

## 5. Minimize Campfire Impacts



**Natural occurring fires are uncommon in the temperate rainforest of coastal Alaska. The wet conditions and soggy wood make having campfires difficult.**

- Discuss whether or not to have campfires and how to have them prior to your trip.
- Be realistic about the wind, weather, location, and wood availability when deciding if it is safe and responsible to have a fire.
- Never rely on fire for light, warmth or cooking.
- Recognize that fires impact other visitors' experiences and disturb wildlife.

**Fires are unethical in places without abundant dead and downed wood and without proper measures to keep them from spreading through organic soil/peat moss/root systems.**

- Ask local USFS staff about pertinent regulations and campfire management techniques.
- Be mindful that campfires can cause lasting impacts to the backcountry by encouraging additional use in pristine areas.



**Foregoing fire and using a camp stove represents the lightest hand on the land.**

- Using a stove is often the most efficient way to prepare food and warm drinks and consequently offers your party more leisure time.
- Forsaking fire gives your party a greater opportunity to see wildlife, stars and the northern lights.
- By not having a fire and a smoke plume, you minimize your impact on other visitors.



**If you choose to have a fire, use an existing grate or fire ring.**

- Concentrating use prevents the spread of fire scars and vegetation trampling.
- Remove any trash in a grate or ring before using it.
- Reduce fire rings that are greater than 24 inches in diameter to discourage large fires that consume lots of wood.

**If there are no existing grates or fire rings, build a low-impact fire.**

- Low-impact fires are generally 18-24 inches in diameter or less.
- Only have fires in areas without organic soil, such as in the sand or gravel of a beach or bar.
- A fire pan or fire blanket (both commercially available) can be used. Place a few inches of inorganic soil on the pan or blanket and then set it atop a bed of stones on a durable, unvegetated surface.
- If there is a source of inorganic soil, you can build a mound 6-8 inches



deep and 18-24 inches wide. By doing this on top of a ground cloth, and by rolling the ground cloth up under the edge of the mound to protect it from embers, it is easy to return the soil to its source once the fire is out.

**Firewood must be dead, down, abundant and collected from a widespread area.**

**In recently de-glaciated areas and at tree-line in the alpine, trees and woody debris are pioneers representing the rise of a forest for the first time in hundreds or thousands of years. In other areas, cedar, spruce, hemlock and shore pine may be centuries old and should remain part of our ancient natural heritage.**

- Never fell a standing snag nor strip dead branches off a standing tree. Certain species of birds rely on dead snags and branches for their perching.
- Areas that accumulate driftwood represent the best natural sources of firewood.
- Milled wood (dimensional lumber) that has washed up on coastal beaches and that is not chemically treated is perfect for fires.
- Otherwise only use wood you can break by hand, roughly the size of an adult's wrist or smaller.
- Do not break up wood until you are just about to burn it so unused wood retains its natural appearance.
- Consider packing in firewood if you are going to an area where firewood is not likely to be abundant or where wood has been preserved for scores of years.

**Manage your campfire and restore the fire site to its natural appearance once the fire is out cold.**

- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Never build a fire at the base of a rock where smoke will blacken the face.
- Never build a fire at the base of a tree where it may burn the roots and blacken the tree.
- Burn firewood completely to ash including the ends.
- Never burn foil, foil-lined packets, plastic, aluminum, metal, glass or food.
- Saturate the ash with water and mix until the entire fire is cold to the touch.
- Spread ashes widely; do not leave them in one place.
- Restore the fire site to its natural appearance.

