

3. Dispose of Waste Properly



Nothing disappoints us more than arriving to wild Alaska and finding trash and human waste. Alaska offers a place of discovery and exploration, where we can experience pristine natural settings and wild animals. Disposing of trash/waste properly is crucial to keeping Alaska wild.

- Discuss with your party ahead of time how trash will be secured/packed out and how human waste and toilet paper will be managed.
- Minimize the amount of trash you generate in the backcountry by repackaging food beforehand.
- Bear-proof canisters stashed away from the tent site represent the most-secure means of storing food and trash.
- Food and trash may also be hung 12 feet off the ground, 9 feet away from the tree, and several feet below the hanging limb.
- Some sites may have developments facilitating secure food/trash storage.
- Inquire with local USFS staff to learn the best means for securing food/trash and for disposing of human waste.

Ensure everyone understands what qualifies as trash and how it must be secured.

- “Pack it in, pack it out” is the simple mantra to follow.
- Biodegradable trash, such as orange peels, apple cores, coffee grounds and onion skins, must be packed out.
- Trash must be secured with food to prevent conditioning of bears, rodents, birds and other animals.
- Separating trash into dry and wet containments allows dry trash to be compressed tightly and wet trash to be doubly- or triply-secured.

As users of our public lands, it is our responsibility to keep our treasured places clean and natural.

- Pack out any trash you find, teach others to do the same and we can re-wild areas that have been historically trashed.
- The vast shorelines of coastal Alaska receive all kinds of flotsam: consider making beachcombing and trash collecting/re-wilding a part of your trip.
- If you are unable to pack out trash you find, note down or GPS its location and inform local USFS staff of its presence.



Report Marine Debris in order that it may get cleaned up.

- Record the date, time, common name of location, latitude, longitude, type of debris and size of debris field.
- Take photos if possible.
- Send debris info to marinedebris@ak.net or submit information at www.MCAFoundation.org.

There are several options for disposing human waste in Alaska. Contact your local Forest Service staff or permit administrator to find out which methods you should follow. Proper disposal of human waste:

- avoids polluting fresh water sources;
- eliminates contact with insects and animals,;
- maximizes decomposition, and
- minimizes the chances for social impacts.

Whenever possible use bathrooms, outhouses and other developed sites for human waste disposal.

Disposing of Human Waste: Pack it out.

Several different methods are now commercially available for packing out human waste. Some methods render the waste inert such that it may be disposed of with regular trash after the trip. Some set-ups include a comfortable toilet seat and a small shelter.

This method represents the strongest outdoor ethic and will be increasingly required as more visitors seek to enjoy their national forests.



Disposing of Human Waste: Pack it out [continued]

Advantages:

- Most eco-friendly means of waste disposal.
- Toilet can be located wherever is most appropriate.
- Toilet seat and shelter help remove the stigma of pooping in the woods by re-creating modern comfort.
- Shelter provides privacy in exposed areas.
- Shelter helps keep clients from getting eaten by bugs and being exposed to the elements while conducting their business.
- Helps areas that receive high-levels of use retain their naturalness.
- Preserves pristine areas.

Disadvantages:

- Incurs some cost.
- Requires logistical considerations.

Required or recommended:

- Whenever possible.
- For larger groups.
- For icefield trips and glacier travel.
- For muskegs.
- In riparian areas / river corridors.



Disposing of Human Waste: Marine disposal.

Along the remote Alaskan coast, human waste may be disposed of in the ocean. It must be done where there is significant wave action and/or currents. It should never be done in eddies, backwaters or where people land/launch, cook, clean or camp. It is best done by relieving yourself directly into the water.

Advantages:

- Prevents areas with bare rock or thin soil from becoming contaminated.
- Prevents areas with limited land disposal from becoming contaminated.
- Easy to wash hands.

Disadvantages:

- Privacy can be hard to come by on open beaches or along busy waterways.
- Can be slippery/hazardous/wet accessing areas exposed to currents and waves.
- Some people object to contaminating the sea and may insist on land disposal.

Required or recommended:

- Only when packing it out is not practiced.
- In glacial fjords with a non-existent or thin soil base.
- On small islands with limited land disposal options.
- Along remote shorelines.

Disposing of Human Waste: Cathole method.

If no facilities are available and packing out your waste is impractical, deposit human fecal material in catholes dug 6 to 8 inches deep at least 200 feet from running water, camp, trails, and drainages. Try to get as high and dry as possible and as far from camp as possible to avoid high concentrations around the campsite. Naturalize the hole site afterward.

Advantages:

- Method most people are familiar with.

Disadvantages:

- In Alaska, microbes are slow to break down feces in the soil.
- Can be difficult to dig 6 to 8 inches down in rocky or frozen ground.
- Concentrations of buried feces can occur in commonly used areas.

Required or recommended:

- Only when packing it out and marine disposal are not practiced.
- In the alpine.

Toilet paper left in the wild is an animal attractant (even if buried), clumps up when wet and remains for months and degrades the visitor experience.

- Toilet paper must be packed out, or a natural alternative must be used.
- Natural options for toilet paper include snow, smooth stones or sticks, leaves and moss.
- Natural TP options should be disposed of the same as the human waste.
- Feminine hygiene products and diapers must also be packed out.

Additional guidelines regarding human (and dog) waste:

- The practice of “shot-putting” – relieving yourself on a flat rock and then hurling it into the sea – is discouraged since it will strip an area of flat rocks.
- Dog feces should be disposed of in the same manner as human waste with the exception that they can be tossed in a trash receptacle without treatment.
- Waterless hand sanitizer offers a good method for cleaning hands after going to the bathroom.

Urine

- Urine can attract animals seeking salt: avoid urinating on plants.
- Urinate away from camps and trails on rock, bare ground, in the ocean or below the high tide line.
- Along big rivers it may be acceptable to urinate directly into the water or wet sand, although eddies and still waters must be avoided.

With dishwater, the goal is to keep food smells away from your camp in order to avoid luring animals, especially bears, into your kitchen.

- Food particles must be strained out and secured the same as trash.
- Ziploc bags with holes, bandanas, cheese cloth, coffee filters and regular strainers all work to strain food particles.
- Be sure to wash your strainer well and secure it with your food and trash.
- When camping along the ocean or big rivers, wash dishes away from the kitchen and camp and after straining the water, dispose of it in moving water at least 200 feet from backwater eddies.
- When camping away from the ocean or big rivers, wash your dishes and strain your dishwater at least 200 feet from camp, the kitchen and any fresh water, and then broadcast (scatter) the gray water over a wide area, avoiding vegetation if possible.

Soaps and lotions

- Biodegradable soap should be used sparingly or not at all: it is not natural; it is chemical.
- Biodegradable soap requires soil to break down properly; it does not biodegrade in rivers or lakes and can lead to algae blooms.
- Eliminate or minimize lotions contacting water for similar reasons.
- A washcloth, water and friction can clean any human.
- Hot water, a scrubbing pad or sand/gravel can clean any dishes.
- Alcohol-based waterless hand sanitizers kill germs without contaminating the environment.

If you feel you must use soap:

- Use only biodegradable and phosphate-free soap in minimal amounts.
- Do all washing, bathing, or cleaning at least 200 feet from any water sources.
- Dispose of soapy wash and rinse water in a cathole 6 inches deep to allow bacteria in the soil to completely biodegrade the soap.

Game and fish entrails

- Dispose of game and fish entrails in swift river currents or in the ocean where there are waves and currents.
- Contact local USFS staff for the best means of disposing entrails away from rivers and the sea: they can serve as a strong bear attractant.



Photo taken by NOAA Fisheries under permit #932-1489-09