

GO!

GET ACTIVE

Using the trails? Be sure to leave them as nice as you found them

By **Debbie Juniewicz**
Contributing Writer

Tranquil wooded trails and peaceful winding waterways can provide much-needed nature therapy in a time of great stress and uncertainty, but not if they are littered with trash, and overrun with visitors.

“We have seen quite an increase in park usage over the past couple of weeks, which has been great, but also means there’s potential for greater impact on these natural spaces,” said Angie Sheldon, Five Rivers MetroParks’ outdoor recreation coordinator.

“I am hearing stories about much more litter in our parks now since the stay-at-home order was put in place,” said Andy Niekamp of the Dayton Hikers. “Also, people are going off-trail and climbing on waterfalls and other natural features.”

Sheldon and Niekamp are both Leave No Trace Master Educators, well versed in the importance of minimizing our impact on the natural world



Leaving your mark is overrated. Don't carve on trees or other objects.

CONTRIBUTED/ANDY NIEKAMP

while still enjoying the many benefits of the great outdoors.

“Leave No Trace is important because it provides guidelines to help us all to enjoy and protect our natural spaces now and for future generations,” Sheldon said.

The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics was established to provide proven, research-based solutions for the protection of the natural world. The organization focuses on education with the goal of reducing the need for restoration as a result of environmental damage.

And a little knowledge can make a big difference.

“I think the most common missteps are not doing a little research ahead of time to set yourself up for a successful, minimal-impact park visit or hiking adventure and overlooking the cumulative effect of recreational impact,” Sheldon said. “It may seem like that one piece of litter left behind is no big deal, but imagine if all 400 visitors to the park that day had the same mindset - it adds up quickly.”

It is possible to enjoy the natural world and protect it at the same time. Niekamp offers some timely tips.

Know before you go

- Print a map of the park’s trails and bring it with you.
- Bring water, snacks, and dress for the weather.
- Expect closed restrooms, water fountains turned off and trash cans removed.
- Bring a leash for your pet.
- Pack bags to carry out your trash and your pet’s waste.
- Visit parks during off-

peak times to avoid crowds.

- Expect parking lots to be closed when full.
- Park only in designated parking spaces.

Stick to the trails

- Avoid walking off-trail to protect vegetation and wildlife.
- Don’t step on flowers or small trees. Once damaged, they may not grow back.
- Walk through muddy areas, not around them. Walking around muddy areas widens and damages trails.
- Do not short cut the zig-zag switchbacks; this prevents erosion.

Trash your trash and pick up poop

- Pack it in, pack it out.

■ Pack out all trash – including apple cores, orange peels, peanut shells, etc.

- Use a plastic bag to pack out your pet’s waste.

Leave it as you find it

- Leave plants, rocks, feathers, and other items as you find them so others can enjoy them.
- Do not pick wildflowers. Take a photo instead.
- Leaving your mark is overrated. Don’t carve on trees or other objects.
- Don’t climb on waterfalls, historical objects or other areas closed to visitation.
- Avoid the temptation to stack rocks. Rocks provide valuable habitat for wildlife.

Keep wildlife wild

- Never feed, approach or follow wildlife.
- Pack out all of your food scraps.
- Don’t allow your pet to chase wildlife.

Share our trails and manage your pet

- Be considerate of other visitors.
- Maintain a safe six-foot social distance from other trail users.
- Keep your pets on a leash.
- Let the sounds of nature prevail. Use earbuds if you listen to music as you hike.
- Remember: other visitors are there to enjoy the outdoors, too.

PRINCIPLES OF LEAVE NO TRACE

Principle 1: Plan ahead and prepare – Adequate trip planning and preparation helps backcountry travelers accomplish trip goals safely and enjoyably, while simultaneously minimizing damage to the land.

Principle 2: Travel and camp on durable surfaces – The goal of travel in the outdoors is to move through natural areas while avoiding damage to the land or waterways. Understanding how travel causes impacts is necessary to accomplish this goal.

Principle 3: Dispose of

waste properly – The Center encourages outdoor enthusiasts to consider the impacts that they leave behind, which will undoubtedly affect other people, water and wildlife.

Principle 4: Leave what you find – Allow others a sense of discovery by leaving rocks, plants, archaeological artifacts and other objects of interest as you find them.

Principle 5: Minimize campfire impacts – The natural appearance of many areas has been degraded by the overuse of fires and an increasing

demand for firewood.

Principle 6: Respect wildlife – Learn about wildlife through quiet observation. Do not disturb wildlife or plants just for a “better look.”

Principle 7: Be considerate of other visitors – One of the most important components of outdoor ethics is to maintain courtesy toward other visitors. It helps everyone enjoy their outdoor experience.

SOURCE: LEAVE NO TRACE CENTER FOR OUTDOOR ETHICS. FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT LNT.ORG.

Class of
20
20

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