

National Forest WILDERNESS

Closed to motor vehicles,
motorized equipment,
hang gliders and bicycles

Area back of this sign is managed and protected
under Public Law (16U.S.C. 551; 16U.S.C. 1131-113

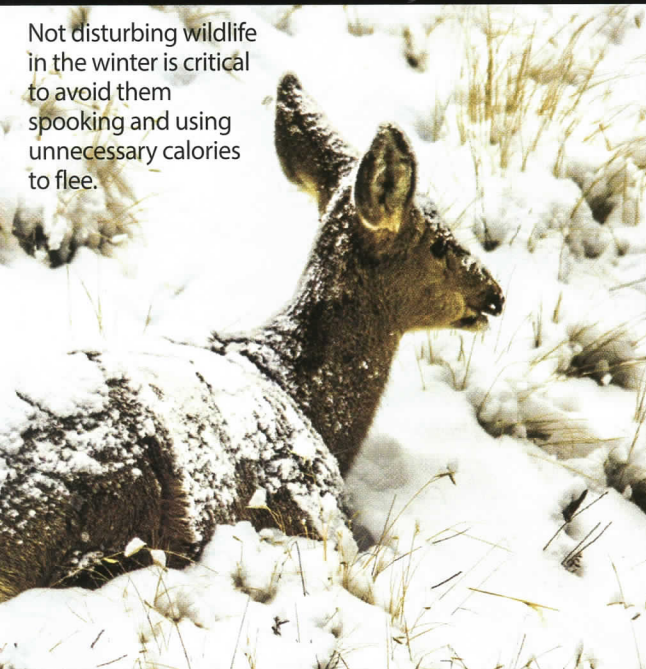
Violations Punishable

7-6A

Horses require extra work to minimize impacts in the outdoors.



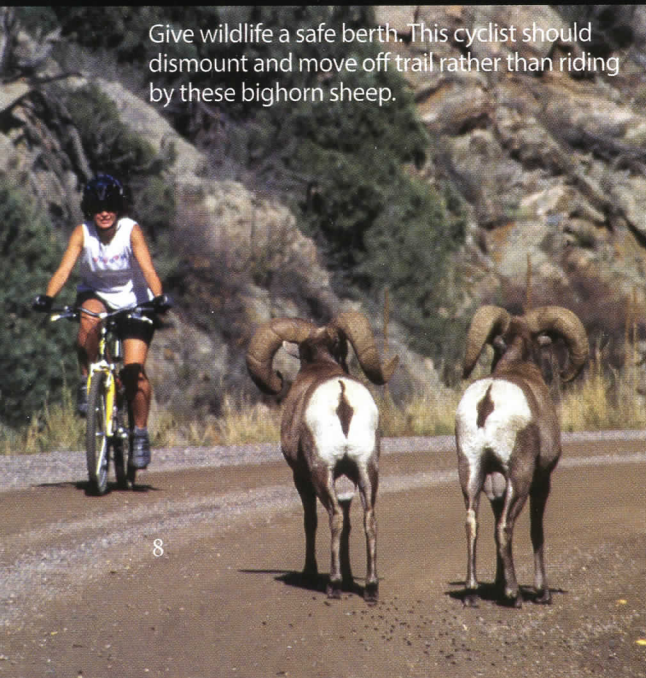
Not disturbing wildlife
in the winter is critical
to avoid them
spooking and using
unnecessary calories
to flee.



Keep to defined trails in the outdoors like these hikers,
especially when above timberline.



Give wildlife a safe berth. This cyclist should
dismount and move off trail rather than riding
by these bighorn sheep.



