

RED RIVER GORGE HIKER

2026 Annotated Guide to Daniel Boone National Forest Dispersed Camping Rules

Kentucky | Reviewed against current primary sources August 10, 2026 | Current-law reference, not an official USDA publication

Temporary closures, emergency orders, fire restrictions, and site-specific alerts can change after publication and are not exhaustively reproduced in this guide. Always check current Daniel Boone National Forest alerts and posted site instructions before travel.



About This Guide

This guide updates the Forest Service's former four-page "Dispersed Camping Rules and Regulations" brochure. It summarizes rules most relevant to dispersed campers and backpackers. The controlling authorities are the current Code of Federal Regulations, active Forest Orders, Kentucky law, posted signs, and temporary closures.

RULE = enforceable restriction from a cited authority. GUIDE = practical Forest Service guidance, not a substitute for a current order or posted instruction.



Fees

- Most dispersed camping in Daniel Boone National Forest has no camping fee. [2]
- Vehicles parked for backcountry camping between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. in the Red River Gorge/Indian Creek permit area must display a recreation pass: \$5/1 day, \$7/3 days, or \$50/annual per vehicle. [25]

Pass prices and fee areas can change; check the current USDA Passes page before travel.



Alcoholic Beverages

- Treat consumption and open containers of alcohol as prohibited on Daniel Boone National Forest; the Forest currently states this restriction on its Safety and Outdoor Ethics page. Kentucky law also prohibits drinking alcoholic beverages in a public place. [24][29]



Food Storage Restrictions

Under current Forest Order DB-02-15, unattended food, refuse, pet/livestock food (except baled hay), and other bear attractants must be secured.

- Use a bear-resistant container; or store it in a closed solid-top motor vehicle; or a closed hard-body trailer. [1]
- If hanging, keep it at least 10 feet clear of the ground, at least 4 feet horizontally from the supporting tree, and at least 4 feet from any adjacent tree. [1]
- Do not discard or abandon food, refuse, or bear attractants except in a bear-resistant trash receptacle or other receptacle provided by the Forest Service. [1]
- Do not burn or bury food, refuse, or bear attractants. [1]



BACKCOUNTRY BEST PRACTICE

The old USDA brochure showed a 100-yard "bear triangle" between sleeping, cooking, and food-cache areas. That is useful safety guidance, but the enforceable DB-02-15 storage rule is the bear-resistant / vehicle / trailer / 10-4-4 requirement above.



Dispersed Camping

- Do not camp within 100 feet of the base of a cliff or the back of a rock shelter unless at a designated site. [1][2]
- Do not maintain a dispersed/non-fee campsite for more than 14 consecutive days without terminating Forest occupancy for at least 10 days within a 31-day period. [1]
- Do not camp in violation of posted signs. [3]
- General federal rule: do not leave personal property unattended for more than 72 hours unless a longer period has been designated. The old brochure's "remove all equipment when vacating" citation, §261.16(f), applies to developed recreation sites. [21]



Red River Gorge - Current Order 12-01-15

- Except at designated sites, no camping within 300 feet of any developed road or Tunnel Ridge Road in the Red River Gorge. [4]
- Except at designated sites, no camping within 300 feet of any developed trail in the Red River Gorge. [4]
- No camping within 600 feet of Grays Arch. [4]

The former brochure cited Order 12-02-15. USDA's current Red River Gorge camping restriction is Order 12-01-15.



Other Area-Specific Camping Restrictions

- Pioneer Weapons Wildlife Management Area: except designated sites, no camping within 300 feet of NFS Road 918. [5]
- White Sulphur OHV Trail System: no overnight camping within 300 feet of the trail system from May 1 through Nov. 30; trailhead parking area use is prohibited after 10 p.m. [6]
- Cave Run Lake: except at designated sites, no camping within 300 feet of the water's edge or within 300 feet of any road or trail leading to the water's edge. [7]
- Laurel River Lake: current lake and camping orders restrict camping within 300 feet of specified shoreline, road, and trail areas except where designated. [7][8]
- Upper Lake Cumberland / Sheltolee Trace area: current order restricts camping within 300 feet of specified high-water-line and trail areas. [8]
- Stearns District / Jellico & Rock Creek: except at designated campsites, no camping within 300 feet of NFSR 492 or NFSR 137. [20]

Historical brochure item omitted: the East Fork Indian Creek FSR 9B restoration closure could not be verified among current DBNF active alerts as of this review. Always obey any current site closure or posted order.



