

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

A publication of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Concord, NH (603) 271-3710

July 2022

Conscious Camping With the Environment in Mind

Summer camping is enjoyed by many Granite Staters and is an opportunity to appreciate nature while also taking a vacation from the stress of the outside world. If we don't take special care of our surroundings while enjoying the fresh air and communing with nature, however, we can bring that stress right into our ecosystem. Conscious camping employs best practices to make sure you aren't contributing to litter, pollution, erosion and other environmental degradation. Here are some ways you can protect the environment while camping.

Setting Up Shop

The first important decision you must make while camping is where to set up your tent and supplies during your stay in the great outdoors. That coveted spot by the river or lake might not be as environmentally friendly as you think. Spontaneous camping spots by the water can cause increased erosion and pollutants from bare soil, among other damages. If you're camping in a state park or public area, make sure to stick to their established campsites and don't set up shop in a blooming meadow or near a water source. Even if you aren't located on a registered campground, it is better to reuse camp sites that are already beaten down than to camp in a fresh spot, as this lowers the chance of damaging another area. If you do choose a site that hasn't been camped on before, it's important to look for areas that don't have many plants or vegetation. Choose sites that have more soil and flat ground and that are away from water sources to set up your tent. While it is tricky to find the perfect camping spot, it's important to consider these factors in order to protect the ecosystem and not contribute to any environmental harm.

Leave Your Campsite Better Than You Found It

While camping, you should also consider the "Boy Scouts Rule" of leaving your campsite better than you found it. This means that you should clean up any trash that you generate and keep your waste to a minimum, otherwise known as "Leave No Trace." Don't litter while on the campsite and maybe take a minute to pick up that wrapper or plastic bottle that you see in the woods. If you have any pets on the campsite, make sure to [scoop the poop!](#) It is also important to keep any nearby water sources, such as lakes, rivers, or streams, clean. Any "grey water," which is used water that is nontoxic (from cooking or cleaning, for example), should be disposed of properly, either in a utility sink or disposal unit when a campground has one. If you don't have these means of disposal, grey water should be "broadcast" by throwing it across a wide area (another Boy Scouts trick we can learn from!). This prevents concentrated damage in one location. Following the simple rule of leaving no trace can go a long way in protecting the surrounding environment and ecosystem.

Keep Your Hands to Yourself

It's exciting to see wildlife while camping -- catching sight of a moose, deer or beaver can be a rare and exhilarating moment! While seeing these animals from afar is exciting, do not interfere with the wildlife in any way. Feeding the animals on your campsite could put them in danger by consuming the wrong foods or developing a dependency on being fed by humans. Wildlife could also become accustomed to humans if fed frequently, which could be dangerous for both animals and humans. Some of these dangers include the increased possibility of disease transmission and animal aggression. For your sake and theirs, make sure not to feed the wildlife or interact with them. You can view from afar but keep your hands to yourself!

S'more Sustainability in Your Campfire

Creating a more effective and sustainable campfire is also a significant step in reducing your environmental impact while camping. A "green" fire not only protects the environment, but it also helps maintain better air quality and can prevent some health complications. First off, every outdoor fire in New Hampshire requires a fire permit in advance. State Parks with camp sites already have these in place, but you should always check to ensure you have a fire permit. [Fire permits can be easily obtained online at the NH Division of Forests and Lands](#), so make sure to get that permit before ripping open the bag of marshmallows! To create your own green campfire, make sure to keep it contained in a fire pit and keep the fire to a manageable size. Flammable items should also be kept away from the fire in a safe location. For firewood, follow the "Buy it Where You Burn It" rule to [avoid introducing invasive species](#). Make sure to use dry wood for your fire. Burning wet wood creates a less efficient and less sustainable fire because it takes longer to start, which increases the amount of smoke and releases more air pollutants.

[Burning trash can also contaminate the air](#). It's especially important not to burn plastic products because these release toxic chemicals, such as dioxins, furans, mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls, that create pollution. These toxins are dangerous for vegetation, wildlife and the atmosphere. Burning plastic can also be hazardous to human health, causing coughing, shortness of breath, asthma and other health effects. All in all, make sure to only burn dry wood while creating your campfire to protect the environment and make the best s'mores!

Here are some other tips to help lower your environmental impact while camping:

- Consider buying gently used gear, repairing your old gear, or renting gear instead of buying new camping supplies.
- Get biodegradable and natural body products, such as soaps and toothpaste.
- Skip the plastic bottles and use reusable water bottles and dishes.
- Make your own snacks and meals instead of buying ones in plastic packaging.
- Bring organic and locally sourced foods to eat.
- Keep hydration packs in the freezer between camping trips to prevent mold growth.

Camping can be a great summer activity and fun for the whole family, as well as a relaxing way to immerse yourself in nature. But remember we are just visitors in the ecosystem of a campsite and by limiting your impact you can enjoy a more eco-friendly camping trip.