

# What Is It?

**Rockhounding** involves the discovery and collection of small quantities of rocks, gems, or other geologic materials from the surface for personal use.

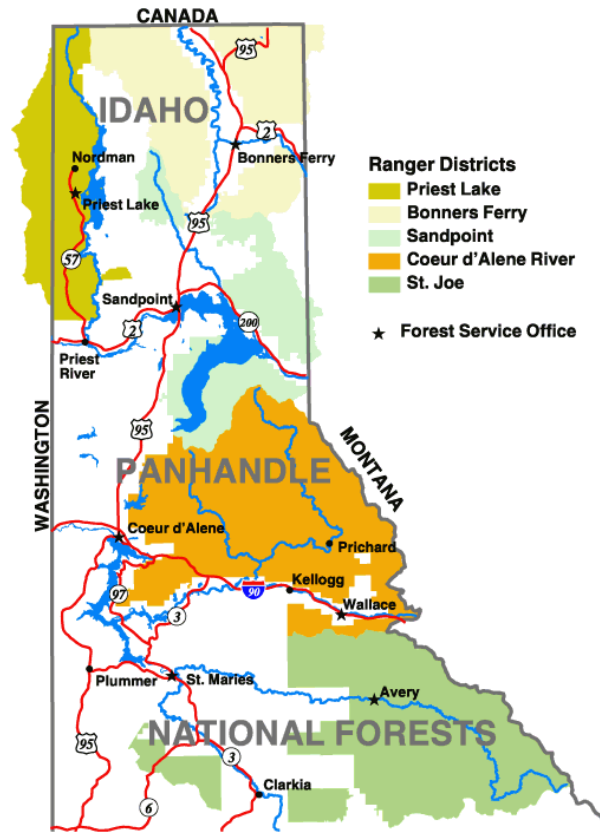
**Prospecting** is searching for valuable minerals. This can include collecting hand samples of mineralized rock, gold panning, using metal detectors, and operating small sluices or dredges.

Forest Service mining regulations listed in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 228 govern rockhounding and prospecting activities. A good CFR website is: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-36/chapter-II/part-228>

**Fossil hunting** allows the collection of petrified wood and *invertebrate* fossils for personal use. The rules for petrified wood collection are found under CFR 228, Subpart C.

## What Cannot Be Collected or Removed?

- Vertebrate fossils (dinosaur bones, fish, - anything with a backbone), and shark teeth.
- Archaeological resources including any material remains of prehistoric or historic human life or activities, which are at least 50 years old, and includes the physical site, location, or context in which they are found. (36 CFR 261.2)
- Projectile points, pottery, or any other archaeological resource or artifact is not allowed (36 CFR 261.9 (h) without a permit. Projectile points include arrowheads and any prehistoric human-modified stone.



## Contact Us:

### Idaho Panhandle National Forests

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(208) 765-7211

### Office Hours:

Monday-Friday, 8:00 am–4:30 pm.

Facebook: [@USFSIPNF](https://www.facebook.com/USFSIPNF)

Website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/ipnf/recreation/rocks-minerals>

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# Rockhounding

On the Idaho Panhandle National Forests



Rockhounding, garnet digging, and gold prospecting are just a few of the recreation activities you can experience on the 2.5-million-acre Idaho Panhandle National Forests.

# Where Can I Go?

Most areas of the national forest are open to collection, except:

- Wild and Scenic River corridors
- Historical or archeological sites
- Campgrounds
- Wilderness Areas
- Administrative sites
- Environmentally sensitive areas
- Areas "withdrawn" from mineral use
- Someone else's mining claim

It's best to check with the local ranger district before collecting.

The **Emerald Creek Garnet Area** on the St. Joe Ranger District is a very popular and unique collection area for emerald star garnets. Advance tickets are required. Visit [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) to make a reservation, or call the St. Maries office at (208) 245-2531 for information.

More collection locations can be found through local gem and mineral clubs as well as rock shops.

**Fossils are not abundant on IPNF** because most of the rocks exposed at the surface are too old to have abundant life forms.

### Be wary of abandoned mines!

Over 1000 abandoned mines exist on the IPNF. These mine sites and workings are extremely hazardous and underground entry is prohibited unless authorized by permit.

## QUESTIONS?

Contact IPNF Geologist Nira Walters

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# Do I Need a Permit?

Prospecting and rockhounding *usually* do not require a permit if there is little or no disturbance to the environment; however, a Notice of Intent (NOI) must be submitted to the District Ranger if there will be an obvious disturbance. Based on the information provided in the NOI, a Plan of Operation (Plan) may be needed. Some examples of when a Plan is required:

- Use explosives
- Use power equipment for excavation
- Drive vehicles off open roads/trails
- Clear or remove vegetation
- Store petroleum products or hazardous/flammable material on site
- Camp in one place more than 18 days

# More on Permits

Suction dredging requires two permits: one from the Idaho Department of Water Resources, and a General NPDES permit from the EPA. The EPA will not issue a General Permit for suction dredging in streams which are listed as impaired for sediment, metals, or have a critical habitat designation for an endangered species. Please contact the IPNF Minerals Program, or submit an NOI, for more information regarding the EPA requirements pertaining to the NPDES permit.

Any **commercial use** of fossils or mineral materials collected on National Forest System Lands also requires a permit.

If your operation (see below):	You will need (see below):
Will cause little or no surface disturbance (e.g., gold panning and rockhounding)	No permit—although some restrictions may apply depending on area
Will involve collecting up to 1 ton of flagstone, rubble, sand, gravel, or similar material by hand or personal use (non-commercial)	A Free Personal Use Mineral Material Permit. Available at Ranger Districts
Uses a small sluice or rocker box	Submit a Notice of Intent
Uses a suction dredge with up to a 5 inch intake nozzle and/or with an engine rating up to 15 horsepower	Submit a Notice of Intent AND provide a current copy of approved IDWR Recreational Dredging Permit and approved NPDES permit from EPA
Uses a suction dredge with greater than a 5 inch intake nozzle and/or with an engine rating above 15 horsepower	Submit a Plan of Operation
Uses motorized equipment and/or will cause significant surface disturbance	Submit a Plan of Operation