

Wallowa and Grande Ronde Rivers Low Impact Camping Practices

The narrow river corridor tends to concentrate visitors within small, popular areas that coincide with average visitor itineraries. These campsites may be resistant to heavy use, but can quickly become overly impacted by many visitors over the course of a season. If impacts become too severe, campsites may have to be closed to all use until they can recover.

You can help preserve the river and its campsites by practicing simple low-impact practices during your visit. With just a little effort and minimal inconvenience, your party can dramatically reduce impacts to a campsite and keep the river healthy for future generations.

- Plan your trip to avoid high-use weekends during the spring and summer months, especially during holidays. Weekday trips during the off-season offer the best opportunity for increased solitude and wildlife viewing opportunities.
- Consider following a trip itinerary that will enable greater flexibility when deciding where and when to stop for the night, as well as launch times. This will help disperse visitor impacts over a larger number of available campsites.
- Select an established campsite appropriate to the size of your group, and treat it with the same care you would a pristine campsite.
- Prevent damage to green vegetation in and around camp.
- Use an approved firepan for any open fires and pack out all ash and unburned debris with the rest of your camp garbage. Consider not building fires at all, or using a gas or propane cookstove. Use only dead and down material for firewood, or bring your own charcoal. Do not construct rock fire rings or dig fire pits (see below).
- Carry and use a portable, containerized toilet system appropriate for the needs of your group which can be emptied, sanitized, and re-used on future trips.
- Pack out **everything** you brought in and leave a clean camp for the next visitor.
- "Take only pictures, leave only footprints."

"Do I have to use a firepan if I see an existing fire pit?"

An open fire built on the ground in a circle of blackened rocks is a traditional part of many people's outdoor experience. However, such

fire pits result in significantly increased impacts to the surrounding natural resources by concentrating visitor traffic, compacting and sterilizing soils, and accumulating large quantities of ash, charcoal, and garbage which in turn requires much time and expense to remove. These traditional open fires can also pose an increased fire hazard during times of increased fire danger. Additionally, management plans direct public agencies to maintain the river campsites in a primitive, natural condition. And, the presence of even one fire pit in a campsite increases that camp's Impact Rating, which could lead to campsite closure or allocated use permit systems if allowed to continue.

The correct use of firepans allows the use of an open fire with a minimum level of impact to the campsite. A firepan is defined as a metal container with sides sufficient for containing all campsite debris. Fires are built off the ground in the pan, and when the fire is no longer desired, may be stirred out with water and cooled. The ashes and coals can then be transported to the next night's camp or disposed of with the rest of the camp garbage after the river trip. For lightweight applications, "fire blankets" constructed of fire-resistant fabrics are also available.

When possible, river crews dedicate early spring river patrols to cleaning and naturalizing river campsites on public lands. As the season progresses and workload increases, river crews cannot always keep up with campsite impacts, and rely heavily on river users to clean up after themselves. Until naturalization efforts can resume in the off-season, some campsites may contain an existing fire pit or ash pile. These fire pits should not be used and do not exempt visitors from the firepan requirement (see "Required Equipment"). River crews will naturalize campsites as budgets and staffing limitations allow. Your help and cooperation in keeping the river as clean and natural as possible is greatly appreciated.

Portable Toilets on the Rivers ("When you gotta go, you gotta go!")

Due to the high cost and remote locations, public restroom facilities (outhouses) are **not** available throughout most of the river canyon. Even where these restrooms are located, human waste has continued to accumulate nearby, such as when accessing a restroom may be inconvenient or require the temporary abandonment of a favorite fishing hole you got up early to stake out for the day. Over time, concentrations of waste tend to build up in the most popular places, until they are ruined for everyone.

To address this problem, and to protect the natural resources of the rivers and to maintain a safe and sanitary place for others to enjoy, **all boating parties are required to carry and use a portable toilet during float trips**. This requirement is nothing new to most rivers and is far less of a nuisance than it may first sound. With just a little advance preparation, you can help keep the river banks and campsites from becoming fields of "cat holes" and toilet paper.

There are dozens of kinds of portable toilets available. You will have to decide what method of packing out human waste is most appropriate for the size and comfort level of your group. The traditional "Porta-Potty" style may be suitable for some groups, but most river runners use a toilet system specifically designed for the rough handling river trips can often dish out. These designs vary from the improvised and inexpensive to the elaborate, but most are leakproof and can be washed out and reused over and over.

A simple river toilet design which is very inexpensive and easy to clean consists of a sturdy 5 gallon plastic bucket with a snap-down lid and gasket seal. These buckets can be found at many restaurants, food co-ops, and hardware stores. For comfort, a toilet seat ring is carried with the toilet which sits right on top of the bucket during use. A separate small ammo box or plastic bag contains toilet paper, some sanitizing hand gel (available at any supermarket), and a few packs of RV portable toilet chemical (also readily available at most sporting goods stores or RV stores).

To prepare the toilet for use, simply put a few inches of water in the bucket along with one pack of RV chemical and let it mix for a few minutes. Keep liquid waste to a minimum to reduce odor and weight in the toilet if possible. As the toilet is used, add a little more water and chemical if needed. Snap the lid down tight during transport and secure the toilet in the boat where it will not be knocked around. At the end of the trip, the bucket contents can be deposited in a vault toilet or an RV dump facility, rinsed with a mixture of bleach, water, and a little Pine-Sol (you can keep these in your take-out vehicle along with some disposable gloves). The toilet is then sanitized and ready for the next trip.

Some toilet designs incorporate garden hose attachments and RV hoses to facilitate servicing of the toilet at any RV dump facility at campgrounds or State Parks. If a liquid based toilet system won't work for your needs, try a "dry" system. There are now portable toilet products which use biodegradable bags and a special chemical powder

that gels liquids and acts as a catalyst to help break down the waste. These bags can then be legally disposed of in a landfill. (Note: in most places, disposing of human waste in plastic bags at a landfill is illegal. And please remember never to dump plastic or other garbage into vault toilets.)

It doesn't really matter what type of portable toilet you choose, as long as you are doing your part to pack out your own waste and garbage. For more product suggestions, availability, or advice, call the River Station at 541-437-5580 or the Bureau of Land Management at 541-523-1256. Your help and cooperation is greatly appreciated.