



Collecting Fossils: When a Permit is Required (Interim Guidelines for Paleontological Resources Management)

Regulations for management of paleontological resources are currently being developed in response to Omnibus Public Land Management Act, Subtitle D. Paleontological Resources Preservation (2009) (PRP). In the interim, here are some guidelines for when a permit may be required for collecting fossils from National Forest System lands. These guidelines are based largely on the Forest Service Organic Act of 1897, the Preservation of American Antiquities Act of 1906, NEPA, and PRP.

1. Common invertebrate (e.g., shells) and plant fossils (e.g., leaf prints) can be collected in small quantities by the public without a permit for non-commercial personal use.* (See the 'Casual Collecting exception' in PRP.)
 - a. When advising the public about casual collecting, encourage them to collect only small quantities, meaning one or two specimens of each fossil type, so others can enjoy finding fossils in that area in the future.
 - b. Casual fossil collection and related activities are restricted to surface collection or use of small non-powered hand tools that cause no more than negligible site disturbance.
 - c. * Common invertebrate and plant fossils casually collected by the public without a permit are for personal use, not for sale.
2. Vertebrate fossils (commonly bones and bone fragments, teeth, and/or tracks) are not available for public collection. Always ask the public to leave any vertebrate fossils where they find them, and to tell us about their find.
3. Issue permits to qualified researchers for collecting vertebrate, invertebrate, plant, and/or trace fossils as part of scientific studies, or mitigation or conservation efforts.
4. Commercial fossil collection, meaning collecting fossils to sell, is not permitted.
5. Some areas, including, but not limited to wilderness, special interest, or research natural areas, may be administratively closed to fossil collecting, or require a permit for any fossil collection.

In summary, fossil collection for research, mitigation, and conservation purposes requires a permit; casual collection of small amounts of common invertebrate and plant fossils is allowed without a permit; collecting fossils for later sale is not allowed; and fossil collection may be restricted in designated areas.

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