THE 100-FOOT RULE

For dispersed camping: keep both your campsite and any fire/campfire/stove at least 100 feet from the base of a cliff or the back of a rock shelter unless at a designated site. [1]



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Pets, Horses and Livestock

- After a Forest Service officer directs that an animal be physically restrained, allowing it to remain unrestrained is prohibited under DB-02-15. [1]
- Do not tether or corral horses or other livestock overnight within 100 feet of stream courses or within 300 feet of other water bodies. [1]
- Do not ride, hitch, tether, or hobble saddle/pack animals contrary to posted instructions. [9]
- At developed recreation sites, animals other than service animals must be crated, caged, on a leash no longer than six feet, or otherwise under physical restrictive control. [21]
- Animals other than service animals are prohibited in swimming areas at developed recreation sites. [21]



Fireworks and Firearms

- Exploding targets, fireworks, and other pyrotechnic devices are prohibited. [21]
- At developed recreation areas, follow DB-01-15 restrictions on firearm display and other posted rules. [10]
- Do not fire tracer bullets or incendiary ammunition. [21]
- Do not discharge a firearm or other implement capable of taking human life, causing injury, or damaging property: within 150 yards of a residence, building, campsite, developed recreation site, or occupied area; across or on a National Forest System road or a body of water adjacent to it; in any manner or place where a person or property is exposed to injury or damage; or into or within a cave. [21]

This guide summarizes Forest Service discharge restrictions, not Kentucky carry/possession law.



Sanitation

Forest-wide sanitation rules in 36 CFR 261.11 prohibit:

- Depositing in a toilet, toilet vault, or plumbing fixture any substance that could damage or interfere with its operation or maintenance. [21]
- Leaving refuse, debris, or litter in an exposed or unsanitary condition. [21]
- Putting in or near a stream, lake, or other water any substance that does or may pollute it. [21]
- Failing to remove or properly deposit garbage, paper, cans, bottles, sewage, wastewater, material, or rubbish. [21]
- Dumping refuse, debris, trash, or litter brought from private property. [21]

HUMAN WASTE - LEGAL RULE VS. BACKCOUNTRY GUIDE

The "body waste must go in a provided receptacle" rule is §261.16(p), which applies to developed recreation sites. In dispersed country, the general legal duty is proper sewage/waste disposal and avoiding water pollution. GUIDE: General Forest Service Leave No Trace guidance recommends packing out solid waste where practical, or using a 6–8 inch cathole at least 200 feet from water, trails, and campsites where site rules allow; pack out wipes and sanitary products. [21][26]



Fires

- Dead-and-down wood may be collected for a campfire without a permit; do not cut any standing tree, dead or alive, or damage other forest products without authorization. [27][21]
- Remove enough flammable material from around a campfire to prevent escape. [21]
- Do not leave a fire until completely extinguished. [21]
- Do not cause and fail to maintain control of a non-prescribed fire that damages National Forest System lands. [21]
- Do not build, maintain, attend, or use a fire, campfire, or stove within 100 feet of the base of a cliff or the back of a rock shelter unless at a designated site. [1]
- Temporary fire restrictions can prohibit or further limit fires. Check current DBNF Alerts and Fire Danger Status before every trip. [28]



