

DISPERSED CAMPING: PART ONE

Also called dry camping, freedom camping, car camping, and other names, 'dispersed camping' refers to camping on public land without services, outside of a designated campground, and without a fee. Backpacking is a type of dispersed camping but not vehicle dependent, except to get to a trailhead. (Backpacking will be discussed in Part Four.)

On National Forest Land dispersed camping is very common and opportunities are fairly limitless. Here on the Coconino National Forest dispersed camping is prohibited by special Forest Orders in select areas including:

- Defined zones around the cities of Flagstaff and Sedona (includes Oak Creek Canyon)
- Parts of lower Fossil Creek
- Central Wet Beaver Creek
- Stage Stop (SR179)
- Bull Pen (FR 215, West Clear Creek Area)
- Inner Basin (San Francisco Peaks)
- Lower Sycamore Canyon
- A defined area at Mormon Crossing and Spring Creek
- South of Kachina Village
- Around Stoneman Lake.

There is also a regulation that **camping is prohibited within a one mile radius of a developed recreation site** (i.e. developed campground, picnic/day use site).

Another tool we can use to help people with dispersed camping is the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM), which shows all the roads **open** to motorized use. Other than exceptions listed above, all forest road corridors are open for camping in close proximity to the road (rule-of-thumb is 30 ft. but is not law). The **vehicle** is restricted to this corridor but the camp is not restricted. If the map shows dots along one or both sides of a road, then the vehicle is restricted, and may be 'off-road' to within 300 ft. off the center line of the road. Again, the camp is not restricted, just the vehicle. In either case, the vehicle must not cause damage to plants, animals, soil, etc. The good news is, most of these 'dotted' corridors have several previously used, easy to spot, already impacted campsites.

DISPERSED CAMPING: PART TWO

Another "style" of free dispersed camping that we see on National Forest Lands is referred to as "**Designated Dispersed Camping**". This is a management designation used to address resource damage and other issues in an area with heavy dispersed camping use. Some of these areas include:

- An area along Freidlein Prairie Road (FR 522), located part way up FR 516 (Snow Bowl Rd). There are 14 campsites, each marked with a brown vertical fiberglass post with a site number and a "**Designated Campsite**" decal. Campers must camp within 50 feet of the post and only a fire ring is provided.

This was a critical management tool to prevent motorized camping sprawl that was threatening the boundary of the Kachina Peaks Wilderness just above the road. RVs and camping trailers are not recommended; **high clearance vehicles are recommended**. A seasonal camping closure for sites 10 through 14 is also in effect from March 1 to August 31 to reduce disturbance to Mexican spotted owls during the breeding season.

- Lawrence Crossing (FR 121) located along the Beaver Creek Rd (FR 618), just opposite the Bruce Brockett Trailhead (FR 624). Access requires high clearance vehicles and is one of the first, and sometimes the only road to close in wet weather conditions because even in 4-wheel drive one usually cannot get in or out, and if you try, the damage to the road is severe. This designated dispersed camping area has 6 marked sites, fire rings, and a single vault toilet in the parking area. Vehicles are not permitted in the campsite itself, so camping gear must be carried to the site. This beautiful location is on the shore of Wet Beaver Creek and was designed to address the increasing impact of people pushing farther up the creek creating more road, soil, and vegetation damage.

NOTE: there is a working, historic irrigation ditch for the old Soda Springs Ranch that begins adjacent to the camping area. People should not block or alter this ditch.

- FR 237 along the east side of 89A just above the Oak Creek Canyon now has 4 camping sites/areas that have numbered markers and campers must be within 50 feet of the marker to camp. Each site has a designated fire ring. Camping is prohibited along this entire road, except for the 4 sites. Any of you who have visited this area in the summer, especially on a holiday weekend, know the tremendous messes made in this area by careless and uneducated campers. We once had to remove a car in that area... from up in a tree!

All dispersed camping areas, including the designated dispersed areas, have no services for water or trash removal and, with the exception of Lawrence Crossing and a very few others, none have a toilet.

