



CODE OF CONDUCT

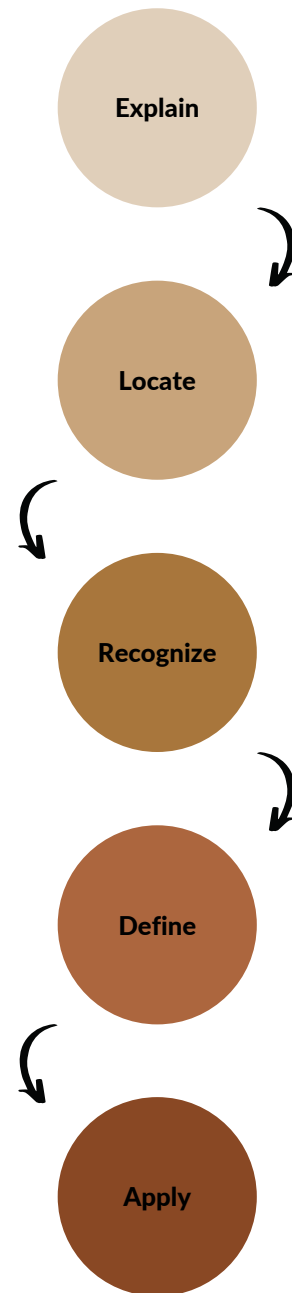
BC Marine Trails - Online Classroom

Unit 2 - Campfires

Campfire Etiquette

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the main impacts that improper fire behaviour has on the aesthetic, environmental and safety aspects of a backcountry site
2. Locate information online about active fire bans
3. Recognize the characteristics of a low-impact fire site
4. Define specific types of materials to use for low-impact fires
5. Apply the best practices in your future recreation to overcome the negative impacts of improper campfires



Introduction

Campfires have long been a normative part of the backcountry experience for many recreationists. Fire is deeply ingrained in the social fabric of coastal recreation. However, fires and fire pits are destructive and, therefore, overall highly impactful to the natural setting.

BC Marine Trails suggests having campfires only on rare occasions, particularly considering the size and impact of any fire you create. However, we also acknowledge that if we propose no campfires under any circumstances, we are missing an opportunity to teach more sustainable campfire habits that can reduce significant impacts.

Our code of conduct outlines the best campfire practices. Have a quick look at the CoC overview for Unit 2 below. This unit will break down each behaviour and provide a more nuanced understanding of how and why each behaviour is essential.

PLEASE NOTE: Note that these are recommended default policies for wilderness sites. Managed locations such as BC Parks and RSTBC locations may have other policies that supersede these recommendations.



Why is good campfire behaviour necessary?

The collecting and burning of wood for backcountry campfires have significant ecological and aesthetic effects on natural sites. The most important ecological effect is the elimination of large woody debris. Soil alteration in heavily used areas where campers are allowed or encouraged to build fires on previously undisturbed sites is also important. In most situations, aesthetic impacts are more severe than ecological impacts. The most common problems are the proliferation of sites, elaborate fire ring construction, leaving burned litter, and building fires on sensitive sites such as on First Nation middens, beach dunes and other sensitive areas.

By following the BCMT CoC, we can do our best to eliminate or significantly reduce these impacts when we choose to have a fire.



Campfire Impacts

Everything we do in the backcountry has an impact. BUT! By following the Code of Conduct, we can reduce our aesthetic, environmental and safety impacts on the natural environment. Below we list researched impacts of improper campfire behaviours.

Aesthetic Impacts from Campfires and Wood Foraging

- Campsites littered with discarded fire rings.
- Scars left on white shell beaches, rocks and driftwood.
- Bare trees surrounding campsites due to upland wood foraging
- Burnt trash left in fire pits.
- Axe and saw cuts in upland trees leave lasting marks.

