

Leave No Trace: Sharing the Responsibility

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) plays a significant and fundamental role introducing millions of youth to the out-of-doors; a critical task amongst a generation increasingly disconnecting from the natural world. This responsibility also creates an important partnership between Scouting and the greater conservation community, including the various public land management agencies, as unquestionably some of today's Scouts will go on to become tomorrow's Scout leaders and conservation professionals.

For many years, Scouts have followed the BSA's Outdoor Code – *“As an American, I will do my best to – Be clean in my outdoor manners, Be careful with fire, Be considerate in the outdoors, and Be conservation minded”* The Outdoor Code embodies the Scouting ideal of stewardship and outdoor ethics. In this article, we explore a critical responsibility of Scout leaders – teaching, modeling, and instilling strong environmental ethics and outdoor skills amongst Scouts. The BSA is the single largest group utilizing public lands today in the U.S. Thus, open communication and agreement on appropriate outdoor practices is essential to ensure the long-term integrity of all lands used for recreation. We also offer guidance on the sources for Leave No Trace education and teaching resources as well as Leave No Trace training opportunities.

What is Leave No Trace and why is practicing it important:

Leave No Trace is not just a slogan or a training program – it is an ethic coupled with low impact practices that can and should be part of any outdoor experience. As a concept, Leave No Trace crosses all boundaries of the recreation spectrum and is applicable for anyone who enjoys spending time in the out-of-doors. The idea is simple – leave the places where you recreate better than you found them. There are skills and ethics involved, as well as good decision-making. The very nature of Leave No Trace lends itself well to fostering a cooperative spirit of stewardship and shared responsibility for lands used for recreation. From the federal land management agencies to Boy Scouts to local governments to individuals, Leave No Trace is the common denominator that leads us all towards the common goal of protecting these areas for future generations while responsibly enjoying them now.

Leave No Trace is based on 7 principles:

1. Plan ahead and prepare,
 2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces,
 3. Dispose of waste properly,
 4. Minimize campfire impacts,
 5. Leave what you find,
 6. Be considerate of other visitors,
 7. Respect wildlife.
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What specifically can you, a Scout leader, do to promote Leave No Trace?

In order to protect natural conditions on public and private lands, land managers and owners NEED YOU, the Scout leader, to help teach Scouts the importance of Leave No Trace and instill a solid environmental ethic amongst those in your troop. The following four topics offer some helpful general and specific guidance supported by public land managers and the National BSA leadership.

1. Take a Leave No Trace training course. The BSA offers Leave No Trace training as part of its core outdoor training programs. There are four levels of Leave No Trace training offered by the BSA: 1) a 5-day Master Educator Course, 2) a 16-hour overnight Trainer course, 3) a 3.5 hour general introduction called “BSA Leave No Trace 101,” and 4) general Awareness Courses. The Master Educator Courses is at the top of the training pyramid and train people to become comprehensive Leave No Trace educators. At the

“We should all realize that every right implies a responsibility, every opportunity an obligation, every position a duty, and that the most effective sermon is expressed in deeds instead of words.” Waite Phillips, 1883-1964

second level, Master Educators teach the Trainer Course to people who become Leave No Trace Trainers. Trainers conduct the third and fourth level of training called BSA Leave No Trace 101 or Awareness Workshops, providing a general introduction to Leave No Trace skills and ethics. Master educators and Trainers also teach Leave No Trace skills within other BSA courses, at Camporees, and on troop, crew, or pack outings. For more information about training opportunities visit these websites (<http://outdoorethics-bsa.org/training.htm>, <http://www.LNT.org/>), or contact your Council staff, Outdoor Ethics Advocate, or your state's Leave No Trace State Advocate. (<http://www.lnt.org/programs/stateadvocate.php>).

2. Take personal responsibility to always lead by example and practice Leave No Trace; publicly recognize Scouts for doing the same. As a Scout leader, your Scouts look to you for leadership, knowledge, and encouragement. Demonstrate proper behavior and look for opportunities during outings for teachable moments to educate experientially and avoid extended lectures. Setting an example consistent with recommended Leave No Trace practices helps reaffirm the importance of the Seven Principles to scouts. Additionally, publicly rewarding scouts for applying proper Leave No Trace behaviors reinforces the significance of low-impact behaviors amongst the larger group.

3. Learn, teach, and practice group-related Leave No Trace outdoor skills with your Scouts. Scouts typically travel and camp in groups, which requires special low impact practices and considerations. For example, a large group can substantially expand the size of a campsite or create a noisy atmosphere that conflicts with others seeking a quiet experience. Scout groups are highly visible to land managers and other visitors and have occasionally presented an image not in keeping with good scouting. Since the BSA teaches life-long outdoor skills to thousands of new youth each year we have a responsibility to teach and promote low impact practices that preserve natural resources and the quality of outdoor experiences. Review and teach chapter 7 of the *Boy Scout Handbook*. Download and use the Leave No Trace Group Use brochure (<http://outdoorethics-bsa.org/resources.htm>) to educate yourself and your group's outdoor leaders on appropriate large group Leave No Trace practices.

"As a Scout, you are the guardian of the woods. A Scout never damages a tree by hacking it with his knife or axe. It does not take long to fell a tree, but it takes many years to grow one..."

Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys*, 1907



4. Adopt low impact campfire practices. Many of the most significant and avoidable camping impacts are related to campfires. Examples include building new fire sites, burning large-diameter wood

(bigger than your wrist) that leaves chunks of charcoal and ash, disposing of trash in campfires, failure to conserve scarce wood resources, and damage and felling of trees from firewood collection. Most troops have transitioned to portable stoves that avoid campfire-related impacts entirely. When you do build a campfire, learn and teach the best-available low impact practices outlined in the *Boy Scout Handbook*. For example, teach woods tool use during service-related conservation projects and leave them at home when camping - as recommended by many public land managers. Collect only locally-obtained, small, dead, and downed wood for campfires and burn it *completely* to ash. Many states advise against or prohibit transporting campfire wood as that can spread invasive insects. Carry out all trash and left-over food.

Where can you go for additional information about Leave No Trace?

Numerous Leave No Trace education and training resources are available from the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics. The Center is an educational, nonprofit organization dedicated to the responsible enjoyment and active stewardship of the outdoors by all people, worldwide. The Center provides numerous on-line and printed educational resources, training opportunities and programs, and other resources. Visit www.LNT.org or call 1.800.332.4100. Additionally, the BSA offers a variety of trainings and educational materials on their website. Please visit <http://outdoorethics-bsa.org/index.htm> before your next group outing.

Conclusion:

The connections between the missions of the Boy Scouts of America, conservation agencies like the National Park Service, and the environmental ethic promoted by both the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics and the BSA Outdoor Code are indisputable. Fully realizing and capitalizing upon these inherent connections falls largely upon the shoulders of you, the Scout leader. We hope this article provides you a foundation upon which to begin sharing and imparting Leave No Trace amongst your troop. And we thank you for your work to introduce young people to the out-of-doors.

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