

# Trail Talk Calendar: February 2024

## Topic: Leave No Trace Principle 5 - Minimize Campfire Impacts

This month the conservation committee would like to promote the importance of preventing wildfires while recreating in the outdoors. We are asking Worcester Chapter activity leaders to promote this topic and to incorporate it into your pre-activity trail talk.



This is the fifth of the seven principles of “Leave No Trace,” and is valuable in reminding us to leave the natural landscapes we find in good or better condition than we found them.

Here is some information to discuss with your group:

### 1.) Why care about campfires?

- Campfires can cause lasting impacts on the environment. This is done by either scorching the ground and clearing all vegetation or having the fire accidentally get out of hand by creating a larger fire.
- A wildfire can be created by an uncontrolled campfire leading to the endangerment of people, plants, and animals. 🔥🚒
- Campfires have the tendency to “creep” if not properly contained. This leads to a larger area of disturbance.

### 2.) Campfire Alternatives

- The first thing anyone should ask themselves is “If you really need a campfire?”.
- Why are you having a fire? Is it to cook or to use as a light source?
- Avoid creating a campfire in the wilderness if at all necessary.
- Unless you are at a public campsite with a provided fire ring...don't have a fire!
- Light source alternatives include: 🔦💡
  - Headlamp
  - Lantern
  - Flashlight
- Heat source/cooking alternatives include: 🔍🍳
  - Bring extra clothing, blankets, and a nice sleeping bag to stay warm
  - Cook using a portable propane stove. There are many lightweight camp stoves available on the market that can cook better and faster than a campfire!
- Entertainment alternatives include: 📺🌟🎮🌐
  - Star gazing
  - Board games
  - Playing cards
  - Read a book
  - Admire the sounds, sights, and wonders of the natural world around you!

### 3.) Firewood

- Firewood can carry invasive species that could completely decimate the health of the overall forest.
- Avoid transporting firewood that is sourced outside a 50-mile radius of your campsite.
- Good practice for gathering firewood is to “buy it where you burn it”.
- When purchasing wood look for a bundle that is certified heat-treated. This process from the supplier involves heating the wood to a certain temperature to kill any living invasive species.
- Do not cut down trees or destroy the woody vegetation in order to gather firewood. Instead gather small sticks and branches that have already fallen on the ground. Use dead wood!
- Only burn wood! Do not burn garbage or waste. Burning garbage can release harmful chemicals into the environment. Small pieces of waste will also be left behind and therefore pollute and ruin a pristine landscape.

### 4.) Using fire pans

- Consider using a fire pan as an alternative to a traditional campfire. These metal containers allow you to build a fire elevated off the ground with easy cleanup.
- You can purchase a commercially produced fire pan at an outdoor retail store or make one on your own using a metal oil drain pan, garbage-can lid, or backyard barbecue grill.
- The pan should have at least 3-inch-high sides and be placed on rocks or mineral soil to avoid scorching the ground.
- Once you're done cooking, disperse cold-to-the-touch ashes 200 or more feet from your camp, across a broad area. Be sure to return the mineral soil or rocks to their original location.

### 5.) Creating a mound fire

- A mound fire is another alternative to a campfire when existing fire rings are not available. The advantage of a mound fire is that it can be built on a variety of surfaces, from flat exposed rock to duff or grass.
- You can construct a mound fire using simple tools, such as a garden trowel, a large stuff sack, and a ground cloth or plastic garbage bag.
- To build a mound fire, collect mineral soil, sand, or gravel from a source that is already disturbed, such as at the root hole of a toppled tree.
- Lay a ground cloth or garbage bag on the site and spread the soil into a circular, flat-topped mound at least 3 to 5 inches thick. This thickness is important to insulate the ground underneath from the heat of the fire.
- The circumference of the mound should be larger than the size of the fire to allow for the spreading of coals.
- Build your fire on the mound, and when it is fully extinguished, bury the ash and dirt from the place where you retrieved it.

## References

<https://Int.org/why/7-principles/minimize-campfire-impacts/>

<https://mountainhouse.com/blogs/camping/minimize-campfire-impacts-leave-no-trace-behind-in-the-woods>

<https://thenextsummit.org/minimizing-campfire-impacts/>