

"I am glad that I shall never be young  
without wild country to be young in."  
— Aldo Leopold

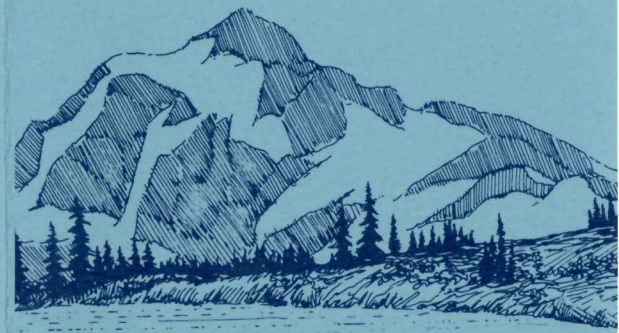
## The 10 Essentials

*Each person should take, and know how to use, the following items in wild country—even on short day hikes. There may be delays, or more serious emergencies. This list is appropriate for most national parks in the northwest.*

- **Navigation**—Topographic map and compass.
- **Light**— Flashlight with spare bulb and batteries.
- **Food**—**Extra** food and water.
- **Clothing**—**Extra** clothing including raingear and wool sox, sweater, mittens, and hat.
- **Sun protection** — Sunglasses and suncreening ointment.
- **Fire**—Waterproof matches and fire starter (such as a candle).
- **First Aid**—Aid kit including any special medications you might need.
- **Knife**—A folding pocket knife.
- **Signals**—Audible and visual; a whistle and a metal mirror.
- **Emergency shelter** — Plastic tube shelter or waterproof bivouac sack.

Pacific Northwest Regional Office  
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# Minimum Impact Camping and Hiking



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## Why minimum impact?

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The surge in popularity of wildland recreation in the last few years has created a population explosion in our national parks and wilderness areas. This increased use has resulted in increasing damage to the wilderness resource we all love.

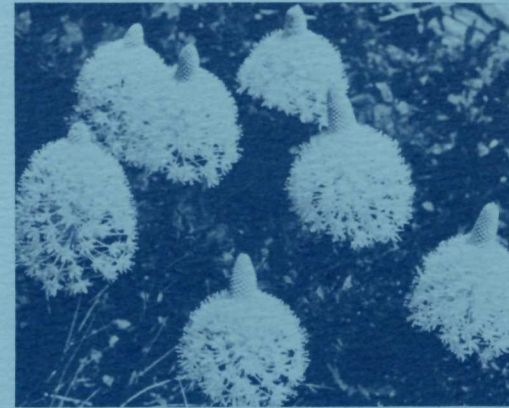
The National Park Service is bound by law "...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." (NPS Organic Act, 1916)

In order to accomplish these charges the National Park Service attempts to educate the public to use the parks in safe and environmentally sound ways. At the same time, it is necessary to enforce rules and restrictions designed to protect the resource from those of us who would love it to death.

However, even necessary and valid rules and restrictions often grate on

our sense of personal freedom. In the wilderness, as elsewhere, true freedom requires a willingness to assume responsibility for one's actions, including those that might harm the land. As wilderness users we must accept that responsibility by using the land in a manner that will minimize our impact on it. By reducing our impact we can ease the growing burden of restrictions on our freedom. The following is a list of minimum impact camping and hiking techniques.

(Note: Some of the following suggestions carry the weight of law in certain jurisdictions and areas. Be aware of local rules.)



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## General Techniques

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- **Plan ahead.** Choose trips that you are in condition to handle. Take along suitable equipment, including the ten essentials. (See below.) Familiarize yourself with where you are going by looking at maps and reading books. Be sure to get a permit where one is required. Permits are designed to control use, to prevent over-use.
- **Limit your party size.** Large groups tend to have more impact than you would expect from increased numbers alone (such as unnecessary trails developing between tent sites).
- **Excessive noise** such as yelling or radios and **bright colors** of tents and packs tend to psychologically shrink the wilderness. If you feel the need for bright colors for safety purposes, carry a piece of brightly colored nylon for an emergency marker. Placing your tent where it will not be

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easily seen is also considerate of others.

