

Wilderness Trekker Environmental Awareness and adherence to “Leave No Trace”

Introduction

There are too many of us. The natural world is *shrinking* around us. Through knowledge and careful conservation we can gain appreciation for the natural world, help preserve what is still left, and take our place in the cycle of living things. As Activity Hosts we have a responsibility to minimize our effect upon the areas we traverse. We must teach by example. It is good to think that future generations can walk beside a great cypress swamp, through an oak forest, or along a natural stream. We want to ensure that they experience the same pristine wildness that we currently enjoy.

In 1997, Wilderness Trekkers, Inc., by unanimous vote of the Board of Directors, endorsed the Leave No Trace (LNT) skills and ethics program as taught by the National Outdoor Leadership School, and joined with the federal land-use agencies--including the US Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and others--to advocate and teach the use of LNT principles and practices among both our members and the public. As a Wilderness Trekkers member, whether teaching a class, hosting an activity or participating in one, we set the example the Wilderness Trekkers are ultimately judged by. It's up to us to tread lightly and **Leave No Trace!**

There are no hard and fast rules for practicing Leave No Trace principles; the impact-minimizing technique applied to one area may not, in fact, be healthy for another. Leaving no trace of our travels through natural areas requires not only skills and techniques, but also the wisdom to apply those skills and techniques appropriately for the given situation. But only by understanding, and *believing in*, our ultimate goal--having a fulfilling wilderness experience without damaging that same experience for those who follow--can we *willingly* make the right decisions and use the right skills to fulfill that goal.

The 7 Leave No Trace Principles

1. 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 time of high use.
- Repackage food to minimize waste.
- Use a map and compass to eliminate the use of marking paint, rock cairns, or flagging.

2. Travel and Camp on Durable surfaces

- Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, 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 -
 1. Concentrate use on existing trails and campsites.
 2. Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when wet or muddy.
 3. Keep campsites small. Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent.
- In pristine areas -
 1. Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
 2. Avoid places where impacts are just beginning.

3. Dispose of Waste Properly

- Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food, and litter.
- Deposit solid human waste in cat holes dug 6 to 8 inches deep at least 200 feet from water, camp, and trails. Cover and disguise the cat hole 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.

4. Leave What You Find

- Preserve the past: examine, 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.

5. Minimize Campfire Impacts

- Campfires can cause lasting impacts to the backcountry. 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 sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand.
- Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes.

6. Respect Wildlife.

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them.
- Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, 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

7. 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.

Portions of this section were borrowed from the ***LEAVE NO TRACE Outdoor Skills & Ethics Training Guide*** published by the National Outdoor Leadership School, PO Box AA, Lander Wyoming 82520

For more information and materials, call Leave No Trace at 1-800-332-4100, or check their web page, www.lnt.org