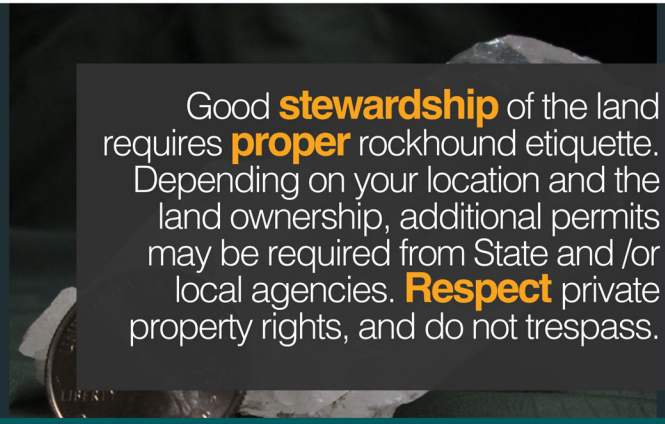
Requirements



Good **stewardship** of the land requires **proper** rockhound etiquette. Depending on your location and the land ownership, additional permits may be required from State and /or local agencies. **Respect** private property rights, and do not trespass.

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

ROCKHOUNDING GUIDE

Rockhounding:

Lapidary Materials: [36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 228, Subpart C]
Agates, jaspers, obsidian, chert, chalcedony, geodes and thundereggs, quartz crystals, and common igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary rocks.

Free Use Permit

Petrified Wood: [36 CFR 228.62 (e)]
Hobby specimens may only be collected for personal use and cannot be bartered or sold. (Specific rules may be in effect for designated collection areas, check with local ranger district office for information.)

Free Use Permit Limited quantities

Mineral Specimens: [36 CFR 228, Subparts A & C]
Specimens collected for hobby and personal use may not be bartered or sold.

Free Use Permit

Exceptions:

Metal Detecting: [36 CFR 228, Subpart A]
Metal detecting for precious metals is considered prospecting and is not allowed on mining claims without the claimant's permission. No historical artifacts may be removed from Federal lands.

No Permit Required

Artifacts: [36 CFR 261.9 (h)]
Prehistoric, historic, and archaeological resources may not be disturbed or removed from Federal lands.

Collecting Not Allowed

Meteorites:
Considered objects of scientific interest, meteorites are not available for collecting and are subject to the Antiquities Act.

Collecting Not Allowed

Treasure Trove:
Treasure trove activities are non-mineral-related activities and include the search for and recovery of valuable quantities of money, unmounted gems, or precious worked metal in the form of coins, plate, or bullion of unknown ownership and purposely hidden.

Special Use Permit Required

Fossils:
Casual collection of common and abundant invertebrate and plant fossils for personal use may be allowed without a permit providing certain conditions are met, as specified by regulation in 36 CFR 291 (See Paleontology brochure, FS-1058).

Level of Activity and Plan of Operations

Low-impact activity with little surface disturbance (e.g., gold panning, hand collection of gems, minerals, and rocks. Metal Detecting.	**Plan of Operations generally not required**
Use of small sluice box or rocker box with a shovel. Use of suction dredge (up to 4 inches) and/or high-banker.	**Plan of Operations may be required**
Use of power sluice or dredging operation with an intake nozzle over 4-inches in diameter.	**Plan of Operations may be required**
Use of motorized earth-moving equipment.	**Plan of Operations required**

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Rockhounding **must not** be confused with commercial mineral activities that are governed by mining and mineral laws.

No mechanical equipment may be used, and any collection must not conflict with existing mineral permits, leases, claims, or sales.

Causing significant ground disturbance or collecting for commercial gain **without a permit** is punishable by fines and potential restoration costs.

USDA Forest Service
Minerals and Geology Staff
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250–1126
Phone: (703) 605-4545
Web site: http://www.fs.fed.us/geology/

ROCKHOUND ETIQUETTE

- **Check in** with your local ranger district for rules regarding rockhounding and prospecting on National Forest System lands east of the Mississippi River.
- **Respect** all public and private property.
- **Learn** the laws, rules, and regulations governing collecting on public lands.
- **Do not use** blasting materials and/or firearms in collecting areas.
- **Fill** all excavation holes and leave the land with minimal signs of surface disturbance.
- **Only remove** small reasonable amounts of material for personal use.
- **Do not destroy** or cause willful damage to collecting sites.
- **Leave** all collecting areas free of litter, regardless of how you found them.
- **Notify** the nearest Forest Service administrative unit of any mineral resources found on public lands that should be protected for the enjoyment of future generations.
- **Avoid** areas marked as archaeological sites, American Indian or Alaska Native sacred sites, or areas with historic or prehistoric artifacts. However, not all sacred sites are marked. If an area is marked as a sacred site or if artifacts are present on the ground surface, do not collect any rocks or minerals from that area.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

Prospecting, rockhounding, and semi-precious stone and mineral hunting are among the many outdoor activities visitors enjoy on our national forests and grasslands.

Generally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, provides for the collecting of rocks and minerals for personal use from our national forests and grasslands through a free use permit. Depending on the significance of surface resource disturbance, prospecting activities may need Forest Service authorization through an approved Plan of Operations.

Forest Service policy allows rockhounding that includes the collecting of rocks, semi-precious stones, and minerals from national forest and grasslands for personal, hobby, and noncommercial use.

Most national forest lands are open for rock and mineral collecting, metal detecting, gold panning, and prospecting.

Low-level surface disturbance and collection of small samples generally does not require a plan of operations.

In national monuments, wilderness areas, and other special or protected areas, collecting may or may not be allowed. Check with the local ranger district for information.