Noise and Conduct

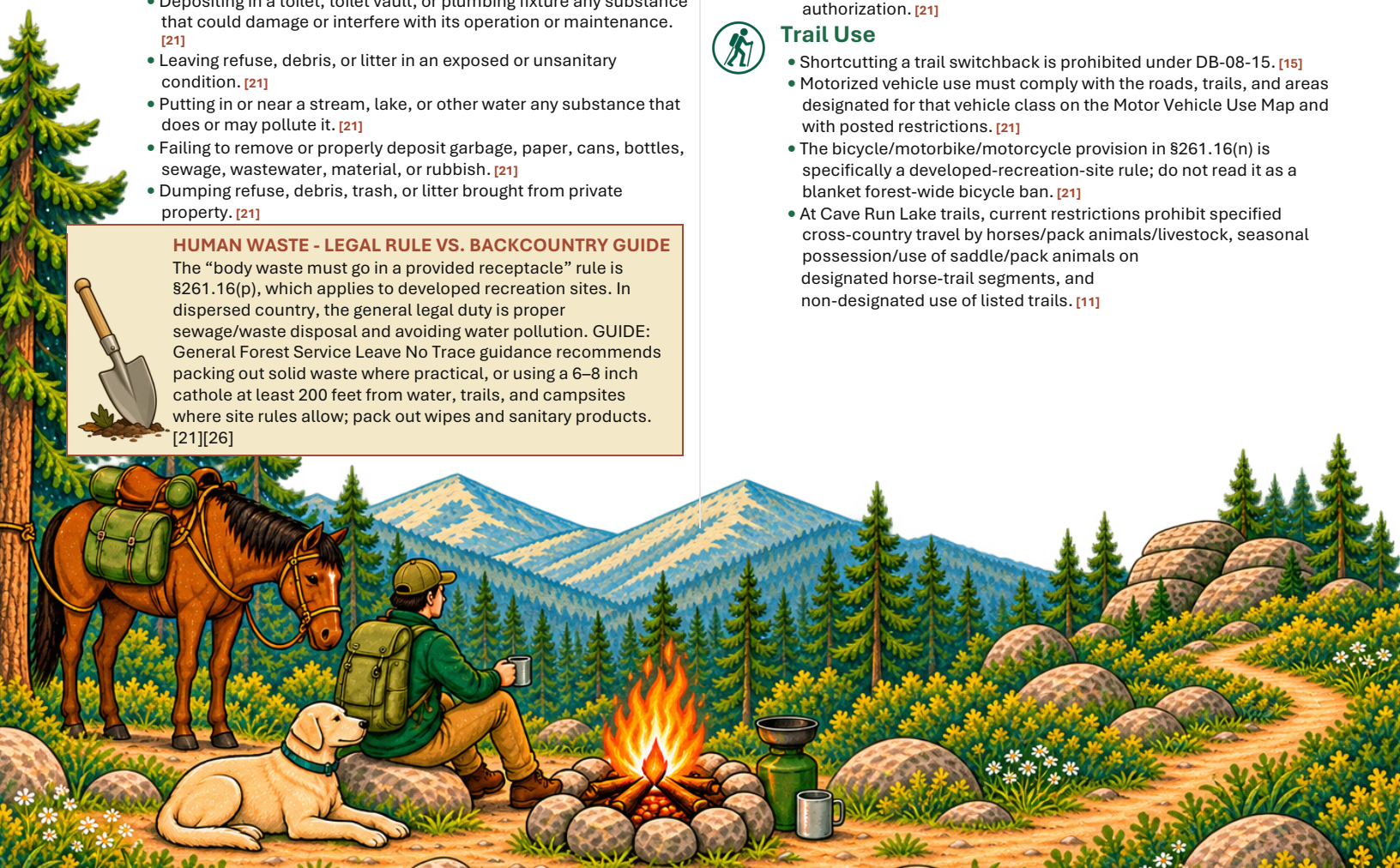
36 CFR 261.4 was rewritten in 2024. Current prohibited conduct includes:

