

## **OUTDOOR ETHICS COSSATOT RIVER STATE PARK NATURAL AREA**

An ethic is a personal standard of right and wrong action. Outdoor ethics relate to how we respect and care for our natural world. Ethics are very important to the Cossatot River area because just being designated a "State Park-Natural Area" doesn't guarantee the area will be protected from harm. It will take each and every one of us to help care for this exceptional Arkansas stream and its natural treasures. In the words of the famous American conservationist, Aldo Leopold, "All ethics rest upon the single premise that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts."

Why does the Cossatot River need protecting? It should be protected because it has a natural majesty and beauty not found in many other parts of the state or even the country. This river corridor is much more than rocks, water, and trees. It is a rich tapestry of Arkansas's natural history. The variety of plant and animal life found here is astounding! **Our challenge is to enjoy these treasures and yet leave this beautiful area without a trace of our presence left behind.**

Careless acts can cause lasting damage to this complex natural system. As human use and activity has increased over the past 20 years or so, it has become easy to see the effects of soil compaction, erosion,

littering, fire, and stream siltation, especially at the high use areas of Cossatot Falls and Brushy Creek. The more these areas are damaged, the harder it is for the natural healing processes to work.

How can we make sure that the natural beauty of the remarkable Cossatot River will be around as part of our natural resource legacy for future generations? The following questions and answers will help.

### **1. HOW CAN I ENJOY THE COSSATOT RIVER WITHOUT HARMING ITS FRAGILE ENVIRONMENT?**

Plan before you go. Repack your food into lightweight containers. Don't bring heavy cans or boxes. Glass should be removed from your camping gear as **GLASS CONTAINERS ARE PROHIBITED WITHIN 50 FEET OF THE RIVER.** Be sure to **PACK OUT WHATEVER YOU PACK IN.** Bring only what is necessary.

Limit the size of your group to 6-8 people. Camping with smaller groups is much easier on the delicate streamside environment.

The sound of portable radios may not harm the resource, but it could impact other campers. Be courteous.

### **2. WHAT EFFECTS DO VEHICLES HAVE ON THIS RESOURCE?**

Vehicles can cause a lot of damage. They can scrape trees, crush vegetation, encourage erosion, and compact the soil. Drive only on established roads and parking areas. Travel in as few vehicles as possible to lessen the severe

impact, conserve energy, and reduce crowding. Never drive any motorized vehicle into the river. This disrupts the stream bottom and puts petroleum contaminants directly into the stream.

### **3. HOW CAN WE HELP CONTROL LITTER?**

Be sure to clean your use area of cigarette butts, gum wrappers, tab tops, and any other trash you find. You may consider these objects "too small to worry about," but they accumulate rapidly. **Several hundred people will use this same site each year.** Keep your camping and use areas clean of exposed food and garbage, and you'll avoid problems with insects and nuisance animals. Take garbage bags to carry out your trash and any trash others may have left. **Remember to recycle.**

### **4. HOW CAN WE BEST ENJOY THE WILDLIFE OF THE COSSATOT?**

Enjoy watching the wildlife, but don't disturb them. These are wild animals, not pets. Don't try to catch or touch any animal, especially if it appears sick or does not behave "normally." Young animals should



also be left alone. Their mothers are nearby and will return when you have left the area.

### **5. ARE PETS PERMITTED IN THIS AREA?**

Pets brought into the park-natural area must be leashed. Bringing the family pet along may prevent the opportunity to see wildlife and may disturb other visitors.

### **6. HOW CAN WE CAMP WITHOUT HARMING THIS SENSITIVE ENVIRONMENT?**

Primitive camping is allowed at each river access point except Brushy Creek, which is a day-use area. When planning your trip, remember these three principles of primitive camping:

- Respect for the environment
- Courtesy toward others
- Common sense

-Use existing campsites to avoid crushing new vegetation and creating new fire scars. Use backpacking or camp stoves instead of wood fires to help eliminate fire scars.

