

SOVEREIGNTY AND OUTDOOR SPACES

On June 22, 2022, Native Governance Center hosted a community event entitled, “Sovereignty and Outdoor Spaces.” The event featured [Dr. Lydia Jennings](#), [Jace DeCory](#), [Shauna Coons](#), [Travis Novitsky](#), and [Grand Portage Secretary/Treasurer April McCormick](#). We are grateful to our presenters for inspiring the content for this guide.

All modern-day “public lands” are stolen Indigenous lands. Before you take your next outdoor adventure, educate yourself about the land you plan to visit and how to interact with the land respectfully.

Many of the United States’ most-visited recreation destinations are sites that hold cultural and spiritual significance for Native people. As Dr. Lydia Jennings notes, they can function as “classrooms, churches, pharmacies, and food pantries” for Native nations. These spaces are not “playgrounds” for non-Native folks.

All of us should all seek to (re)connect to the land while honoring Tribal sovereignty, recognizing the centrality of land to Indigenous identity, creating safe spaces for all, and supporting #LandBack movements.

HOW CAN I RESPECT NATIVE NATIONS’ SOVEREIGNTY WHEN RECREATING OUTDOORS?

We encourage you to do your own research before you travel. Below is a list of tips to keep in mind so you can recreate responsibly.

DO	DO NOT
Respect Tribal sovereignty and governance. If a Native nation has closed off access to its lands or a particular area, respect the rules.	Think it’s ok to bend the rules just this once and that recreating a closed area won’t cause harm.
Prioritize visiting Native-managed places and using Native guides. Let park managers know that you appreciate the inclusion of Indigenous voices in park materials and information.	Assume that there are no Indigenous guides operating within a particular area and that it’s too difficult to prioritize Native-designed tourism experiences



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DO	DO NOT
<p>Leave places better than how you find them by cleaning up your trash and other trash you may see. Leave (do not take or move) natural “souvenirs” that are part of the local ecosystem.</p>	<p>Permanently damage or trash protected areas. Examples include installing bolt anchors on sacred sites, removing trees for campsite firewood, using marking paint, dumping garbage, etc.</p>
<p>Treat animals as relatives. Be quiet, and observe from a distance.</p>	<p>Touch, feed, or approach animals.</p>
<p>Educate yourself about ways to prevent the spread of invasive species and promote plant health.</p>	<p>Conclude that your actions won’t have an impact on ecosystem health.</p>
<p>Use products (sunscreens, rashguards, insect repellent, etc.) that do not put harmful chemicals into our waters or air.</p>	<p>Use products that you know are harmful to the environment (single use plastics, non-reef safe-sunscreens, backyard mosquito sprays, etc.).</p>
<p>Research the Indigenous history of the lands you plan to visit. Determine which Native nations are located nearby.</p>	<p>Suppose that a particular area has no Indigenous history or connection to modern-day Native nations if it’s not expressly spelled out in park information or signage.</p>
<p>Use the Native name for a particular place or landmark. For example, say Mato Tipila or Bear Lodge instead of Devil’s Tower.</p>	<p>Insist that naming doesn’t really matter or continue to use a non-Native place name because it feels more comfortable.</p>
<p>Consider how your physical presence in a space may impact others.</p>	<p>Expose yourself to your fellow recreators. No, seriously, this one happens more than you think. White folks frequently feel emboldened to expose themselves while recreating outdoors. Consider history and power dynamics regarding the policing and sexualization of Black and Brown bodies, as well as white bodies being seen as the “default” in outdoor spaces.</p>





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WHAT IS LANDBACK?

When educating yourself about Native-led movements to reclaim outdoor spaces, you'll likely see the term *LandBack*. LandBack has many different meanings to different Indigenous people and communities. At its core, it's a call to action. It's about returning stolen lands to Native people, strengthening sovereignty, respecting treaties, and recentering Indigenous governance.

Recreating responsibly includes amplifying and supporting LandBack efforts whenever possible. To get started, research Native-led organizations and campaigns in your local area working on LandBack issues. Pay attention to what these groups need and how you can tangibly take action and help.

HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE IN INDIGENOUS-DESIGNED OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPERIENCES AND TOURISM?

The best way to find Indigenous-designed recreation experiences in your area is to do your own research. Here are a few examples of experiences in Native Governance Center's region (MN, ND, and SD):

MNI SOTA MAKOCE

- [Grand Portage State Park](#): The Grand Portage Band of Chippewa Indians co-manages Grand Portage State Park with the State of Minnesota. In addition to natural beauty, Grand Portage State Park features interpretive displays created by Tribal citizens.
- [Eddy's Resort](#): Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures, a Tribally-created entity managing the business affairs of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, owns this northern Minnesota resort. Enjoy fishing, boating, and swimming, among other activities.
- [Dakota Sacred Sites Tours](#): Departing from St. Paul, Dakota Sacred Sites Tours provide a chance for attendees to learn about Minnesota history from a Native perspective. The tours are led by Rev. Jim Bear Jacobs (Mohican) and Kelly Sherman Conroy (Oglala Lakota).

NORTH DAKOTA

- [North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance](#): The North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance is endorsed by the Tribal councils and Tribal colleges of the five Native nations that share geography with North Dakota. Their website features a list of Native-managed destinations in ND.
- [MHA Nation Great Outdoors](#): MHA Nation offers activities such as boating, fishing, hunting, golfing, horseback riding, hiking, biking, and bird watching. Their website offers a list of suggested activities and guides.

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SOUTH DAKOTA

- [A Guide to Tribal Nations: Oceti Sakowin Homelands](#): The South Dakota Native Tourism Alliance created a comprehensive guide to Native tourism in South Dakota. The guide is sorted by Native nation.
- [Crow Creek Wildlife Management Department](#): The Crow Creek Wildlife Management Department provides a list of Native-run guide services (mostly hunting guides) on its website.
- [Lower Brule Department of Wildlife, Fish, and Recreation](#): The Lower Brule Department of Wildlife, Fish, and Recreation offers interpretive exhibits, displays of native trees + plants, and guided hunting packages for buffalo, elk and deer.

