

WINTER LNT

LNT Principle #1: Plan ahead and Prepare

With the short, dark and cold days of winter come thoughts of the warm, sunny days of summer riding and camping. Where do you want to ride next summer? Are you going to a new destination? If so, now is the time to plan your trip. Get as much information on the area where you will be camping. Will you be on USFS, BLM, WDNR or WDFW land? Do you know the requirements (permits, hay requirements, camping fees, etc.) for camping/riding in a chosen location? If going out of state you will need a veterinary health certificate and your horse may need additional vaccinations or blood tests. (Get these done at least 2 weeks before your departure date.) Be sure to get maps of the trails in the area. You may purchase Green Trail maps for many areas in Washington State by going to outdoor stores. In other states you may need to use Cowboy maps or obtain maps from a USFS or BLM regional office. There are also maps available online if you have the ability to find them and print them.

LNT Principle #2: Camp and Travel on Durable Surfaces

Winter presents a challenge for us in the Pacific NW. Trails become wet and very muddy. The number of backcountry users continues to grow and every impact by a user is more important and more visible. Hikers and bikers outnumber us so their impression of us is often what you leave behind. This not only includes the usual piles of “horse pucky” but also deep, water-filled hoof marks. So what do we mean by “travel on durable surfaces”? It means we choose trails we travel by how well their surfaces will stand up to the impact of our horses’ hooves. This may mean we choose not to ride certain trails until a drier part of the year. You may need to choose riding logging roads or old road surfaces. When you come to a muddy patch of trail go through the middle rather than on the edges—that increases the size of the muddy area and further widens and erodes the trail. Ride single file through these areas of high impact but in open areas with a firm surface you can spread out so that there will be less impact and allow the area to recover. Select routes such as dry meadows or areas that are rockier. When you come to a stream crossing look for a route that is the safest, but also the most durable. In other words, try to cause the least damage to the banks and stream bottom.

Remember that Leave No Trace (LNT) is about being conscientious and following principles. Principle #2 is about traveling through an area with leaving little evidence of your passing through. This includes parking at trailheads too.

By Karen Johnson
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