



USFS - Regulations

Recreational Mineral Collecting

Limited collection¹ of rocks and minerals for personal use is allowed on most National Forest System lands. These materials may be collected without a permit provided the collecting is for personal, hobby, and noncommercial use. For commercial² or other uses of rock material, contact the local Forest Service Office.

What types of recreational rock and mineral collecting are allowed on the National Forests?

- Collection of small amounts of widespread, low-value, relatively common minerals and stones (common quartz crystals, agate, obsidian) for noncommercial use.
- Hobby mining activities; such as recreational gold panning or use of metal detectors³ to prospect for gold nuggets and other naturally occurring metals.

Are there any National Forest areas that are closed to recreational collecting?

- Certain lands within the National Forest are not open to collecting due to wilderness designation or other sensitive areas. Contact the Forest Service for local information.
- It is a good idea to check with the Bureau of Land Management for specific locations to find out whether or not there are mining claims in the area.

Would I need a permit or other permission?

No permit or notification is required for collecting if the following applies:

- Collecting of samples is on the surface (no digging with hand tools or mechanized equipment).
- Collection is for personal use and esthetic values (cannot be sold or bartered).

For the following activities, please contact the Forest Service to discuss permitting or authorization:

- Activity that does involve digging with hand tools or mechanized earth-moving equipment, including bobcats, suction dredges, 'high banking' or dry washing equipment.
- Commercial activities including collecting mineral or fossil >specimens for re-sale.
- Removal of more than insignificant amounts^{1/} of landscape rock.

However, the following items may not be collected or removed by casual collectors:

- Vertebrate fossils (dinosaurs bones, fish, - anything with a backbone), and shark teeth.
- Archeological resources including any material remains of prehistoric or historic human life or activities, which are at least 50 years old, and includes the physical site, location, or context in which they are found. (36 CFR 261.2)
- The collection of projectile points, pottery, or any other archeological resource or artifact is not allowed (36 CFR 261.9 (h) without a permit. Projectile points include 'arrowheads' and any prehistoric human-modified stone.

¹ You may collect reasonable amounts of specimens. Generally, a reasonable amount is up to 10 pounds.

² Commercial use is any trading, bartering, or selling of rocks and minerals from National Forest System Lands.

³ Searching for artifacts (man made objects) with metal detectors is discouraged, as any ancient or historical artifacts found may not be removed from federal lands, such as old coins, metal implements, or utensils.