

# PRIMITIVE CAMPING

## in Pennsylvania State Parks and Forests

11/2014



### Camping at Forest Districts

#### STATE FOREST DISTRICTS:

Bald Eagle State Forest (570) 922-3344  
Buchanan State Forest (717) 485-3148  
Clear Creek State Forest (814) 226-1901  
Cornplanter State Forest (814) 723-0262  
Delaware State Forest (570) 895-4000  
Elk State Forest (814) 486-3353  
Forbes State Forest (724) 238-1200  
Gallitzin State Forest (814) 472-1862  
Lackawanna State Forest (570) 945-7133  
Loyalsock State Forest (570) 946-4049  
Michaux State Forest (717) 352-2211  
Moshannon State Forest (814) 765-0821  
Rothrock State Forest (814) 643-2340  
Sproul State Forest (570) 923-6011  
Susquehannock State Forest (814) 274-3600  
Tiadaghton State Forest (570) 753-5409  
Tioga State Forest (570) 724-2868  
Tuscarora State Forest (717) 536-3191  
Weiser State Forest (570) 875-6450

### Contacts

For more information, contact:

Bureau of Forestry  
PAForester@pa.gov  
717-787-2703



### What is Primitive Camping?

Primitive camping is a simplistic style of camping. Campers hike, pedal or paddle to reach a location and spend the night without the presence of developed facilities. This primitive camping experience takes place off the beaten path, where piped water, restrooms and other amenities are not provided. You pack in all you need, exchanging a few conveniences for the solitude found in the back country setting.

Fresh air, fewer people and out-of-the-way natural landscapes are some of the benefits of primitive camping. Once off the beaten path, however, additional advantages begin to surface such as a deeper awareness and greater appreciation of the outdoor world around you. Primitive camping also builds outdoor skills and fosters a gratifying sense of self-sufficiency.

### Where to Camp

Pennsylvania has 2.2 million acres of state forest land with 2,500 miles of trails and 5,132 miles of rivers and streams winding through it. Hiking, biking and multi-use trails traverse most state forest districts and six districts have designated water trails that transect state forest land.

State parks are not open to primitive camping. However, with the exception of William Penn State Forest, all state forest districts are open to this activity. Camping is not permitted in designated natural areas or at vistas, trail heads, picnic areas and areas that are posted closed to camping. Contact a forest district office for specific information, maps and Camping Permits (if needed).

Primitive campers spending no more than one night at a campsite do not need a Camping Permit. A Camping Permit is required if:

- You desire an emergency point-of-contact.
- You stay at a campsite more than one night.
- A campfire is desired during spring or fall fire seasons.
- You camp using a vehicle for storage or transportation.
- You are "group camping" (more than 10 people).
- You camp within the Pine Creek Gorge in Tiadaghton or Tioga state forests.
- There is no fee for a Camping Permit. Group camping requires a Camping Permit and a Letter of Authorization from the district forester.



## Water Trails

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) promotes and assists with local partners 25 water trails throughout the state. The Bureau of Forestry allows primitive camping on designated islands along several water trails and the sites are marked with island locator campsite signs. Camping can be found along water's edge for water ways passing through state forest. Water trails with primitive camping:

- North Branch Susquehanna Water Trail extends from the Pennsylvania state line to Sunbury.
- Middle Susquehanna River Trail includes Sunbury to Harrisburg with 23 volunteer maintained island campsites along this section of river. Srta.org
- Juniata Water Trail transects Rothrock State Forest where riverside camping is permitted except within the Little Juniata Natural Area. This water trail passes through Tuscarora State Forest as well and island camping is permitted.

**WATER TRAIL LINKS:** PA Fish and Boat Commission [www.fishandboat.com/watertrails](http://www.fishandboat.com/watertrails);  
Pennsylvania Water Trails Program [www.pawatertrails.org](http://www.pawatertrails.org); Susquehanna River Trail  
[www.susquehannarivertrail.org](http://www.susquehannarivertrail.org).

Camping can also be found on islands in the Allegheny River, along the shore of the Delaware River where it passes through the Delaware State Forest, and along the Clarion where it passes through Clear Creek State Forest.

### Bike Trails

The Pine Creek Rail Trail offers primitive camping opportunities along its length. A permit is required.

### Backpacking Trails

See fact sheet on Backpacking for opportunities for backpacking in Pennsylvania.

## Primitive Camping Reminders

- Know and follow all state forest rules and regulations.
- All camping should be at least 100 feet from any stream or open water source.
- Bathe and wash dishes or clothes using a container. Washing in a spring, lake or waterway is prohibited. Dispose of wash water at least 200 feet from water resources.
- Non-native invasive plants, animals and pathogens threaten Pennsylvania's biodiversity. Help minimize the spread of invasive species by not transporting them from one place to a new location. Before leaving a site or any body of water, remember to clean off shoes, clothing, pets, watercraft and all gear. Also, stay on designated trails and do not move firewood.
- Make wise choices in the backcountry setting where emergency response may be delayed and medical help is not readily available.

## Primitive Camping with Children

- Start small with a day trip to a nearby forest or park. This trial run offers children a chance to spend an extended period of time in nature. Next, try an overnigher in the backyard to help everyone assimilate to night sounds and sensations. These preludes will also help you plan a realistic itinerary and allow you to develop a family checklist of things you'll definitely need to pack and things that are better left behind.
- Pre-trip planning and organizing are key elements to a successful outing. Involving children in the planning process stirs excitement and encourages responsibility. When appropriate clothing, reliable equipment, ample food, a water supply and an emergency plan are taken care of in advance, the trip will be far more enjoyable for the whole family.
- Make activities kid-friendly; adjust time and distance of hiking, biking or canoeing excursions to suite everyone's interest and ability; children will have a greater interest in a three-mile hike if that hike is filled with exploration, adventure, quality time together and fun snacks.
- Keep activities simple and focus on fun and the outdoor experience.
- Primitive camping has the potential to build confidence and expand a child's view of the world.



## Bears and Campsites

An estimated 16,255 black bears inhabit Pennsylvania, so there is potential to encounter a bear while camping. Wildlife is a thrilling part of the camping experience. Help protect black bears and keep encounters positive by using these guidelines:

- Pass up campsites with obvious signs of bear activity.
- Keep a tidy camp.
- Avoid bear conflicts and prevent causing problems for the next camper by not feeding bears and by doing your best to avoid attracting bears to your campsite.
- Store all food and scented objects in sealed containers away from your tent. Suspend containers with dark cord 100 yards away; ten feet off the ground; and five feet from tree trunk.
- Wild animals typically avoid people. Discourage a bear from snooping around your campsite by using loud noises such as blowing a whistle, yelling or banging loud objects together. Stand tall and be bold to scare off a persistent bear.

## Leave No Trace

- Plan Ahead and Prepare.
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces.
- Dispose of Waste Properly - primitive camping is a pack in/pack out form of camping.
- Leave What You Find.
- Minimize Campfire Impacts by using designated fire ring if available and extinguishing your fire completely.
- Respect Wildlife.
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors.

By using low-impact camping techniques, we help protect the natural character of our forests and the environment. Practice Leave No Trace principles whenever possible to minimize your recreational impact on nature. If camping on a river island with a journal, be sure to record your visit and list any issues that need attending.

