

Sustainable Steps for Parks Preservation

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PHOTOGRAPH BY BETH TRUDEAU/SHUTTERSTOCK

More than 270 million people visit America's national parks each year. While these excursions produce thrilling encounters with nature, they also generate some 100 million pounds of trash, most of it headed straight for landfills. Drawing on its expertise in environmental stewardship as America's first zero-landfill automaker, with all waste recycled or reused since 2004, Subaru launched an innovative program to test waste-reduction and zero-landfill practices in three national parks—Yosemite (in California), Grand Teton (in Wyoming), and Denali (in Alaska)—that collectively generate millions of pounds of waste each year.

Subaru's online [environment hub](#) features *Who We Are is What We Leave Behind*, a documentary webseries tracking the progress of the Subaru-National Park Zero-Landfill Initiative. The series explores recycling-related issues to show how proactive measures helped the automaker preserve natural resources. The website lists a number of everyday ways to reduce environmental impact before leaving home, on a day trip, camping, or staying in a park hotel.

Using refillable coffee cups, for instance, eliminates considerable waste, since the wax linings in most paper cups can render them unrecyclable. Shopping for snacks in compostable or reusable packaging is an environmental best practice. Opting for digital versions of park maps puts essential information at your fingertips while saving a ton of paper waste. A few additional practical and sustainable tips for visitors:

- Carry reusable water bottles and plastic bags
- Avoid disposable utensils and single-serving containers
- Recycle waste in cities before or after visiting parks
- Do not burn waste in campfires
- Use air dryers, not paper towels, in restrooms
- Support park composting efforts and separate waste items before discarding

A parallel practice to reducing waste is redirecting (or diverting) materials away from landfills and toward recycling centers. “Waste is a material that hasn’t found its use yet. So you just have to find a use for it,” says Denise Coogan, a Subaru environmental and safety manager who helped kickstart the automaker’s zero-landfill initiative by diverting garbage from waste sites to recycling hubs. “We started by dumpster diving,” she says.
