

# #RecreateResponsibly

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## AS COVID-19 PRESSES ON, NEW GUIDELINES HELP PEOPLE RECREATE RESPONSIBLY OUTDOORS THIS WINTER

**WASHINGTON**—With the winter season upon us, and COVID-19 infections and corresponding public-health measures increasing worldwide, many in the United States continue to seek opportunities for outdoor recreation, including visits to the nation’s public lands, waterways and public spaces like parks and trails.

As winter brings cooler temperatures and shorter days to much of the country, the [Recreate Responsibly Coalition](#) is releasing an update to its guidelines for safely recreating outdoors. The new guidelines outline considerations specific to winter outdoor activity, including information about extreme weather and seasonal access to outdoor facilities.

“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, people in urban and suburban areas across the nation have actively sought time outside for restorative and wellness benefits. As we continue to look for solace outdoors through the winter, it is our responsibility to ensure we’re making activity choices that don’t further stress overburdened systems,” said Taldi Harrison, manager of government and community affairs at REI Co-op. “Regardless of the activity or location where someone wants to play outside, everyone should take time to be informed before and during their adventure.”

The winter #RecreateResponsibly guidelines are:

- **Know Before You Go**—Some areas can become dangerous with winter conditions. Research your destination, as roads and facilities may be closed in winter.
- **Plan Ahead**—Check local conditions and prepare for the elements, packing extra layers, waterproof clothing, and avalanche safety gear for the backcountry.
- **Play it Safe**—Know your limits and your gear. Slow down and choose lower-risk activities to reduce your risk of injury.
- **Practice Physical Distancing**—Be prepared to cover your nose and mouth. When possible, opt to eat and rest outside. If you feel sick, stay home.
- **Explore Locally**—Consider exploring locally, as driving and parking may be more challenging in winter. If you travel, be mindful of your impact on local communities.
- **Leave No Trace**—Did you know that the snow is our water supply? Keep our winter playgrounds clean. Pack out any human or pet waste. Be respectful of the land and Native and local communities.
- **Build an Inclusive Outdoors**—Everyone deserves to experience a winter wonderland. Be an active part of making the outdoors safe, accessible, and welcoming for all identities and abilities.

“Given the extraordinary numbers of people turning to outdoor recreation in these times, coupled with record sales of backcountry winter gear, reduced capacity at ski resorts, and the particular challenges and risks that winter brings, we’re all going to need an extra dose of caution, self-reliance, responsibility and kindness as we head out into the snow this winter,” said David Page, advocacy director for the Winter Wildlands Alliance and a member of the Winter Recreate Responsibly Task Force.

With these new winter guidelines, the overall #RecreateResponsibly message remains simple: We all have a role to play in keeping people, places and communities safe as we enjoy the outdoors.

“As we head into the winter months, it is critical that we continue to take care of each other and the lands where we recreate,” said Mason Smith, head of government and community relations at Hipcamp, and co-chair of the California Recreate Responsibly Coalition. “Along with fantastic recreation opportunities, the winter season brings shorter days, unpredictable weather and generally challenging conditions. We truly believe that recreation can be a force for good in land stewardship, and our hope is that with this guidance, people can better understand how to enjoy the winter climate safely and responsibly.”

The coalition first came together in May as a group of two dozen organizations based in Washington State. Since then, the group has grown into a diverse, international community of nearly 1,000 businesses, government agencies, nonprofits, outdoor media and influencers. The coalition’s common ground is a shared love of the outdoors, a desire to help everyone experience the benefits of nature, and a belief that by sharing best practices, people can get outside safely and help keep our parks, trails and public lands open.

“Since the pandemic began, we’ve seen trail use skyrocket,” said Ryan Chao, president of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and a member of the Recreate Responsibly Coalition Advisory Committee. “While we came to expect sustained increases in trail use during the spring and summer, we’re seeing those trends continue into fall and winter. With more people using these amenities, and many who are new to trails and the outdoors, it’s essential that we all take care to keep each other and our outdoor spaces safe and healthy.”

“As the season changes, it is important to know before you go, especially as weather can be unpredictable and facilities may have different hours and access points. If you plan to visit a national park, check NPS.gov for the latest updates on park operations,” said Will Shafroth, president and CEO of the National Park Foundation. “There are more than 400 national parks located across every state—many closer to home than you might realize. With so many options, consider visiting lesser-known national parks nearby with fewer visitors and more room to roam this winter.”

In addition to the winter guidelines, the Recreate Responsibly Coalition recently partnered with the team behind “The Dark Divide,” starring David Cross and Debra Messing, to produce a [public service announcement](#) underscoring the importance of keeping one another safe and protecting the places where we play. The film, [which is now available on demand](#), is based on the true stories of renowned butterfly expert Dr. Robert Pyle's (Cross) perilous 1995 journey across one of America’s largest undeveloped wildlands.

Media assets and resources for the winter season are available in English and Spanish at [recreateresponsibly.org/winter](https://recreateresponsibly.org/winter) and by following #RecreateResponsibly on social media.