

Sustainability Tip #4:

CAMPING AND HIKING

We all love the great outdoors. But when millions of us converge on the same special places, nature buckles under the weight of our impact. Its beauty, quiet, purity, and diversity can be altered or destroyed. To minimize human impact on natural areas, it's crucial to follow certain basic principles whenever you venture into a national or state park, forest, or wilderness area:

1. Stick to established paths and trails whenever possible. If trails don't exist, travel along the surfaces that will be affected least: rock, gravel, dry grasses, or snow. Make rest stops off trails, on durable surfaces with no vegetation, so others won't have to go off the trail to get around you. If you're in a group, travel in single file on established trails to avoid widening them. When your group comes upon a pristine area, disperse rather than cutting one path through the landscape. You don't want to create new trails where there were none before.
2. Steer clear of sensitive ecological areas. Hike, rest, and camp at least 200 feet from lakes and rivers. If you need to wash dishes or clothes, maintain this 200 feet and use only biodegradable soap. At the beach, keep off dunes and away from nesting areas.
3. Follow the golden rule of the outdoors: carry in, carry out. Don't leave any trash behind, even food scraps, which will attract wild animals.
4. Don't take your dog off its leash unless you are certain it can follow your voice and sight commands. Even then, keep the leash handy and your dog in sight, and do not let it approach other people and their pets unless invited to do so. Never let a dog chase wildlife. Dispose of animal waste in a trash can or a hole dug into the ground.
5. Don't take the outdoors home with you. This includes historic artifacts such as fossils and arrowheads, as well as natural materials such as plants, rocks, shells, and driftwood.
6. Minimize the use and impact of fires. Use designated fire spots at beaches (if permitted), and use preexisting fire rings or build mound fires in the back country. When building fires, use small sticks (less than 1.5 inches in diameter) that you find on the ground. Keep your fire small, burn it to ash, put it out completely, and scatter the cool ashes. Better yet, use a camp stove for cooking, a candle lantern for light, and skip the fire altogether.
7. Observe wildlife from a distance. Avoid animals completely if they're mating or taking care of their young. Do not swim with, ride, chase, or grab marine animals. And don't feed wild animals-you may damage their health and expose yourself (and them) to danger.