

The Use of Metal Detectors on National Forest Land

The use of metal detectors has become a popular hobby for many people. Here is direction on how or when metal detectors can be used on the Fishlake NF.

Metal detector use is allowed in developed campgrounds and picnic areas if they are not specifically closed to such activity. It is permissible to collect coins, but prospecting for gold would be subject to mining laws. However, you should know that agencies have not identified every archaeological site on public lands, so it is possible you may run into such remains that have not yet been discovered. Archaeological remains on federal land, known or unknown, are protected under law. If you were to discover such remains, you should leave them undisturbed, stop metal detecting in that area, and notify the local FS office. The legal citations are listed below for your information.

The Forest Service has conducted numerous projects in conjunction with metal detectorists and metal detecting clubs through our volunteer archaeological program, Passport In Time (PIT). The cooperation has been fun for both the detectorists and the agency's archaeologists. Locating archaeological sites becomes a joint endeavor and we learn a lot! You can receive the PIT Traveler, our free newsletter advertising the PIT projects each year, by calling 1-800-281-9176. Look for the ones where we request metal detecting expertise! On the Fishlake, Archeologist Bob Leonard hosted a project that detected Old Spanish Trail artifacts from a battle site near Fish Lake.

Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR 261.9: "The following are prohibited: (g) digging in, excavating, disturbing, injuring, destroying, or in any way damaging any prehistoric, historic, or archaeological resources, structure, site, artifact, or property. (h) Removing any prehistoric, historic, or archaeological resources, structure, site, artifact, property." (Historic means older than 50 years.)

USDA Forest Service Manual Direction (draft): "Metal Detector Use. Metal detectors may be used on public lands in areas that do not contain or would not reasonably be expected to contain archaeological or historical resources. They must be used, however, for lawful purposes. Any act with a metal detector that violates the proscriptions of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) or any other law is prosecutable. Normally, developed campgrounds, swimming beaches, and other developed recreation sites are open to metal detecting unless there are heritage resources present. In such cases, Forest Supervisors are authorized to close these sites by posting notices in such sites."

ARPA, 16 U.S.C. 470cc: "No person may excavate, remove, damage, or otherwise alter or deface or attempt to excavate, remove, damage or otherwise alter or deface any archaeological resources located on public lands or Indian lands unless such activity is pursuant to a permit. . ."

For more information, contact Rob Hamilton, Fishlake National Forest, Supervisor's Office, 115 East 900 North, Richfield, UT 84701, 435-896-1022 or email rhamilton@fs.fed.us.