

# Washington County 4-H Wagon Train Environmental Protection Policy

4-H Wagon Train considers itself a low/no impact outdoor activity even though we have a significant number of participants. Many topics presented during the monthly meetings have to do with teaching backcountry horsemanship and “Leave No Trace” ethics to prepare participants for their outdoor experience. It is our goal to leave only footprints and take only pictures. Part of our mission is to promote the Oregon outdoors and with that is a responsibility to recreating conscientiously. Environmental values and safeguards are integrated into our decision making processes. Having prior knowledge of the area is taken very seriously and scouting is started sometimes a year in advance. The sites and routes are scouted to ensure that the natural open areas and existing trails are used to minimize the environmental impact of our large group. Areas are also identified that are avoided such as fragile riparian areas, trails that are overly used, or sensitive species habitat.

**Vehicles** – carpooling is encouraged to get to staging. All non-essential vehicles are left at staging for the week. Support are the only ones traveling in regular vehicles. Support consists of the least amount of vehicles necessary to move our camp gear and support personal from camp to camp. Support vehicles take alternate routes from the wagon train in order to avoid non-motorized roads. Support vehicles include a cookshack with tow vehicle, hay trailer with tow vehicles, 4 hole outhouse with tow vehicle, 2 hole outhouse with tow vehicle, water trailer with tow vehicle, and possibly a rescue horse trailer with tow vehicles. These are the only vehicles that are traveling for the week. All support vehicles are current DOT licensed and insured vehicles or trailers. When in camp the cookshack is powered by a generator that meets current emissions and noise standards as well as being equipped with a factory installed spark arrestor. Wagons are classified as non-motorized vehicles but care is still taken to use established roadways.

**Grey Water/Sewage** - discharge from the cookshack is disposed of using a sump hole that has a minimum of 12” deep and located 200’ away from any water sources according to LNT ethics. When available grey water is captured in buckets and emptied into designated grey water disposal drains. Any other grey water is scattered according to LNT ethics as well. All dishwashing and bathing soaps are biodegradable and phosphate free. Both mobile outhouses are taken to town daily to a prearranged designated RV dump site, emptied, and cleaned. When on the trail, participants dispose of human waste using a “cat hole”. Participants are trained in proper human waste disposal prior to the trek, and each wagon is outfitted with the tools necessary to facilitate backcountry bathroom use.

**Chemicals/Hazardous Materials/Other** – we carry on the support crew approximately 15 gallons of gasoline in approved containers with secondary containment within a pickup bed or trailer tongue. A spill kit accompanies the fuel cans as well as a dedicated fire extinguisher. 200lbs of propane are stored

in two approved tanks that are permanently mounted to the outside of the cook shack. 650 gallons of potable water are carried in two tanks either both on a trailer or one on a trailer and one in a truck. These water tanks also have an accompanying gas powered high pressure pump for pumping to the stock tanks, cook shack, or firefighting purposes. In the case of a spill or exposure, immediate mitigation and care will be given and local authorities will be notified following the "Emergency Procedures Plan".

**Garbage** – Any garbage generated while in camp and out on the trail is divided into recyclables and waste and transported out each day when the outhouses are towed out for emptying. Garbage and recycling is disposed of at prearranged appropriate collection sites. Usually the grocery store that is providing food supplies allows us the use of their recycling and garbage facilities. While out on the trail the walking group prides itself on collecting other trash along the way, leaving it better than how we found it. We will only utilize the dumpsters and recycling at hardened campgrounds when we are there staying at the camp. All other days garbage and recycling will be hauled out, so as not to tax the facilities. Prior to the trek, campsites may be visited ahead of time, if necessary, to clean up any broken glass, cans, and other garbage in preparation for site use.

**Vegetation/Soil Impact** – soil and vegetation impact is minimized by traveling on constructed trails or roadways that are already used and designated to accommodate our type of travel. We discourage walking off trail, breaking down the trail edges, developing a secondary trail, skirting mildly difficult obstacles, and shortcutting switchbacks when feasible. If the trail conditions have changed or are impassible due to recent events we notify the agency responsible for the area. When selecting a camp site we consider our impact and judgement to minimize further disruption to an area. A decision about where to camp is based on information about the level and type of use in the area, the delicacy of vegetation and soil, the likelihood of wildlife disturbance, an assessment of previous impacts and our party's potential to cause or avoid impact. We choose sites that are popular only when our use creates no further impact or we choose sites that naturally lack delicate vegetation. The objective is to confine impact to places which already show use and avoid enlarging the area of disturbance. When leaving camp, we make sure that it is clean, attractive and appealing to other campers who follow. We ensure that any regulations in the area related to campsite selection are obeyed. Any alterations to sites or trails is discouraged however upon leaving, holes are filled in from equines, manure scattered, hay picked up, understory and ground cover returned if disturbed. When equines are secured in primitive camps, the highline method is used according to the LNT practices using tree savers and required distances from trees and water sources. For specifics see “Washington County 4-H Guidelines to Highlining”. Prior to the trek, campsites may be visited ahead of time, if necessary, to move any “matter out of place” that impacts the safety of highlining the equines. Examples of “moop” include dead and down branches, low dead branches, and small dead trees. Emphasis is on “move” and not remove and all of this is done in the areas identified for securing equines with the direct supervision and input of the host agency. This is done for the ultimate safety of the equines, and to remove any hidden sticks and matter that may pose a puncture or cut hazard. These areas are predesignated with the host agency in advance in spaces that can tolerate this activity.

