



# Recreation Opportunities

This guide answers questions most frequently asked by visitors to the Shawnee National Forest. Additional information can be found in our brochures and other publications. All recreation users are encouraged to practice the “Leave No Trace” outdoor ethics.

## Hiking and Backpacking

Shawnee National Forest includes diverse hiking and backpacking trails, including the 160-mile River to River Trail. Forest streams do not meet the safety standards for drinking water; carry plenty of water or be prepared to treat or filter water. Plan your trip, let someone know where you are going and carry a compass/map or GPS unit. Most trails are designated hiker/equestrian trails; hikers should yield to equestrians and move off the trail to the downhill side. Talking with the rider as they pass will help prevent startling their horse. Backcountry areas are open to hunting: Be aware of current hunting seasons and take precautions. National forest ownership is interspersed with privately-owned lands; respect the rights of private land owners by staying on public lands.

## Campgrounds

There are seven campgrounds within Shawnee National Forest. Most accommodate tent and small campers. Johnson Creek, Lake Glendale and Camp Cadiz campgrounds accommodate RVs, though only Lake Glendale’s campground has electric/water hookups, showers and a dump station. Campsites are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. We do not take reservations. In general, campgrounds are open from mid-March to mid-December. Refer to the *Recreation Site Index* for fees, amenities and dates of operation. The maximum occupancy per single campsite is eight people, two vehicles and two tents (or one camper). Campers are limited to a maximum of 14-day continuous stay at a single campground. Campers can transfer to another campground if they desire further camping.

## Primitive Camping

Primitive camping is allowed ¼ mile outside developed areas within Shawnee National Forest. It is not allowed in the 80 natural areas or within 150 feet of lakes and streams or near trails. Equestrian camping is not allowed in designated Wilderness. Primitive camping is free and is allowed any time of year. Don’t trespass on private land, and do not cut down live trees, shrubs or other vegetation. Pack out personal garbage, and make sure fires are completely out. Campers may camp up to 14-days continuous stay, but no permanent structures may be built.

## Horseback Riding

Shawnee National Forest is popular with equestrians because it offers large, forested areas with an abundance of wildlife and natural features. There are many miles of roads and trails that provide access to interesting and scenic sites. Equestrians are not allowed in developed recreation areas (unless posted), on hiker-only trails or within designated natural areas. Natural area boundaries are marked with yellow posts. Equestrians can camp at Camp Cadiz and Johnson Creek Campgrounds and several private campgrounds in the area.

Equestrians are required to stay on designated trails in Eagle Creek, Big Grand Pierre Creek, Lusk Creek and Upper Bay Creek watersheds. A trail map for this area is available for purchase at Shawnee National Forest offices or *Friends of the Shawnee* ([www.shawneefriends.org](http://www.shawneefriends.org)). Equestrians should stay on designated trails to minimize the impact to natural resources.

## Wilderness (back country areas)

There are seven designated wildernesses in Shawnee National Forest, forming roughly 30,000 acres of non-motorized, non-mechanized recreation. These areas help perpetuate natural processes and provide an undeveloped recreation experience. Most activities are allowed here, except bicycling and the use of motor vehicles. In Garden of the Gods, Lusk Creek and Bay Creek Wilderness sites, group are limited to 10 people. As with any backcountry travel, carry water, a map and compass. Learn and practice the “Leave No Trace” outdoor ethics ([lnt.org](http://lnt.org)).

## Maps

A free brochure about Shawnee National Forest is available at Forest Service offices. Information and site maps for recreation sites can be downloaded from our website. The Shawnee NF map, weather-resistant trail map or topographic maps can be purchased at any office. Maps show national forest ownership, roads and features. To order via mail, an order form is available on the forest website. We recommend obtaining topographic maps prior to entering Wilderness. A detailed trail map for the east side of the Forest can be purchased at any office or at the *Friends of the Shawnee* website ([www.shawneefriends.org](http://www.shawneefriends.org)).



