



Frequently Asked Questions

Is metal detecting allowed?

Yes. Metal detecting is allowed as a low-impact recreational activity in appropriate locations.

You may search for small, modern items such as coins or jewelry and dig shallow holes—6 inches deep or less—as long as you fully backfill the holes.

Metal detecting is legal for recreational use and prospecting when done correctly:

- **Recreational detecting**—Recreational detecting involves looking for small, nonvaluable items in limited areas, and most developed sites do not require a permit.

Many Forest Service campgrounds are located on long-used Native American cultural sites. Because of this, metal detecting may not be allowed in all campgrounds, even when it is permitted in some recreation areas.

- **Prospecting detecting**—Prospecting detecting uses metal detectors to search for minerals or gold, and this activity is subject to mineral regulations and may require a Notice of Intent.



Where can I metal detect?

Metal detecting is typically allowed in developed recreation sites—such as campgrounds, picnic areas, and swimming beaches—unless specific regulations or signs prohibit it; however, many natural campgrounds, especially those near lakes or long-used confluence areas, have been significant cultural use sites for generations.

Be aware that not all archaeological sites are identified. If you encounter one, leave it undisturbed, backfill any disturbance, and notify the Forest Service.

What is the difference between historical and archaeological resources?

- **Historical resources:** items older than 50 years.
- **Archaeological resources:** materials at least 100 years old that hold scientific or cultural interest.

What if I find something?

Stop detecting immediately and report the find to your local Forest Service office. It is your responsibility to avoid areas that may contain cultural or historic resources.

When detecting, always:



- *Leave what you find.*
- *Take only photographs.*
- *Fill in all holes you dig.*



Protecting Cultural and Historic Resources



Metal Detectors and Prospecting

The following activities are not allowed on national forests and grasslands:

- Knowingly or unknowingly digging into or disturbing any historic, pre-contact, or archeological site, structure, or feature.
- Removing any historic, pre-contact, or archeological artifact or object.
- Damaging, altering, or defacing any cultural resource on public lands, including by accident.
- Using metal detectors in or near areas that contain, or are likely to contain, cultural or historic resources.

These protections come from Federal laws, including the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), and related Forest Service regulations.



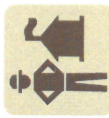
Metal detecting may be used as a prospecting tool to locate mineral deposits, including gold.

Be aware that:

- Mineralized lands open to prospecting may already be claimed under mining laws.
- For prospecting activities that cause surface disturbance, you must file a Notice of Intent under 36 CFR 228A.
- If you are unsure whether your activity could result in significant surface disturbance, contact your local Forest Service district office for guidance.



If you locate something of potential significance, report it to your local Forest Service archaeologist!



Contact Us

For contact information, visit www.fs.usda.gov/visit/forests-and-grasslands and choose the national forest or grassland you plan to visit.

Ask to speak with an archaeologist or the minerals administrator.



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Metal Detecting



Metal detecting is a growing recreational activity on national forests and grasslands. Many people enjoy searching for lost items, such as coins and jewelry. To ensure safe and responsible use, this brochure provides essential guidance.

Responsible metal detecting helps protect the natural and cultural resources we all share. This brochure explains simple practices that support stewardship and recreation on public lands.

