

Recreational Prospecting

Lincoln National Forest



General Information – your first stop should be the Smokey Bear, Sacramento or Guadalupe Ranger Station for a map to help you, to ensure the location is on national forest land and to find out if there are any specific areas closed to recreational prospecting. It is the panner's responsibility to ensure that they are in an appropriate location. **Respect and protect the land.** Dry stream banks are especially sensitive areas and easily susceptible to damage. These riparian areas provide water, food and shelter to wildlife. Lincoln National Forest Lands have mixed ownership, which includes areas along streams and creeks. **Please do not trespass on private lands.** Ensure you pack out what you pack in, remove all litter and all items used while geocaching. Remember: the use of dredging equipment is **NOT** allowed on the Lincoln National Forest without a Forest Service permit. In some instances, the minerals on the Lincoln National Forest may be owned by another person, whereby the person may have owned the land before it became National Forest land or they may have a mining claim or minerals lease. If you are planning anything more than just "recreational prospecting", you should contact the nearest Bureau of Land Management (BLM) office to check mineral ownership records. However, if you are just "recreational prospecting" for the fun of it, and are approached by someone who says they own the mineral rights, then please leave the area or ask their permission to do recreational prospecting.

Gold panning is a common prospecting technique used to identify locations where gold dust and flakes have collected in stream sediments. Recreational panning for gold in most streambeds is an adventure allowed on the Lincoln National Forest. To protect the scenic value, riparian vegetation and recreational opportunities, the use of a shovel and pan is recommended in the streambed and no special permission, permits or fees are required. If your plans are to use **any** mechanical equipment, such as metal

detector or suction dredge, please contact the local Ranger Station.

First come, first served means if more than one person wants to prospect in a certain location, the first person at the site gets to prospect. Subsequent prospectors must move to another location.

Metal Detecting, Treasure Hunting & Geocaching is allowed, without permits, unless they are a commercial (business) venture. Commercial activities require a permit, as does any excavating or removal of a treasure.

Under all of these activities, it is the responsibility of the user to avoid disturbing, altering or removing archaeological, paleontological or historical objects from the Lincoln National Forest. Archaeological/historical sites are defined as "any remnants of mans activities or behavior that is 50 years old, or older."

Rock Hounding & Fossil Collecting

A "**Rock Hound**" is any amateur who hunts and collects rocks and minerals as a hobby. Within the Lincoln National Forest, rock hounds may find a wide variety of sedimentary, metamorphic, and igneous rock types, along with a variety of individual minerals.

Special permission – permits or fees are not required to take a handful of rocks or minerals from the surface of Lincoln National Forest lands as long as the specimens are for personal use, non-commercial gain and significant surface disturbance does not occur. In addition, no mechanical equipment may be used and any collection must not conflict with existing mineral permits, leases, claims or sales.

Rock hounding should not be confused with commercial mineral activities, which are governed by mining and mineral leasing laws. If a rock hound believes a certain area should be explored to determine a mineral's presence in commercial quality and quantity, exploration may be conducted under a Forest Service permit.

The collection and removal of quartz crystals from the White Mountain Wilderness area of the Lincoln National

Forest is strictly **prohibited**. A closure order is in effect for this activity.

The best sources of information on minerals are State Geological Survey offices, university geology departments, libraries, and mineralogical society and rock hounding/lapidary clubs.

Mines - Entry into abandoned mines is prohibited. **Mines are unstable, unpredictable and unsafe. Hazardous conditions such as these may exist:**

Possible cave-ins due to rotted timber.

Explosives left behind such as dynamite and blasting caps, which could detonate.

Habitat for dangerous animals.

Danger of being lost due to the maze of tunnels.

Noxious gases that can lead to suffocation.

Build up of radon.

Toxic materials including hazardous waste.

Danger of drowning in deep pools of water.

Deep mine shafts, some as much as 1,000 feet.

Please report any unsafe conditions or hazardous mines to the nearest Ranger Station.

Caves - Entry into any Forest Service caves requires a permit. Entry permits may be obtained from the Guadalupe Ranger Station. Please **DO NOT DISTURB OR REMOVE ANYTHING** from any cave.

Maps of the Lincoln National Forest

are available at all Ranger Stations and the Supervisor's Office. Forest Service maps of the National Forests in the Southwestern Region are available via mail at the following address:

USDA Forest Service Or to order by phone:
Attn: Map Sales **(505) 842-3292**
333 Broadway SE **(TTY) (505) 842-3198**
Albuquerque NM 87102

The Maps Sales Order Form lists National Forest maps within the Southwestern Region that are available for purchase. The form includes prices and ordering instructions. Download the form by selecting one of the following:

Map Sales Order Form (TXT)
Map Sales Order Form (Acrobat PDF, 113kb)

For more information about the Lincoln National Forest, please visit the following locations, Monday

through Friday, 7:30 am to 4:30 pm, excluding federal holidays.

Smokey Bear Ranger District
901 Mechem Drive
Ruidoso NM 88345
(505) 257-4095

Guadalupe Ranger District
114 South Halagueno
Federal Building, Rm 159
Carlsbad NM 88220
(505) 885-4181

Sacramento Ranger District
61 Curlew Place
Cloudcroft NM 88317
(505) 682-2551

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can I collect artifacts from or excavate sites on the Lincoln National Forest?

A: No. Both of these activities are prohibited by the 1906 Antiquities Act and the Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1974 and can result in fines and possibly incarceration (jail time). Damage of over \$500 to an archaeological resource can be a felony offense.

Q: Can I metal detect on the Lincoln National Forest?

A: Yes, with caution, although it is not advised. If artifacts are recovered during metal detecting or archaeological sites are disturbed, the metal detector user can be in violation of the Antiquities Act or Archaeological Resource Protection Act. Violation of each of these laws carries serious consequences including the possibility of fines, jail time and confiscation of the metal detector.

Q: Do I need a permit to conduct archaeological surveys or excavation on the forest?

A: Yes. Only qualified, permitted archaeologists can conduct surveys or excavation on the Lincoln National Forest.

Q: Are old bottles artifacts?

A: Yes. Collecting them from lands managed by the Forest Service is an illegal activity.

Q: Can I collect fossils on the Lincoln National Forest?

A: Yes. You may collect invertebrate fossils only and as long as they are not for commercial use or resale. Invertebrate fossils are things such as seashells and ammonites, sea creatures basically. The gathering of vertebrate fossils (bones) is not allowed.

The Lincoln National Forest hopes you enjoy your stay within the area, however, please adhere to the above regulations.