- **Leave rocks and flowers** where you find them so others can enjoy them as you do. Minimize disturbance of stones, soil, and plant life, so as not to disturb the conditions in which plants and animals live.
- **Campcraft** (rock wind screens, wood construction, trench lines around tents, etc.) is not only unnecessary, but is also extremely destructive. Pick a well drained campsite and use a tent with waterproof floor or a waterproof groundcloth so trenching won't be necessary.
- **Pets**—dogs in particular—are a threat to wildlife and could prevent your seeing any on your trip. Bears are an exception in that it is the dog that is in danger. Dogs are also an esthetic intrusion for other hikers—threatening them on the trails and fouling campsites with feces and noise. Please leave them at home.
- **Feeding wild animals** produces numerous undesirable effects. It creates unnatural, unbalanced populations which become dependent on unnatural foods. This causes increased susceptibility to disease, and unnatural stresses

within the population. Serious personal injury from the larger animals may result as they lose their fear of man. Please—help maintain a natural, balanced ecosystem—don't feed them. Observe animals from a distance—do not disturb.

- Use a lightweight **campstove rather than a wood fire**. Fires sterilize the soil and use up material which should be allowed to recycle naturally, where it falls. Where fires are allowed, the number of firesites tends to increase beyond need. If you do build a fire, use an existing fire ring. Use only dead and down wood. (That silver snag is part of the scenery and a home for wildlife.) Keep the fire as small as possible and build it on mineral soil away from flammable materials. Be sure it is out before you leave.
- **Pack out your litter**, including leftover food. You might even try to carry out litter left by others. Buried litter and food leftovers disturb soil and they will probably be dug up and scattered by wild animals. Cigarette filters are not biodegradable. Pack out the filters and paper.
- **Latrines** should be dug five to six inches deep (within the soil's biological disposer layer), and should be at least 300 feet away

from water. A lightweight plastic trowel is good for this purpose. Burn your toilet paper in the latrine pit.

- **Washing** should be done at least 300 feet from water sources. Soap and food particles should be dumped on well drained soil, so that pollutants will be filtered out before reaching water. Minimize your use of soaps since even biodegradable types are pollutants.
- Carry a collapsible water container to **reduce the number of trips** between water sources and your campsite.

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#### Techniques for Areas with Trails and Established Campsites

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The general techniques apply. The emphasis here is on concentrating your use in these facilities, thus sparing the untouched surroundings.

- **Stay on the trail**. Where possible, go over, under or through water, mud, or obstacles on the trail. Going around obstacles results in development of parallel trails, or in widening of existing trails. Notify the responsible agency of any obstacles or unsafe conditions you find. Staying on level ground, snow or rocks, will minimize damage to soil and plants.

- **Shortcutting switchbacks** on steep trails also damages soil and plants, leading to severe erosion problems. Switchbacks are designed and built into trails on steep terrain to minimize erosion and to conserve your energy as well.
- **Camp** in an established site so as to prevent the spread of bare areas.

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#### Techniques for Crosscountry Areas (Without Trails and Established Campsites)

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The general techniques still apply, with the emphasis in this case on dispersing impact rather than concentrating it.

- When hiking, **spread out** and walk abreast rather than in single file. Don't follow trampled paths. Switchback on steep hills. These methods will spread the impact and allow trampled plants to recover. Walk on snow and rock where safe.
- **Camp** where there is no evidence that others have camped before, and at least 50 feet from open water sources. Camp off of vegetation if possible. Damage to soil and/or vegetation will be least if you camp on snow, ice, sand or rock. Damage tends to increase if you camp on forest floor, grasses, brittle shrubs and is greatest on soggy spring meadows. Spend no more than a night or two at any one site, to give plants a chance to recover.

Enjoy your wilderness and treat it gently!

