

# National Park Service Healthy and Sustainable Food Choice Guidelines for Backcountry Operations



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# National Park Service Healthy and Sustainable Food Choice Guidelines for Backcountry Operations

The National Park Service (NPS) administers hundreds of concession contracts providing services to backcountry visitors. Backcountry activities range from cycling daytrips and overnight stays at hike-in lodges to multi-day rafting trips and mountaineering expeditions. Whether they involve sit-down meals at an alpine camp or snacks on the river or trail, many of these activities offer some level of food service. Though not comparable to the level of food service experienced at NPS front country visitor services, backcountry food and beverage operations present an opportunity to deliver healthy and sustainable food to visitors and continue to build upon the NPS *Call to Action* Goal 8: Eat Well and Prosper, which states that the NPS will:

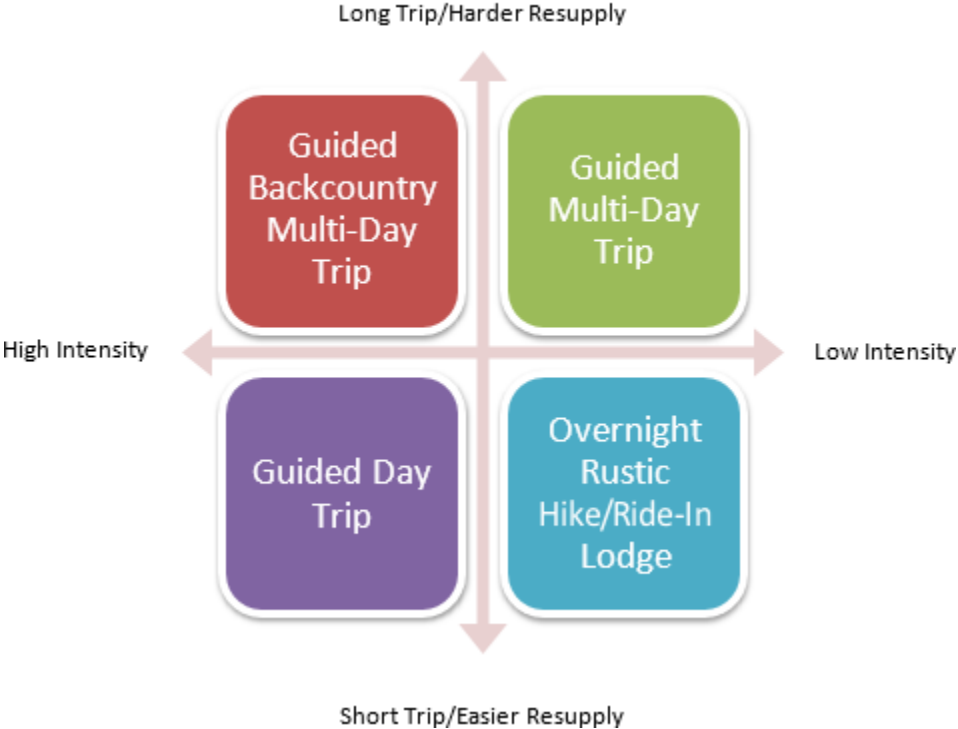
*Encourage park visitors to make healthy lifestyle choices and position parks to support local economies by ensuring that all current and future concession contracts require multiple healthy, sustainably produced, and reasonably priced food options at national park food service concessions.*

Backcountry food and beverage operations have fundamental considerations that are different than those of the front country. To a much more substantial degree than in the front country, backcountry NPS concessioners must ensure that visitors' nutritional needs are met during outdoor activities. These concessioners must also overcome the many technical and economic challenges of delivering food service to the backcountry. In addressing these needs, healthy and sustainable food opportunities in the backcountry can be evaluated by looking at four primary factors: level of physical exertion required for the activity (i.e., intensity), the length of the trip, the remoteness of the destination, and the ease of resupply. To provide healthy and sustainable food for high-intensity activities, concessioners must consider caloric and electrolyte replacement requirements and other nutritional factors. For low-intensity activities, concessioners may offer foods with fewer calories, lower fat content, and less sodium. The length of trip and remoteness of the destination may also limit the concessioner's ability to provide healthy and sustainable food choices. For example, fresh produce may be available at the beginning of the trip, but not later in the trip. Furthermore, providing healthy and sustainable food may be more feasible at backcountry locations that are accessible within a day via motorized vehicles or pack-animals versus more remote locations without such access.

The [NPS Healthy and Sustainable Food Choice Guidelines for Backcountry Operations](#) considers all the above factors, and can be used by parks and concessioners to identify appropriate healthy and sustainable food and beverage requirements for new contracts. Additionally, these guidelines may assist concessioners in identifying opportunities to voluntarily implement healthy and sustainable food practices into existing operations. The guidelines have been segregated into four categories as outlined in Figure 1 below. This segregation is useful for understanding the options available to backcountry operations; however, not all backcountry concession operations

will fit neatly into a particular category. Parks and concessioners should use their best judgment and experience to determine where their operation best fits and to identify which healthy and sustainable food strategies are most technically appropriate and economically feasible for their specific operation and location.

**Figure 1 – Matrix of Backcountry Operations**



The definitions of terms identified in the guidelines are provided in a separate **NPS Healthy and Sustainable Food Choice Glossary**. The definitions can be found in the following link: [NPS Front Country Healthy and Sustainable Food Choice Standards](#).

## HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD GUIDELINES – BACKCOUNTRY OPERATIONS

These guidelines may be used to determine requirements for new contracts, following an analysis of what is technically and economically feasible and appropriate given services, location, and other contract-specific factors. They may also assist concessioners in identifying options for voluntarily integrating healthy and sustainable food standards into existing operations.

