



NEW HAMPSHIRE

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YEARS

1921 2024

YOUR CONNECTION TO THE OUTDOORS

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NEW HAMPSHIRE CHAPTER
YOUR CONNECTION TO THE OUTDOORS

Sustainable Hiking Practices: Enjoying New Hampshire's Fall Foliage Responsibly

BY: DIANA MOORE

New Hampshire's fall foliage is a breathtaking spectacle that attracts visitors from all over the world. The vibrant colors of the leaves, the crisp autumn air, and the serene landscapes make it a perfect destination for nature enthusiasts. Along with the allure of abundant orchards and tax-free shopping, New Hampshire attracted 3.6 million visitors last fall according to the New Hampshire Division of Travel and Tourism Development. As this number continues to increase each year, it is essential that we adopt and maintain sustainable hiking

practices to minimize our impact on the environment and set an example to others.

Follow Leave No Trace Principles¹

The easiest way to actively conserve our natural habit here in New Hampshire is to apply the seven Leave No Trace principles whenever you are enjoying the outdoors. The Leave No Trace principles are a set of guidelines designed to minimize the impact of outdoor activities on the environment.

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OUR MISSION

The Appalachian Mountain Club is the nation's oldest outdoor recreation and conservation organization, and promotes the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the mountains, forests, waters and trails of the Appalachian region. AMC has more than 100,000 members, 16,000 volunteers, 450 full-time and seasonal staff. The New Hampshire Chapter is the second largest of the 12 Chapters within the Club.

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Photo Credit: Diana Moore - View From the Summit of Mt. Major

These principles include:

- 1. Plan Ahead and Prepare:** Proper planning ensures the safety of groups and minimizes damage to the land.
- 2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces:** Stick to established trails and campsites to avoid trampling vegetation.
- 3. Dispose of Waste Properly:** Pack out all trash, leftover food, and litter. Use restroom facilities when available or dig a small hole at least 200 feet away from water sources to bury human waste.
- 4. Leave What You Find:** Preserve the past by leaving rocks, plants, and other natural objects as you find them.
- 5. Minimize Campfire Impact:** Use a lightweight stove for cooking and enjoy a lantern for light. Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires.
- 6. Respect Wildlife:** Observe animals from a distance and do not follow or approach them. Never feed animals as it can alter their natural behaviors.
- 7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors:** Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience. Keep noise levels down and yield to other hikers on the trail.

Plan Your Route in Advance

One of the main ways to reduce your impact on your next hike is to plan your route in advance. Research the area you plan to visit, including trail difficulty, length, and terrain. Knowing your route in advance will help you avoid overused paths damaged by numerous visitors. This helps to distribute the impact of hikers more evenly across different trails, reducing the wear and tear on any single path. If you aren't hiking with an AMC group, consider the needs and abilities of your hiking group when selecting a route. Check weather forecasts and trail conditions to prepare for potential challenges. Knowing the trail conditions and weather forecasts can help you avoid dangerous situations that might result in the need for emergency interventions that could lead to environmental damage.

Choose Eco-Friendly Transportation

Reducing your carbon footprint starts with how you get to the trailhead. Whenever possible, use public transportation, carpool, or drive a fuel-efficient vehicle. Some areas in New Hampshire offer shuttle services to popular hiking destinations, which can help reduce traffic and parking congestion. The AMC offers a White Mountain Hiker Shuttle at The Highland Center and Pinkham Notch.³ If you must drive alone, try to combine your trip with other errands or activities to make the most of your journey.

Stay on Designated Trails

Staying on designated trails is critical to protecting the environment. Venturing off-trail can lead to soil erosion, damage to vegetation, and disturbance to wildlife habitats. Bushwhacking is a common practice among experienced hikers, but we should always keep in mind how our treading through wild spaces will impact the environment and natural habitats. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, venturing off a formal trail tramples and destroys protective vegetation and other organic material that affects wildlife habitats and increases water runoff, leading to increased erosion, which is the most significant and long-lasting environmental impact.² It is best to stick to marked paths and avoid shortcuts. If you encounter muddy sections, walk through the mud in your water-proof hiking boots, rather than around it, to prevent trail widening and erosion.

