



# Dispersed Camping

## Stanislaus National Forest

Dispersed camping allows visitors a chance to recreate in the forest off the beaten path and experience solitude. However, this comes with greater responsibilities as there are no services in these areas— no water, toilets, picnic tables... etc. – and no designated camping or parking areas. It is up to you to find the area best suited to your needs and practice outdoor ethics so we can steward the land for future Stanislaus National Forest visitors to enjoy.

### Regulations

The maximum cumulative days camping in any forest ranger district is 21 per calendar year. *36 CFR 261.50(a)*

Dispersed campers are permitted to park within one vehicle length (including any tow vehicle) of a National Forest transportation route and walk into camp.

Dispersed camping is not allowed within a designated developed recreation area. *36 CFR 261.16(e)*

Camping in violation of posted signs. *36 CFR 261.58(e)*

You must remove all of your belongings and trash when you vacate your campsite. *36 CFR 261.16(f)*

### Winter and Spring Road Closures

From December 15 to April 15 all forest roads are subject to a seasonal closure due to winter weather.\* Check the “Alerts and Closures” page on our website for any updates. During to this closure, traditional dispersed camping is not available. However, some CA SNO-Parks allow you to camp overnight in your vehicle with a valid SNO-Park pass, check each for restrictions.

\*Some may open to over snow use, subject to snow and vehicle regulations, talk to a forest ranger about winter camping options.

### Finding a Campsite

Use existing campsites in lieu of clearing new sites. If you want to have a campfire, find a site with an existing fire ring, do not make a new one. Although it’s natural for campers to want to stay near water sources, camp at least 100 feet away from edges of meadows, lakes, or streams to minimize damage to critical wildlife and riparian areas.

### Water Sources

It’s best to bring your own water supply. If you are going to use water from a lake, stream, or spring make sure you run it through a 0.5 micron filter, treat it, or boil it first.



### Campfires

**If you are planning on using campfires, stoves, lanterns, or barbeques outside a campground or recreational vehicle (and even in some developed campgrounds), you will need to obtain a campfire permit.**

The permit is free, valid for a full year from January 1 to December 31, and may be obtained in person from Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, CalFire offices, or online at [www.readyforwildfire.org/permits/campfire-permit/](http://www.readyforwildfire.org/permits/campfire-permit/). Your responsibilities for building and putting out your fire safely are explained on the campfire permit and must be adhered to, *36 CFR 261.52(k); PRC 4433*. You are welcome to gather dead and downed wood to use for your campfire, but you may not to take any home unless you obtain a fuelwood permit.

**Be aware that as fire danger becomes greater, fire use may be prohibited.  
It is your responsibility to check for fire restrictions before you leave.**

## Travel and Access Into the Forest

Conditions can change rapidly in the forest, and passages deep into the forest are determined by weather, safety, and seasonal road closures. The Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) displays seasonal openings of National Forest roads and trails designated for motorized travel use. It is most easily used in conjunction with a forest visitor map. MVUMs are free to the public at each ranger district office, on our website:

[www.fs.usda.gov/activity/stanislaus/recreation/ohv](http://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/stanislaus/recreation/ohv), and can also be freely downloaded for offline use on the Avenza app.

All motorized vehicles using forest roads must be registered with California's DMV either as street-legal (meets requirements for operating on a public thoroughfare) or as a "green sticker" vehicle (OHVs such as dirt bikes, ATVs, UTVs, and snowmobiles that meet emission standards). Most dirt roads in the forest are maintained in a roughly graded condition. Except for snowmobiles, green-sticker vehicles are restricted to these types of roads and some gravel trails. Consult the MVUM for available routes in your intended travel area.

Visitors should always consult road signs on forest roads to confirm what vehicle use is allowed on a given road. However, not all roads and junctions may be signed—ultimately, it is your responsibility to know where you are allowed to travel with your vehicle. Stay on established, open routes. Each pass of a tire over terrain redefines a track, wanted or unwanted. In a closed area this creates a signal to others that the area is open for use. You may find something that could have been an old road but shows no signs of recent travel. Many of these are old logging skid trails that were never intended for vehicle use and have never been logged or maintained as any sort of route.

Not all traveled ways are open to the public. Some forest roads are gated or blocked by obstacles such as boulders, logs, or dirt piles. As a general rule, if a route is not designated "open" by public notice (or you aren't sure which road it is), stay on the safe side of the law and assume the route is closed for use. Check the Stanislaus National Forest website for Forest Orders mandating any road closures or contact a ranger station before you leave.

**Driving in wet areas is never acceptable**, except for designated stream crossings on approved roads. Muddy, wet roads can be extremely susceptible to damage, and you are prohibited from damaging any roads or trails, *36 CFR 261.12 (c)*. If you come across any egregiously swollen stream crossings or other dangerous conditions, please report them to the appropriate ranger district.

## Leave No Trace!

- **Trash**—Pack out what you pack in. Taking out more than you brought is even better! This helps reduce recreational impacts on the forest. Litter and garbage are unsightly, unsanitary, and is harmful to wildlife and fish populations. Clean dishes at least 200 feet away from water sources. Place food scraps in a closed container to pack out and dispose. Do not burn your trash.
- **Human waste**—Proper disposal of human waste is important. Leaving human waste in dispersed camping areas can spread disease, lead to contaminated water supplies, soils, attract wildlife, and spoil a camping area. Portable human waste disposal systems which allow you to safely "Pack It Out" are commercially available. As a last resort, choose a spot at least 200' away from water sources and campsites, dig a small hole at least six inches deep, and cover it when you are through. Pack out any toilet paper or sanitary products and dispose of them properly. Depositing any body waste except into receptacles provided for that purpose is prohibited, *36 CFR 261.16 (p)*.

## Food Storage in Bear Country

- Here's a good rule to remember: if something goes in your body or on your body, then make sure it is attended at all times or properly secured. This includes any and all food trash.
- You can use a bear resistant food container or your car to secure your items, just make sure anything is sealed, out of sight, and that the doors are locked with the windows up.

## Contact Us:

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**Groveland Ranger District  
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Most offices are open Monday through Friday, call or visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/stanislaus> for current hours.