

CAN I KEEP THIS?

A Guide to Collecting on Public Lands

Christmas tree permits are available for a nominal fee during the holiday season. Check with local BLM offices for designated cutting areas.

Small amounts of plants, plant parts, seeds, flowers and berries may be collected for personal use in most areas. However, you may not collect species federally listed as threatened or endangered or designated by BLM as Bureau sensitive species unless you have a specific permit. You should also avoid species that are candidates for listing as threatened or endangered. Please contact a local BLM office for a list of these species.

Harvesting plants or plant materials such as seeds, landscaping materials, firewood and timber for commercial purposes requires a permit.

Violation of regulations under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, state and federal wildlife laws and other laws may be punishable by fines, imprisonment, and forfeiture of equipment and vehicles used in commission of the crime.

MT/Dakotas BLM Offices and Phone Numbers

Montana State Office (406) 896-5004	Billings Field Office (406) 896-5013
Butte Field Office (406) 533-7600	Dillon Field Office (406) 683-2337
Glasgow Field Office (406) 228-3750	Havre Field Station (406) 262-2820
Lewistown Field Office (406) 538-1900	Malta Field Office (406) 654-5100
Miles City Field Office (406) 233-2800	Missoula Field Office (406) 329-3914
North Dakota Field Office (701) 227-7700	South Dakota Field Office (605) 892-7000

Public Lands USA:
Use, Share, Appreciate

BLM/MT/GI-11/007

It's okay to collect many items such as firewood, gemstones and plant and invertebrate fossils for your personal use and enjoyment from the public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. But please be careful, and avoid damaging the land, vegetation, scenery or archeological sites. Don't create hazards such as pits or trenches. Power equipment and explosives may not be used except for woodcutting and certain dredging operations.

In general, you may collect reasonable amounts of the following for non-commercial purposes:

- Flowers, berries, nuts, seeds, cones and other plant parts.
- Campfire wood for immediate use.
- Rocks, mineral specimens, common invertebrate fossils and semiprecious gemstones.

Exceptions include collecting protected plants or gathering campfire wood in posted areas. You need a permit to collect invertebrate fossils.

Rules are generally more restrictive for wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, areas of critical environmental concern, national monuments and national landmarks, or historic and prehistoric sites and districts, so it's best to ask first.

Maps and information on specific restrictions are normally available from local BLM offices.

Minerals

You may prospect for locatable minerals such as gold and silver with hand tools including pans and metal detectors. But locatable minerals found on mining claims belong to the claim holder. Mining claim records can be viewed at BLM and county recorder offices. Permits are required for sluicing, dredging and commercial mining.

Sand, gravel, topsoil, landscaping rocks and many other common mineral materials are considered saleable minerals that must be purchased through prior arrangement with BLM.

Gemstones and common rock specimens may be collected for private use on unclaimed sites, but commercial production of common rocks on unclaimed sites requires a permit. Only hobby collecting is allowed in wilderness and wilderness study areas and must not involve surface disturbance.

Collecting prehistoric tools and chips or flaking debris made of precious or semiprecious stones is not allowed.

Fossils

Only researchers operating under a BLM permit are allowed to collect vertebrate fossils such as dinosaurs, mammals, fish and reptiles, as well as uncommon invertebrate or plant fossils. Collected fossils remain public property and are placed with museums, universities or other public institutions after study.

You may collect reasonable quantities of common invertebrate fossils such as mollusks and trilobites, but this must be for personal use, and the fossils may not be bartered or sold.

You're allowed to collect up to 25 pounds plus one piece of petrified wood per day with a maximum of 250 pounds per person per year. Permits are required for pieces over 250 pounds. You may not trade, barter or sell the petrified wood you collect without a permit.

Resources found in caves including plant, animal and geologic features are federally protected and may not be altered, damaged or removed.

Cultural Materials

Cultural materials on public lands may not be removed, damaged, disturbed, excavated or transferred without a BLM permit. These cultural resources include prehistoric and historic artifacts and sites, whole or broken objects and debris that were used by humans. Protected materials include arrowheads and other stone tools, grinding stones, beads, baskets, pottery, old bottles, horse shoes, metal tools, graves and trash scatters. Modern money may be collected, but not historic coins and artifacts.

Historic sites such as cabins, sawmills, graves, trail traces, mining areas, town sites, ranches and railroads are closed to collecting.

Wood and Plants

Firewood permits for personal use are available for some areas. These allow a family to cut up to 10 cords of wood in specified areas for a nominal fee. Collecting dead or down wood for immediate campfire use is allowed except in posted areas.