-Do not ditch or build trenches around your tent. These cause erosion, create lasting scars, and generally don't work, anyway.

-Don't cut green trees or other living vegetation. Use dead wood for your fires.

-Don't use live trees for chopping blocks, instead, bring a block from home for such purposes. Even a little damage to the bark of a tree reduces the tree's grip on life by damaging the protective layer.



-Avoid hanging lanterns on trees. This produces burn scars that damage and eventually kill the tree.

-Avoid driving nails into trees. If you need to make temporary clotheslines, use cord that you untie and remove.

-Some flowering plants in this area are quite rare. They can only survive if left unpicked to seed next year's crop.

### **7. WHAT IS THE BEST METHOD OF DEALING WITH HUMAN WASTE?**

Human waste can cause severe damage to the water quality of the Cossatot River and its tributaries. Although certain soil layers can recycle this waste, this ability is quickly exceeded in heavily used areas. Toilet paper is always unsightly.

Until sanitary facilities are provided, use the "cat method" for minimum impact. **Make a shallow hole in the top 6-8" of the soil, at least 200' away from your camp, trails or any water source.** Afterward, refill the hole with soil. The organisms in the soil will decompose the waste. Never urinate in or near the river.

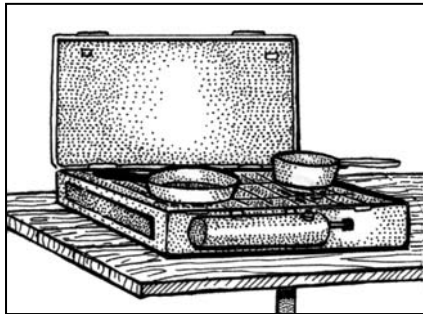
### **8. HOW CAN WASHING BE DONE WITHOUT DAMAGING WATER QUALITY?**

Being careful with soap, shampoo, grease, and food particles will protect the high water quality now enjoyed at the Cossatot. All washing should be done at least 50 feet from the stream. Use only small amounts of biodegradable, phosphate-free soap. Scatter used wash water onto the ground at least 50 feet from the river, water sources, and campsites.

### **9. HOW CAN FIRE BE USED SAFELY?**

Fires caused by humans is a serious resource threat. To avoid an accidental fire, keep your campfire small, and be sure the fire is completely out before you leave. Make sure your fire is far enough from trees that the tree branches and roots are not damaged.

The best solution is to cook over a portable stove, rather than an open fire, but if you must build a fire use existing fire circles rather than making a new scar. Use only dead wood. If the weather has been very dry, fires may be banned in the park-natural area.



### **10. ARE TRAILS THE BEST WAY TO EXPLORE THE PARK-NATURAL AREA?**

Trails are designed to provide a single, hardened access route that discourages crosscutting through the delicate riverside ecosystem and controls damage from drainage. Even though trails meander and switchback to fit the topography of the land, stay on the trail. Cutting across or bypassing a switchback starts a new channel of erosion.

We hope this brochure has given you a deeper appreciation for how your caring, ethical actions can help protect the beautiful Cossatot River environment.

*The earth speaks to everyone who visits here. There is a great need for each of us, as part of the natural community, to listen. We hope you will.*

**NOTICE:** To preserve scenic beauty and ecology, fences and warning signs have not been installed in some park locations. Caution and supervision of your children are required while visiting these areas.

For more information on park hours or programs contact:

Cossatot River State Park -  
Natural Area

1980 Highway 278 West  
Wickes, AR 71937

Phone: (870) 385-2201

Email: [cossatot@arkansas.com](mailto:cossatot@arkansas.com)

[www.ArkansasStateParks.com](http://www.ArkansasStateParks.com)



As a part of our conservation mission, Arkansas State Parks has printed this on recycled paper.

# Cossatot River State Park - Natural Area

## ETHICS

