

## Leave No Trace and Minimize Human Impact

Intro: The season of summer is a great time to take leisurely walks and hikes through your local preserves and sanctuaries. The New Canaan Land Trust offers many trails and paths on their properties for the public to peruse and enjoy with their friends, family, pets, or for some time to themselves. In order to protect and take care of the land and trails, there are 7 leave no trace principles that are a guide on how to treat and respect wildlife and nature while also enjoying and making the most out of it.

First body:

One way to make sure you are respecting and being thoughtful of the land and nature is by making sure you leave with everything you went in with. This could include trash or food remnants. It is important to not leave any trash, especially plastics as they can degrade into microplastics. These microplastics can go into the soil or be eaten by animals which disturbs the natural order of things and can lead to negative effects on the environment of that area. Making sure that you are not leaving any leftover food behind is also important as they were not previously part of the environment of that land before and does not fit in.

While walking through the trails of the New Canaan Land Trust during my internship, we discovered a big variety of trash along the trails. There are the common pieces of trash such as plastic bottles, foil, wrappers, pieces of string or tape, cans, plastic, and other things that are tossed aside when someone is walking. Some of the unusual trash we have come across are tires, a pool filter, cardboard boxes, fabric/cotton sort of material, wire fences, netting, etc. Another very common piece of trash is dog poop bags that are just left on the side of the trail, or have been there for so long that they were buried. During my three weeks, we have probably come across a few dozen bags.

Second body:

When going on a walk, many people like to bring their pets (dogs) with them for company. While this is allowed at many of the New Canaan Land Trust properties, it is important to make sure to pick up after your dogs. Because the environment your dogs live in and are exposed to are very different from the secludedness of the land and trails, dogs can carry many foreign microorganisms and particles in their feces that can disrupt the land. When their waste is not picked up, it is spread and carried throughout the preserves or sanctuaries where the foreign microorganisms and particles are absorbed into the soil where it is then affecting the lives of the native plants and animals that are trying to be conserved and protected in the NCLT properties.

When bringing in pets such as dogs, it is important to keep them on leash despite wanting to let them roam around and explore. But during their time off leash, they could trample native plants or homes and habitats of animals and insects that live in the ground. They could also go chasing after animals that live on the land and disturb or cause them stress, which is why it is better to be able to keep them close and under control in order to protect the wildlife on the land.

Third body:

While the Leave no Trace Principles include leaving with everything you brought in, it also includes not making any marks on the land while walking and enjoying nature. This could include carving on trees,



graffiti, or creating desired paths/trails. Desire trails are paths that are created by humans that are not part of the original trail. It is important to stick to the created trail rather than making your own because in this process, you are creating a space where there is more human impact. Not only that, but you could be stepping on native plants or animal homes that were built in the ground.

The reason why carving into trees is an issue is because by cutting into the tree, you are creating an opening/wound in the tree where bacteria and diseases could get into and hurt the tree. Beech trees are especially known for their smooth bark and they can be seen on all of the Land Trust properties. Because of their smooth bark, they are very vulnerable to people who want to carve into trees because it would be easier than carving into ragged bark and it is clearer to see. Beech trees are especially suffering in current times from two different diseases. The Beech leaf disease which can be seen through a discoloration of the leaves and the Beech bark disease. Beech trees are under a lot of stress due to these two diseases, so carving into them harms them even more than just creating a wound in the tree.

#### Conclusion:

The New Canaan Land Trust Properties are open to the public so people can enjoy and appreciate nature so that it is conserved and protected rather than being built up with buildings and machinery. By following the Leave No Trace Principles, you are taking care of the land, the plants, and the animals that live on the properties of the NCLT by minimizing the impact of humans on wildlife. During my internship, I learned that there are many native species of plants living on the properties of the New Canaan Land Trust, so it is important to protect and conserve these plants. We want native plants to be widespread and outcompete the invasive plants brought in from other places. In order to do this, we need to create environments where these plants can thrive, and by acting in accordance with the Leave no trace principles, the native plants living on the properties have a better environment to grow and populate areas. We want areas to be populated by native plants because they promote biodiversity and are essential to some native bugs and animals that rely on these plants. By protecting native plants, other native species are conserved as well, which the New Canaan Land Trust wants to promote and spread awareness about.

Picture- <https://veggievagabonds.com/7-leave-no-trace-principles/>

7 principles- <https://lnt.org/why/7-principles/>

Dog faeces-

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3564131/#:~:text=Dog%20faeces%20may%20contain%20several,2%2C3%2C4%5D>.