Bring Reusable and Plastic-Free Items

Reduce waste by bringing reusable items on your hike. Use reusable water bottles, food containers, and utensils instead of single-use plastics. Pack snacks in reusable containers and reusable plastic bags instead of plastic sandwich baggies. Carry a small bag to collect any litter you find along the trail to be disposed of later. You can clip the bag to the outside of your pack. By minimizing your use of disposable items, you can help reduce the amount of waste that eventually ends up in landfills or pollutes natural areas.

Wear Sustainable Outdoor Gear

Choose outdoor gear made from sustainable materials to reduce your carbon footprint and help fight climate change. Many outdoor brands now offer eco-friendly options that are durable and environmentally friendly. Look for gear that is Fair Trade Certified or made by companies with strong environmental and social responsibility practices. Investing in high-quality, sustainable gear can also save you money in the long run, as it tends to last longer.

Practice Sustainable Eating

Pack sustainable and locally sourced food for your hike. Choose organic, non-GMO, and locally grown produce as much as possible to reduce your carbon footprint. Avoid single-use packaging by buying in bulk and using reusable containers to purchase produce instead of those plastic bags in the produce section. Consider packing plant-based meals, which have a lower environmental impact compared to animal-based products, or at least reduce the amount of animal-based products you buy. Every little bit counts. By making mindful food choices, you can enjoy a delicious and eco-friendly meal on the trail.

Respect Wildlife

Respecting wildlife helps maintain the natural balance of the ecosystem. Observe animals from a distance and avoid feeding them – this includes gray jays. While they may steal your food, actively offering it to them is doing them a great disservice and negatively impacting our environment. Feeding wildlife can disrupt their natural foraging habits and make them dependent on human food as well as super annoying. Keep your food and trash securely stored to prevent animals from accessing it. Be mindful of your surroundings and avoid disturbing nesting sites or habitats (stay on the trails).

Minimize Campfire Impact

If you plan to camp overnight, minimize your campfire impact by using a camp or backpacking stove for cooking and

a lantern for light. Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires. Keep fires small and burn only material that has already fallen to the ground. Never cut live trees or plants, and never leave a campfire unattended. Make sure it is completely extinguished before leaving. By minimizing your campfire impact, you can help prevent wildfires and protect natural habitat.

We can all enjoy the beautiful fall foliage here in New Hampshire responsibly by adopting and maintaining these simple and logical hiking practices. Doing your part as an individual hiker makes a difference. The example you set influences others in your hiking groups or people you see along the way to also act responsibly. Educating others when necessary is a duty with a beautiful reward. With a small amount of effort, you can help preserve the natural beauty of our state and surrounding New England for future generations. Wise words rang true when Lee Talbot said, “We have not inherited the earth from our parents, we have borrowed it from our children.” Let us all do our part to protect the environment while enjoying the stunning colors of fall this year.

Resources & Further Reading

1. Leave No Trace: <https://lnt.org/>
2. Leave No Trace this Summer as You Explore the Outdoors: The USGS is Studying How to Enjoy the Wilderness Without Impacting the Environment: <https://www.usgs.gov/news/featured-story/leave-no-trace-summer-you-explore-outdoors>
3. White Mountain Shuttle Schedule: <https://www.outdoors.org/shuttle/>

Diana Moore is an AMC New Hampshire Chapter hike & paddling leader, an ambassador for LGBT Outdoors New England Chapter, and the Chair of the AMC NH Conservation Education Committee. She has an MFA in creative writing and a PhD in educational technology. She is a perpetual student of nature — including plants, trees and local wildlife, and an avid environmentalist with a deep-seated desire to protect the natural world and all the beauty, secrets, and natural cures she holds.



Photo Credit: Diana Moore