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# WILDERNESS ETHICS AND ETIQUETTE

## Sierra National Forest

Once North America was all wilderness. However, with time, there were fewer natural places and more land was developed. Some people began to worry that one day there would be no wilderness left. The U.S. Congress passed the Wilderness Act in 1964 to protect some wild lands forever. Wilderness is a place where natural processes operate freely. The natural environment of the wilderness may appear rugged and harsh, but it is actually a very fragile system.

**It is the responsibility of all visitors to help ensure the preservation of this unique area by practicing Leave No Trace (LNT) techniques and the following regulations.**

**Leave No Trace!** Leaving no trace depends more on attitude and awareness than on rules and regulations. Your actions can make a difference in protecting the wilderness. Here are the 7 principles of Leave No Trace.

***WILDERNESS REGULATIONS ARE LISTED IN BOLD ITALIC:***

- 1. Plan Ahead and Prepare:** This is probably the most important part of having a safe and fun wilderness experience! Know the regulations of the area where you plan to visit and make sure you have the required permits. ***ALL OVERNIGHT HIKES - REQUIRE A VALID WILDERNESS PERMIT.*** Call ahead to the ranger station to find out current local weather and trail conditions. Plan for the possibility of extreme weather, high water crossings and other hazards, and unexpected emergencies. Always bring a map and compass and know how to use them. Consider the physical condition, skills, experience, and expectations of all the members of your group when planning your trip. Teach everyone about Leave No Trace well before leaving home. Plan to filter or boil all drinking water because here are Giardia cysts and other contaminants in many water sources. Protect your food from black bears by using bear-resistant canisters if possible, or by hanging your food bags by the counter-balance method.
- 2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces:** Please stay on the trail; cutting switchbacks causes erosion. If you have to hike off trail, please hike on durable surfaces and avoid fragile areas such as meadows. Select a campsite on a hard dry surface such as rock, sand, gravel, or pine needle duff, not on vegetation or meadows. ***MAKE SURE THAT YOUR CAMPSITE IS AT LEAST 100 FEET AWAY FROM WATER SOURCES AND TRAILS.*** 100 feet equals 40 to 50 normal walking steps.
- 3. Dispose of Waste Properly:** Pack out everything you pack in. Human food and trash are unhealthy for animals and can lead to harmful habituation by animals to human presence and food. Pick up trash left by less thoughtful visitors and leave your campsite cleaner than you found it. All soaps, including biodegradable ones, pollute. Soap changes the delicate pH balance of water and can seriously affect aquatic plant and animal life by introducing phosphates and other chemicals. ***WASH-WATER MUST BE DISPOSED OF AT LEAST 200 FT FROM ANY LAKE, STREAM, OR WATERCOURSE.*** Human waste must also be disposed of carefully. ***BURY HUMAN WASTE AT LEAST 6 INCHES DEEP, AND 200 FEET FROM WATER SOURCES, TRAILS, OR CAMPSITES.*** Use toilet paper sparingly and pack it out. A plastic bag confines odors effectively and double bagging prevents any accidental contamination.
- 4. Leave What You Find:** Natural objects of beauty or interest, such as pinecones and fossils, should be left for others to discover and enjoy. In all areas it is illegal to remove cultural artifacts such as arrowheads or pictographs.

- 5. Minimize Campfire Impacts: *CAMPFIRES ARE ALLOWED IN THE WILDERNESS AREAS ON THE SIERRA NATIONAL FOREST.*** Consider using a portable gas camping stove instead. Always be concerned and alert about fire danger.
- 6. Respect Wildlife:** Never feed wild animals! This is for your own safety and the health of the wild animal. Habituation to human food leads to unhealthy interactions between wildlife and people – the animal is usually the worse for the experience. Always store food and trash properly, either in a bear canister or by hanging your food using the counter-balance method. Pets must be kept on a leash and under control and not allowed to harass wildlife, stock, or other visitors.
- 7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors:** Solitude is an important part of the wilderness experience. It is freedom from intrusion of human sights and sounds. Respect the solitude of others by avoiding boisterous behavior and loud noises camping in areas that are not visible to other visitors. Let Nature's sounds prevail. To some, electronic devices are a necessity even in wildlands. To others it is inappropriate, interfering with solitude and natural sounds. Avoid conflicts by making a conscious effort to allow everyone their own experience. Avoid the use of bright lights, cell phones, radios, electronic games, walkie-talkies, and other intrusive devices. If they must be used, use earphones. Keep the noise down, especially at night or in remote places. Keep voices low. In the Sierra National Forest, it is illegal to discharge firearms except in the legal pursuit of game or in designated shooting ranges.

### **Pack and Saddle Stock Etiquette**

When encountering pack stock, please step ten feet off the trail, moving to the safest side of the trail (with all members of your part on the same side of the trail). This practice will ensure a safe passing and help prevent damage from stock stepping off the trail.

Many people enjoy visiting wilderness with pack stock. In camp, tie stock to hitch lines 100 feet away from water, trails, and campsites. Unload and load only in camp. Scatter manure left in camp or hitch areas before you leave. Keep the area clean.

Pellets and cubes are easy to handle on pack trips and are the recommended supplemental feed for stock.

### **Other Regulations You Need to Know:**

In addition to the regulations listed in bold italics, the following acts are prohibited. Contact your nearest Ranger Station for a complete list of regulations.

- 1. *CAMPING OR DAY-HIKING IN A LOCATION OTHER THAN THAT SPECIFIED ON PERMIT.***
- 2. *BUILDING, MAINTAINING, OR USING A FIRE OR CAMPFIRE.***
- 3. *POSSESSING A DOG NOT ON A LEASH.***

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