DISPERSED CAMPING: PART THREE

Remind visitors that in dispersed camping areas there are no services and they must practice **Leave No Trace** techniques to leave their camp in a condition as good as or better than they found it.

“No services” means no toilet, no trash, no water, and no one to help them in camp. It also means that nobody will be coming by during or after their visit to clean up after them.

There is a very useful handout Bruce Carlson made for us in the visitor center, which we can give to visitors interested in dispersed camping. It includes inset pictures from the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) of some of the more popular dispersed camping areas. The handout also includes many regulations and important camping practices we want to share with visitors, including the following:

- There is a 14-day stay limit (Forest Order #04-99-08-R) on the Coconino National Forest. Please note that there are some exceptions where the limit is less than fourteen days. These areas are posted.
- Please use a digging tool to bury all human and pet waste at least 6 to 8 inches deep and pack out toilet paper with your other trash.
- Pets are welcome in most areas but must be kept on leash or physically restrained at all times. Pets can impact wildlife by chasing or killing animals, destroying nests, and also can negatively impact other visitor’s experiences while they enjoy the National Forest. Many pets are lost on National Forest and never found because they were off leash and wandered off.
- Always practice "Leave No Trace" Outdoor Ethics. Visit www.int.org for more information.
- Contain and remove all garbage, sewage, or rubbish you create and take it with you when you leave the National Forest. Dispose of it at home with your regular trash service or find a commercial trash disposal site or sewage disposal site as needed. Failure to do so will result in a fine. (Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart A, 261.11(d), under "Sanitation")
- Please do not camp in or drive through open meadows or areas with wet or soft soil due to the scarring effect it causes.
- Dead and down firewood may be gathered around your camping area for use at your campsite but it is illegal to load wood in a vehicle to take out of the Forest without a special permit. You may not cut branches off standing trees for firewood.
- Do not burn trash, food scraps, containers, or pallets in campfires. These leave behind food odors that attract animals, create trash that is difficult to remove, leaves residual chemicals behind, and in the case of pallets, hundreds of nails are left and could be stepped on or driven over causing injury or damage.

DISPERSED CAMPING: PART FOUR (FINAL)

Backpacking is another form of dispersed camping. Even though there are some areas in the country with designated campsites or backcountry campgrounds for back packers, we do not have any here on the Coconino National Forest. Unlike other dispersed camping opportunities backpacking is less road dependent and locally there are fewer options for backpacking. Most backpackers want to have a 2-3 night trip where they travel to a new camp each night. This is difficult to find in our area because of the smaller size of "roadless" areas and limited availability of drinking water. Here are areas to recommend, that are also the most asked about, for backpacking:

♥ **Secret Canyon Trail** (alt. Secret Canyon-David Miller-Bear Sign loop): High-clearance 4X4 vehicle to access the Secret Mountain Trailhead (FR 152 Dry Creek Road) or alternate access from pavement using Chuck Wagon Trail from Long Canyon Trailhead on FR 152D (Long Canyon Road). No water most of year. Especially with alternate route options, can have a 1-3 night trip even if moving camp. Ten to 13 mile round trip depending on route/alt. route chosen.

♥ **Long Canyon #122**: Easy access from the paved Long Canyon Road (FR 152D). No water most of year. Limited options for multiple night camping unless staying in same camp. Trail is also heavily traveled by day hikers, backpackers may experience less solitude. Seven mile round trip.

♥ **Loy Canyon Trail** (alt. Loy to Secret Mountain): Unpaved road access to Loy Canyon Trailhead (FR 525) can be difficult in car and during wet seasons. No water most of year. Possible for 1-3 night with/without changing camp location. Popular option is camp in back of canyon then day hike up to Secret Mountain and hike out after second night. Ten to 20 mile round trip depending of route chosen.