- Fighting or threatening/violent behavior when intentionally causing, or recklessly creating a substantial risk of, public alarm, nuisance, jeopardy, or violence. [21]
- Obscene or threatening utterances/acts, or conduct likely to inflict injury or incite an immediate breach of peace, under the same intent/recklessness standard. [21]
- Noise that is unreasonable considering the nature and purpose of the conduct, location, and time. [21]
- Without a permit, do not use a noise-producing device in or near a campsite/developed recreation site, or over adjacent water, in a manner and at a time that unreasonably disturbs another person. [21]
- Using a public-address system in or near a campsite/developed recreation site, or over adjacent water, without special-use authorization. [21]



Trail Use

- Shortcutting a trail switchback is prohibited under DB-08-15. [15]
- Motorized vehicle use must comply with the roads, trails, and areas designated for that vehicle class on the Motor Vehicle Use Map and with posted restrictions. [21]
- The bicycle/motorbike/motorcycle provision in §261.16(n) is specifically a developed-recreation-site rule; do not read it as a blanket forest-wide bicycle ban. [21]
- At Cave Run Lake trails, current restrictions prohibit specified cross-country travel by horses/pack animals/livestock, seasonal possession/use of saddle/pack animals on designated horse-trail segments, and non-designated use of listed trails. [11]





Resource Protection

- Do not enter areas closed for protection of endangered, threatened, rare, unique, or vanishing species. [12]
- Metal detecting or using electronic apparatuses/devices to locate metal objects is prohibited under DB-10-15 except as allowed by applicable authorization. [13]
- Do not damage or remove natural features or other U.S. property. [21]
- Do not damage or remove plants classified as threatened, endangered, sensitive, rare, or unique. [21]
- Do not dig, excavate, disturb, injure, destroy, or remove prehistoric, historic, or archaeological resources, structures, sites, artifacts, or property. [21]
- Do not excavate, damage, or remove cave resources without required special-use authorization; commercial removal of cave resources is prohibited. [21]



National Forest Wilderness

- No motor vehicle, motorboat, or motorized equipment in National Forest Wilderness except as authorized by federal law or regulation. [21]
- No hang glider or bicycle in National Forest Wilderness. [21]
- No landing of aircraft or dropping/picking up people, material, or supplies by aircraft, including helicopter. [21]
- In Clifty Wilderness and Beaver Creek Wilderness, groups of more than 10 people are prohibited, as are wagons, carts, bicycles, and other vehicles under DB-05-15. [14]
- In Beaver Creek Wilderness, horses or other livestock are allowed only on designated trails or as specifically authorized. [30]



Fish and Wildlife

- Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources seasons, limits, licensing, and other applicable state rules apply on National Forest lands through 36 CFR 261.8. [21]
- For deer hunting on Daniel Boone National Forest, Kentucky regulation 301 KAR 2:178 prohibits the use of bait. [23]
- DB-02-15 prohibits hunting or trapping within 150 yards of a residence, building, or developed recreation site, or across a developed roadway. [1]
- DB-02-15 also restricts fishing in areas closed for fishing derbies/festivals during posted dates unless participating as a registered participant. [1]



Vehicle Operation

- Operate motor vehicles only on NFS roads, trails, and areas designated for that vehicle class on the Motor Vehicle Use Map; obey gates, barriers, signs, and closures. [21]
- At developed recreation sites, park only in places developed/designated for parking, and use motorbikes/motorcycles/other motor vehicles only for entering or leaving unless otherwise designated. [21]
- On open Forest System Roads, comply with applicable Kentucky motor-vehicle law and posted parking instructions. [1]
- Using a Forest Service System Road for commercial hauling requires a permit or authorization. [16]
- Stop a vehicle when directed by a Forest Officer. [21]
- Do not place a vehicle/object so it creates an impediment or hazard. [21]
- Do not exceed applicable load, weight, height, length, or width limitations except as authorized. [21]
- Do not damage roads/trails or block/restrict/interfere with roads, trails, or gates. [21]



Off-Road Vehicle Rules

When operating a vehicle off National Forest System, State, or County roads, 36 CFR 261.15 prohibits operation:

