Wilderness Trip Planner

Getting Started

Planning Your Route

There are countless backcountry routes and possibilities in this wild land. The diversity of climate and geographic creates different habitats on each mountain range or plateau. For example, some sections of the park are covered in alpine meadows, while others are covered in lush forests. There are also a wide variety of trail systems throughout the park, from well-maintained and well-marked to steep and rugged.

When to Visit

Fondulac is the highest point in the park, located on the east side of the North Cascades. It is typically closed from mid-June to early July due to heavy snowfall. The lower elevations are typically closed from mid-July to late August due to heavy snowfall. The higher elevations are typically closed from mid-August to mid-October due to heavy snowfall. The lower elevations are typically closed from mid-October to mid-January due to heavy snowfall. The higher elevations are typically closed from mid-January to mid-March due to heavy snowfall.

How Large Is Your Group?

Group size is limited to protect wilderness values. The size limit is 12 in the backcountry, and camps of 12 or fewer are recommended in the backcountry. The size limit is six in the backcountry for groups of 12 people.

Plan For Your Safety

Plan for Changes in Weather

Although the North Cascades frequently enjoy a sunny drought with snow in the summer and snow in the winter, be prepared for sudden and drastic changes in weather. Weather can change quickly, even in the summer, especially in the higher elevations. Be prepared for cold and wet weather, even if the sun is shining. A raincoat and hat are often welcome. Tropical heat and humidity can be uncomfortable, especially in the higher elevations. Be prepared for cold and wet weather, even if the sun is shining. A raincoat and hat are often welcome.

Safety in the Wilderness Environment

With a few notable exceptions, most trails typically follow valleys bottoms to high passes, as the terrain usually too steep to follow high, rugged peaks. In clearings, drive carefully, especially in autumn, when the foliage is dry and dusty. Be aware of the possibility of encountering grizzly bears in the area. Be aware of the possibility of encountering grizzly bears in the area. Be aware of the possibility of encountering grizzly bears in the area.

Weather Protection

Protect the native vegetation and reduce established bare sites, not the vegetation. Learn about the area, including local weather, trail conditions, and the weather forecast. Learn about the area, including local weather, trail conditions, and the weather forecast. Learn about the area, including local weather, trail conditions, and the weather forecast.

Dress in layers so you can regulate your body temperature by adding or removing insulation. Carry water at least 200 feet (61 m) from streams or carry water at least 200 feet (61 m) from streams or carry water at least 200 feet (61 m) from streams.

Toilets

If you wash, use toilet paper. If your dishes instead. Scatter strained dishwater and disperse toothpaste. Urine is salty and thus very potable. Keep yourself, purify your drinking water by using a water filter, purifying tablets, or boiling fully. Keep yourself, purify your drinking water by using a water filter, purifying tablets, or boiling fully. Keep yourself, purify your drinking water by using a water filter, purifying tablets, or boiling fully.

Cell Phones?

As you hike off-trail, rely on the cellular phone for a quick backup. Always bring a whistle, mirror, or a fire starter. It is a wise precaution to bring a whistle, mirror, or a fire starter. It is a wise precaution to bring a whistle, mirror, or a fire starter. It is a wise precaution to bring a whistle, mirror, or a fire starter.

Backcountry Trip Essentials

The following items are useful or necessary for safe and comfortable travel in the North Cascades.

• Navigation tools (map and compass)
• Sun protection for skin and eyes (imperative for snow travel)
• Weather protection (extra clothing layers, raingear, hat, gloves)
• Protective footwear
• Sleeping bag and pad
• Stove
• Water filter, purifying tablets, or boiling fully
• Emergency signaling device (whistle or mirror) + fire starter
• First aid kit
• Emergency signaling device (whistle or mirror) + fire starter
• Backpack
• Gaiters

Can I Bring my Pet?

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Today, as in the past, wilderness is an important part of every American’s story. People seek wilderness for many reasons: physical or mental challenge, solitude, renewal, or escape from modern life, or as a place to find inspiration and to explore our heritage. What draws you to visit wilderness?

The Stephen Mather Wilderness is at the heart of over two million acres of some of the wildest lands remaining—a place “where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man.” Untrammeled (meaning “free of restraint”) captures the essence of wilderness; a place where the land’s natural processes prevail, and the development of modern technological society are largely uninvolved here; we are visitors, but we also come home—to our natural heritage. It is a place to experience our past and a place to find future respite. This is the enduring legacy of wilderness.

An Enduring Legacy of Wilderness

“[It] is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.” — Wilderness Act, 1964

The North Cascades National Park Service Complex includes 684,000 acres in three units: North Cascades National Park, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, and Ross Lake National Recreation Area. Congress has designated 85% of the Complex as the Stephen Mather Wilderness.

North Cascades National Park
Ross Lake National Recreation Area
Lake Chelan National Recreation Area

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior