

Dispersed camping in Minnesota state forests

What is dispersed camping?

Dispersed camping means camping outside of designated campgrounds or campsites in a Minnesota state forest. Dispersed camping is free and operates on a first-come, first-served basis. There are no amenities. It's just you and the woods!

Campers must be fully self-sufficient and take responsibility for protecting natural resources. Practice "leave no trace" principles. Littering, creating permanent campsites, or damaging vegetation can lead to closures or restrictions. If an area shows heavy use or resource damage, choose a different location.

Length of stay

Dispersed camping in one general location is limited to:

- 14 days between the first Saturday in May and the second Sunday in September.
- 21 days between the second Sunday in September and the first Saturday in May.

To continue camping after reaching the limit, you must move at least 15 miles away.

Staying beyond the allowed time limits or repeatedly returning to the same site without moving the required distance can cause resource damage and may result in a fine or enforcement action.

Key rules

All dispersed campers are responsible for obeying state forest rules and regulations in Minnesota Rules, part 6100.3000 through 6100.4300.

- State forests are open to dispersed camping unless otherwise posted.
- Dispersed camping must be at least one mile away from designated campsites and campgrounds.
- Vehicles must be parked in parking areas or safely on the full shoulder of a road. Do not block trails, roads, or gates with your vehicle.
- You cannot camp or sleep in your vehicle at parking areas or trailheads.
- Camps must be occupied by a responsible person during the time the equipment is left on state land.
- You must remove all garbage and equipment when you leave. Leaving items behind could result in a fine and cleanup costs.
- Building permanent structures of any kind is prohibited.
- Do not dig, flatten, or trench the ground around your tent or campsite.
- Do not create spots by cutting trees, clearing vegetation, or flattening the ground.

Thank you for helping protect Minnesota's beloved state forests for generations to come.

Human waste and sanitation

Dispersed camping areas do not have restrooms, so campers must properly manage human waste. Improper disposal can contaminate water and create sanitation problems. We recommend using commercially available waste bags or a portable toilet kit for a convenient way to pack out human waste whenever possible.

If burying human waste:

- You must choose a location at least 150 feet from water, trails, and campsites.
- Dig a hole 6 inches deep.
- Cover the hole with soil when finished.
- Pack out used toilet paper whenever possible.
- Never leave waste, toilet paper, or trash on the ground - it's illegal.

Leave no trace

All campers must "leave no trace" no matter where you camp. Pack out what you pack in, and do not damage trees, water, habitat, or anything else. Do not burn litter or garbage.

Don't spread invasive species

Seeds and mud on gear and clothing can spread harmful invasive plants. Before leaving home, make sure your gear, footwear, and clothing are free of seeds and soil—especially tents, tarps, hammocks, and vehicles.

Campfire safety

- Only use dead wood lying on the ground or approved firewood for campfires.
- Do not cut or remove living or standing dead trees.
- Make sure your campfire is not more than 3 feet across by 3 feet high.
- After a campfire, Drown-Stir-Repeat until it is out cold.
- If it is too hot to touch, it is too hot to leave.
- If you see a wildfire, call 911.

If a fire rekindles or escapes, the person who set it is liable for any damage caused, as well as for the costs of wildfire suppression.

Visit our website for more details:

mndnr.gov/dispersed-camp



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