- Without a valid license when State law requires one; without operable brakes; or from 30 minutes after sunset to 30 minutes before sunrise without working head/tail lights. [21]
- In violation of applicable federal/state noise standards; while under the influence in violation of State law; or while creating excessive/unusual smoke. [21]
- Carelessly, recklessly, or at a speed/manner likely to endanger people/property; in a manner that damages or unreasonably disturbs land, wildlife, or vegetation; or in violation of State off-road vehicle law. [21]



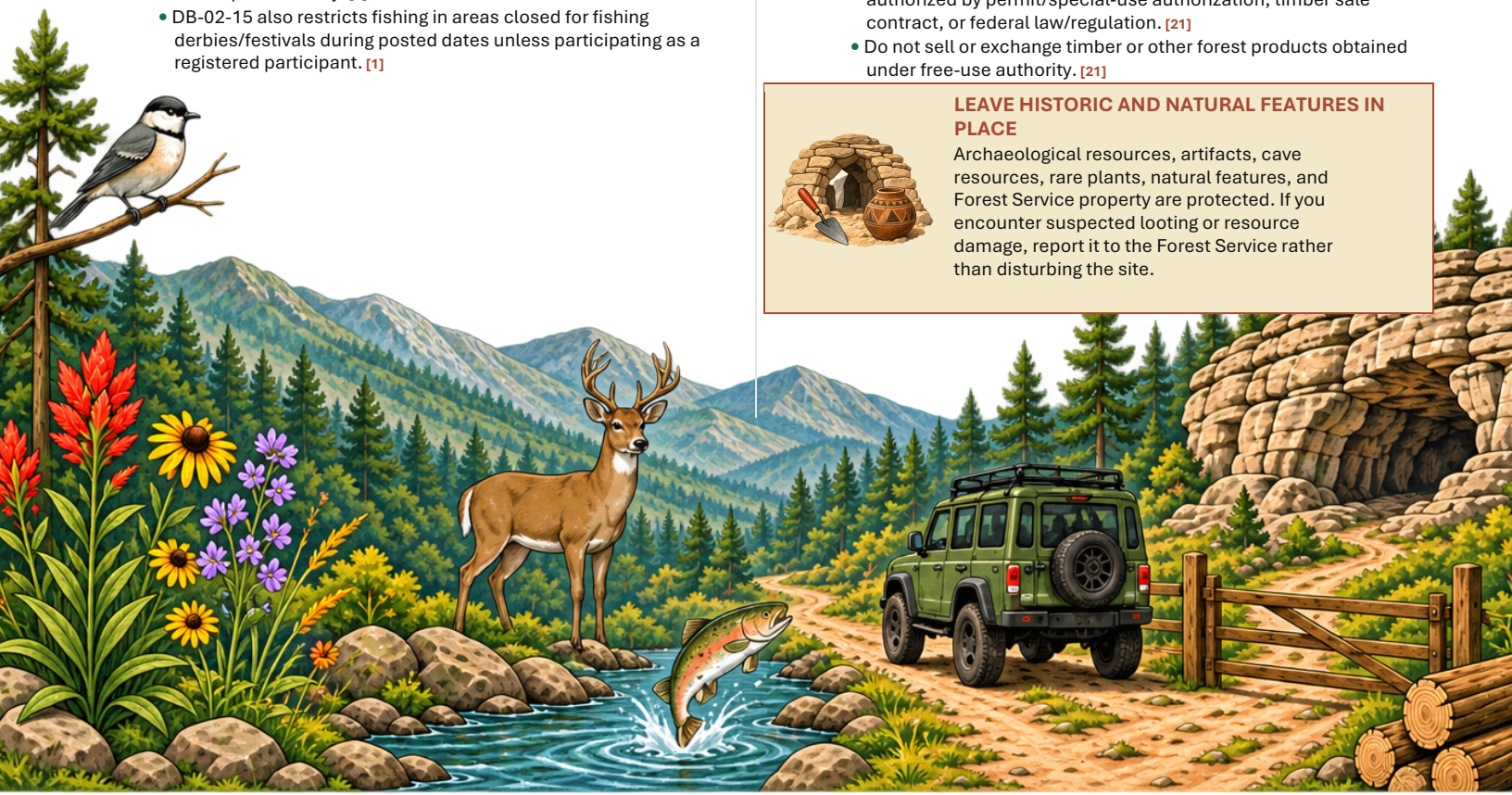
Forest Products

- Do not cut or otherwise damage timber, trees, or other forest products except as authorized. [21]
- Do not remove timber, trees, or other forest products except as authorized by permit/special-use authorization, timber sale contract, or federal law/regulation. [21]
- Do not sell or exchange timber or other forest products obtained under free-use authority. [21]

LEAVE HISTORIC AND NATURAL FEATURES IN PLACE



Archaeological resources, artifacts, cave resources, rare plants, natural features, and Forest Service property are protected. If you encounter suspected looting or resource damage, report it to the Forest Service rather than disturbing the site.



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Forest Officers and Volunteers

- Do not threaten, resist, intimidate, or interfere with a Forest officer performing official duties. [\[21\]](#)
- Do not knowingly give a false, fictitious, or fraudulent report or information to a Forest Officer performing official duties. [\[21\]](#)
- Do not threaten, intimidate, or intentionally interfere with a Forest officer, volunteer, or human-resource-program enrollee while performing assigned duties. [\[21\]](#)



Historical Brochure Closures Still Verified

- Tater Knob Fire Tower site: entry is prohibited under Order 11-02-15. [\[17\]](#)
- Special biological areas around Cave Run Lake and Laurel River Lake: entry into posted areas closed for protection of listed/rare species is prohibited under DB-09-15. [\[12\]](#)
- Shallow Flats Wildlife Viewing Area: current order prohibits entry and specified firearm/hunting/fishing/trapping activity within the described closure. [\[18\]](#)
- Wildcat Branch: entry into the described closure area is prohibited under Order 14-05-15. [\[19\]](#)