# Rentals

Contact Southernmost Illinois Tourism Bureau or chambers of commerce for info on rental cabins, canoes, bicycles or horses.

# Bicycles

Mountain bikes are allowed on roads. Generally, roads within the forest consist of either dirt or gravel. Forest Service prohibits mountain bikes from traveling off-road, in natural areas and in other non-motorized areas. Southern Illinois state highways are narrow with heavy truck use. Therefore, use caution when riding these routes.

# ATV and Off-Highway Vehicles

There are no ATV/OHV riding opportunities. The Forest Service prohibits motorized vehicles from traveling off forest roads. This means there is no motorized use on trails or cross-country. The traffic codes for Illinois apply to all Forest roads open for general public motorized use. Only licensed vehicles and licensed operators are permitted on roads.

# Group Gathering on National Forest Lands

Large groups and commercial gatherings require a special use permit. Contact the Hidden Springs Ranger District for more information or to see if your event or group gathering requires a permit.

# Hunting

State hunting laws apply to Shawnee National Forest. To acquire a license, contact Illinois Department of Natural Resources ([www.dnr.illinois.gov](http://www.dnr.illinois.gov)). Hunting activities are prohibited in or within 150 yards of any building, campsite, developed recreation site, trail or occupied area. Shooting across roads and bodies of water also is prohibited. Firearms and bows with arrows should be cased and unloaded while in recreation areas or public areas. Construction or use of permanent deer stands is not permitted on national forest land.

# Fishing

You can fish lakes and small ponds at Shawnee National Forest. Anglers must have an Illinois fishing license in possession while fishing. Rules and regulations for fishing on the forest are set by the IDNR. Anglers can download the IDNR Fishing Guide and obtain a fishing license on-line at [www.dnr.illinois.gov](http://www.dnr.illinois.gov).

# Gathering Plants and other Natural Products

Gathering berries, fruit, mushrooms, rocks and other natural products for personal use is allowed. Regulations vary depending upon what is being gathered. Do not trespass on private land.

Personal plant collection is allowed except in designated natural areas. Commercial plant collection requires a special permit from Shawnee NF. Endangered, threatened or rare species collection is prohibited. When gathering berries or fruits, gather only what you can use; wildlife depends on foods for sustenance. Rock collecting is limited to the amount that fits in the palm of your hand. Ginseng collection is not permitted.

# Know Before You Go

- Plan ahead and prepare.
- Let someone know your travel plans.
- Be aware of hunting seasons.
- Be aware of changing weather conditions.
- Carry plenty of water or boil/treat water before drinking.
- Use protective spray or ointments and wash skin and clothing to protect yourself from bugs and poison ivy.
- Venomous snakes occur in southern Illinois. Be cautious, watch where you step or place your hands.
- Bug repellent is recommended.
- Cell phone reception may be weak or non-existent in many parts of the Shawnee National Forest.
- Use a map and compass or GPS device.
- Practice the Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics: <https://lnt.org>



## Shawnee National Forest Headquarters

Open M-F 8 a.m. to 11:30am  
12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m..  
50 HWY 145 South  
Harrisburg, IL 62946  
(800) 699-6637  
(618) 253-7114

## Mississippi Bluffs Ranger District

Open T & Thu 8 a.m. to 11:30am  
12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
521 N. Main St.  
Jonesboro, IL 62952  
(618) 833-8576

## Hidden Springs Ranger District

Open M-F 8 a.m. to 11:30am  
12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
602 North 1<sup>st</sup> Street  
Route 45 North  
Vienna, IL 62995  
(618) 658-2111

Be aware as a Forest visitor you could face inherent risks of adverse weather conditions, isolation, physical hazards and lack of rapid communications, especially in remote areas of the Shawnee National Forest. Search and rescue efforts may not be as rapid as expected in urban settings.

**In the event of an emergency, call 911.**