



BOULDERWISE WINTER RECREATION GUIDE



The BoulderWise campaign celebrates Boulder's commitment to exploring, playing, living and working responsibly in the outdoors and around town. Through this community-wide effort, Visit Boulder and Leave No Trace are helping visitors, residents, visitors, and businesses protect what makes this place so special: our open spaces, trails and welcoming spirit. This guide is designed for local partners, hospitality staff and educators who share that commitment.

Winter in Boulder transforms trails, foothills and city parks into playgrounds for snow-dusted hikes, snowshoeing and skiing. But cold weather brings its own challenges for people and the environment.

The BoulderWise campaign helps everyone explore safely and sustainably, protecting delicate ecosystems even when they're hidden under snow. Use these talking points to inspire mindful recreation all season long.

Know Before You Go

Action: Check trail closures, weather conditions and avalanche forecasts before heading out. Carry navigation tools and emergency layers. If conditions are icy, consider using a traction device, such as cleats for your footwear and trekking poles.

Why It Matters: Preparation reduces rescue incidents and limits off-trail travel that damages winter habitats. Visitors who plan for conditions are less likely to trigger avoidable impacts or require resource-intensive rescues. ¹

Action: Know your route, and time your return before dusk.

Why It Matters: Shorter daylight hours and extreme cold increase the risk of exposure. Inadequate preparation is one of the leading factors in winter search-and-rescue calls in mountain communities. ²

Stick to Trails

Action: Use existing packed routes or designated snowshoe and ski trails instead of breaking new ones.

Why It Matters: Repeated off-trail travel compacts snow over vegetation, which delays meltwater infiltration and damages plant root systems. ³

Action: Avoid post-holing (sinking deep into snow) near cross-country ski tracks.

Why It Matters: Foot traffic degrades ski tracks and widens corridors, leading to increased soil erosion and vegetation loss once snow melts. ⁴

Practice Petiquette

Action: Keep pets leashed where required and near wildlife zones, and pick up waste, even on snow.

Why It Matters: Nutrients and bacteria from pet waste persist in frozen soil and re-enter waterways during spring melt. Elevated nitrogen and E. coli levels are common in recreation watersheds impacted by winter use.⁵

Trash Your Trash

Action: Pack out all food wrappers, hand warmers, toilet paper, and broken gear parts.

Why It Matters: Litter left in snow resurfaces in spring runoff, polluting creeks and trailheads. Microplastics from synthetic materials can be carried long distances in meltwater.⁶

Bring Your Own Reusables

Action: Use insulated, refillable bottles and reusable snack containers.

Why It Matters: Reusable gear minimizes single-use waste that accumulates around trailheads and ski areas. Outdoor recreation generates substantial seasonal waste spikes from disposable packaging.⁷

Cultivate Kindness

Action: Yield to others on narrow winter trails and maintain good trail etiquette with skiers, snowshoers and hikers.

Why It Matters: Mixed-use winter trails function best when users communicate clearly. Predictable, courteous behavior reduces conflict and accident risk, improving everyone's experience outdoors.⁸

Be a Transit Hero

Action: Take the SKIP or HOP bus to trailheads, or carpool to ski areas. RTD bus routes go directly from downtown Boulder to the chairlift at Eldora, our nearest ski area!

Why It Matters: Winter air inversions trap vehicle emissions in valleys, worsening seasonal air quality. Using shared transit cuts carbon emissions and traffic congestion at busy winter recreation sites.⁹

Research Sources

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