**Fire/Firewood** - most sites that accommodate our size of group are generally found with one or more fire rings already constructed. Our group being family based centralizes our activities around one existing fire ring. We do not encourage dismantling or constructing new fire rings, however we will ensure that 5' around the fire ring is cleared to the soil. 650 gallons of water is onsite nearby, with pump capabilities, as well as fire extinguishers on each support vehicles. Only one type of wood is collected for building a low impact campfire--dead and downed wood. Small firewood is gathered by hand. Firewood is gathered from a wide area, not just in the immediate vicinity of camp. In all campfire situations, the use of saws, axes and hatchets on living trees is forbidden. Sawing and chopping leave more impact and further detract from the naturalness of the area. The campfire is kept relatively low and moderate and is attended at all times. When preparing to move to another camp, water is used to drown the campfire, and it is ensured cold, dead, and out. We do not burn, plastic, or food waste or other items.

**Other Visitors/Wildlife** – when traveling in the backcountry, care is taken to minimize disturbance of other visitors and wildlife. This disturbance is minimized by scheduling use well ahead of time with the host agency to avoid conflicts with other users, planning our routes away from active areas, providing information about the group to the host agency and other users, and carrying out appropriate behavior. Participants give plenty of space and never chase wildlife. Participants also obey trail courtesy when encountering other traffic.

**Historical/Artifact** – we ensure that others enjoy the sense of discovery by leaving rocks, plants, archaeological artifacts and other objects of interest as we find them. Natural objects of beauty or interest, such as antlers or petrified wood, are left for others so that they too can experience that sense of finding them. Participants understand that in National Parks and other areas it is illegal to remove natural objects. The same ethic is applicable to the discovery and removal of cultural artifacts found on public land. Cultural artifacts are protected by the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, and it is illegal to remove or disturb artifacts from *any* public lands. This act protects all artifacts ranging from seemingly insignificant potshards and arrowheads to ornate pots and clothing items. Participants are informed of leaving natural, cultural, archeological, and artifacts where they are found. Participants are encouraged to alternately photograph, write and draw in journals about those items they may have seen.

**Road Crossing/Water Crossings/Travel Plans** - when necessary to cross or travel on County or State roads, plans are formulated in advance and directed by an ODOT certified flagger on our staff. All laws and regulations pertaining to road travel are obeyed. Prior to the trek, local law enforcement and/or ODOT shall be notified of the logistics if necessary. When traveling on a County or State roadway all wagons shall have a slow moving vehicle sign affixed to the rear of the wagon. The group shall travel as one group bunched safely together with a forward pilot vehicle operating its hazard lights and a rear pilot vehicle operating its pilot lights and caution sign affixed to its rear. When traveling on a busier and/or roadway with poor visibility, flaggers on foot that have been trained in traffic control shall assist with advance warning of other motor vehicles both from the front and rear. And if necessary and available law enforcement

may be used to assist with road travel or crossing. Flaggers shall be equipped with a high visibility vest and radio communication. Any participant conducting traffic control shall be wearing a high visibility vest or otherwise remain bunched with the group. When crossing or traveling on a roadway our group shall use existing road crossings and road shoulders. When crossing a busier roadway it may be necessary to cross in a series of sequenced group. In that case wagons shall cross as a group, walkers shall cross as a group, and equines shall cross as a group and if necessary for safety, dismounted. It is imperative that no equines are separated when crossing as this creates a dangerous situation on the roadway. When crossing water, low impact methods are used such as using existing crossings and gravel bars. No stream or river shall be crossed that is designated as a sensitive salmon breeding grounds, or any other protected designation by ODFW.

**Gate Management** – our treks may take us places where we cross public to private or vice versa. Or we may cross through grazing management ranges within those areas. Between or within those areas there may be gates and/or cattle guards that we cover or open for our passage. When the Scout encounters a closed gate, it is opened for passage and the gate is closed by the Ramrod when everyone has passed. Acknowledgment and confirmation is achieved via radio communication. When a gate is found open attempts shall be made to contact the host agency and confirm the gate remains open once past. When encountering cattle guards, attempts shall be made to use a gate to circumvent the cattle guard. In the case of no gate, support personal cover the cattle guard with thick plywood, and it is removed once everyone is past. The same procedure for opening and closing gates is used by support.

**Noise** – all stationary sources of noise (i.e. generators, propane burners, etc.) shall be placed in a location that has taken into consideration the impact that it will generate, such as distancing away from other campers. As a group our overall noise level is very minimal as our modes of transportation are primitive and when there are conventional vehicles used it is the minimum amount necessary and those vehicles are adequately muffled. Generators that are employed for use have the original factory exhaust on them and are rated at 58dB and lower when under maximum load. Human generated noise is infrequent and limited to morning wakeup call with a bugle, evening taps with a bugle and group hand clapping to bring everyone together for meetings. All noise that is generated is temporary in nature and none is generated to intentionally scare or chase wildlife. All noise generated activity is limited to between 6am and 10pm. All other campground rules and regulations regarding noise are observed as well.