

Fire Ring Management



A Supplemental Resource to Manage User-Created Impacts

Campfires, for many, are an essential part of an overnight outdoors. The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics principle on minimizing campfire impacts emphasizes using existing fire rings, using wood smaller than your wrist that is already on the ground, dead, and found a good distance from the campsite.

Definitions

Formal fire ring: Located at a designated overnight site, and made of either steel or large rocks. The established location of this primary fire ring to an overnight area is determined by the A.T. club and land manager. Depending on the overnight site and/or rules/regulations of the management area, this may be the only permissible fire ring.

User-created fire ring: These crop up when a visitor takes it upon themselves to collect rocks to build a fire ring. These may be referred to as "illegal fire rings" in some locations where dispersed camping is not allowed. Even if their existence may be permitted when dispersed camping is possible, it may not be preferable to leave the fire ring because it creates an attractive nuisance for continued use of a campsite that may not be preferable from a resource management perspective.

Designated overnight site: A shelter or campsite that is sanctioned by A.T. Cooperative Managers and included in A.T. maps and guidebooks as an approved location to stay overnight.

Dispersed camping: When the land manager allows visitors to camp at locations other than at designated overnight sites (shelters and established campsites). The expectation is that visitors are following Leave No Trace practices for selecting and managing their campsite.

Campsite: Either formal or informal, a location where a visitor camps.

Leave No Trace Principles Applied for Campsite Selection: More than 200 feet from water or the Trail, on a durable surface.

Assessing Fire Rings

Because even well-intentioned and Leave No Trace-minded hikers may decide to have a fire, it's important for trail maintainers to not only clean formal fire rings at designated overnight sites, but managing fire rings for appropriate location and size elsewhere. By leaving a user-created fire ring in a location, maintainers signal to other visitors that this is a place to camp and have a fire. The decision to leave or dismantle a fire ring should be made based on the desired experience for the section of Trail as described in the area's local management plan, the impact to the resource from current/future use of the area, Leave No Trace principles, occurrences of rare, threatened, endangered plant and/or animal species, and proximity to other available/preferred campsites.

Each section maintainer should be aware of designated overnight site location(s), familiar rules/regulations of land management entity and the ANST Compendium, and be aware of Leave No Trace practices for campsite selection. Check with your ATC regional office to find out if a campsite impact survey has been done for your section of Trail; it may be a helpful resource in your continued management of the area.

Fire Ring Management



Assessing Fire Ring(s)

- Determine which are formal fire rings in need of cleaning.
- Determine user-created fire rings that would be acceptable to clean and leave in place, if any.
- Determine any user-created fire rings that need to be removed.

Clean Fire Rings

- Make sure it's cool to the touch before starting.
- Remove any unburned wood. Any long limbs that do not fit the size of the existing fire ring or that are partially burned should be moved several hundred feet away to discourage their use.
- Sort through the ash for any burned trash, and pack out (reference trash Job Hazard Analysis).
- Using a shovel or trowel, dig out and flatten the ash heap. Dispose of the ash in a distributed fashion far from the camping area.
 - Pro tip: Using a plastic grocery bag to convey ash materials to the location where they'll be scattered.

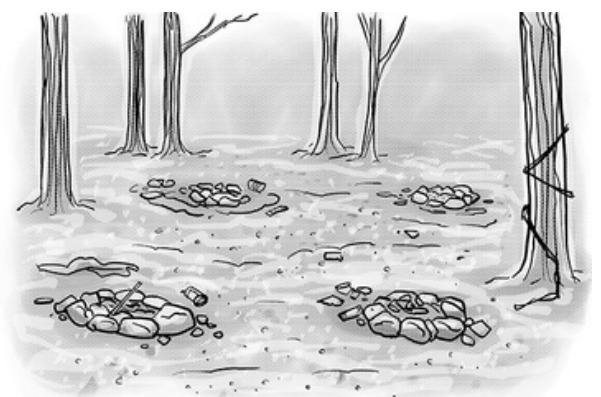
Resizing Fire Rings

Rocks around fire rings can get built up if the ash heap has been unattended to for a long time. In other cases, user-created fire rings can be built too large which encourage fires that are too large.

In these instances, resizing the fire ring that is in an acceptable location is one approach to help visitors meet Leave No Trace best practices with fire.

Eliminating Fire Rings

- Throw/toss/carry the rocks for the fire ring a considerable distance from the camping area, preferably far downhill where they are out of sight.
- Sort through the ash for any burned trash, and pack out (reference trash JHA).
- Using a shovel or trowel, dig out and flatten the ash heap so it is flush with the ground. Dispose of the ash in a distributed fashion far from the camping area.
- Using leaf litter from surrounding forest, obscure the burned ground by scattering leaves over the area.
- Move any large logs or other items that people may have been sitting on that could invite future re-creation of the fire ring.



An obvious need to eliminate fire rings