



**Forest Service**

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# Hoosier NF Highlights

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## LOST AND FOUND ON THE HOOSIER NATIONAL FOREST



By Vicki Gullang-Harris

Spring is a wonderful time to spend outdoors. Unfortunately, for some adventurous folks who venture off trail, a day of fun exploration could turn to fear as they realize they have become lost.

With a bit of preparation, becoming lost can be avoided. Proper planning helps ensure your safety. It will also increase your ability to deal with unexpected situations should they arise.

When planning an outing, whether a day or overnight trip, consider how many miles you want to cover. Tailor the length and difficulty of your trip to the least fit member of your group. This reduces the risk for injury and affects the speed at which your group can travel and the distance you can travel safely in your allotted timeframe.

Ensure you know the way by consulting area maps prior to your visit. Maps provide terrain information and details on the types of trail. Take your map with you, even if you have a GPS unit. If you take a GPS unit, ensure you know how to use it. A compass is also a good tool but takes practice to use properly. The Hoosier National Forest has an orienteering course available where you can practice map, compass and GPS skills.

Always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return, and then stick to your plan. This simple, but often overlooked, survival rule can be key to finding you quickly in the event that you become lost or injured. Fairly inexpensive, personal locator devices can be purchased and are good for anyone who spends a lot of time in the outdoors.

Appropriate clothing for the weather is essential. Dress in layers to ensure that you don't overheat and sweat, as this can lead to hypothermia, a potentially dangerous drop in body temperature. Hypothermia can occur even in milder temperatures around 60 degrees. Taking a hat and gloves is also recommended year-round. Be sure and also wear appropriate footwear. Take a first aid kit regardless of how far you're hiking. Even if only doing a short hike always pack water, snacks, and some means of starting a fire.

So, what to do if you find yourself lost, with no cell signal, and facing the reality of spending the night alone in the Forest? Most importantly, don't panic. Panic leads to poor decision making. Remember, survival is 90% mental and 10% skills. Evaluate the situation and make a plan, which may include building a fire and shelter. Assess your location. Try to find a location that is high and dry for a shelter and has supplies for fire building.

Carry a space blanket in your pack, even if just day hiking. With a bit of rope, you can fashion a reasonable shelter that will keep the rain off. A simple lean-to can be made with a stick between two tree forks or a rope line with a wall of brush. Remember, bigger is not necessarily better. Construct a shelter large enough to fit in. Place your fire near enough to warm your shelter. Insulate the shelter floor with dry leaves or pine needles. If you do become chilled, do calisthenics to warm up. Wear your hat and gloves and other layers and stay put.

Being lost or injured in the Forest doesn't mean you're doomed. If you are prepared and take along a few simple items it will ensure your survival. For more information contact Vicky Gullang-Harris at 812-275-5987 or [vgullang@fs.fed.us](mailto:vgullang@fs.fed.us).



A diagram of an emergency shelter with a tarp or space blanket.