8

CAMPING PROHIBITED
WITHIN 100 FEET
OF WATER

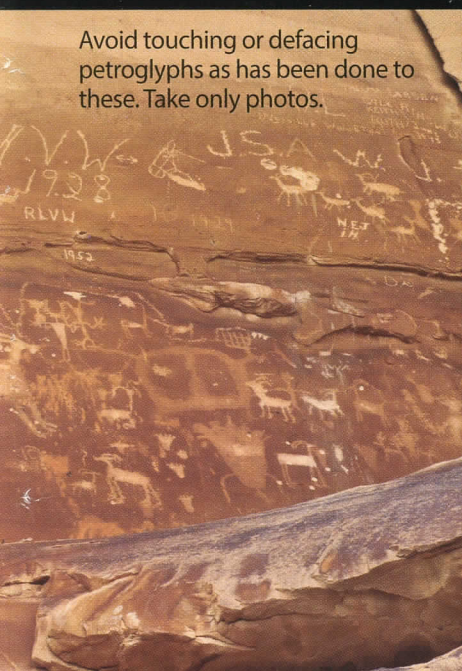
NO CAMPFIRES
STOVES ONLY



Colorado Outdoors



Motorized recreationists should keep to roads and defined trails.



Avoid touching or defacing petroglyphs as has been done to these. Take only photos.



Leave archaeological artifacts where you find them. Take only photos.

Practicing common sense outdoor ethics will benefit both the environment and fellow recreationists.

WALK SOFTLY AND CARRY A SMALL STICK

We climbed 2,000 vertical feet over 6 miles to one of my favorite lakes — Lost Lake. With eager anticipation of three days of dry-fly fishing, we scurried along the north shore toward our favorite camping spot — a well-used site just below timberline. We wiped the sweat from our brows and shed the heavy burden of our backpacks. Then we stared at each other in horror. The campsite was trashed. Strewn around were food wrappers, empty beer cans, fishing line and half-burned firewood. Within the campfire ring was partially burned aluminum foil, uneaten food and dozens of glass shards from a broken whiskey bottle. The coup de grâce was a dried cutthroat hanging on a string tied to an overhanging branch. Instead of settling into our campsite and stringing up rods, we spent the next couple of hours cleaning up the mess and giving the fish a proper burial.

Unfortunately, wildland abuse like this is far more common than most recreational managers like to admit. The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, a nonprofit dedicated to protecting the outdoors, estimates there are 13 billion outdoor trips per year in the United States. And this estimate predates COVID-19; undoubtedly more occur now. Just the physical presence of so many people enjoying the outdoors will have a negative impact on the landscape, let alone the trash they leave and their occasional destructive behavior.

Article & Photos by RON BELAK

Practicing common sense outdoor ethics should start as soon as you leave home on an outdoor adventure. Unless you are privileged to live in the outdoors, you will need to drive to a trailhead, or maybe your outdoor adventure will consist of that drive or ride through the outdoors. When you leave pavement, stick to the road, whether in a motor vehicle or on an ATV or dirt bike. Be cognizant of permitted uses of the road or trail. If you encounter an obstacle, it is best to drive over it, if you can avoid vehicle damage, rather than driving around it and widening the road or trail. Maintain an appropriate speed and watch for other motorists and recreationists. The Tread Lightly® campaign has useful guidance for motorized and nonmotorized recreation on their website at treadlightly.org/learn.

Minimizing impacts on the environment starts immediately at the trailhead. Limit your group size or divide your large group into smaller groups. When hiking and mountain biking, stay on the trail and avoid cutting switchbacks. Even if the trail is wet or muddy, stay on the trail to avoid widening it and causing erosion. Be aware that other outdoor enthusiasts relish the peace and quiet of the outdoors, so speak softly. If you must listen to music, use earbuds but don't play it so loudly that you become oblivious to your surroundings, wildlife or approaching recreationists. When hiking off trail above timberline, avoid stepping on the vegetation and keep to the rocks. In the desert, keep off cryptogamic soils — black crusts that are actually living assemblages of algae, bacteria and fungi. Instead of walking single file off trail, spread out to minimize trampling of vegetation.

Since many enjoy the backcountry, etiquette exists for approaching and passing other recreationists. When approaching someone from behind, announce your presence. When approaching someone head-on, hikers going downhill should yield to uphill hikers. Hikers should yield to equestrians, and mountain bikers should yield to both hikers and equestrians. I once hiked the Grand Canyon with a friend and met a mule train carrying supplies to the bottom. He nearly sent the entire train off a cliff because he fumbled with his over-sized backpack when the mules were passing. Remain still in a spot off trail when livestock passes, preferably a spot below them. If you bring along your dog, keep it on a leash. More than once an off-leash dog blazed ahead only to then run back to the owner with an angry bear or moose in pursuit. The slower, less mobile owner often

received the mauling or trampling, and Bowser slipped away scot-free.

