

PRIMITIVE CAMPING

Adirondack Forest Preserve Lands



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Primitive or backcountry camping is a popular activity in the Adirondacks. It involves camping in a tent or lean-to deep in the woods away from civilization. This type of camping offers few or no amenities such as running water, electricity, picnic tables, or restrooms. Primitive camping also requires you to backpack or paddle all of your equipment, food, clothing, toiletries and sleeping gear (sleeping bag, tent and pad) that you will need during your stay.



Designated Primitive Tent Sites

The best place to camp is at designated primitive tent sites. These sites are typically flatter than other areas and have deeper, harder soils more resistant to heavy use and erosion, minimizing the impacts of camping. Many sites have nearby pit privies and rock fire rings.

Campers are encouraged to use designated tent sites. They are often close to trails and provide views of ponds, lakes, streams or rivers. These can be a source of water when properly treated.

All designated primitive tent sites have yellow and black “Camp Here” markers. Many sites on lakes and ponds are identified by a yellow number against a dark brown wooden plaque typically attached to a tree near the water’s edge.



Rules of Primitive Camping

Primitive tent sites and lean-tos are available on a first-come, first-served basis and cannot be reserved. If you find a tent site or lean-to with no people or gear, then you can camp there.

In general, you can camp anywhere on Forest Preserve or Conservation Easement lands in the Adirondacks, but your tent must be at least 150 feet from a water body, road, or trail. Do not camp in areas posted with “Camping Prohibited.”

Check the regulations for the area you plan to camp. Camping is allowed at designated sites only on some areas of Forest Preserve and Conservation Easement lands, and overnight use is prohibited in other areas. DEC’s website provides information on camping regulations for specific areas.

Tents are not allowed inside lean-tos and must be at least 150 feet from the lean-to or on a designated tent site with a “Camp Here” marker.

Camping for more than three nights or with ten or more people requires a permit from a Forest Ranger. Call 518-897-1300 to get the name and contact information for the local ranger.

It is proper etiquette to share your tent site for one night if a second camper or group of campers arrives after dark, especially when it is raining, cold or windy. In the morning, the second group should pack up and leave to look for another location. Lean-tos should be shared by multiple parties until filled to capacity (normally 8 people). These situations are rare, but can happen in heavily used areas, such as the Eastern High Peaks Wilderness.

Black bears are present throughout the Adirondacks. Campers should store all food, garbage and toiletries in a bear-resistant canister or food hang. Bear-resistant canisters are *required* in the Eastern High Peaks Wilderness.