

CHAPTER 5 – LEAVE NO TRACE

By Lana Dolly, March 2008

Objectives – Upon completion of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Describe and practice the principles of Leave No Trace.
- Describe and practice proper personal hygiene in the backcountry.
- Identify and volunteer for conservation opportunities within the CMC.

Leave No Trace is a national awareness campaign and educational program designed to promote skills and ethics to outdoor recreationists (like us!) to help minimize our impact while we are enjoying the wilderness. The concept was developed in 1991 by the U.S. Forest Service, the National Outdoor Leadership School, and the Bureau of Land Management. The program is managed by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, a nonprofit organization established in 1994. Today, the program is supported by the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, outdoor retailers and manufacturers, educators, groups, and organizations such as the Colorado Mountain Club, who share a commitment to protect and maintain our wildlands and natural areas.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF LEAVE NO TRACE

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare.

- a. Select a destination appropriate for your group’s ability, skill, and fitness levels.
- b. Educate your group about the rules and regulations of the area you will be traveling in.
- c. Carry the necessary gear to ensure safe and efficient travel.

2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces.

- a. Durable surfaces include designated trails, rocks, sand, gravel, dry grasses, snow, and water.
- b. Designated trails – hike single file in the center of the trail. Do not take shortcuts or cut switchbacks.
- c. Pristine areas – spread out to minimize impact on fragile tundra and to avoid creating a trail. Step on rocks, dry grass, or other durable surface wherever possible.
- d. Camp at least **200 feet** away from water sources.

3. Dispose of Waste Properly.

- a. “Pack it in, pack it out.”
- b. Do not bury any garbage (organic material), trash (inorganic material), or leftover food.

- c. See the Personal Hygiene section later in this chapter for the proper disposal of human waste.

4. Minimize Campfire Impacts.

- a. Use established fire grates and campfire rings if available.
- b. Gather dead wood found on the ground. Do not snap branches off trees.
- c. If the fire danger is high, or there is not enough dead wood available, use a camp stove.
- d. Never leave your fire or stove unattended.
- e. Make sure your fire is completely out before leaving the area.

5. Leave What You Find.

- a. Leave natural features undisturbed.
- b. Do not remove artifacts or items from archeological, historic, or religious sites.

6. Respect Wildlife.

- a. Never feed animals.
- b. Store your food and trash securely.
- c. Observe from a safe distance.

7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors.

- a. Yield to livestock – groups riding or leading livestock have the right-of-way on trails.
- b. Yield to hikers traveling **uphill** – step off the trail, preferably on a durable surface.
- c. Minimize noise level – enjoy the sounds of nature.
- d. Maintain control over your pet.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

Accomplishing personal hygiene in the backcountry can be a challenge, but every effort must be made to do so. Improper hygiene and waste disposal can contribute to health problems and have a significant, detrimental impact on the environment. But you can practice good hygiene in the wilderness with some advanced planning and the proper supplies.

Basic Supplies

These items can be kept in a small stuff sack in your pack:

- Hand sanitizer
- Pre-moistened wipes
- Resealable plastic bags
- Toilet paper and a trowel

Basic Practices

- Wash your hands frequently using the hand sanitizer – it is lightweight and convenient.
- Select a bathroom location that is at least **200 feet** from water sources.
- Urinate on bare ground or rocks – animals are attracted to the salt in urine and could damage vegetation.

Proper Waste Disposal

There are two safe and ethical options for the disposal of human waste: burying it in a cat hole and packing it out.

Cat Hole Burial

Use your trowel to dig a hole that is six to eight inches deep (and at least 200 feet away from water sources). Mix your waste with soil using a small stick, and cover the hole thoroughly. Place used toilet paper and/or pre-moistened wipes in a plastic bag to carry out.

Packing It Out

An increasing number of heavily used land areas are requiring visitors to pack out their waste. There are now several commercial products available, including the Restop 2 and the Wag Bag. However, two resealable plastic bags can work just as effectively. Place one of the bags over your hand and scoop up the solid waste. Turn the bag inside out to envelope the waste, seal it, place it in the second bag, and seal that. The odor can be reduced by placing some kitty litter or a small square sponge saturated with ammonia in the first bag.

Girl Talk

All feminine hygiene products must be packed out, including those listed as biodegradable. In addition to the supplies listed above, you will need some small pieces of aluminum foil and some baking soda. Place the used product on a piece of foil and sprinkle with baking soda to hide the odor. Wrap it tightly and seal it in a plastic bag. Wash your hands with a pre-moistened wipe in addition to using hand sanitizer.

CONSERVATION

The CMC is committed to all aspects of conservation as stated in the final two tenets of our mission statement:

- Encourage the preservation of forests, flowers, fauna, and natural scenery; and
- Render readily accessible the alpine attractions of the region.

There are virtually endless opportunities for you to help, both within and outside the club.

Conservation Opportunities within the CMC

- Sign up for a trail maintenance trip – help support the trails we hike, ski, and snowshoe on by volunteering as little as one day per each school you attend per year.
- Attend classes, lectures, and films sponsored by the Conservation and Education departments.
- Add your name to the Conservation department’s Alert and Information Update email lists.
- Join your group’s Conservation committee.
- Visit the Conservation section on the CMC web site at <http://previous.cmc.org/cmc/conservation/> to learn more about current opportunities.

Conservation Opportunities outside the CMC

- Read the web pages and subscribe to list serves and newsletters of environmental organizations.
- Attend informational forums and public meetings.
- Write letters, make phone calls, and vote on conservation-related issues.

You **can** make a difference!

REFERENCES

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The Backpacker’s Field Manual, by Rick Curtis, New York, Three Rivers Press, 2005.

Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills, 7th Edition, edited by Steven M. Cox and Kris Fulsaa, Seattle, The Mountaineers Books, 2003.