- Stearns District: current consolidated order includes entry prohibitions for Railroad Tunnels 7, 8, and 9 and other district restrictions. [\[20\]](#)

This is not a complete list of current closures; temporary alerts, emergency closures, and newly issued or rescinded orders may not appear in this printed guide. The former brochure's blanket Southern Region cave/mine closure (Emergency Order R8-01-2014) is not carried forward here as a current blanket DBNF rule. Current Forest Service alerts and posted site instructions control.



Other Restrictions

- Being publicly nude is prohibited by current DB-02-15. [\[1\]](#)
- Possessing, storing, or transporting cannabis plants or substances derived from manufacturing cannabis plants is prohibited by current DB-02-15; federal controlled-substance law also applies on National Forest System lands. [\[1\]](#)[\[21\]](#)
- Do not knowingly/intentionally possess controlled substances in violation of federal law or drug paraphernalia in violation of State law. [\[21\]](#)
- Do not construct roads, trails, structures, fences, enclosures, communications equipment, signs, or significant surface disturbances without required written authorization. [\[21\]](#)
- Do not construct, reconstruct, improve, maintain, occupy, or use a residence on NFS lands without required authorization. [\[21\]](#)
- Do not leave personal property unattended longer than 72 hours unless a longer period is designated. [\[21\]](#)
- Do not enter federal buildings, structures, or enclosed areas that are not open to the public. [\[21\]](#)



Permits, Events, Sales and Photography

- Do not sell or offer for sale merchandise or conduct any kind of work activity or service unless authorized by Federal law, regulation, or special-use authorization. [\[21\]](#)[\[22\]](#)
- Commercial distribution of printed material requires special-use authorization. Use of a public-address system in or near a campsite or developed recreation site, or over adjacent water, also requires special-use authorization. [\[21\]](#)
- Noncommercial group use means 75 or more participants/spectators and generally requires special-use authorization. [\[22\]](#)
- Filming/still-photography rules changed in March 2026: qualifying activities by no more than five people require no special-use authorization or fee; qualifying groups of 6–8 may require a no-fee de minimis authorization; other filming/still photography may require authorization and a fee. [\[22\]](#)