Bowser brings up other wildlife concerns. Please give wildlife space. Not only is it dangerous to encroach on larger wildlife, but it worries them when trying to forage or raise young, and they expend needless calories when alarmed during winter — a critical time for their survival. If you want a picture, invest in a good camera with a telephoto lens and leave the cell phone in your pocket. Several years ago, I stopped along a road near my home in Evergreen to photograph with my 300 mm lens a bull elk during the rut. A woman walked right up to the antsy bull to snap a cell phone shot. I advised her of the danger, but she said that she knew it was safe because she lived in Conifer among the elk for 20 years. I replied that I lived in Evergreen for 40 years and knew she was just lucky.

Spending multiple days outdoors, especially when it includes nights in the backcountry, can be glorious, but it comes with added responsibilities. One should choose a campsite to minimize ecological impacts as well as impacts on fellow recreationists. If possible, choose a campsite that is well-established to avoid impacts elsewhere. Choosing a site isolated from other sites by trees gives you a sense of solitude. Camp at least 100 feet from trails and water to minimize impacts on these resources as well as other recreationists, particularly anglers who need access to the stream or lake. I no longer apologize for traipsing through one's campsite pitched along shore but do gently explain to the campers why their site is not ideal. Avoiding low spots when pitching a tent negates having to dig trenches to divert water. Use an inflatable mattress for comfort instead of cutting boughs. Needless to say, cutting trees to build lean-tos and chairs went out of fashion with the 1965 edition of the *Boy Scout Handbook*.

Cooking in the backcountry can be hard on the environment but need not be. Authors have written extensive instructions on how to minimize impacts of building campfires in the backcountry. My advice is to forgo campfires in the backcountry and save them for fire grates in developed campgrounds. Too many times I have arrived at backcountry campsites to find a smoldering campfire left by departed campers. With prolonged drought in Colorado, the wildfire risk from a poorly tended or abandoned campfire is just too great. Often fires aren't allowed at all. Light-weight backpacker stoves are

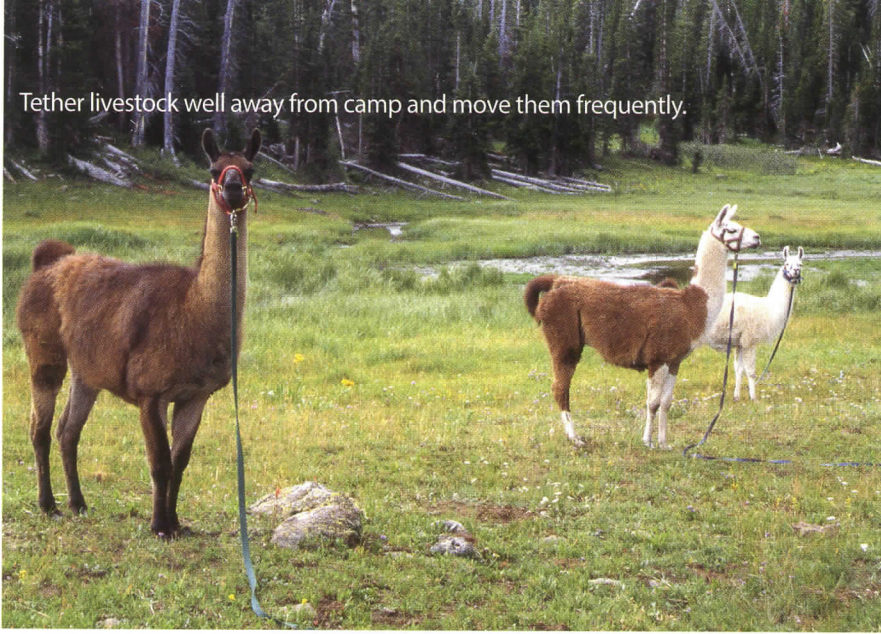
much better and safer for cooking. However, use these stoves within fire rings, on rock slabs or bare ground. One-pot meals, such as freeze-dried entrees, minimize cleanup. I bring along a large collapsible water container to minimize the number of times I trample vegetation enroute to securing water for drinking, cooking and cleanup. Dishwater should first be strained and then discarded far from camp by throwing it into the air in a sweeping arc. Uneaten food and the residue resulting from straining should be packed up in a plastic bag and carried out, along with other trash. Speak softly in camp, especially at night when sounds carry long distances in the still air.

