

Ottawa National Forest

Recreational Collecting

(Rock hounding, fossil collecting, gold panning & metal detecting)

Recreational collecting is the collecting of rocks, fossils and minerals for personal enjoyment. The collection of these materials cannot be for the purpose of sale, barter or trade.

Rock-Hounding/Fossil Collecting

"Rock hounding" does not require special permission or fee payment when done for personal enjoyment. To make sure special permission or fee payment is not necessary, please contact the Ottawa National Forest Supervisor's Office at (906) 932-1330.

- Forest visitors are welcome to pick up mineral specimens, rock samples, geodes, or other earth oddities, and to pan for gold using hand tools.
- Invertebrate fossils, casts and molds can be collected in a recreational sense in accordance with the 36 CFR 291.

Landscaping Material

A **mineral material permit is required** for materials collected for landscaping purposes (gravel for a driveway, decorative stone & etc.). A permit must be obtained before material for those purposes is removed. For more information please contact the Forest Geologist.

Gold Panning

The Ottawa National Forest allows recreational mineral collecting, such as panning for gold or rock collecting without the need for a permit. Gold panning is only allowed with the use of hand tools (pan, small shovel, and hand pick). Occasional recreation panning, for an individual or group, is limited to extremely small areas of stream disturbance: a few scattered areas of less than 1 square foot, totaling less than 40 square feet within a 500 foot segment of a stream, and occurring less than 5 days per year. The activity cannot undercut the banks.

The Forest does not issue permits for more substantial recreational collecting. Because the Eastern United States is not subject to the 1872 Mining Law, a claim cannot be filed.

Prohibited: the use of suction dredges, any type of motorized equipment, mercury or any kind of chemical, and sluice type devices.

Metal Detecting

Forest Service policy does not prohibit the use of metal detectors for the recreational collecting of rock and mineral samples. However, the activity must not leave open holes in the ground and each hole will be filled back in and returned to as close to a natural condition as possible.

There are limitations to a metal detector's use in National Forests based on laws and regulations designed to protect cultural and natural resources. Some of the rules protecting cultural resources are:

- Secretary of Agriculture Regulation 36 CFR 261.9 prohibits the excavation and/or disturbance of "any prehistoric, historic, or archaeological resource, structure, site, artifact, or property"
- The Archeological Resources Protection Act prohibits surface collecting and excavation of artifacts and allows for both civil (fines) and criminal felony penalties for violators.

While the use of a metal detector is not prohibited, the excavation and removal of artifacts from National Forests System lands is a prohibited act.

Wilderness Areas

All of the above activities are **NOT** allowed within any of the Wilderness areas.