BEFORE EVERY TRIP

1) Check DBNF Alerts and Fire Danger Status. 2) Check the current Passes page for Red River Gorge. 3) Check posted trailhead/site instructions and Motor Vehicle Use Maps. 4) When in doubt, call the Forest Supervisor's Office: 859-745-3100. Temporary closures and orders can change faster than a printed guide.



What Was Corrected From the Historical USDA Brochure

- Updated Red River Gorge order citation to 12-01-15 and current lake/district order references.
- Separated developed-recreation-site rules (§261.16) from dispersed backcountry rules, especially body waste, equipment removal, and bicycle language.
- Replaced the pre-2024 disorderly-conduct wording with current §261.4.
- Updated the general unattended-property rule to the current 72-hour §261.10(e) standard.
- Updated wildlife baiting authority to 301 KAR 2:178.
- Did not carry forward historical closures that could not be verified as current active DBNF restrictions.
- Updated special-use / filming and still-photography rules for the March 2026 federal amendments.



Live Primary Sources

- [\[1\] USDA - General Forest Prohibitions \(DB-02-15\)](#)
- [\[2\] USDA - Camping & Cabins](#)
- [\[3\] USDA - Camping Prohibitions \(DB-06-15\)](#)
- [\[4\] USDA - Red River Gorge Camping Restrictions \(12-01-15\)](#)
- [\[5\] USDA - Pioneer Weapons WMA Camping Prohibition](#)
- [\[6\] USDA - White Sulphur OHV Trail System \(11-04-15\)](#)
- [\[7\] USDA - General Lake Prohibitions \(DB-03-15\)](#)
- [\[8\] USDA - Laurel River Lake / Lake Cumberland Camping Prohibitions](#)
- [\[9\] USDA - Saddle and Pack Animal Prohibitions](#)
- [\[10\] USDA - Developed Recreation Area Prohibitions](#)
- [\[11\] USDA - Cave Run Lake Trails Restrictions](#)
- [\[12\] USDA - Prohibited Entry into Special Areas \(DB-09-15\)](#)
- [\[13\] USDA - Metal Detecting Prohibitions \(DB-10-15\)](#)
- [\[14\] USDA - Wilderness Prohibitions](#)
- [\[15\] USDA - Trail Prohibitions \(DB-08-15\)](#)
- [\[16\] USDA - Commercial Hauling Prohibitions](#)
- [\[17\] USDA - Tater Knob Fire Tower Closure](#)
- [\[18\] USDA - Shallow Flats Wildlife Viewing Area Closure](#)
- [\[19\] USDA - Wildcat Branch Closure](#)
- [\[20\] USDA - Stearns District Prohibitions](#)
- [\[21\] eCFR - 36 CFR Part 261, Prohibitions](#)
- [\[22\] eCFR - 36 CFR Part 251 Subpart B, Special Uses](#)
- [\[23\] Kentucky - 301 KAR 2:178](#)
- [\[24\] Kentucky - KRS 222.202](#)
- [\[25\] USDA - Daniel Boone National Forest Passes](#)
- [\[26\] USDA Forest Service - Dispose of Human Waste Properly](#)
- [\[27\] USDA - Daniel Boone National Forest Permits](#)
- [\[28\] USDA - Daniel Boone National Forest Alerts](#)
- [\[29\] USDA - Safety and Outdoor Ethics](#)
- [\[30\] USDA - Beaver Creek Wilderness Prohibitions](#)

Legal note: This is an independent educational summary, not legal advice and not an official Forest Service publication. If this guide conflicts with a current Forest Order, regulation, posted sign, closure, permit condition, or instruction from an authorized officer, the official authority controls.