Overnight or when unattended, food and anything emitting scents or odors, such as toothpaste, soap and other toiletries, should be hung in a tree away from camp. In bear country, hang food and toiletries at least 10 feet above ground and 6 feet from supporting limbs and branches. Bears will eat anything. To this end, my brother told me of his adventure at the Philmont Boy Scout Camp in New Mexico in the late 1960s. A bear broke into the storage shed and took a liking to Tetrox — an industrial, light blue powdery soap. The soap was known for causing diarrhea if not properly washed from dishes. The bear ate half a 30-gallon drum of Tetrox, earning him the name King of the Tetrox Trots.

Using livestock in the backcountry requires extra work to minimize impacts in the outdoors. Tether livestock far away from campsites, trails and water. Do not tie them to trees. I have several times seen the results of horses tethered within developed campgrounds or in well-used backcountry campsites. Non-equestrians do not enjoy their fresh droppings or the flies they attract. When picketing livestock, move them around frequently to decrease their impact on the vegetation. Equestrians should use only certified weed-free hay in the backcountry.

Relieving oneself in the backcountry can be quite an ordeal. Urinating, especially for men, is no problem, but go far away from trails, water and campsites. Urine will attract wildlife because of its salt content, so be especially aware of this at night if you get up to relieve yourself. Passing solid waste, however, requires much more planning. One can write a book about this, and indeed Kathleen Meyer has done so with *How to Shit in the Woods* (1989, Ten Speed Press). Despite its crude

Tether livestock well away from camp and move them frequently.



The impacts from campfires can last for decades, even when rocks used in fire rings are scattered. Glass shards can last for thousands of years.

Keep your distance from wildlife, especially when they are caring for their young.



title, in over 30 years and four editions, it sold 3 million copies. In short, select a private spot far away from camp, dig a hole 6 to 8 inches deep and use only unscented, white toilet paper. I use a 1-ounce, aerospace-grade aluminum trowel called the Deuce® and religiously carry it even on day hikes. Bury the solid waste and pack out the used toilet paper (do not burn it) and any sanitary napkins or tampons in plastic bags. If Bowser comes along on a day hike, carry out his waste in a doggie bag; just don't bag it and leave it along the trail because no one is going to pick up after you. However, on multi-day trips, you'll have to bury Bowser's waste just like your own. You can't teach him to use the Deuce®. Recreationists can find additional information on reducing their environmental impacts on the Leave No Trace website at lnt.org/why/7principles or in the book *Leave No Trace in the Outdoors* by Jeffrey Marion (2014, Stackpole Books).

Certain recreationists should heed additional advice. Hunters should do their target practicing at the shooting range, not in the backcountry. Pick up spent shell casings and move gut piles at least 200 feet from trails. Anglers should pack out unspooled monofilament and consider using tungsten or tin instead of toxic lead in constructing flies or submerging bait. Practice catch-and-release for the least impact, but if you do kill a fish, bury the entrails 100 feet from trails and water. I have encountered too many instances of fish entrails tossed into high mountain lakes. They take a long time to decompose in the lakes, pollute the water and are extremely unsightly. Amateur archaeologists should refrain from touching or disturbing petroglyphs and artifacts. And leave the drones at home. They are illegal in wilderness areas and may need special permission to fly elsewhere.

All recreationists should scout around for pieces of trash, tent stakes and other gear when breaking down camp. Fluff up matted grass and rake footprints. Leave natural things as they are. Just as the old saying goes: "Take only photos, leave only footprints." 🐾

Ron Belak is a frequent contributor to *Colorado Outdoors* and is the author of the award-winning books *Fly Fishing Colorado's Backcountry* and *The Fishing Guide to 800 High Lakes in Colorado*. Both books are available through his website ronbelak.com. This article is copyrighted by the author.