Environmental Impacts from Campfires and Wood Foraging

- Topsoil and vegetation is degraded from trampling and heat from the fire.
- Upland scavenging degrades soil quality, and moisture retention of the site.
- Upland scavenging removes the habitat required for the establishment of nitrogen-fixing micro-organisms and mycorrhizal fungi.
- Axe and saw cuts in trees can cause damage and potentially kill the rest of the tree.
- Moving rocks to create fire rings can damage First Nation cultural items such as burial cairns, clam garden walls, and other features.

Safety Impacts

- Unattended or out-of-control fires can cause wildfires which pose extreme danger not only to the party involved but to much of the landscape and local wildlife.

**Now ask yourself!
Do I really need to
have a campfire?**

The only ecologically responsible campfire is no campfire at all.

Should you still choose to have a campfire, there are a few steps you can take to mitigate the impacts listed above and reduce your environmental, aesthetic and safety footprint. Let's go through the following suggested behaviours for proper fire etiquette.

BEST PRACTICES

Adhere to Fire Bans

The single most important campfire rule is to check if there are fire bans where you are planning to travel. This is a crucial step to take before embarking on a trip.



Check [Wildfire BC](#) to ensure that burns are permissible during the time of your trip

Almost all paddling takes place in the coastal fire zone. Check this designation. Sometimes the zone is divided into smaller fractions for specific fire risks. If there is a closure, **respect the fire ban in order to avoid hefty penalties and prevent wildfires**. Additionally, many parks and protected areas have specific burning regulations. If you plan to visit any BC Park campsites, be sure to check the specific burning regulations they prescribe for the site you are visiting.

Fire Location

All fires on marine trail sites should be **below the daily high tide line**. Absolutely **no fires** should be made in the upland area.

What makes the intertidal zone ideal for a campfire?

- The intertidal zone removes the environmental impact on soils
- The intertidal zone distances a fire from larger vegetation, thus, the risk of wildfires is greatly reduced
- The intertidal zone has a larger buffer against ecological and safety impacts when compared to upland environments
- The natural tidal flush removes ashes and any trace of the fire
- The intertidal zone at campsites is often composed of small rocks, sand and grit. All of these are more resistant than soil when exposed to campfire impacts

proper fire location



improper fire location



Fuel Selection

BC Marine Trails suggests **only burning driftwood** and restricting the size you burn to no larger than the **width of your wrist**.

Using driftwood instead of wood foraged from the upland has lots of advantages:

- Eliminates trampling caused by upland foraging
- Stops the footprint of an upland site from expanding
- Maintains the coarse woody debris that is beneficial to the biodiversity of upland ecosystems
- Uses a wood source that is naturally replenished much quicker than upland tree branches and limbs
- Removes the need to cut trees and branches leaving living plants intact

Small pieces of driftwood burn easier and leave a smaller impact:

- Wrist width or smaller pieces of driftwood burn easily to ash
- Small pieces of wood create a fire that can be controlled easily
- Small pieces of wood leave less scarring



Fire Rings

BC Marine Trails **discourages moving rocks to create fire rings**. Fire rings are **not required** to manage a fire as they harm the cultural and aesthetic aspects of a site. We recommend that when you are visiting a site, **dismantle any existing fire rings**, even if you were not the one who created them.

- Moving rocks for fire rings can disrupt First Nations' cultural features like burial cairns, clam garden walls and other important archaeological features.
- Rock rings are often left in the upland or high above the tide line. These remnants encourage other users to have fires in more susceptible areas.
- Rocks around a fire ring can become forever scarred, leaving sites looking dishevelled.
- Dismantling existing fire rings removes the social licence for others to have fires above the high tide line.

Grand Fire Master Responsibility

Once you start a fire in the backcountry, you are imbued with the honourable distinction of grand fire master. When you become a Grand Fire Master, you hold a few very important responsibilities. Below you will find the quick and dirty rules of fire master school; the school has given us permission to share with our course participants.



Here are the secrets of a Grand Fire Master:

A Grand Fire Master will never leave a fire unattended

A Grand Fire Master will always burn all the wood in the fire

A Grand Fire Master will never leave evidence of the fire once it is out
(this prevents the water sprites from finding their location and putting out their next fire)

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