♥ **Dogie Trail** (alt. Dogie-Sycamore Basin-Taylor Cabin-Casner Mountain or Dogie-Sycamore Basin-Packard Mesa): Requires high-clearance vehicle to access Dogie Trailhead (FR 525C). No water much of the year. Being in the Sycamore Canyon Wilderness Area it is more remote than other options. A greater chance of solitude except in spring when this area is popular with college student backpackers. Beautiful red rock scenery for about a 7 square mile area around jct. Dogie Trail and Sycamore Basin Trail. Alternate routes for longer trips of 3-5 nights require ending hike at a different trailhead. A second vehicle drop-off or coordinated pick-up/drop off would be required. Alternate route suggestions are not recommended for beginning/less experienced backpackers. Twelve to 30 miles depending on route choices.

♥ **West Clear Creek Trail** (alt. former Bald Hill or canyoneering from top): High clearance vehicle required to access Bull Pen Trailhead (FR 214). Only suggested location where water is available year-round. This is a good choice for newer/inexperienced backpackers and families with younger children since they will not need to carry a water supply, only a filtration system and it is a shorter hike with minimal elevation change. Best for a 1 night trip or for people who want to have 2-3 easy nights in the same camp to spend the day fishing or relaxing before hiking out. In the hotter months this area is popular for day hikes, water play, and fishing, so finding solitude can be difficult.

Alt. routes require ending at a different trailhead, so transportation arrangements are necessary. A higher skill level is required if climbing out of the canyon using the former Bald Hill Trail (now just an extension of the West Clear Creek Trail). This route ends at FR 215 on Cedar Flat. Do not recommend making this into a loop route by returning on the old Blodgett Basin Trail. This is unmaintained and very steep with soft soils and loose rock and signs have been removed. Even the most experienced hikers slip and fall on this old trail. Finally, it is also popular with extreme hikers and canyoneers to drop in upper West Clear Creek at Maxwell Trail, Tramway Trail, Point Route or other non-designated, undeveloped access routes. This route (no trail) involves a great level of skill, equipment planning, first-aid needs, physical/environmental endurance and a minimum of 5 nights. About 40% of this route involves swimming gear through long, deep pools and you never dry out. 5-10% requires bouldering skills dropping self/gear down places you cannot get back up without ropes. "Camps" are rock ledges. This route is also not recommended during monsoon season or other times when flash floods are possible. Ten to 20 miles round trip depending on route chosen.

♥ **Bell Trail** (alt. loop to Long Canyon Trail #63, Apache Maid, White Mesa): Most of the area where backpackers want to camp along Wet Beaver Creek is inside of the camping and campfire closure. This is also the only portion of the hiking area where there is water year round. Short 1-2 night trips can be accomplished by camping at the top of one of the two side trails, White Mesa or Apache Maid. These are not ideal camp spots as they are rocky and exposed. Some prefer the side canyon, containing 'The Crack' swimming hole, and bushwhack up the back of the canyon until they get 1/4 from the creek as required by the Forest Order. This requires bouldering skills with a pack and water is not available year round. Camping is mostly on rock and it is difficult to get out of the flood zone if there is a flash flood. A route that used to be popular was hiking the entirety of Wet Beaver Creek Trail to the top of the canyon, navigate (map and compass) cross country to the top of Long Canyon Trail and hike down to FR 618H opposite the V Bar V Heritage Site. Most of this route receives little to no maintenance and is very dry. Good map and compass skills are required as landmarks are few on top. Ten to 16 miles depending on route chosen.

BACKPACKING TIPS:

- One gallon of water per day per person. More if you plan to cook/clean with water. Don't forget extra water for any 4-legged hike companions.
- Water filtration/treatment for native water sources are always recommended.
- Don't rely solely on a cell phone for emergency communication. Leave your location, trip itinerary, expected return date, vehicle and personal description with a responsible person not backpacking with you before departing. Inform the person they are to call 911 if you do not return.
- Always practice leave no trace practices, especially backing out all trash including toilet paper. Bury fecal waste 6-8 inches deep in soil 200 feet away from water/wash or trail.
- Always be willing to turn around and end your trip if you find you or your companions are: physically compromised, water is running low, or weather/physical terrain compromises your safety or ability to return to the trailhead.