

Norms and Expectations of Humans in the Wilderness

Enjoyment of the outdoors enriches our lives, but it is also important that we recognize the negative impact of our activity and learn how to minimize it. Below are the norms and behaviors that will serve as your guide in this pursuit.

Planning

1. Keep group sizes small. However, remember that the ecological impact of a group is not necessarily a function of numbers. Two careless people can do far more damage than either careful ones. Carry capacity (i.e. the ability of an area to support life) varies, so the number of people should depend on the specific region you plan to explore.
2. Prepare carefully.
 - a. Carry everything you need with you. If you pack it in, pack it out.
 - b. Research the trip area and become familiar with relevant federal, state, and local laws and regulations.
 - c. Conduct pre-trip discussions and instruction with your team.
 - d. Carry adequate food supplies. Do not rely on the environment to provide.
 - e. Carry proper equipment.

Traveling

1. Use existing trails and portages, and stay within their confines. Conduct a careful study of the environmental implications before considering new trails.
2. Use switch backs in trails. Do not cut a new trail to save some yards.
3. Limit the wearing of log soled footwear (footwear with pronounced ridges on the soles) to the times when absolutely necessary. The type of boot tends to disturb vegetation to a considerable degree and generally leads to unnecessary erosion, especially when work by a large group.
4. Respect private property. Obtain travel permits, or ask permission to traverse private property where applicable.

Campsites and Shelters

1. Use existing campsites. Keep heavy use to a confined area (because of soil compaction).
2. Do not overstay. Do not expand campsite.
3. Refrain from using natural materials for shelter, except in emergency situations. Use a tent or plastic tarp.
4. Refrain from landscaping the campsite.
5. Use natural drainage. Do not dig trenches, especially in delicate environments.
6. Change footwear to a lower impact shoe while staying in and around the campsite.

Fires

1. Use stoves where law and local regulation dictate; where there is a fire hazard; where serious danger to the ecosystem exists; where there is little to no firewood; and where the user wishes to have minimal impact.
2. Obtain fire permits when applicable.
3. Keep fire small.
4. Use existing fire pits. If the area is untraveled, remove evidence of fire after use.
5. Where a fire pit is absent, dig to the mineral level of the soil, avoiding the burnable soil, roots, and overhanging trees. Save sand to cover cold ashes. Replace top sod.
6. Use only deadwood for a fire. Use wood no larger than 2-3 inches in diameter.
7. Burn all wood completely to a white ash. Retrieve non-burnables such as foil, tin cans, and glass, and pack it out with you to dispose of properly.
8. Douse the fire thoroughly. Stir ashes and the area surrounding the ashes. Douse again. Eliminate fire scars where possible.

Human Waste

1. Use existing outhouses.
2. If there are no outhouses in the area, bury human waste in a small, shallow latrine (cat hole) that is 6-8 inches deep and at least 150 feet away from open water.
3. Use single ply white toilet paper, and burn or bury completely.

Other Waste

1. What is carried in must also be carried out. Burn it, bash it, back it, bring it back.
2. Personal hygiene activities such as brushing teeth and washing hair should be carried out using pans designated for such use. Different pans should be used for the washing of dishes and clothes. Cleaning of any type must not take place in a lake or stream. Water used for personal hygiene and water used to wash dishes and clothes must be disposed of in a pit at least 150 feet from the bank or shoreline.
3. If using soap, use mild biodegradable soap, but never in a lake or stream.

Wildlife and Natural Foods

1. You are a guest in someone's home, so act accordingly.
2. Avoid over-fishing, over-hunting, or over-trapping. Obtain necessary licenses, such as fishing licenses.
3. Obey all fish, game, and forestry laws and regulations.
4. Do not pick edible wild foods, except where they are clearly abundant. Never pick wild flowers, especially when there are not many of that particular species in the area. Some species are killed when picked. Most species of white orchids, for example, are killed when picked during the flowering phase.
5. Avoid camping or traveling through environmentally sensitive or ecologically unique areas.

Clean Up Others' Mistakes

1. Pack out all non-biodegradable garbage you find.
2. Fill in oversized latrines that are situated too close to the water.
3. Inform authorities of the mistakes of others if they are too extensive for you to correct.

*Adapted from "Wilderness Code of Behavior," created by The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, Canada.
<https://www.dukeofed.org/guidelines-wilderness-code-of-behaviour->*