites are found, not made: you shouldn't need to dig, cut, or build anything.
Concentrate use in popular areas: stay in *the middle* of trails (don't shortcut switchbacks or skirt around muddy areas), walk single file, use established campsites / fire pits / toilets.
Disperse use in pristine areas: walk far abreast over durable ground, camp fifty paces away from trails and water sources, disguise campsite in heavy cover, don't build a fire.
- 3) **Dispose of Waste Properly:** pack it in, pack it out.
Use toilets if available: if not, bury waste 50 paces from water / trail and 8" (20cm) deep in soil.
Natural "toilet paper" (smooth stones, safe leaves, etc.) is best: bury or pack out used TP.
Urinate on rocks or sand away from water & trails: animals will destroy plants to get the salt.
On glaciers / in winter it is best to pack out solid human waste in bags and / or a PVC tube.
To wash dishes, haul water away from its source, use no soap, scrub with sand or dry pine needles (if needed), strain wastewater through a bandana or wire mesh, pack out crumbs, scatter wash water away from the trail and camp (or simply drink the "soup" you just made).
Carefully police your camp for micro-trash (gum wrappers, cigarette butts, food scraps, etc.).
- 4) **Leave What You Find:** take nothing but pictures.
Any souvenir you take is something the next person won't be able to see & enjoy.
What if everyone took only one thing... how long would it be until there was nothing left?
Don't harm plants by trampling, carving, burning green wood, cutting boughs for bed, etc.
Don't contribute to what you find: no graffiti, improvised shelters, cairns, blazes, etc.
- 5) **Minimize Campfire Impacts:** don't build one unless you *need* it. Check regulations.
Use a white gas or propane / butane stove for cooking and water purification needs.
If you need a wood fire, try to use an established fire pit, and then only if allowed by agency.
If you must have a fire w/ no established pit, don't build a ring or dig a pit. Instead, put down a tarp, make a large mound of sand / gravel / dirt, build a small fire and burn it to ash, douse thoroughly, then return sand (with ash) to its source using the tarp to carry it.
Use small, dead & downed wood: if you can't break it by hand, it is too big for most fires.
Don't take branches from standing snags; they provide valuable habitat for animals.

- 6) **Respect Wildlife:** avoid contact or influencing their behavior; they have a hard enough life. Don't feed the animals and remember to store food and trash securely (either bear-bag or use a bear-resistant container). Human food is not good for animals: it can make them dependent on hand-outs (and starve in the off season), habituation to humans and their food can pose a health risk to both animals and humans and may lead to destruction of problem animals. Obey game laws, kill humanely, and use the animal completely.
- 7) **Be Considerate of Other Visitors:** remember the Golden Rule and help those in need. Be quiet: you'll see more wildlife and won't spoil the experience for other people. Keep lights to minimum: you don't need to light up the wilderness like a stadium. Use small flashlights or candle lanterns for camp chores and enjoy the dark skies and stars. Wear natural colors (browns, greens, blacks) and use tents and tarps in these colors to blend in. Yield the right of way to those traveling faster or with more difficulty and anyone on horseback.

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In these cases, some regulations and principles can be altered in the interest of survival. However, there are a few things to keep in mind.

- 1) **Plan Ahead and Prepare:** in emergencies it is even more important to plan everything you do because the margin for error is almost non-existent.
 - 2) **Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces:** still applies... sort-of. The durable surfaces will, in most cases, be the safest and most comfortable places to travel and sleep. But at the same time, using them will make it very difficult for rescuers to track you. The bottom line is to be aware of what it is you are walking across and how it will affect the land, you, *and* those trying to find you. Consider using labeled flagging and cairns in places you won't leave tracks.
 - 3) **Dispose of Waste Properly:** mostly applies. You probably won't be too concerned with packing out your trash, but before you discard something, consider ANY possible use it may have. In general, never throw anything away. Remember, your man-made resources are limited, so don't waste any! All of the sanitation aspects are still valid; stay healthy!
 - 4) **Leave What You Find:** unless you need it to survive. Harvest only what you can use or preserve by drying. Fir boughs make a good bed, but take from several trees, not just one.
 - 5) **Minimize Campfire Impacts:** within reason. We're not as worried about black rings as we are safety this time. Use fire wisely and carefully: several smaller, well-located fires may be more effective than one large one. Be aware of possible consequences: fire can quickly escape to become an uncontrolled forest fire and cause severe ecological and economic loss (and potentially kill). Burning green branches is usually frowned upon, but if it assists in signaling for help, you'll be rescued sooner and thus have less impact on the area in the long term.
 - 6) **Respect Wildlife:** use all parts of animal fully: it gives you the most benefit for your effort. Dry leftovers into jerky. Bones have nutritional value and can be used as tools; skins can be made into shelter or tanned for clothing. Internal organs (if not used for food) make good bait for traps. Sinew is excellent cordage for lashing items tightly; it shrinks as it dries.
 - 7) **Be Considerate of Other Visitors:** in this case, YOUR RESCUERS. Disregard the usual LNT advice (being quiet and avoiding high-use areas) and be loud & visible. Follow the safety principles described in this and other classes. Don't make rescuers follow you over cliffs and through avalanche zones. Make yourself easy to find by signaling, leaving notes and trail markers, or just sitting tight until help arrives (which is almost always the best course of action).
- ❖ **Do Whatever You Need to Do in Order to Survive:** but don't be wasteful about it. Try to work *with* nature, not against it.