



## The USDA Forest Service and PCTA will issue long-distance permits for the 2021 Pacific Crest Trail season

The USDA Forest Service has decided to issue long-distance travel permits **at normal levels** this year on the Pacific Crest Trail.

The decision by the agency, which has overall management responsibility for the trail, comes after in-depth discussions with federal land managers and state recreation officials, other agency partners and Pacific Crest Trail Association staff.

- As public health concerns may change rapidly, **permit holders are reminded to follow all local, state and federal COVID-related travel and safety guidelines.**
- **Northbound** permits for trips starting anywhere from the PCT Southern Terminus at the Mexican border to Sonora Pass will be issued at **normal levels of 50 permits per day** from March 1st through May 31st.
- **Southbound** permits for trips starting from the Northern Terminus will be issued at **normal levels of 15 per day** from June 15th through September 15th.

The U.S. Forest Service also authorizes PCTA to issue

- 1400 permits for **section hikers** crossing the **John Muir Trail overlap** and
- 600 permits for trips **starting in the Southern Sierra.**

The PCTA distributes long-distance permits for trips of **500 miles or more** on behalf of federal land management agencies.

### Permit Application Opening Date

You'll be able to apply online starting on **Jan. 19, 2021 at 10:30 a.m. Pacific Time.** Learn about [how to apply for a permit](#).

It is very important to read, understand and follow all the information on our [permit page](#) as well as all state and federal COVID-19 guidance. Answers to many of your questions and important trip planning information can be found in the [Discover the Trail](#) section of our website.

Please take special note of the first term of the long-distance permit: **“By using a PCT Long-distance Permit, you agree to abide by all terms of the permit, and all laws, rules, and regulations which apply to the areas that you pass through on the Pacific Crest Trail.”**



That means that **you must follow all local, state and federal regulations related to COVID-19**. These regulations can change at any time and could range from mask requirements and camping restrictions to travel bans.

**NOTE:** Permit holders should be advised that **permits may be cancelled if state travel restrictions limit backcountry travel**. So again, please remain aware at all times of any current restrictions, or you may be traveling on a cancelled permit.

Submitting an application secures your requested date but your permit still needs to be approved. We'll review applications in the days and weeks following the permit opening. **Do not submit more than one request** or all of your requests may be denied. You are advised to wait until your application is reviewed and approved before making travel arrangements.

### Please Consider Postponing Your Trip

Despite permits being issued at normal levels, these are not normal times, and this will not be a normal year to go for a long trip. **Well over a quarter-million people have died from COVID-19 in the United States**. We don't take this lightly.

**If you are not prepared to change your behavior to lower the risk to yourself and those around you, this is not the time for a long-distance trip on the PCT. Please postpone your trip.**

Every one of us has had to make difficult decisions and change our lives to protect the health and well-being of our family, friends and neighbors. With state guidance and restrictions that change often (and which are not always easy to understand), it can be difficult to determine the right thing to do.

In any season, people unwilling to carry ice axes and traction devices or unable to safely traverse snowy slopes should time their hikes to avoid snow travel. Likewise, if you're not willing to **go farther between resupplies and give up some of the social experience of a long-distance trip in the face of this deadly virus**, you should avoid long-distance travel during the pandemic.

**Postpone your trip if you're at high risk for getting COVID-19 and would be in particular danger if you got sick in the backcountry. First responders and hospitals along the trail could be overwhelmed and unable to respond quickly.**

### Consider the risks of infection—to yourself and others.

Many of the risks associated with COVID-19 can be mitigated by planning and good decision-making. But the risks we take during a pandemic go far beyond how they affect us as individuals. It's important to acknowledge that **our personal actions could have severe and lasting consequences for others**, including search and rescue teams, first-responders, other travelers and people living and working in communities along the trail.

Currently, states crossed by the PCT (California, Oregon and Washington) recommend against non-essential travel while acknowledging that getting outdoors is one of the safest ways to improve our physical and mental well-being.

Being outside on a trail involves lower risk than most other activities. But traveling long distances on the PCT is not exclusively outdoors. **A long PCT journey involves higher-risk situations such as** sharing a vehicle with strangers while catching a ride into towns, sharing hotel rooms to save money and dining together in restaurants.

Because hikers are traveling from one place to another, **anyone—even someone who shows no symptoms of COVID-19—could spread the disease more than someone staying local.** And that's not even considering the consequences of becoming severely ill with COVID-19 while deep in the backcountry, far from medical help.

As hikers, we are accustomed to thinking about risk management. Crossing a steep snow slope is risky, but with the proper gear and experience we may be able to lower that risk. Being on-trail during a cold rain can mean a real risk of hypothermia, but we can mitigate that risk by planning ahead, preparing and making good decisions.

The PCT community has incredible compassion, and we know there are people who can travel long-distances with relatively low risk to themselves and others, but it will take some extra time and effort.

**Anyone planning a 2021 long-distance hike should only do so if they're able and willing to take necessary steps to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.**

### Leave No Trace

Please take a moment to read our PCT-specific [Leave No Trace information](#) and our [Covid-19 Guidance for Trips on the PCT](#). It's up to all of us to take care of the trail and surrounding landscapes. And this year, **it is more important than ever to consider the well-being of others—both those on the trail, as well as those in communities along the trail.**

Following LNT practices is important for protecting the trail environment and ensuring that the PCT provides a wild experience for all hikers and horseback riders for years to come.

After you've learned about **Leave No Trace** and ways to reduce the risk of Covid-19, keep learning about how to have a wonderful and safe time on the trail in [our Backcountry Basics section](#).

Please, make smart choices in 2021, consider the safety of others and have a wonderful year on the trail!