Type of Trip	Trip Description	Concessioner Examples	Guidelines for Consideration
Guided Day Trip	Day trips during which snacks and bag lunches are provided to guests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishing Day Trips</li> <li>• Horse and Mule Day Trips</li> <li>• Guided Water Float Day Trips</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer a choice of healthy meals and snacks with fewer calories, lower fat content, and lower sodium content. Target a healthy lunch with 400 calories or fewer; target a healthy snack with 150 calories or fewer.</li> <li>• Offer organic, whole fruits and vegetables with snacks and meals.</li> <li>• Offer organic, seasonal produce locally or regionally grown when possible.</li> <li>• If dairy products are offered, provide low-fat options, fat-free options, rBGH-free options, or products labeled “no antibiotics added.”</li> <li>• Where grains are offered, use whole grains (e.g., whole grain breads, granola bars) or gluten-free grains.</li> <li>• Offer beverages (other than water, coffee, and tea) with no added sugar (e.g., high-fructose corn syrup, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, honey, sucrose, dextrose). For example, natural fruit juices.</li> </ul>

Type of Trip	Trip Description	Concessioner Examples	Guidelines for Consideration
Guided Multi-Day Trip	Multi-day trips during which daily meals and snacks are provided. Basic facilities for food storage available (e.g., ice chests, coolers).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guided Water Float Multi Day Trips</li> <li>• Guided Water Tour Multi Day Trips</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide healthy meals and snacks that include a combination of calories, proteins, carbohydrates, and healthy fats appropriate to the level of activity. These may include low-calorie, low-sodium, and low-fat choices within a more limited menu.</li> <li>• Offer organic, whole fruits and vegetables with snacks and meals.</li> <li>• Offer organic, seasonal produce locally or regionally grown when possible.</li> <li>• If dairy products are offered, provide low-fat options, fat-free options, rBGH-free options, or products labeled “no antibiotics added.”</li> <li>• Where grains are offered, use whole grains (e.g., breads, pastas, granola bars) or gluten-free grains.</li> <li>• Offer beverages (other than water, coffee, and tea) with no added sugar (e.g., high-fructose corn syrup, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, honey, sucrose, dextrose). For example, natural fruit juices.</li> <li>• Offer entrees and snacks with no artificial trans-fats.</li> <li>• Offer all-natural meats, seafood, and eggs that are hormone-free, antibiotic-free, and humanely raised.</li> <li>• Offer steamed and/or grilled foods rather than foods prepared using fats/oils.</li> <li>• Where seafood options are offered, provide only those listed as “Best Choices” or “Good Alternatives” on the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch list, certified sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council, or identified by an equivalent program that has been approved by the NPS.</li> <li>• Offer fair-trade certified, shade-grown coffee.</li> </ul>

Type of Trip	Trip Description	Concessioner Examples	Guidelines for Consideration
Rustic Hike/Ride-In Lodge	Multi-day trips to backcountry facilities with complete but primitive kitchens. Rustic food storage and preparation facilities. Meals are typically served family-style. Access to supplies is challenging, but motorized vehicles/pack animals are available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food and Beverage (Rustic Casual Service)</li> <li>• Lodging (Rustic)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide healthy meals and snacks that include a combination of calories, proteins, carbohydrates, and healthy fats appropriate to the level of activity. These may include low calorie, low sodium and low-fat choices within the more limited menu that may be offered.</li> <li>• Offer organic, whole fruits and vegetables with snacks and meals.</li> <li>• Offer organic, seasonal produce locally or regionally grown when possible.</li> <li>• If dairy products are offered, provide low-fat options, fat-free options, rBGH-free options, or products labeled “no antibiotics added.”</li> <li>• Where grains are offered, use whole grains (e.g., whole grain breads, pastas, granola bars) or gluten-free grains.</li> <li>• Offer beverages (other than water, coffee, and tea) with no added sugar (i.e., high-fructose corn syrup, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, honey, sucrose, dextrose). For example, natural fruit juices.</li> <li>• Entrees and snacks that have no artificial trans-fats.</li> <li>• Offer all-natural meats, seafood, and eggs that are hormone-free, antibiotic-free, and humanely raised.</li> <li>• Offer steamed and/or grilled foods rather than foods prepared using fats/oils.</li> <li>• Where seafood options are offered, provide only those listed as “Best Choices” or “Good Alternatives” on the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch list, certified sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council, or identified by an equivalent program that has been approved by the NPS.</li> <li>• Offer fair-trade certified, shade-grown coffee.</li> <li>• Post signage or provide visitors with other educational materials on the importance of healthy food in the context of the facilities and activities at the particular location.</li> </ul>
Guided Backcountry Multi-Day Trip	Multi-day trips in remote locations with limited resupply. Several meals per day may be provided. Cooking and food storage facilities are very limited.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hunting Multi Day Trips</li> <li>• Mountaineering Multi Day Trips</li> <li>• Guided Land Tour Multi Day Trips</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide healthy, high calorie meals and snacks that include a combination of proteins, carbohydrates, and healthy fats. For example, seeds and nuts, peanut butter, energy bars, sweet potatoes, eggs, etc.</li> <li>• Where grains are offered, use whole grains (e.g., whole grain breads, pastas, granola bars) or gluten-free grains.</li> <li>• Offer all meals with at least one serving of fruits or vegetables; fresh or frozen.</li> <li>• Offer entrees and snacks with no artificial trans-fats.</li> </ul>